

opening repertoire

# Beating the Sicilian main lines



Jonas Hacker

EVERYMAN CHESS

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**EVERYMAN CHESS**

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

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# About the Author

**Jonas Hacker** is a FIDE Master and chess coach from Germany. He has over five years' teaching experience and has worked as a professional coach for about two years.

He has played and tested the repertoire presented in this book himself for more than a year. The results were good, so he decided to collect the ideas and start this project of sharing a complete and simple repertoire against the Sicilian Defence.

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(Quality Chess 2015-16)

*Grandmaster Repertoire – The Sicilian Taimanov*, Antonios Pavlidis  
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## Online Resources and Databases

ChessBase Live Database

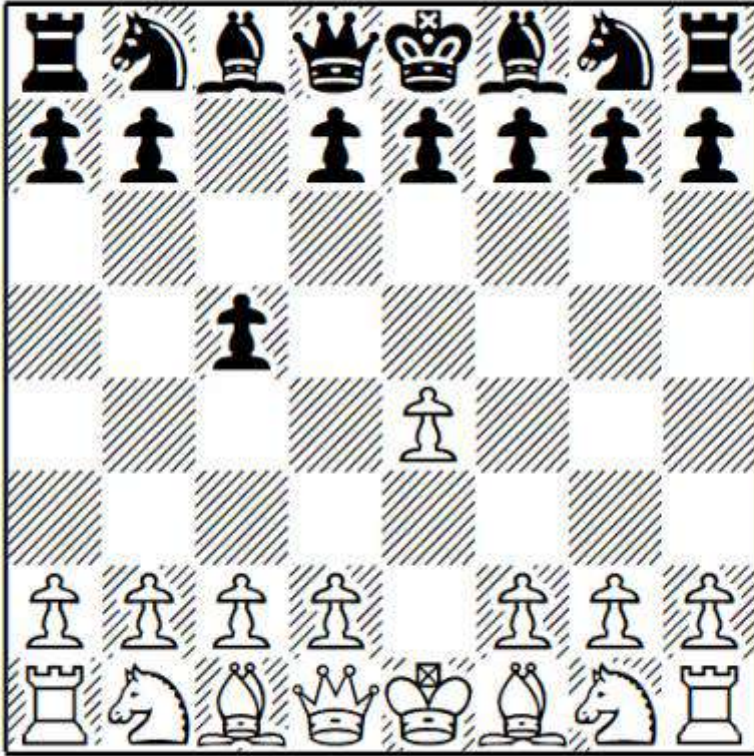
MegaBase 2019

## Engines

Stockfish 10

# Introduction

1 e4 c5



## *The Sicilian Defence*

The Sicilian Defence is the most popular weapon for Black against 1 e4. It is played at every level, from beginners to the absolute elite and there is probably no strong player who has not tried it at least once. The reasons for this popularity are numerous, but the most important point is that Black obtains a complex and double-edged game, so that the second player can also strive for a win. As a downside, the opening is very difficult to play and the mass of different variations create the impression of a deep forest.

To address the great complexity of the Sicilian, this book will offer a relatively simple and consistent repertoire against all variations. The repertoire itself is built to avoid mainstream theoretical debates, especially

against 2 ... d6 where my recommendation is 5 f3 to avoid both Najdorf and Dragon set-ups. The overall theme is to construct a strong centre with a timely c2-c4 and thus reach positions with a space advantage. One advantage of being consistent, and playing c2-c4 whenever it is possible, is that not only do you acquire a repertoire against the Sicilian, you will also get a lot of experience in a certain type of pawn structure. By understanding the structure and the motifs and patterns associated with it, you will become familiar with the positions and will also improve your general positional understanding.

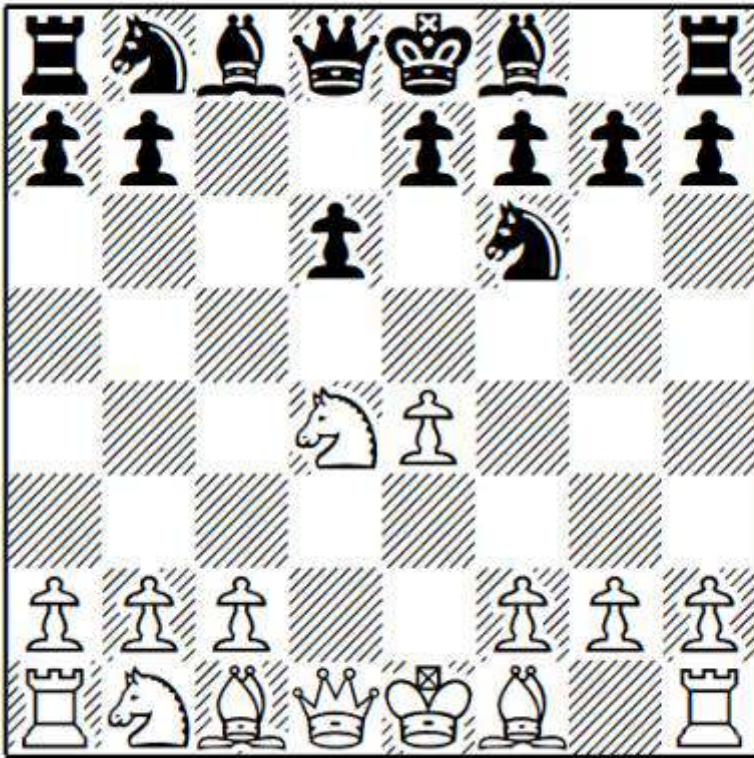
Of course, avoiding mainline theory also has drawbacks. The price you must pay is that the variations are not the theoretically most challenging. However, they are not easy to meet either, and you get sound and playable positions with plenty of scope. Furthermore, the amount of concrete memorization required is much less than in average Sicilian main lines and you can count on the surprise value of this opening choice.

So let me now give you an overview of all possible variations. A key point to understand is when to apply the idea of 5 f3 and when you should abandon it and choose a different path. Let's therefore divide the main Sicilian systems into three major groups depending on their second move: 2 ... d6, 2 ... Nc6, or 2 ... e6.

All other independent tries, such as 2 ... d5, 2 ... Nf6 and so on, will be covered in Chapter One, Early Deviations.

## **2 ... d6**

After this the game usually continues 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6, when we reach the first important moment of our repertoire.



*We play 5 f3!? next*

5 Nc3 is the popular choice, but this will be the point where we leave the main paths. Here we employ our special weapon 5 f3, delaying the development of the b1-knight and aiming for the construction of a strong centre with a subsequent c2-c4. This leads to original and relatively unexplored play which can set Black problems. Even the world champion Magnus Carlsen made use of this line in his World Championship match against Karjakin and won a crucial game with it.

After 5 f3 Black has several options that we will cover in detail.

a) 5 ... e5, followed by 6 ... d5, trying to exploit White's slow play at once, will be the subject of Chapter Two.

b) 5 ... e5, followed by moves other than 6 ... d5 – for example, 6 ... a5 or 6 ... Be7 – will be discussed in Chapter Three.

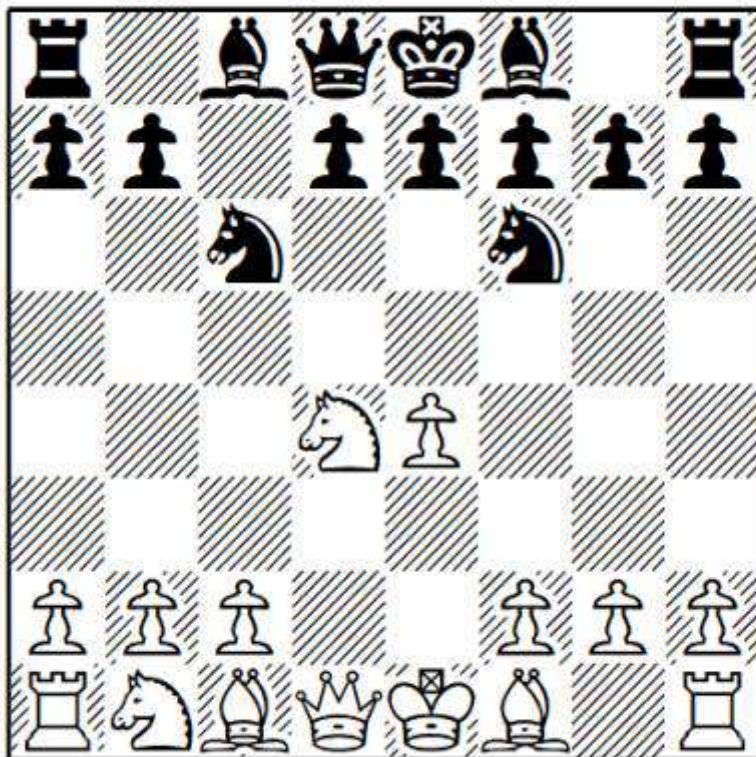
c) The rare 5 ... g6, leading to the Maróczy Bind after 6 c4, is seen in Chapter Four.

d) In Chapter Five, we examine the normal Najdorf-style move 5 ... a6 which is likely to lead to somewhat passive positions for Black.

## 2 ... Nc6

In the style of an Open Sicilian we continue 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4, when 4 ... e5 leads to the Kalashnikov Variation (covered in Chapter Eight) and 4 ... e6 leads to positions discussed via 2 ... e6 below.

Alternatively, 4 ... Nf6 asks us an important question. Should we also play 5 f3 here?



*Here 5 f3? is wrong*

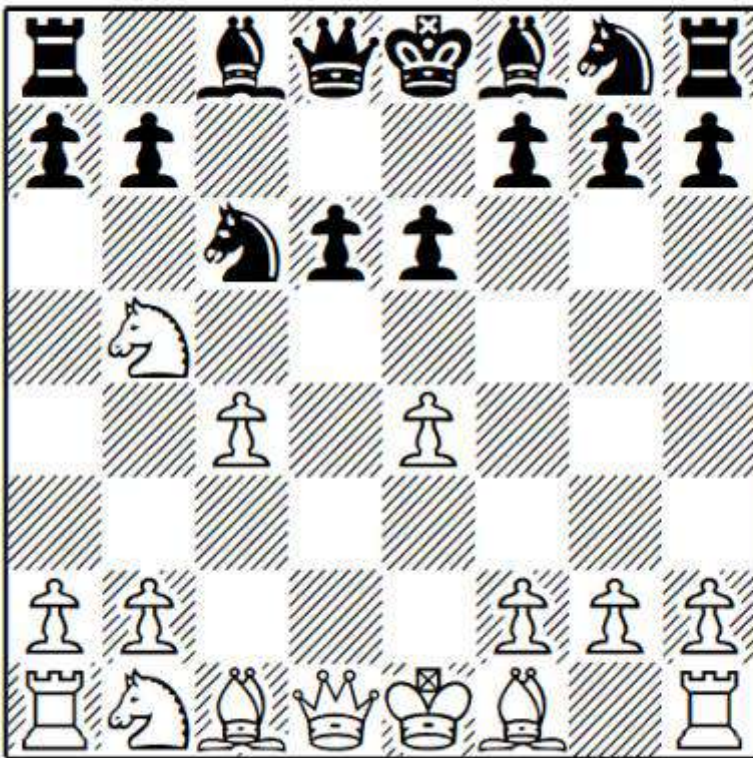
The answer is no. In contrast to variation 'a', Black has already developed both knights and can therefore continue 5 ... e5 and 6 ... d5 with an extra tempo (since Black has played ... d7-d5 in one move, rather than two as above) which changes the evaluation. After 5 f3? e5 6 Nb3 d5 Black is fine.

As a result there is no alternative and we must play 5 Nc3. Fortunately, this is only relevant for two Sicilian systems: the Sveshnikov and the

Rauzer. For both I will suggest comprehensible and original ways to handle the resulting positions. For the Sveshnikov Chapter Nine, and for the Rauzer Chapter Eleven.

## 2 ... e6

This is the third major option for Black. We now continue as usual with 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4, when Black has 4 ... a6 (the Kan Variation) or 4 ... Nc6 (the Taimanov). Here my recommendation is – in accordance with the style of the repertoire – 5 c4 against 4 ... a6 (see Chapter Six), while against 4 ... Nc6 we continue 5 Nb5 d6 6 c4 followed by the rare 7 N5c3 (see Chapter Seven). In both cases you can recognize the same strategic theme with White having a space advantage and pawn on c4, a pattern with which you will definitely become familiar.



*Typical space advantage*

Another possibility for Black is 4 ... Nf6, when 5 f3 does not make sense

here; Black could, for example, play 5 ... d5 with no worries at all. Instead, we must play 5 Nc3 and Black can choose between:

a) 5 ... e6, the Scheveningen Variation, where our repertoire choice will be the Keres Attack with 6 g4, discussed in Chapter Ten.

b) 5 ... Nc6 is the Sicilian Four Knights, after which we continue 6 Nxc6 followed by 7 e5.

c) 5 ... Bb4, known as the Pin Variation, is tricky but not entirely sound.

These last two variations will be discussed in Chapter Seven as a deviation from the Taimanov.

In conclusion I would say that the variations proposed in this book are well suited for anyone who is looking for an ambitious repertoire against the Sicilian Defence but wants to avoid the necessity of keeping up-to-date with the latest and sharpest theoretical developments.

I hope you enjoy the book and that you will discover inspiring ideas which you can implement in your own games successfully.

Jonas Hacker,  
Germany,  
October 2020

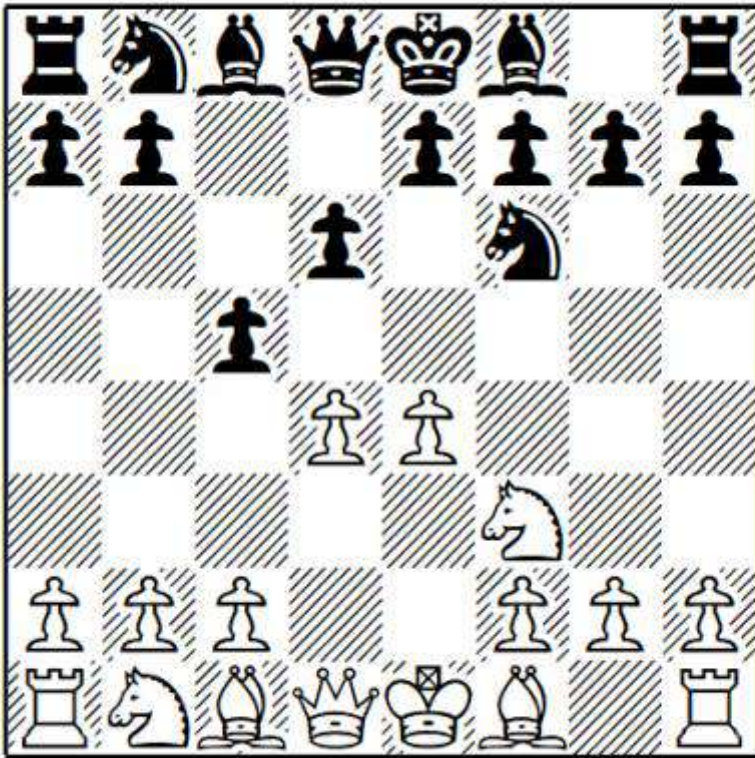
# Chapter One

## Anti-Najdorf: Early Deviations

### Introduction

In this chapter we are going to deal with rarer options for Black on move two or three. We will categorize them into two groups. First, we will discuss the sidelines 2 ... d5, 2 ... a6 and 2 ... b6, which are neither critical, nor do they lure us outside our repertoire. There will be a solution proposed against each of these moves.

The second group includes 2 ... Nf6 and 2 ... d6 followed by 3 ... Nf6!?. This is an attempt to confuse the move order and prevent us from implementing our main idea with 5 f3. The second section is mainly about move orders, but we should be aware of all the options in order not to be surprised over the board. So, let me quickly explain what the options are and the points behind them.



### *Trying to force 4 Nc3*

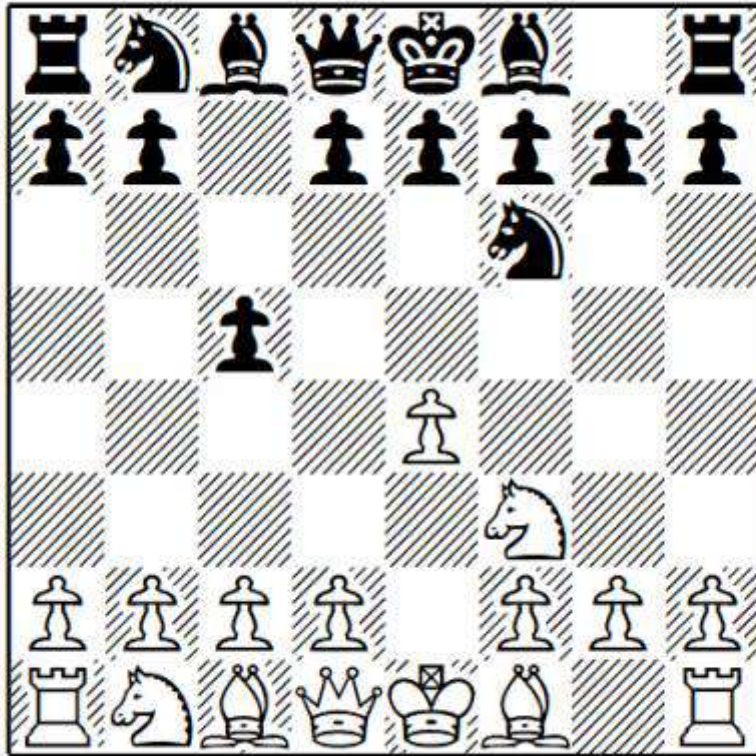
I came across the move 3 ... Nf6 some years ago when I was still playing Najdorf main lines. I did not pay much attention to it because I always continued 4 Nc3, when 4 ... cxd4 5 Nxd4 reaches the main line starting position.

Indeed, back then I wondered why anyone would opt for 3 ... Nf6 in an Open Sicilian, instead of 3 ... cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 as almost everybody plays. It felt like an inaccuracy because it gives White several extra possibilities, such as 4 dxc5 or 4 Bb5+, in addition to heading back to the main lines with the standard 4 Nc3. So why should Black want to apply this move order?

A few years later, when I started using the 5 f3 system regularly, and against strong opposition, I found that a few players played 3 ... Nf6 regularly. After analysing a little deeper I soon realized that the whole point is to avoid the 5 f3 variation, since at this stage of the game 4 f3 is not yet possible. This implies that they think our intended 5 f3 is a dangerous line, but it also means that we must take Black's counter-idea seriously. In this

case we have a simple and effective method with 4 dxc5, which has the advantage of not being so well known, as Black will expect to transpose to the main lines after 4 Nc3 in 90% of games. Thus, we can surprise our opponents with a little preparation.

The other sideline covered in this chapter is 2 ... Nf6.



*Black attacks the e4-pawn*

Clearly this is not a Najdorf anymore but rather a rarely seen sideline of the Sicilian. Now if we try for a main line and play 3 Nc3, we can find ourselves in a tricky situation after 3 ... d6!?. Here 4 d4 is the best choice, in my opinion, and the only real chance to fight for an edge, but it would immediately take us outside of our repertoire.

Okay, in most cases this is not what a 2 ... Nf6 player has in mind, so we could maybe risk playing 3 Nc3, given that 3 ... d6 is unlikely to follow. In order to stay consistent, I will offer two ways to handle this variation. The first is the immediate 3 e5!?, which is more in accordance with our Anti-

Najdorf repertoire because it leads to independent positions. The second is 3 Nc3, which is probably the best move but does risk the small move order trick. Which of the two variations you adopt will be up to you.

We will begin with a theoretical overview of these sidelines before we go on to some illustrative games. In general, White can count on obtaining a comfortable position with a fairly easy opening advantage. But enough of general considerations: let's start studying some concrete variations!

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3**

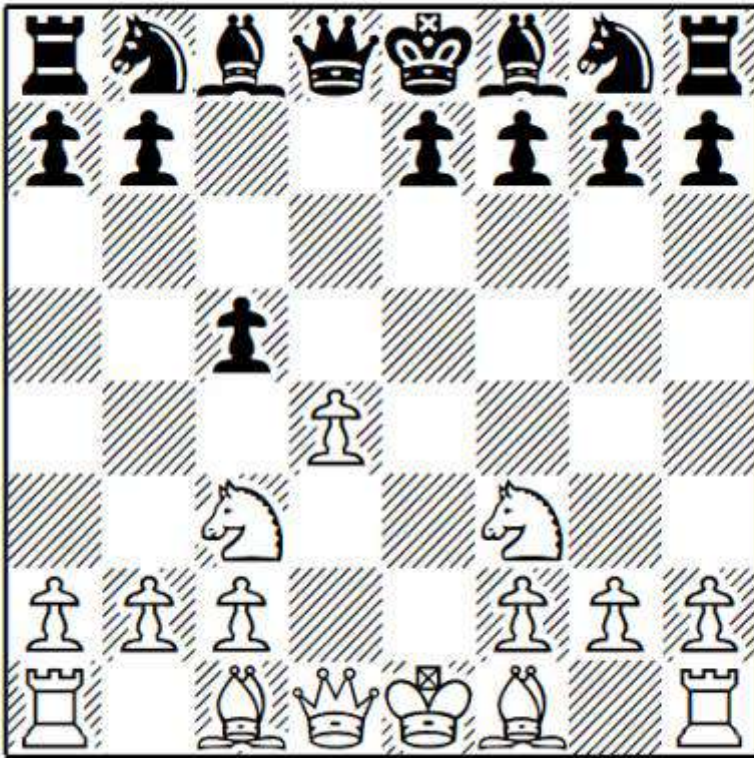
And now the two main continuations we will examine here are:

**A: 2 ... Nf6**

**B: 2 ... d6 3 d4 Nf6**

Black also has three rarer moves:

a) 2 ... d5 is really rare and not especially good. White gets a pleasant position and there is not much to remember. Play continues 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 Nc3 Qd8 5 d4!



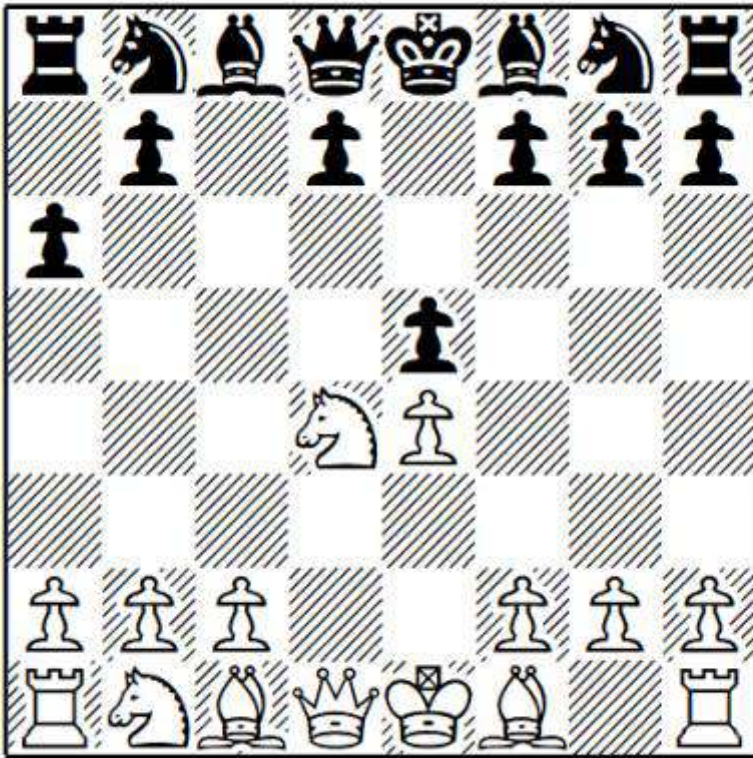
### *Lead in development*

White opens the position and stands much better. Black has many options but will always struggle with the lack of development. 5 ... cxd4 is seen in Game 1, while after a simple plan such as 5 ... Nf6 6 Bf4 cxd4 7 Nb5 Na6 8 Nfxd4 White has a stable plus.

b) 2 ... b6 can be met by 3 c4!?, which is a good option to remain inside our repertoire, as in variation “c”. After 3 ... Bb7 4 Nc3 e6 5 d4 cxd4 6 Nxd4 a6 7 Be2 Qc7 8 Be3 Nf6 White entered a standard kind of Hedgehog set-up in R.Edouard-J.Herrera Reyes, PRO League, Chess.com (rapid) 2020. For more details on Hedgehogs see Chapter Four.

c) 2 ... a6 will not be covered here in detail as there is a simple solution: transposing to Chapter Four. White can play 3 c4! and will soon reach either a Hedgehog or Maróczy set-up after, for example, 3 ... e6 4 d4 cxd4 5 Nxd4 Nf6 6 Nc3.

Another good option is 3 c3, intending to build a strong centre with d2-d4. Note that 3 d4?! cxd4 4 Nxd4 e5 is a pitfall White needs to avoid.



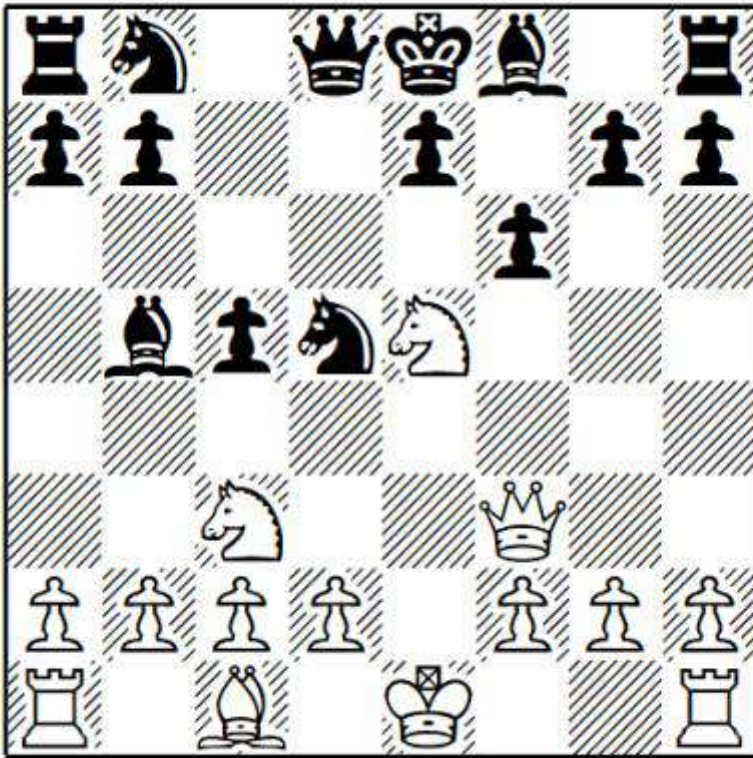
### *A trap to avoid*

The point is that 5 Nb5 is not possible, while after 5 Nf3 or 5 Nb3 Black reaches a more comfortable version of a mainline Najdorf.

### **A: 2 ... Nf6!?**

This introduces a significant sideline, where White has two major options: 3 Nc3 and 3 e5!?. The latter is my recommendation in order to maintain our repertoire. Nonetheless, we will have a short look at 3 Nc3 because the line includes some interesting tactical tricks.

After 3 Nc3 the only independent idea for the system is for Black to play 3 ... d5!?. However, the resulting positions are objectively quite good for White, who either wins an exchange or damages Black's pawn structure irreversibly; e.g. 3 ... d5 4 exd5 Nxd5 5 Bb5+ Bd7 6 Ne5! Bxb5 7 Qf3! f6



*How to regain the material?*

**Question:** White is currently a piece down and the knight on e5 is attacked. Can you find the best way to deal with these problems?

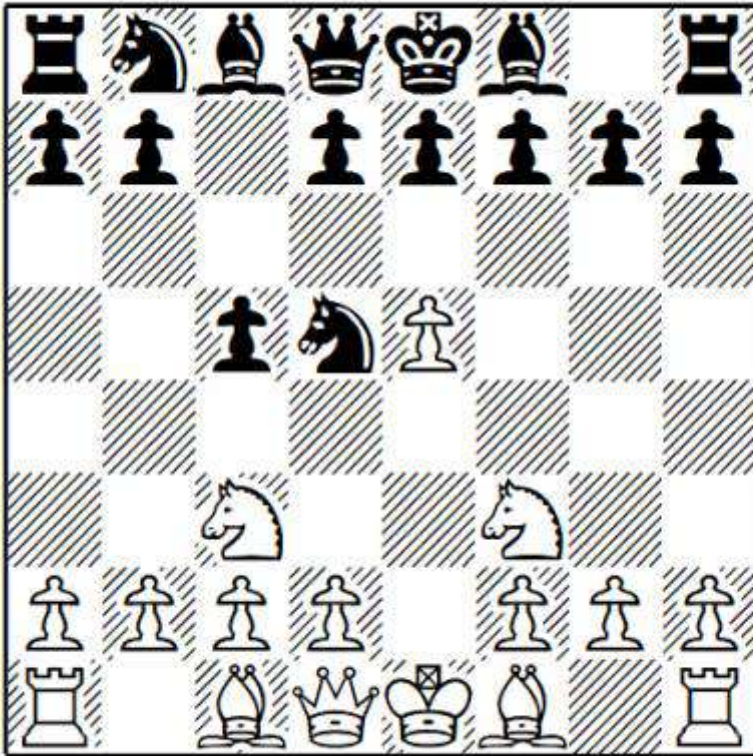
**Answer:** 8 Nxb5! (8 Qh5+? is premature due to 8 ... g6 9 Nxc6 hxc6 10 Qxc6+ Kd7 11 Nxd5 Kc8 and Black is more or less okay) 8 ... Na6 (8 ... fxe5 doesn't win a piece due to 9 Qxd5! with a pleasant advantage for White) 9 Qh5+ (now White can grab material) 9 ... g6 10 Nxc6 hxc6 11 Qxh8 when Black lacks sufficient counterplay. The best try is 11 ... Qd7 with the idea of preventing White from castling, but there are several satisfactory replies that maintain a huge advantage; e.g. 12 Nc3 Qe6+ 13 Kf1 Nab4 14 Qh4 0-0-0 15 Qe4 Qa6+ 16 Qe2 Qxe2+ 17 Kxe2 and White was close to winning in Iv.Saric-R.Tischbierek, German Bundesliga 2012.

As mentioned previously, Black can always play 3 ... d6!? instead. After this, there is no way White can make progress without 4 d4. Set-ups with g2-g3 and d2-d3 are possible but are outside the scope of this book. Our

problem is that 4 d4 can lead to an actual Najdorf after 4 ... cxd4 5 Nxd4 a6 which is what we are trying to avoid.

So, you can risk being tricked by the move order, which is probably not the intention of a 2 ... Nf6 player, or you can simply play 3 e5, which avoids all Najdorf structures.

**3 e5 Nd5 4 Nc3**



*Position after 4 Nc3!?*

This is the main line, and White scores an impressive 60% from here, so I see no reason to deviate from this approach. Black now has two quite different choices, capturing on c3 with 4 ... Nxc3 or defending the knight with 4 ... e6.

**4 ... Nxc3**

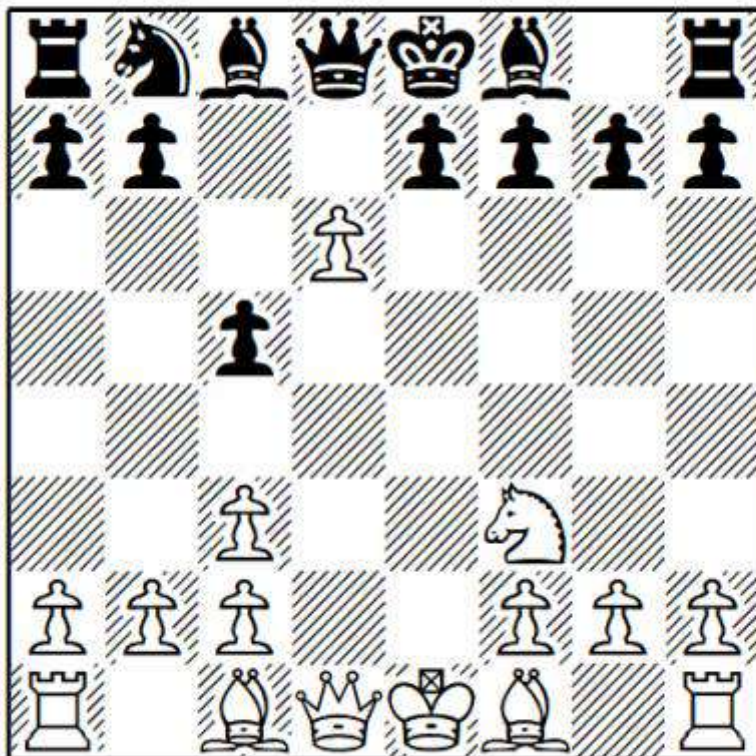
The alternative is 4 ... e6 5 Nxd5 (simple and challenging; if you want to keep more tension you can have a look at 5 Ne4!?) 5 ... exd5 6 d4 and now 6 ... Nc6 is the most dynamic and testing variation available to Black (everything else leads to a very convenient Isolated Queen's Pawn position

for White). Here I recommend not being afraid of Black's activity and to go for the extra pawn with 7 dxc5 Bxc5 8 Qxd5 d6 (the immediate 8 ... Qb6!? is featured in Game 3) 9 exd6 Qb6 10 Qe4+ Be6 11 Qh4!, when White is a pawn up with no clear weaknesses and threatens to consolidate quickly.

### 5 dxc3!

5 bxc3?! is less accurate, since White cannot create pressure down the d-file, and the pawn centre with d2-d4 looks more impressive than it is. Black can respond with 5 ... d5, steering the game into a position like the French Winawer, but in a very comfortable version. In contrast to the French, the c8-bishop is not closed in and Black still has the dark-squared bishop.

The text move is way more challenging as we ask Black a long-term question about the pawn structure. Black has two different strategies. First, to keep everything closed, developing with ... Nc6 and ... e7-e6; we will look at this in Game 2. The second plan is to open the centre with 5 ... d5 (or 5 ... d6) 6 exd6 and then:

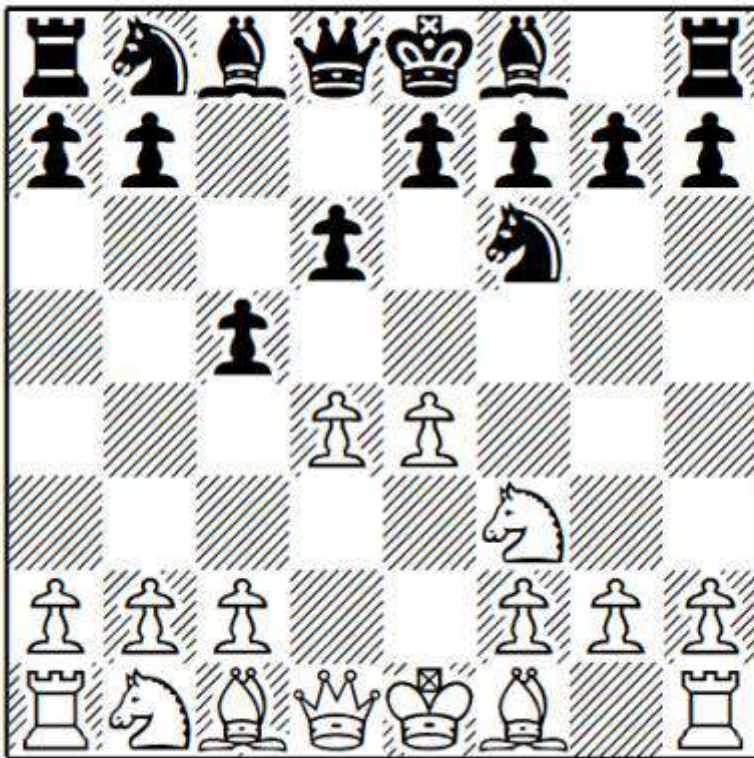


a) 6 ... Qxd6?! is dubious as the d6-pawn will quickly come under fire after 7 Qxd6 exd6 8 Bf4 and 9 0-0-0.

b) 6 ... Nc6 looks interesting since 7 dxe7 Qxa1+ 9 Kxd1 Bxe7 offers some compensation to Black. In view of this I think we should simply develop. Our pawn on c3 does a great job restricting the knight and I see no point behind 6 ... Nc6 then. For example, 7 Bc4 exd6 8 0-0 Be7 9 Re1 0-0 10 Bf4 with a big advantage due to our active piece play

c) 6 ... exd6 7 Bc4 Be7 8 Bf4 0-0 9 Qe2! (the normal-looking 9 Qd2?! is a bit inaccurate as 9 ... Nd7 10 0-0-0 Nb6 followed by ... d6-d5 solves Black's problems) 9 ... Nd7 (after 9 ... Re8 10 0-0-0 there is no danger to the queen) 10 0-0-0 Nb6 11 Rhe1 with a huge initiative.

**B: 2 ... d6 3 d4 Nf6!?**



### *Early confrontation*

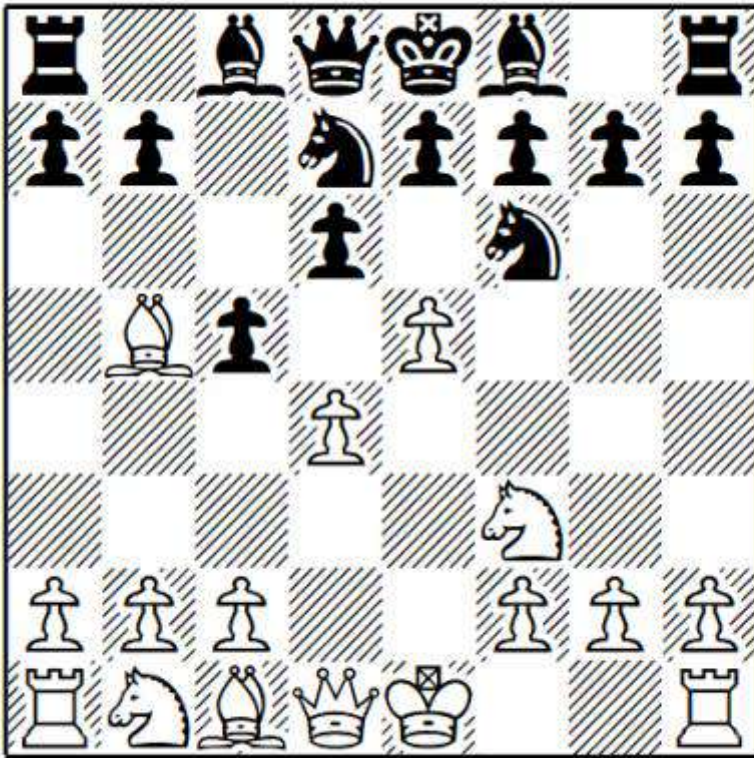
Quite early in the game Black asks us an important question. Do we want to play 4 Nc3 to stay inside the well-known theoretical paths? This book's

answer to it is definitely “No”, since we are aiming for positions with f2-f3 and c2-c4 at all cost, not willing to enter the mainline Najdorf. When I started playing 5 f3 on a regular basis I was always looking out for ways to keep the system independent, because otherwise I would not consider the approach consistent. Our next move is quite forcing but we will figure out which paths to follow and, honestly speaking, the amount of precise memorization required is still quite limited.

#### **4 dxc5!?**

We have a very aggressive alternative here in 4 Bb5!?, setting up a few pitfalls for our opponent which can be easily overlooked. I think that Black has two choices from a human perspective: 4 ... Bd7 or 4 ... Nbd7. After each of them we can go for the advance e4-e5!?, when Black must solve some concrete and likely unexplored problems on move five. If these are not navigated correctly, White obtains a huge advantage.

Let's have a look at this in more detail: 4 ... Nbd7 (after 4 ... Bd7 5 Bxd7 Nbx7 6 e5! White already has an excellent position; e.g. 6 ... Nd5 7 exd6 exd6 8 0-0 threatens 9 dxc5 as well as 9 Re1+, when the black king is stuck in the centre) 5 e5!?



*Attack in the centre*

**Question:** How should Black react to White's aggressive play?

**Answer:** With the tactical 5 ... cxd4! which is the only satisfactory defence. The point is that after 6 exf6 Qa5+ our bishop on b5 will drop, while if we try the intermediate 6 Bxd7+ Black can recapture with 6 ... Nxd7 and even stands better!

Instead, White should proceed safely with 6 Qxd4 dxe5 7 Nxe5 and the position is balanced. Okay, one can argue that we do not get any advantage here, but Black had to think early on with the chance of committing big mistakes, which is not so bad in my opinion.

Returning to our main move 4 dxc5!?, Black has two obvious replies: 4 ... Qa5+ and 4 ... Nxe4.

**4 ... Nxe4**

The alternative 4 ... Qa5+ is a bit inaccurate. White can gain the advantage with several continuations; for example, 5 Bd2 Qxc5 6 Bd3 g6 7

h3 Bg7 8 c4 and White is slightly better.

Other moves are clearly inferior, as White obtains a big advantage easily with almost no knowledge required. For example 4 ... Nc6? 5 Nc3! (not 5 cxd6, as then 5 ... Nxe4 transposes to the main line) 5 ... Qa5 (if 5 ... dxc5 White simply swaps queens with a big edge) 6 Qe2! and there is direct pressure on Black again. The recapture on c5 is now mandatory, so we have 6 ... Qxc5 (6 ... dxc5 7 Qb5!) 7 Nb5 Qb6 8 e5! a6 9 Nxd6+ exd6 10 exf6+ and White has a clear advantage.

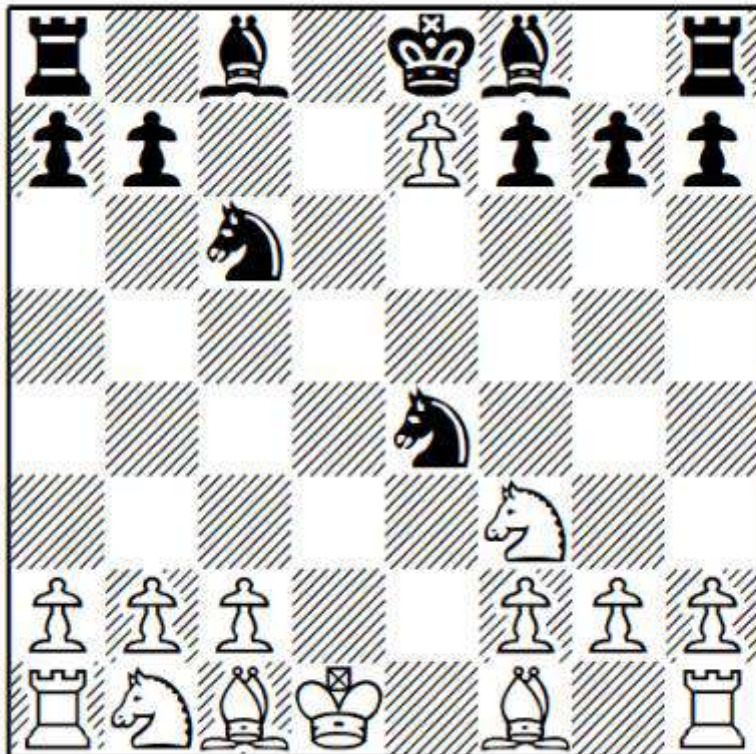
**5 cxd6 Nc6!**

For the slightly inaccurate 5 ... Nxd6, see Game 6.

**6 dxe7!**

In my opinion this the most challenging move because we immediately grab a pawn. As a result, the pressure is on Black to decide between restoring material equality or going for dynamic compensation (see the next question).

**6 ... Qxd1+ 7 Kxd1**



7 ... Nxf2+ or 7 ... Bxe7

**Question:** Should Black go for the complications arising after 7 ... Nxf2+ 8 Ke1

or quietly take on e7, playing for positional compensation?

**Answer:** Objectively speaking, the quiet approach is better. 7 ... Nxf2+ 8 Ke1 Nxf1 9 exf8Q+ Rxf8 10 Bd3 might look very unclear, but with accurate play you will be able to catch the knight in the corner and thus reach a very promising endgame with a slight material plus. For example: 10 ... Bg4 11 Be3 0-0-0 12 Nc3 Rfe8 13 Kd2 Bxf3 14 gxf3 Ne5 15 Ke2 (not 15 Rxh1?? due to 15 ... Nc4+, winning the e3-bishop) 15 ... Nxd3 16 cxd3 Nf2 (16 ... f5?! 17 Kd2 is much better for White) 17 Kxf2 Rxd3 18 Rc1 as in Game 5.

**7 ... Bxe7 8 Be3 Bg4 9 Kc1**

White has a slight advantage thanks to the extra pawn, and it is up to Black to prove compensation. We will see this position continue in Game 4 below.

## Illustrative Games

We will now analyse a few sample games to deepen our understanding of the positions discussed in the theoretical introduction.

Game 1 features the rare option of 2 ... d5, which White punishes in a straightforward manner. The approach is exemplary and keeping the ideas used in mind will help you play similar positions.

In Game 2 we see the 2 ... Nf6 line with 3 e5, after which we reach a position with a closed structure. Demchenko exploits Black's weak squares and passivity in thematic style.

Game 3 features the same variation again. This time Black goes for a more solid approach, accepting doubled pawns but intending to get rid of them soon. In response, Shirov opts for a very a direct and critical line which is worth seeing.

We then examine the tricky 3 ... Nf6 4 dxc5, beginning with Black's best response: 4 ... Nxe4 5 exd4 Nc6. In the recent top-level Game 4 Karthik sacrifices a pawn for positional compensation, but Idani manages to stay on top. In Game 5 Black chooses the tactical solution with 7 ... Nxf2+, leading to an interesting material balance and dynamic play.

Finally, in Game 6, we study the inaccurate 5 ... Nxd6, which is punished by accurate play starting with 6 Bf4. The knight is under a lot of pressure and the Russian grandmaster exploits this in a strong way, reaching a favourable endgame.

We begin with a game featuring the rare 2 ... d5. This was played by correspondence, so it is even more impressive how White won in straightforward manner. Black encounters huge problems and over the board it is almost impossible to solve them.

### *Game 1*

**J.Mrkvicka-T.Heilala**

Correspondence 2009

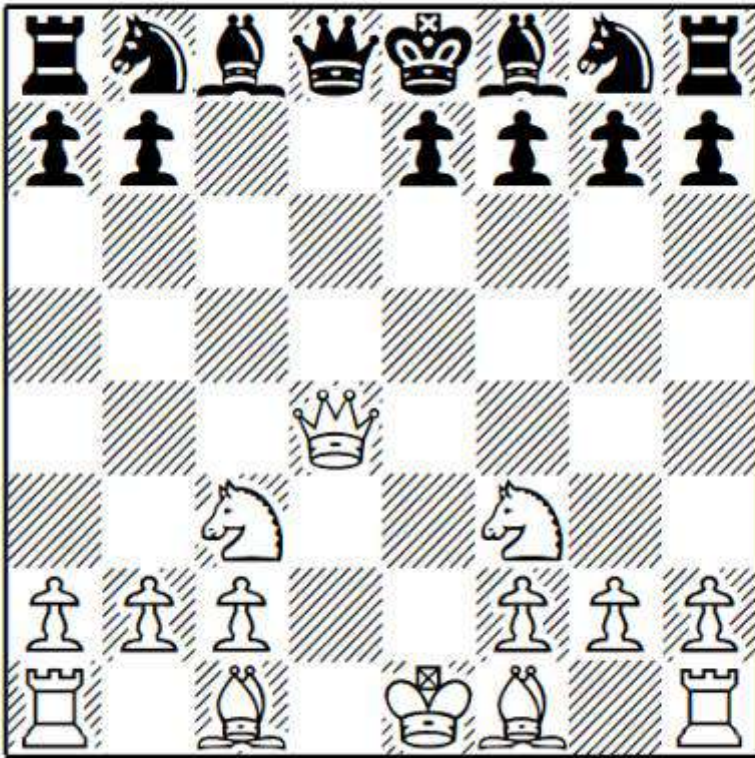
**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d5 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 Nc3 Qd8 5 d4!**

Opening the centre, aiming to exploit White's lead in development.

**5 ... cxd4**

5 ... Nf6 is more resilient as we saw in the introduction, though Black must watch out for early pawn grabs then.

**6 Qxd4**



*Lead in development*

6 Nxd4 a6 is also good, but the queen swop leaves Black's queenside more vulnerable.

**6 ... Qxd4 7 Nxd4 e6**

In contrast to 6 Nxd4 above, 7 ... a6? loses on the spot to 8 Nd5.

**8 Ndb5 Na6 9 Be3**

Threatening simply to take on a7.

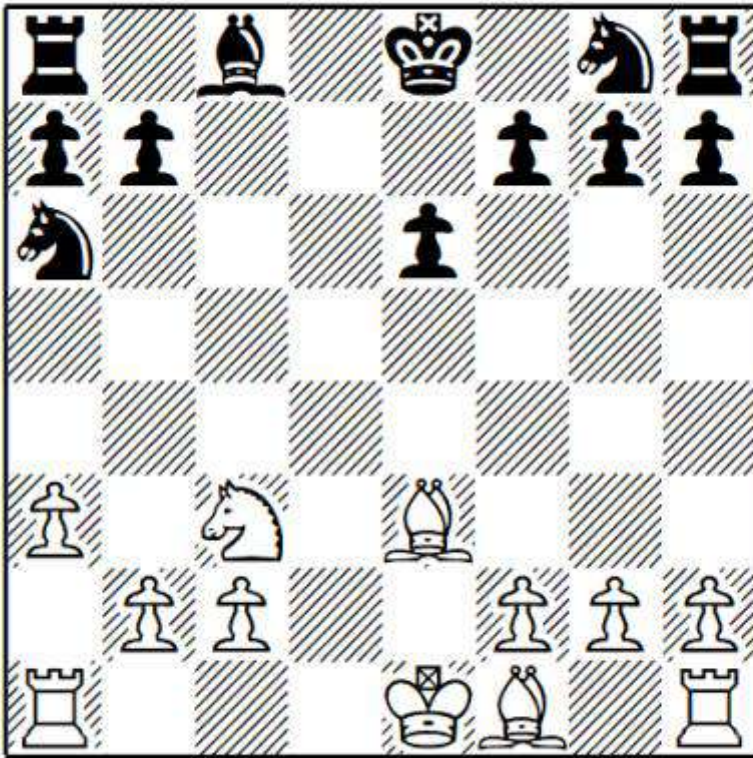
**9 ... Bb4**

Black prefers to give up the dark-squared bishop than grant White a solid extra pawn.

**10 a3**

10 Bxa7 Bxc3+ 11 bxc3 still wins a pawn but White's wrecked structure would make the realization hard.

**10 ... Bxc3+ 11 Nxc3**



*12 Nb5 is threatened*

White is clearly better. 12 Nb5 is a threat, attacking the a7-pawn again.

**11 ... Nc7 12 Bb5+ Bd7**

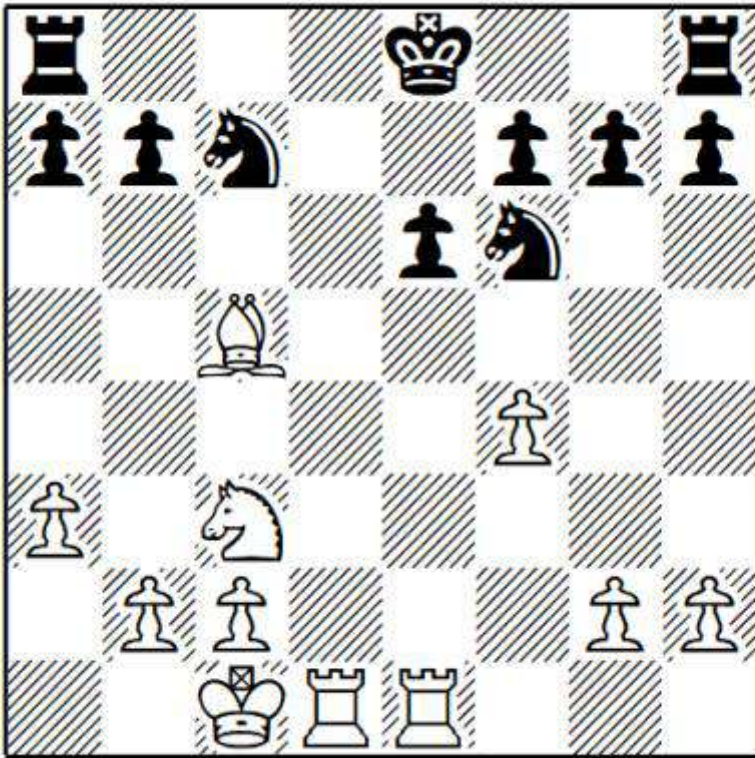
12 ... Nxb5 13 Nxb5 Kd8 14 0-0-0+ Bd7 15 Nd6 is crushing.

**13 Bxd7+ Kxd7 14 0-0-0+**

White's initiative is ongoing and the moves are easy to find.

**14 ... Ke7 15 Rhe1 Nf6 16 Bc5+ Ke8 17 f4**

A key move. Without this resource White would have a much harder task in breaking through. Now he can easily create a new weakness on the e6-square.



*f4-f5 is coming soon*

**17 ... b6 18 Bd6 Rc8 19 f5**

White finally wins a pawn.

**19 ... Rg8**

19 ... Kd7 20 fxe6+ fxe6 21 g4 would be too dangerous with the black king so exposed.

**20 h3 Kd7 21 fxe6+ fxe6**

In case of 21 ... Nxe6 22 Nb5 Ra8 23 Be5+ Ke7 24 Re3 a6 25 Bd6+ Kd7 26 Nc7 Nxc7 27 Re7+ Kd8 28 Rxc7 White wins.

**22 g4 Rcd8**

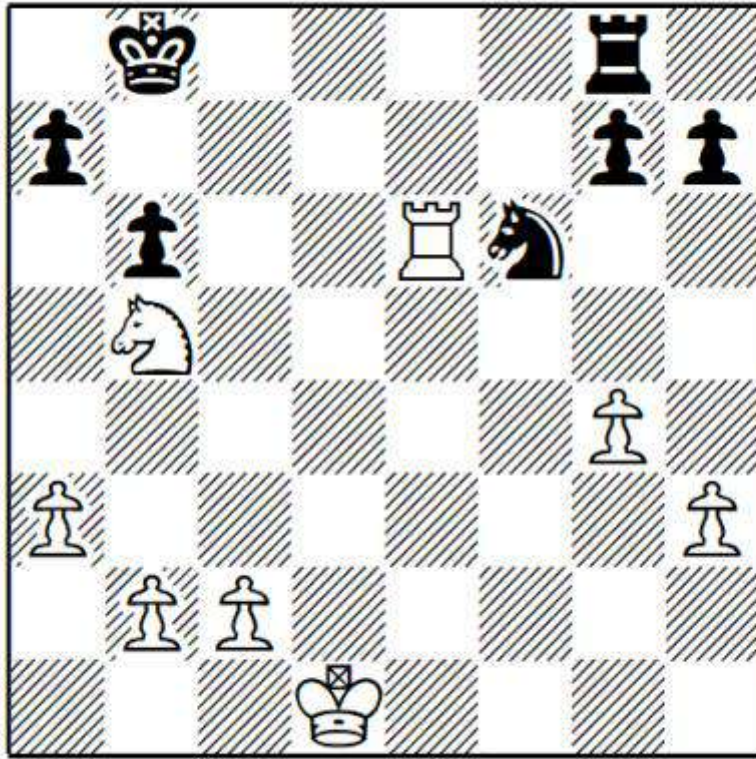
This means giving up a pawn, but it was hard to suggest an alternative.

a) 22 ... Rge8? loses the exchange to 23 Bxc7+ Kxc7 24 Nb5+ Kb8 25 Nd6.

b) 22 ... Nfd5!? was an interesting practical decision, hoping to reach a rook ending after 23 Bxc7?! Rxc7 24 Nxd5 exd5 25 Rxd5+, when White's

task is not completely easy. So 23 Bg3 was stronger, and if 23 ... Rgf8 then 24 Ne4 Kc6 25 c4 with ongoing pressure.

**23 Bxc7+ Kxc7 24 Nb5+ Kb8 25 Rxe6 Rxd1+ 26 Kxd1**



*A solid extra pawn*

**26 ... Nd5 27 c4 Nf4 28 Re7 Rc8 29 Rxc4 Nxc3**

After 29 ... Rxc4 30 Rxc4 White has two connected passed pawns.

**30 b3 a6 31 Nd6 Rc7 32 Rg8+ Ka7 33 Ke2 Re7+ 34 Kf3 Rd7 35 Rh8 Ng5+ 36 Kf4 Rxd6 37 Kxg5 Rg6+ 38 Kf5 Rg7**

Black has no chance of holding. White has more active pieces, plus an extra pawn, and will soon win the h-pawn too, after which the game is over.

**39 g5 Kb7 40 Re8 b5 41 c5 Rf7+ 42 Ke5 Rf3 43 Re7+ Kc6 44 Rxc6 Rxb3 45 Rh6+ Kxc5 46 Rxa6 Rg3 47 g6 Re3+ 48 Kf4 Re7 49 Kg5 Re3 50 g7 Rg3+ 51 Kf6 1-0**

Now we start exploring the 2 ... Nf6 variation. In the first game we see Black playing an early 4 ... Nxc3. In response White chooses a very

classical and very effective plan.

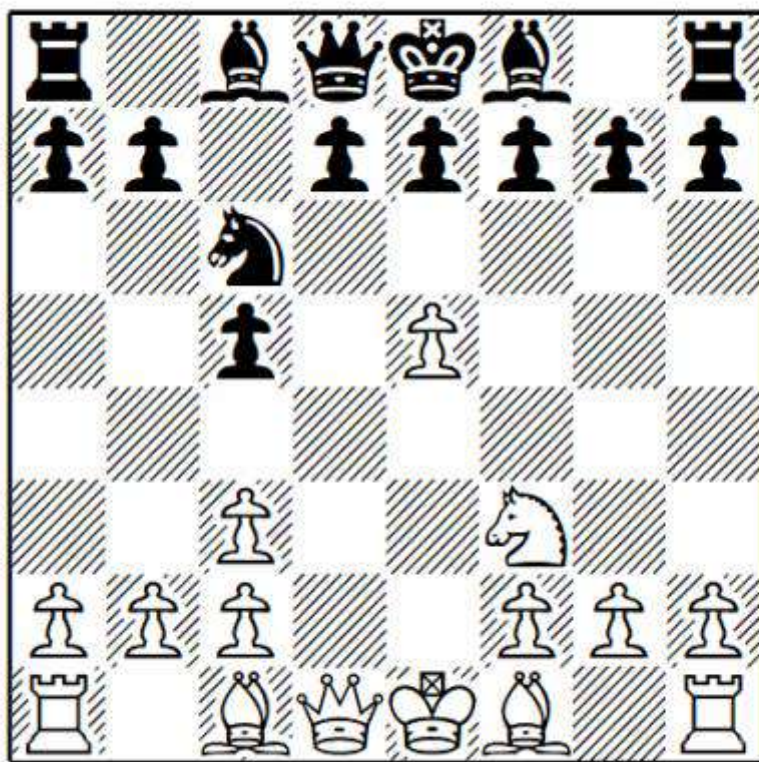
### *Game 2*

**A.Demchenko-A.Predke**

World Rapid Championship, St. Petersburg 2018

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 Nc3 Nxc3 5 dxc3 Nc6**

As we saw in the introduction, 5 ... d5 is the main alternative, which allows White to open the centre.



*Keeping the centre closed*

**6 Bf4 e6**

Now if 6 ... d5 7 exd6 exd6 8 Qd2 Be7 9 0-0-0, Black has trouble with the d6-pawn. So Predke decides to keep the centre closed and avoid an immediate battle against a better developed opponent. The drawback is that

pushing the d-pawn is now impossible and White can try to exploit the dark-squared holes in Black's camp.

### 7 Qd2

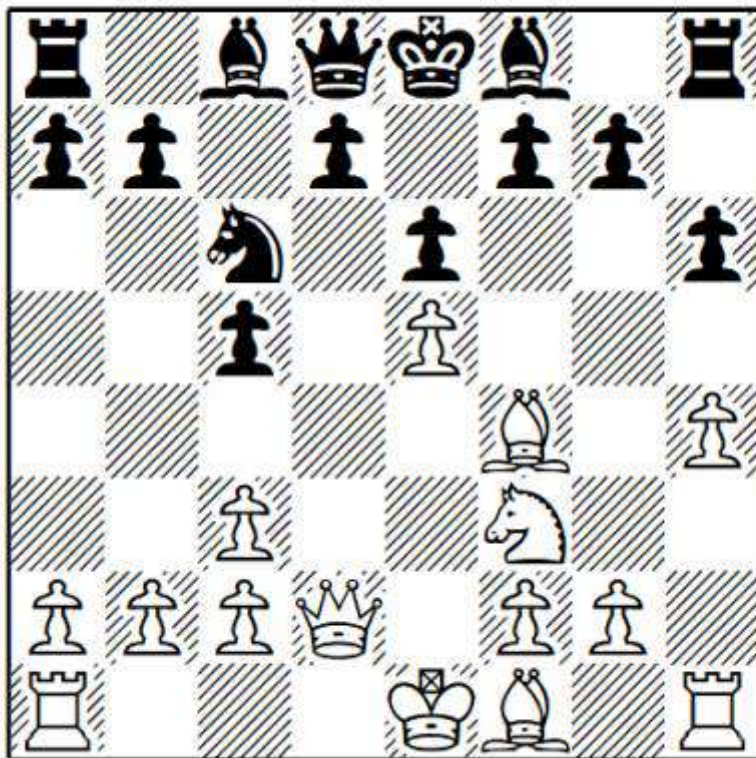
Another option is 7 Be2 Qc7 8 Qd3, when we are ready to defend the pawn in a harmonious way for the third time. Black is passive here and White can steadily increase the pressure.

### 7 ... h6

7 ... Qc7 8 h4 Be7 9 h5 h6 would not change much. 7 ... f6 is the only way for Black to challenge the cramping e5-pawn, but the quick development gives White a huge advantage; e.g. 8 0-0-0 fxe5 9 Nxe5 Be7 10 g3 d5 11 Bh3 and White has easy play.

### 8 h4

A logical space-gaining move on the kingside which also prevents ideas like ... g7-g5-g4 forever. 8 ... Qa5 also becomes pointless as White can castle kingside, when the black queen will be misplaced. Instead, 8 0-0-0?! commits the white king to the queenside so that Black knows where to play.



*No counterplay*

**8 ... Qc7 9 Be2 a6 10 c4**

White is gaining space while prohibiting ... b7-b5 for the moment.

**10 ... Rb8 11 a4 Qa5 12 c3 b5 13 cxb5 axb5 14 0-0**

14 Bxb5? Rxb5 would win for Black.

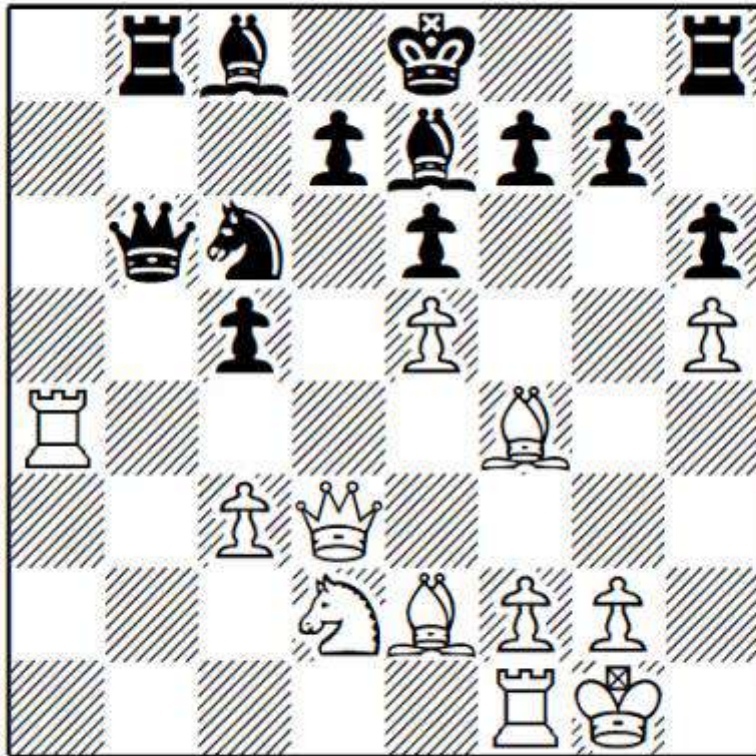
**14 ... bxa4**

White is a pawn down but is still controlling everything.

**15 Qc2 Qb6 16 Nd2 Qxb2 17 Qd3**

White must play a middlegame with queens on the board in order to exploit Black's lack of development.

**17 ... Qb6 18 Rxa4 Be7 19 h5**



*How to complete finish development?*

**Question:** Here it is already hard to suggest a move for Black. Castling is almost impossible. Can you see why?

## **19 ... Qc7**

*Answer:* 19 ... 0-0 runs into 20 Bd1! with the idea of 21 Bc2 and a decisive threat to checkmate on h7. This motif emphasizes the strength of the advanced h-pawn: Black can no longer defend his king by means of ... g7-g6. After, for example, 20 ... Qb5 21 c4 Qb2 22 Bc2 White is winning.

## **20 Nc4 f5**

If Black opts for 20 ... Bb7, White can continue 21 Rfa1 Qd8 22 Qg3 Kf8 23 Qd3 Qc7 24 Bf3 Nd8 25 Ra7 Nc6 26 R7a2 Nd8 27 Bxb7 Rxb7 28 Ra8 and at some point White will at least win back the d7-pawn, while his crushing initiative is still ongoing.

## **21 g4**

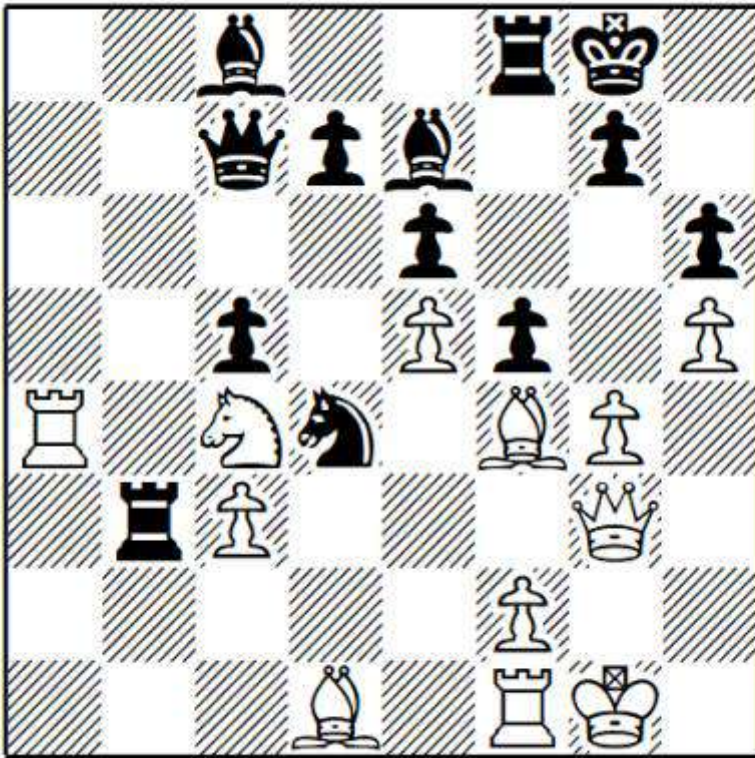
21 Qg3 was stronger, when Black has no chance to get his pieces out; e.g. 21 ... Kf8 22 Bf3 Rg8 23 Qg6 Bb7 24 Nd6 Bxd6 25 exd6 Qd8 26 Rb1 and White is winning.

## **21 ... 0-0 22 Qg3 Rb3?**

22 ... fxg4 23 Qxg4 Rxf4 24 Qxf4 Bf6 25 Nd6 Nxe5 might be the best practical try, though but only White can be better here.

## **23 Bd1 Nd4**

Retreating with 23 ... Rb8 does not help since 24 gxf5 Rxf5 25 Bxh6 Rf7 26 Bc2 is completely winning for White.



*How to win?*

**Question:** After Black's mistake White wins material. Can you see how?

**Answer: 24 Nd2!**

Now Black cannot save both rook and knight. Not 24 Bxb3??, when 24 ... Ne2+ would turn the tables.

**24 ... Bb7 25 Nxb3 Qc6 26 f3 Ne2+ 27 Bxe2 Qxa4 28 Nd2**

The rest is easy. White is a whole piece up and won convincingly in a few moves.

**28 ... fxg4 29 f3 Qc2 30 Qd3 Qa4 31 Bg3 Rxf1+ 32 Nxf1 Bg5 33 Qg6 Kf8 34 Qd3 Kg8 35 Bf3 Ba6 36 Qe4 Qa1 1-0**

*Game 3*

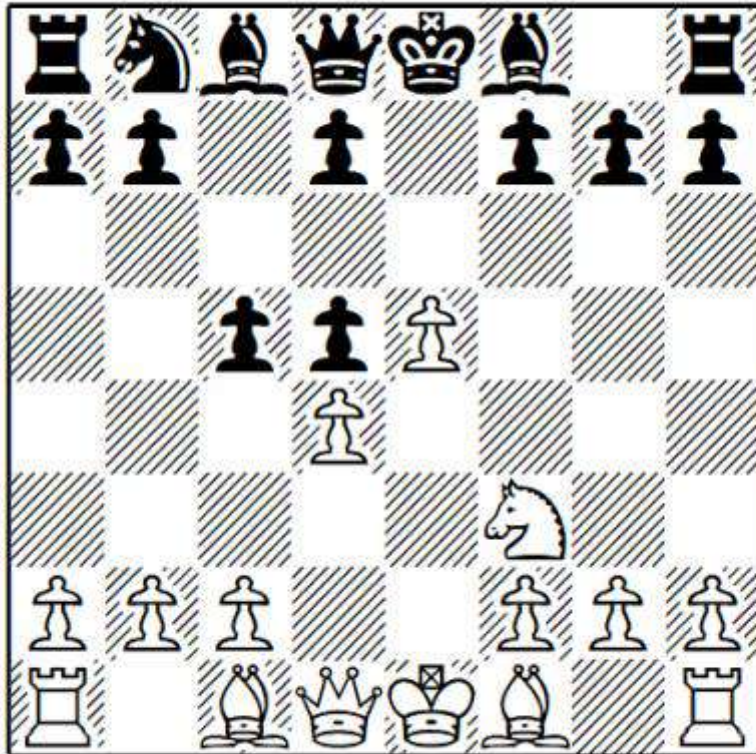
**A.Shirov-J.Markos**

Tromsø Olympiad 2014

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 e5 Nd5 4 Nc3 e6!?**

This is a more solid option than 4 ... Nxc3 as in the last game. Now White must be accurate to fight for an advantage.

**5 Nxd5 exd5 6 d4**



*Solid play*

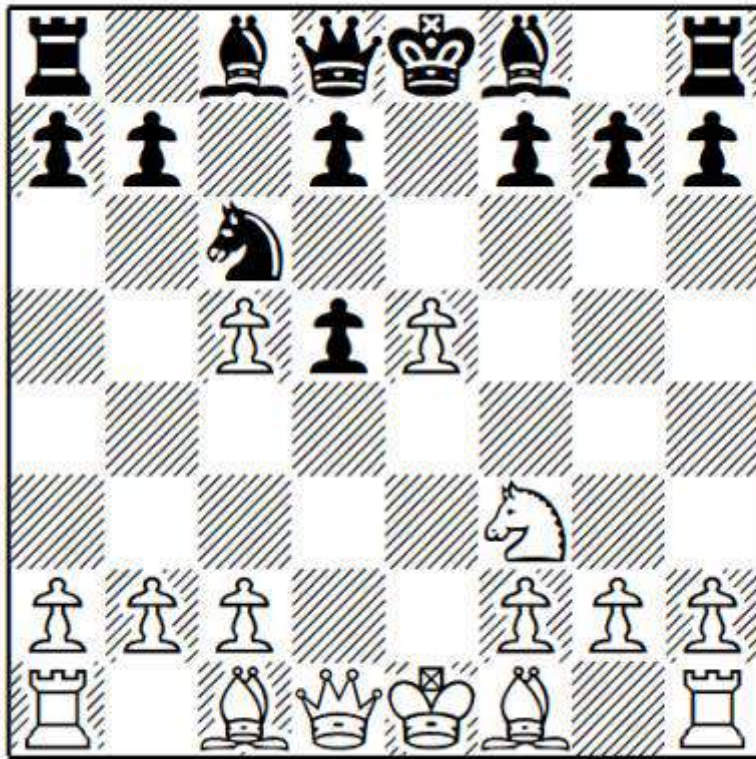
Black has doubled d-pawns but with ... d7-d6 coming quickly he is ready to get rid of his biggest liability. As always, Shirov opts for a very aggressive approach and his opponent was unable to solve all the problems over the board.

**6 ... Nc6**

6 ... d6 can be considered in order to avoid the line played by Shirov, but here White reaches at least a convenient isolated queen's pawn position: 7 Bb5+ (this scores a fantastic 70% for White; if you happy just to play against an IQP, then 7 exd6 Bxd6 8 dxc5 Bxc5 is also possible, but we are trying to improve the circumstances first) 7 ... Nc6 (7 ... Bd7?! would allow

White to exchange a pair of pieces and then go for the IQP structure, which is a slight improvement) 8 Qe2 Be7 9 exd6 Qxd6 10 dxc5 Qxc5 11 Be3 with a plus for White, who is active and the d5-pawn is a long-term target.

**7 dxc5!?**



*White wants the d5-pawn*

**7 ... Bxc5 8 Qxd5**

**Question:** Aggressive play by White who is currently a pawn up. How should

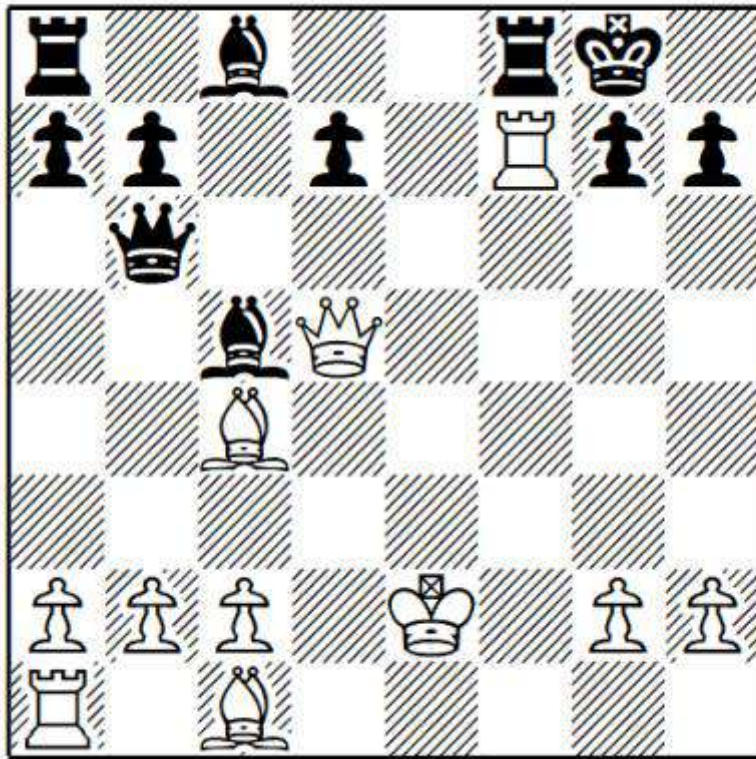
Black react in order to get counterplay?

**8 ... Qb6!?**

**Answer:** By attacking f4 Black re-establishes the material balance, but there was another option in 8 ... d6!? 9 exd6 Qb6 10 Qe4+ Be6 11 Qh4, when White is only slightly better and the situation remains more

complicated than in the game. The text move leads to an unpleasant ending by force and Black must defend for quite a long time.

**9 Bc4 Bxf2+ 10 Ke2 0-0 11 Rf1 Bc5 12 Ng5 Nxe5 13 Nxf7 Nxf7 14 Rxf7**



*How to survive?*

**Question:** White is threatening several discovered checks with his rook, and 14 ... Rxf7? would lead to a quick mate. Can you find a way out for Black?

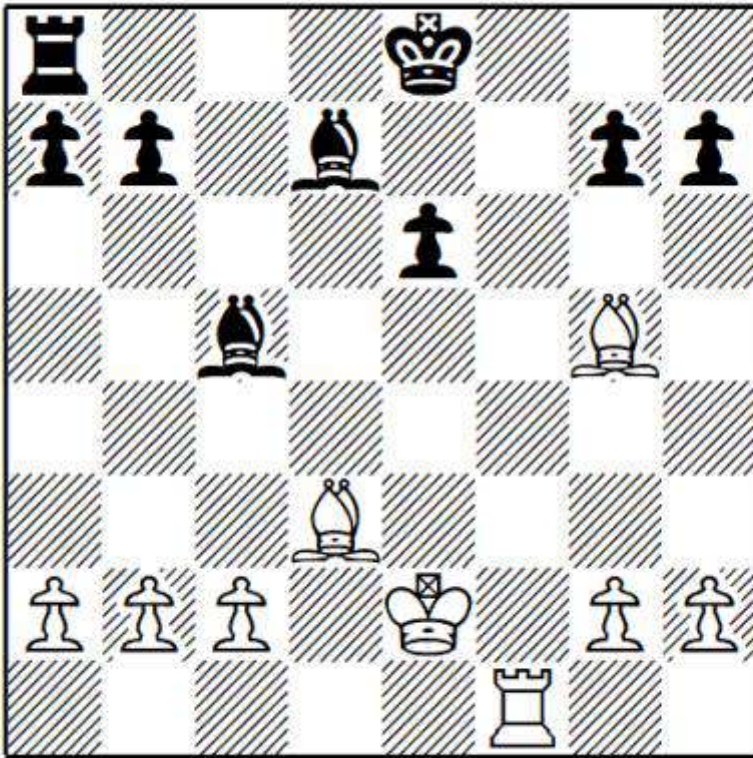
**Answer: 14 ... Qe6+!**

The only move, but now White reaches a slightly more comfortable ending due to a superior structure and temporarily more active pieces.

**15 Qxe6 dxe6 16 Rxf8+ Kxf8 17 Bg5 Bd7 18 Rf1+ Ke8**

Otherwise 18 ... Kg8 19 Rd1 wins a pawn, unless Black goes for the extremely passive 19 ... Bc8.

**19 Bd3**



*How to defend h7?*

**Question:** Black already needs to be accurate, as the h7-pawn now becomes a target. Can you find a way to solve the problem?

**Answer:** 19 ... Be7! is a nice tactical resource. White cannot win a pawn with 20 Bxe7 Kxe7 21 Bxh7 because of 21 ... Rh8! and the game will end in a draw. White would have to play 20 Be3 with a slight positional plus.

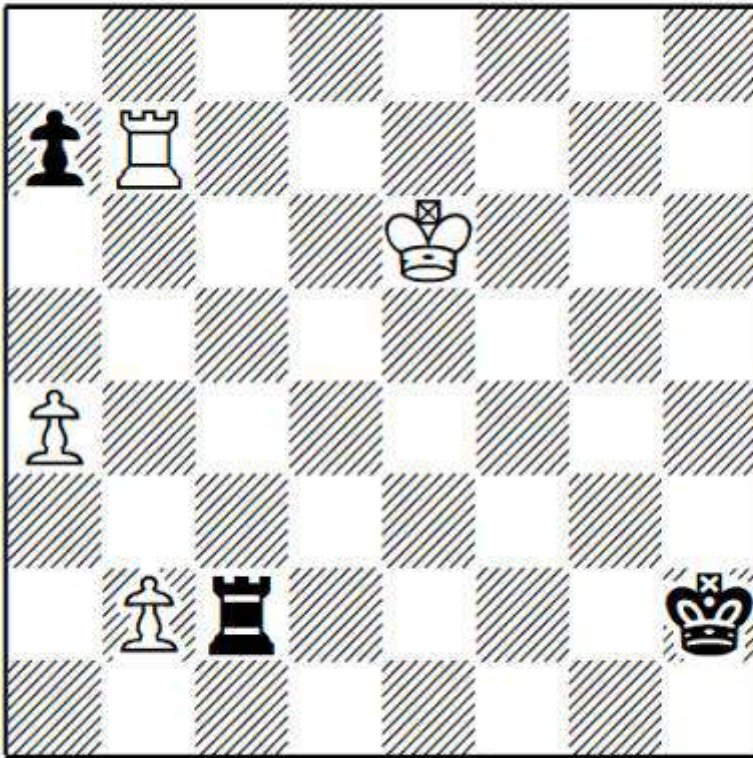
**19 ... g6?**

After this White went on to win a pawn and eventually the game. 19 ... h6?? is even worse in view of 20 Bg6 mate.

**20 Rf4 Be7 21 Bxe7 Kxe7 22 Rh4 Bc6**

Obviously 22 ... Rh7 fails to 23 Bxg6.

**23 Rxh7+ Kf6 24 g4 Kg5 25 Ke3 Kxg4 26 Bxg6 Rf8 27 Be4 Bxe4 28 Kxe4 Rf4+ 29 Ke5 Rf2 30 Rg7+ Kh3 31 Kxe6 Rxc2 32 Rxb7 Kxh2 33 a4**



### *A lost endgame*

Black's king is too far away, so White has no trouble converting his material plus.

**33 ... Kg3 34 b4 a5 35 bxa5 Rc4 36 Kd5 Rxa4 37 Rb5 1-0**

In the next game we will see the move order trick 3 ... Nf6, hoping for a standard main line after 4 Nc3 cxd4 5 Nxd4. Instead, as analysed in the theoretical section, the game goes on with 4 dxc5 and Black decides to sac a pawn for active play.

### *Game 4*

**P.Idani-V.Karthik**

Qinhuangdao 2019

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 Nf6 4 dxc5 Nxe4 5 cxd6 Nc6 6 dxe7 Qxd1+ 7 Kxd1 Bxe7**

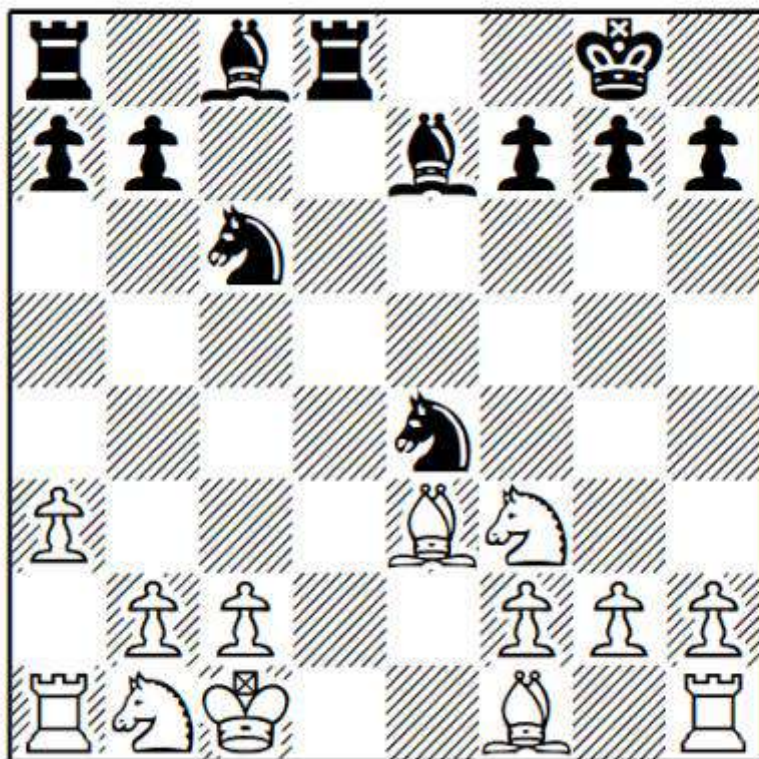
The alternative 7 ... Nxf2+ is the subject of the next game.

## 8 Be3

So far, the position is well known to us from the introductory notes.

## 8 ... Bg4

After 8 ... 0-0 9 Kc1 Rd8, the straightforward 10 Nbd2?! Nxd2 11 Nxd2 Bf5 12 c3 Rc8 13 f3 Nb4! would give Black a serious initiative and White must be really careful not to be worse. Instead, I recommend 10 a3!?, intending Bd3, when the c6-knight is quite limited for the moment and Black cannot develop an initiative on the c-file so easily.



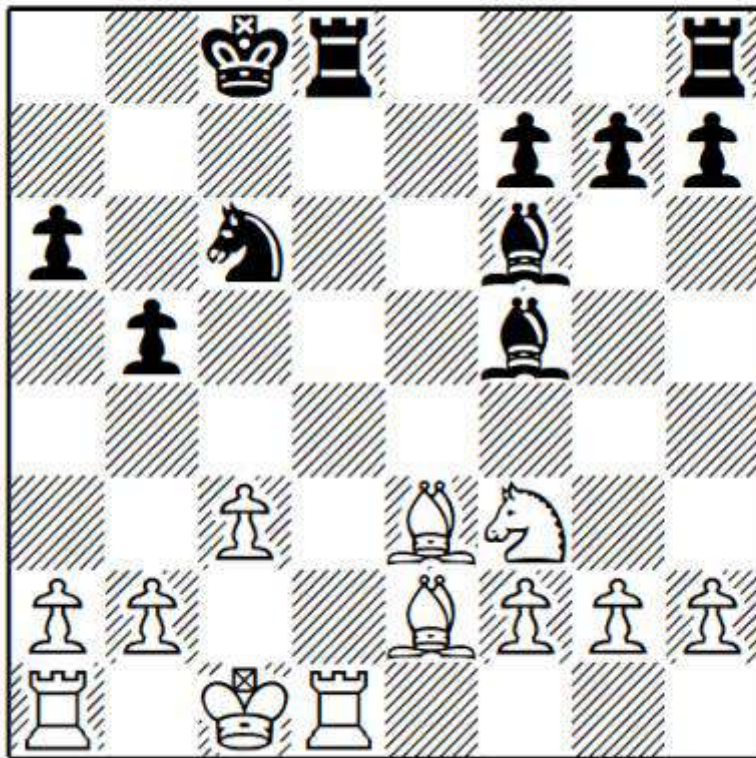
*White plans 11 Bd3*

For example, 10 ... Bf5 11 Bd3 Rc8?! 12 Nc3! secures a big edge for White who is now developing smoothly and exchanges some pieces without compromising his position at all. After 12 ... Nxc3? 13 Bxf5 Ne2+ 14 Kb1 White would even be winning because the e2-knight is stuck, and White already has an extra pawn.

**9 Kc1 0-0-0 10 Nbd2 Nxd2 11 Nxd2 Bf5 12 c3 a6**

Presumably Black was afraid of giving up a second pawn. Nonetheless, 12 ... Ne5 looks more active, and if 13 Bxa7 then 13 ... Bg5! (Black would not achieve anything with 13 ... Nd3+?! 14 Bxd3 Rxd3 15 Be3! and White has a rock-solid position thanks to his superiority on the dark squares, while simultaneously being two pawns up – the only thing White should not play is 16 Rd1?? because of 16 ... Rxc3+! 17 bxc3 Ba3 mate) 14 Be3 Bxe3 15 fxe3 Ng4 16 e4 Nf2 17 Rg1 Bxe4 and Black has managed to regain one of the pawns, but White is still slightly better due to his material advantage, while Black's activity is not too threatening.

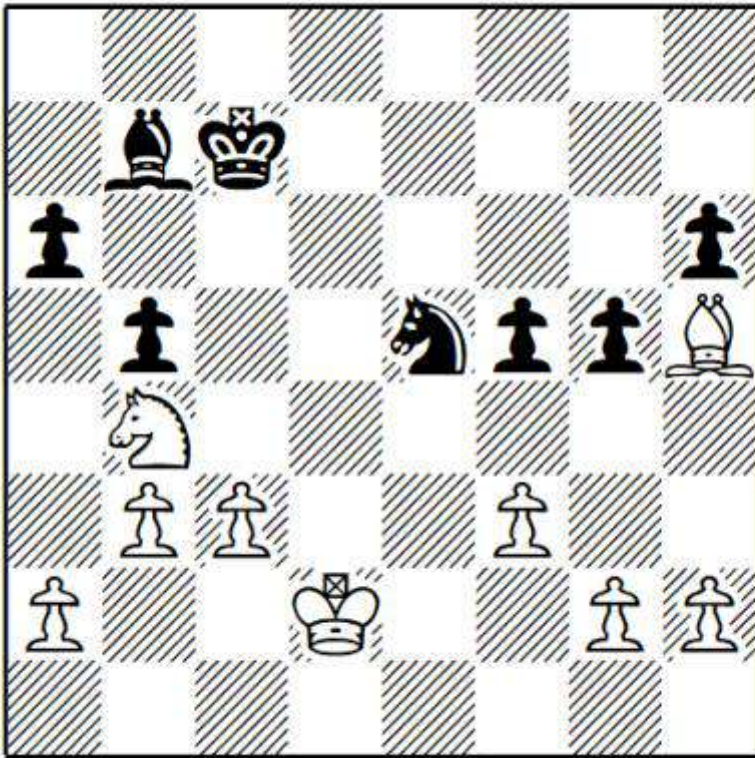
**13 Nf3 Bf6 14 Be2 b5 15 Rd1**



*White wants the rooks off*

White plans simply to exchange all the rooks, after which his advantage would be indisputable.

**15 ... Kb7 16 Bg5 Bxg5+ 17 Nxc5 Rhe8 18 Rd2 f6 19 Nf3 Be4 20 Kd1 Bd5 21 b3 Kb6 22 Rb1 g5 23 Rbb2 h6 24 Ne1 Ne5 25 Bh5 Rf8 26 f3 Kc7 27 Nc2 f5 28 Nb4 Bb7 29 Rxd8 Rxd8+ 30 Rd2 Rxd2+ 31 Kxd2**



*Play for two results*

Now with all the rooks removed the game becomes very one-sided because the potential for counterplay is very limited; maybe it is not there at all.

**31 ... Kd6 32 Nc2 Bc6 33 Nd4 Bd7 34 f4!**

White starts to convert his advantage by creating further weaknesses in Black's camp. Black must either exchange his knight or compromise his pawn structure, as happened in the game.

**34 ... gxf4**

34 ... Nc6 35 Nxc6 Bxc6 36 g3 is just a lost bishop ending for Black, according to the principle of two weaknesses. Black's first "weakness" is being a pawn down, the second an inferior pawn structure with pawns fixed on light squares.

**35 Ne2 a5 36 Nxf4 Bc6 37 Be2 b4 38 g3 Be4 39 cxb4 axb4 40 Nd3 Bxd3 41 Bxd3 Nf3+ 42 Ke3 Nxe2 43 Bxf5**

For such a strong grandmaster the rest is just a matter of technique. White won after a few more moves.

**43 ... Ke5 44 Bh3 h5 45 Kd3 Kd5 46 Bg2+ Kc5 47 Ke4 Ng4 48 Bf3 Nf6+ 49 Ke5 Nd7+ 50 Kf5 Kd6 51 Bxh5 Nc5 52 Be2 Ne6 53 Bc4 1-0**

The next game features 3 ... Nf6 4 dxc5 again. This time Black opts for the wild 7 ... Nxf2+, which is the main alternative to 7 ... Bxe7 we've just seen in Game 4.

### *Game 5*

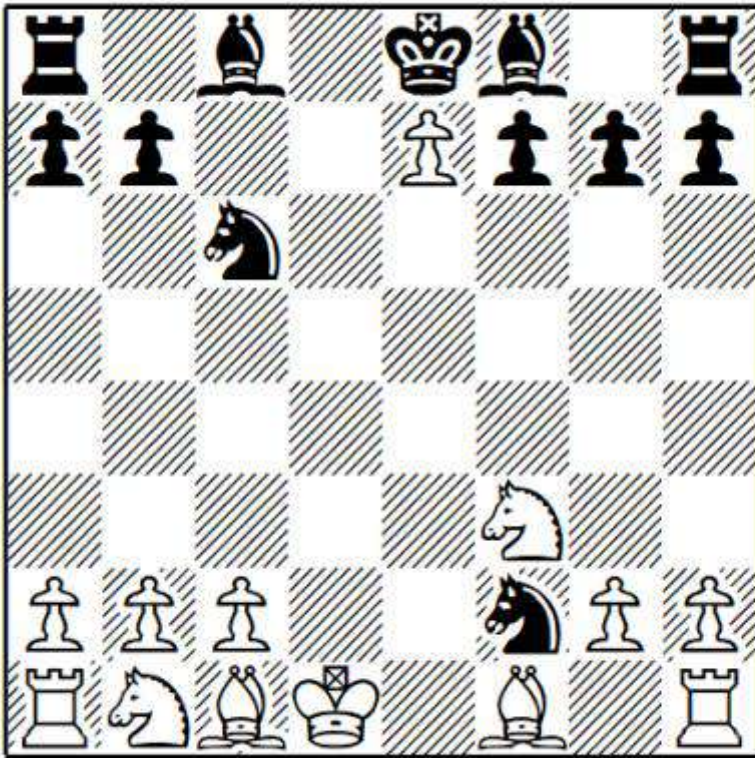
**R.Nanjo-D.Vorobjev**

St. Petersburg 2014

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 Nf6 4 dxc5 Nxe4 5 cxd6 Nc6**

When I first saw a game with 5 ... Nc6 I thought the point behind it was preventing 6 dxe7 because of the fork on f2. Looking deeper, it became clear that 6 dxe7 is not a blunder but a very serious option for White. In addition we can count on its surprise value as 6 dxe7 is only the number three move by frequency, and we are already inside a sideline of a sideline.

**6 dxe7 Qxd1+ 7 Kxd1 Nxf2+**



*A crazy position*

I think this is slightly the inferior of Black's two options here.

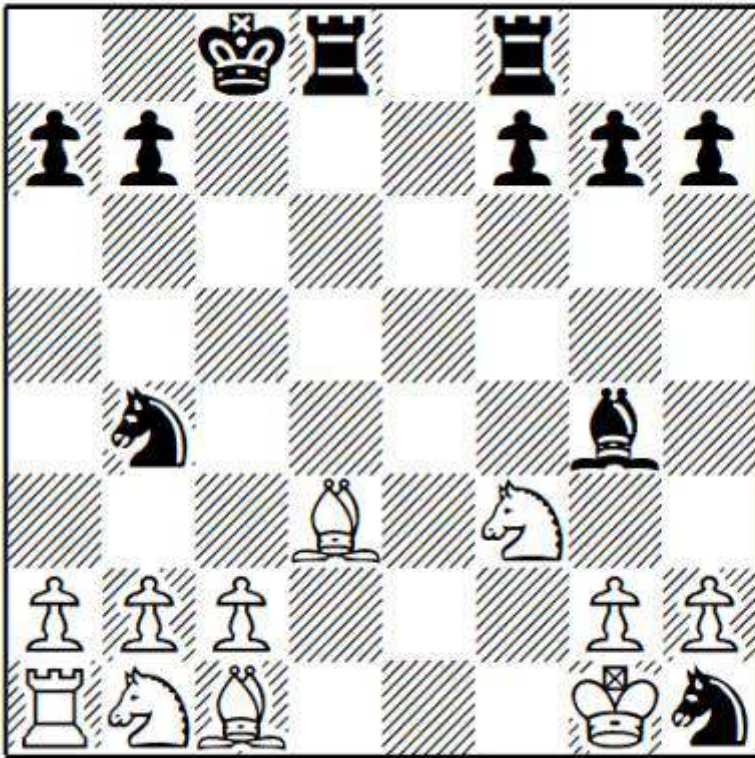
**8 Ke1 Nxb1 9 exf8Q+ Rxf8 10 Bd3 Bg4**

That is the usual way to go. Black needs to develop as quickly as possible with 11 ... 0-0-0 and 12 ... Rfe8 in order to create counterplay and disturb White from simply collecting the knight in the corner.

**11 Nc3**

We will have a look at different plans to catch the knight to get a feeling for the speed and danger of Black's possible counterplay.

First, there is the direct attack 11 Kf1, intending Kg1 and Kxh1. If White carries out this plan too naïvely, then 11 ... 0-0-0 12 Kg1? Nb4! is an appropriate answer.



*Something went wrong*

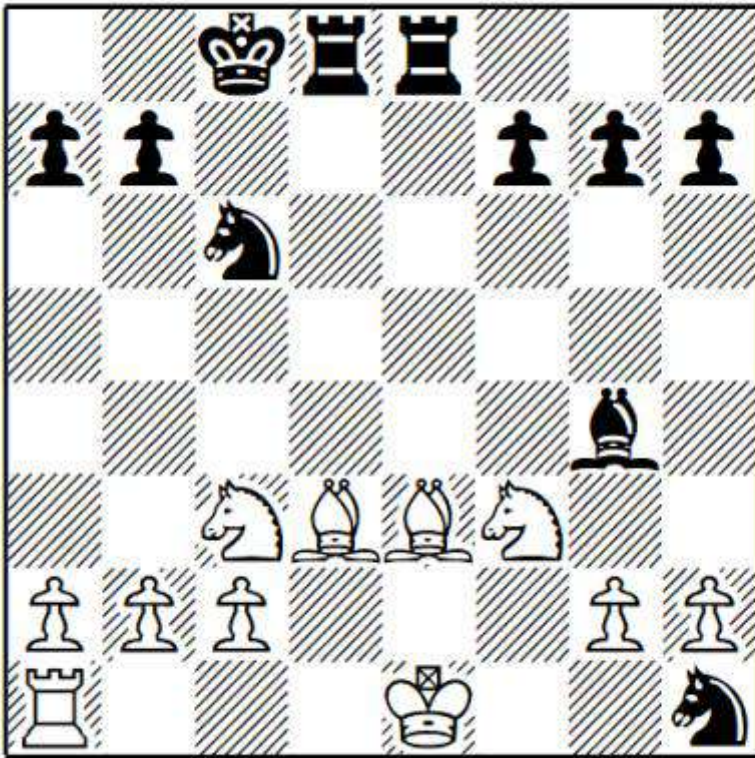
In fact Black is already better because of the threat of ... Nxd3, as well as ... Rxd3 and ... Nc2.

Instead, White should play 12 Bd2 Bxf3 13 gxf3 Ne5 and then must walk the very narrow path 14 Bf5+! Kb8 15 Bf4! Ka8 16 Bxe5 Rd1+ 17 Kg2 Re8 18 f4 f6 19 Bg4 Rc1 20 Bc3 Rd8 21 b3! and is ready to unpin. Although this might lead to an overwhelming advantage, I think it is very hard to find all the only moves along the way. Finally, It is up to you to choose between this ambitious line and the calmer game continuation.

**11 ... 0-0-0 12 Be3**

If 12 Kf1 then 12 ... Nb4! gives Black some counterplay, similar to the previous note.

**12 ... Rfe8**



*Accuracy is needed*

**Question:** How to defend against the pin?

**Answer: 13 Kd2!**

The only move.

a) 13 Ke2?? loses to 13 ... Nd4+ 14 Kd2 Nxc2!

b) 13 Nd1? is too passive and allows Black to attack with 13 ... Nb4, threatening ... Rxd3 followed by ... Nc2+, for example.

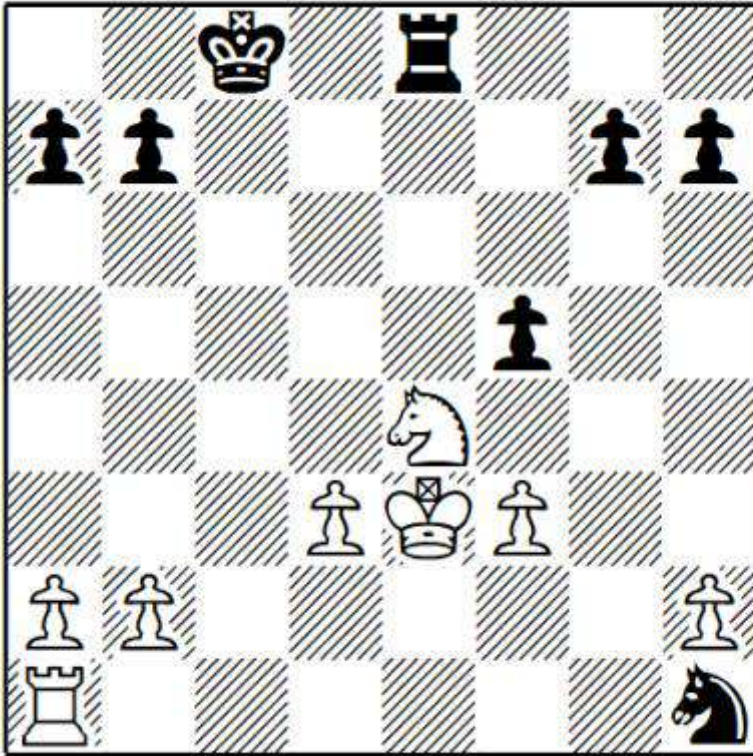
**13 ... Bxf3 14 gxf3 Ne5! 15 Ke2**

The only answer to both threats: 15 ... Nc4+ and 15 ... Nxf3+. Now Black must be inventive to create further counterplay. Allowing 16 Rxf1 would leave White with two minor pieces for a rook.

**15 ... Nxd3 16 cxd3 Nf2**

Here 16 ... f5?! looks like a tempting alternative but it only makes matters worse. After 17 Kd2 f4 18 Bxa7 Black won't even get a single pawn for the knight. If Black tries an exchange sacrifice 17 ... Rxe3 18

Kxe3 Re8+ with the idea of freeing the knight, White has the strong reply  
19 Ne4!!



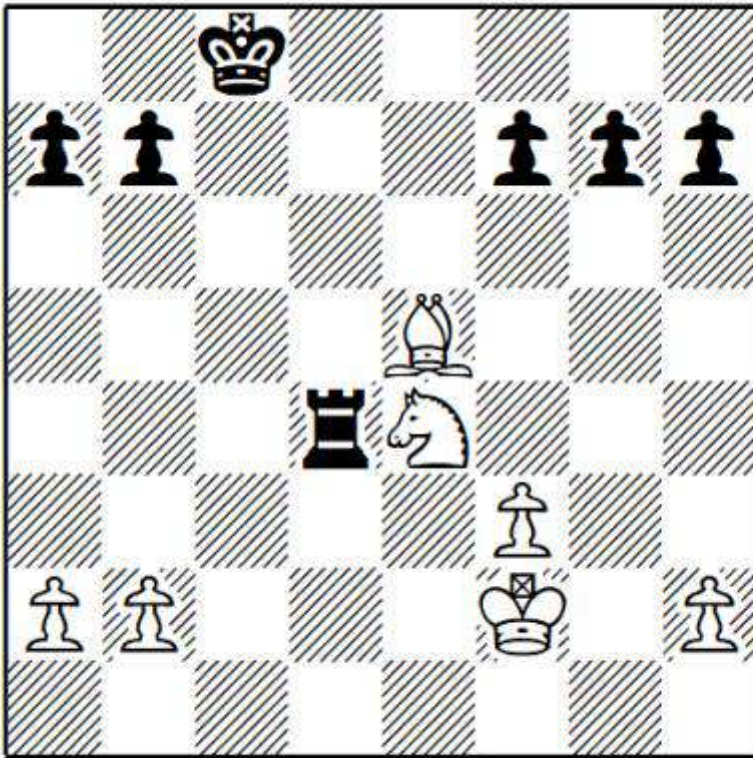
*Black is lost*

19 ... fxe4 20 fxe4 and the game is effectively over because of the connected central passed pawns.

**17 Kxf2 Rxd3**

Now we face a typical rook and pawn versus two minor pieces situation. I think White must have some advantage, even if it might be technically hard to convert it, but anyway we can be happy to get such a position out of the opening.

**18 Rc1 Kd7 19 Bf4 Rd4 20 Ne4 Rc8 21 Rxc8 Kxc8 22 Be5**



*Can Black save the pawn?*

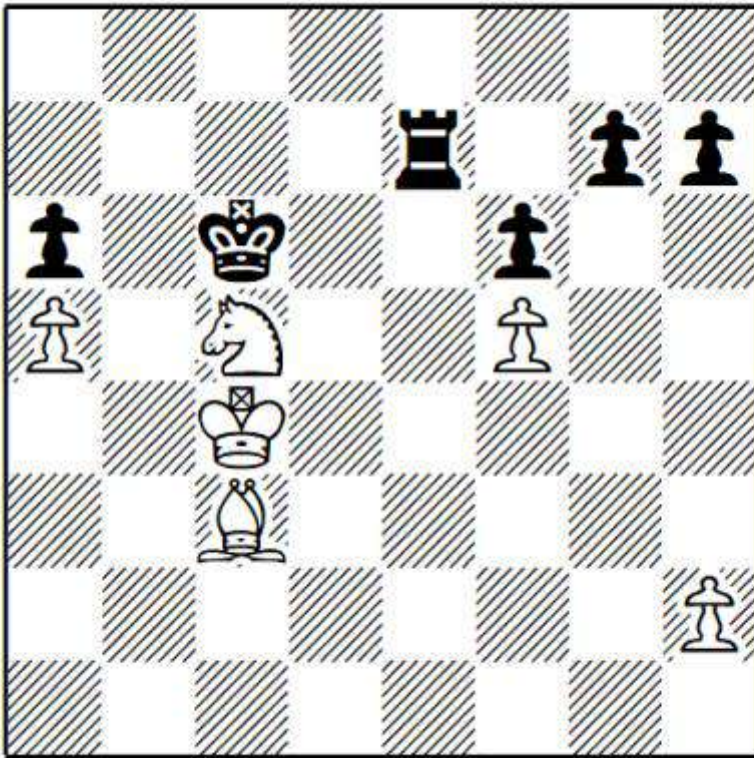
**Question:** White threatens both rook and g7-pawn. Is there a way for Black to keep the material balanced?

**Answer:** Yes, there is.

**22 ... Rd7!**

Black defends by means of tactics. 23 Bxg7 is now impossible due to 23 ... f5, winning a piece. Note that 22 ... Ra4?! is less appealing, as after 23 Bxg7 Rxa2 24 h4 White gets a dangerous initiative on the kingside.

**23 Ke3 f6 24 Bd4 Kc7 25 Kd3 Kc6 26 a4 Rd5 27 b4 b6 28 Ng3 Rd7 29 Nf5 Kd5 30 f4 Ke6 31 Ne3 Rc7 32 a5 bxa5 33 f5+ Kd6 34 bxa5 Kc6 35 Kc4 Rd7 36 Nc2 a6 37 Nb4+ Kb7 38 Nd3 Kc6 39 Bc3 Re7 40 Nc5**



*What is the best defence?*

**Question:** How should Black react to the threat to the a6-pawn?

**Answer:** He should seek active counterplay rather than try to keep his extra pawn at all cost.

**40 ... Re2!**

Defending the pawn with 40 ... Ra7 is too passive. After 41 h4! White will exert some pressure with h4-h5 and Ne6, targeting the weak g7-pawn. It is not easy for Black to find an appropriate antidote as the following variations show:

a) 41 ... h6?! 42 h5 Kd6 43 Bd4 Kc6 (the waiting strategy is not good at all here, as White has the crushing plan of winning the g7-pawn) 44 Bg1 Ra8 45 Ne6 Rg8 46 Bc5 and the game is over.

b) 41 ... g6 is the computer move. White wins a pawn after 42 fxg6 hxg6 43 Bxf6, but Black has reduced the number of pawns on the board and has drawing chances if he activates his rook again with 43 ... Rf7.

**41 Nxa6 Rxh2 42 Nb4+ Kc7 43 a6 Rh5 44 Nd5+ Kb8 45 Bd4 Rxf5  
46 a7+ Kb7**

White should force a draw now, before Black starts running with his pawns.

**47 Nc7 Ra5 48 a8Q+ Rxa8 49 Nxa8 Kxa8 50 Kd5 Kb7 51 Ke6 h5 52  
Bf2 Kc6 53 Kf7 h4 54 Bxh4 g5 55 Bf2 f5 56 Kf6 g4 57 Kxf5 g3 58 Bxg3  
½-½**

### *Game 6*

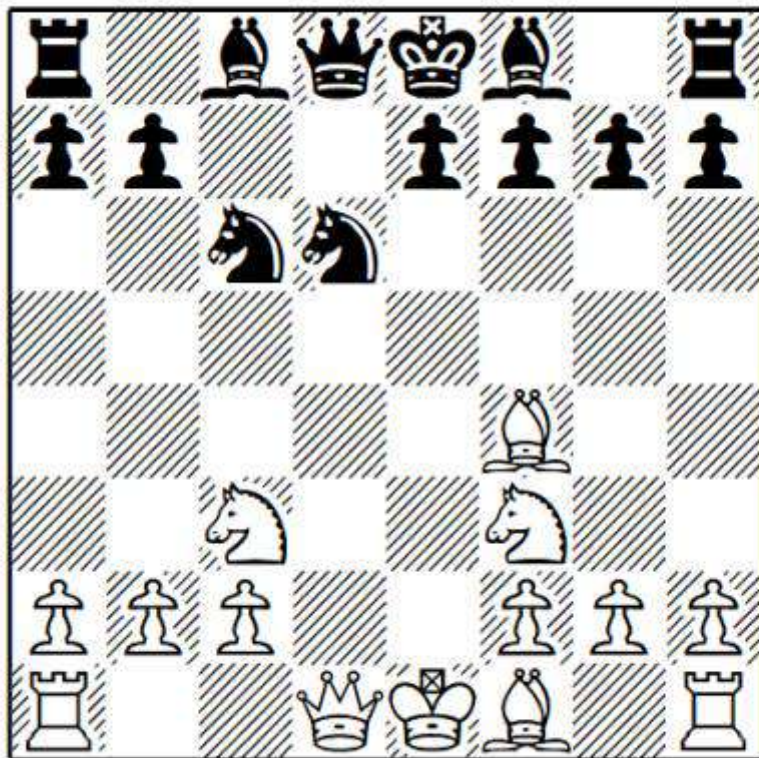
**A.Demchenko-S.Drazic**

Mersin 2016

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 Nf6 4 dxc5 Nxe4 5 cxd6 Nxd6**

As we saw in the introductory notes, this move is inaccurate. We get a choice between different types of positions, all of which offer a small, long-lasting advantage to White.

**6 Nc3 Nc6 7 Bf4!**



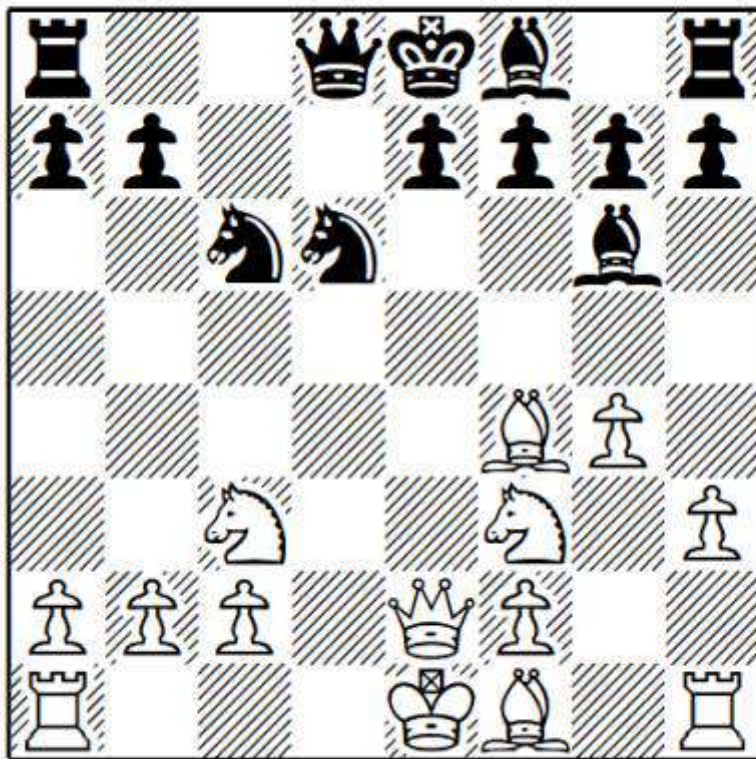
## *Pressure against d6*

### **7 ... g6**

The alternative to fianchettoing the bishop is development via ... e7-e6.

a) 7 ... e6 sees annoying pressure put on the d6-knight after 8 Qd2 Be7 9 0-0-0 Nf5 10 Bd3, which is excellent for White, who is ready to play g2-g4 next.

b) 7 ... Bg4 tries to develop the bishop first and then go for ... e7-e6, but Black does not have time for this. White can respond with the aggressive 8 h3 Bh5?! 9 g4 (I think this is objectively best, though it has never been played before, so far White has generally opted for 9 Qd5!? which is also very good; e.g. 9 ... Bg6 10 0-0-0 Bxc2 11 Rd2 Bg6 12 Bb5 Qc7 13 Nd4 and Black was pinned everywhere in V.Popov-S.Shaydullina, St. Petersburg 2011) 9 ... Bg6 10 Qe2!



## *Big problems*

The threat of 11 Rd1 or 11 0-0-0, followed by 12 Nb5, becomes very concrete and Black is in big trouble.

### **8 Nb5!**

This is our typical motif, putting pressure on the d6-knight early in the game. Black does not have an easy choice here.

### **8 ... Be6**

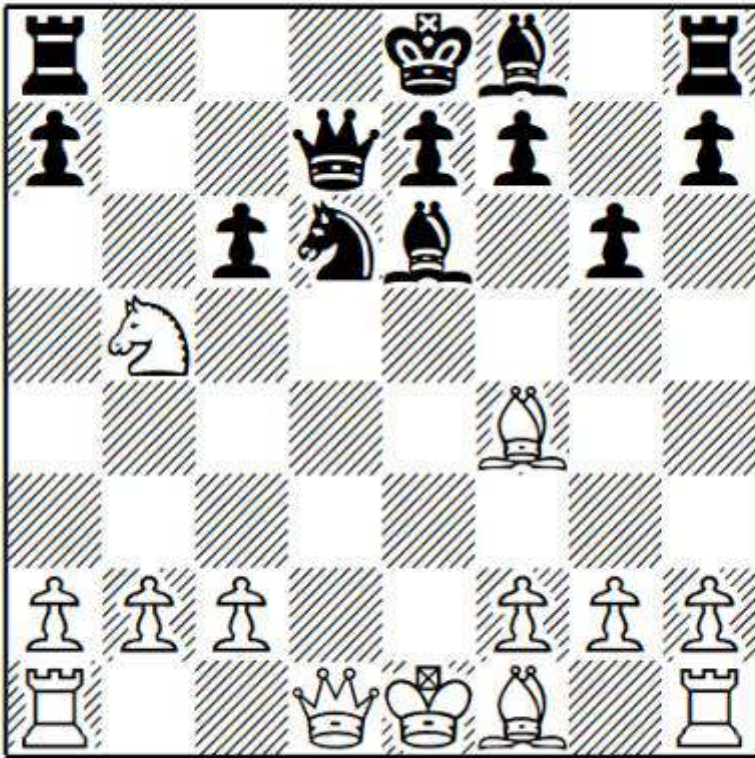
After 8 ... Nxb5 9 Qxd8+ Nxd8 10 Bxb5+ Bd7 11 Bxd7+ Kxd7 12 0-0-0+ Ke8 13 Rd3 the game is very one-sided. Black has no activity at all, whereas White has ideas like 14 Rd1 and 15 Rd7, invading on the seventh, or activating his rook via the third rank. Altogether I would say that it is a game for two results, so we can be very happy having the white pieces here.

### **9 Nfd4 Qd7**

Now 9 ... Nxb5?! 10 Nxe6 fxe6 11 Qxd8+ Rxd8 12 Bxb5 is quite bad for Black, but it is also very unlikely to be played by a human because of the resulting doubled e-pawns, which give White a lasting edge.

### **10 Nxc6 Nxb5**

**Question:** How should White continue if Black simply recaptures with the b-pawn?



*How to secure an advantage?*

*Answer:* 10 ... bxc6 11 Qd4! is a nice zwischenzug, forcing Black to compromise his structure even more: 11 ... f6 12 Nxd6+ exd6 and White has a lasting advantage because of Black's loosened pawns.

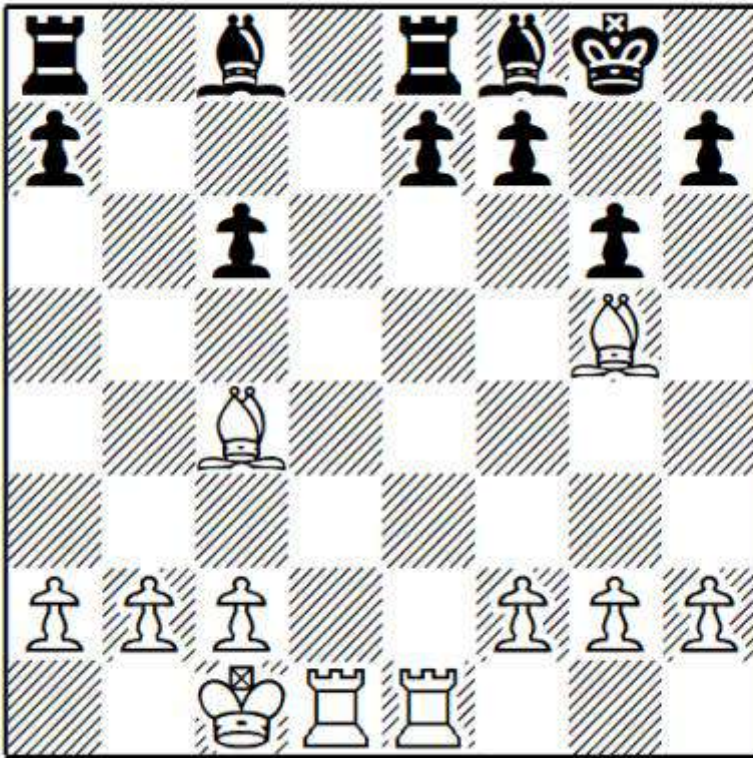
**11 Bxb5 bxc6 12 Qxd7+ Bxd7**

After only twelve moves we have arrived in an endgame where White has good winning chances, because of the superior pawn structure and activity.

**13 Ba6!**

This is another strong intermediate move before retreating to the c4-square. Black is obliged to undo his development as otherwise the exchange is lost.

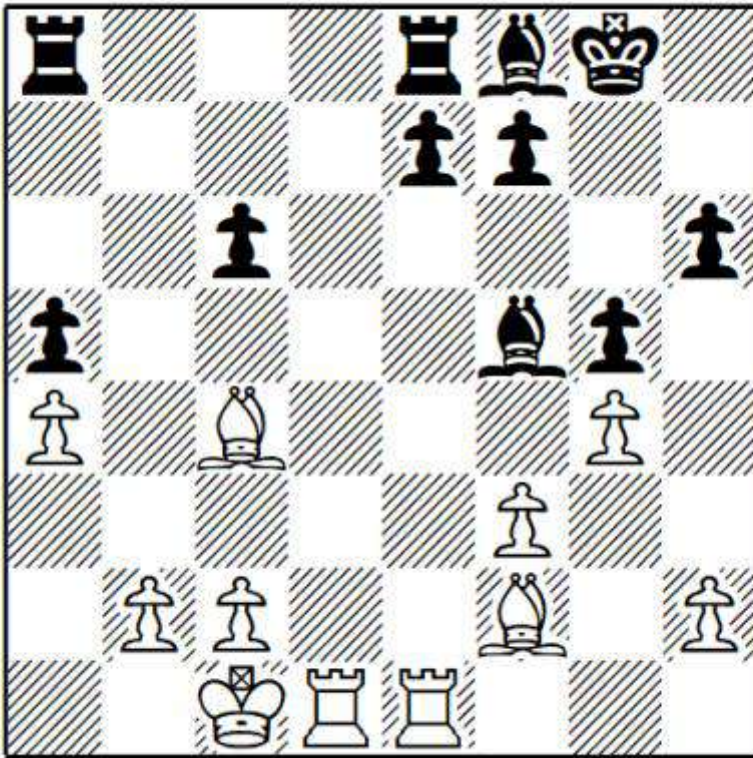
**13 ... Bc8 14 Bc4 Bg7 15 0-0-0 0-0 16 Rhe1 Re8 17 Bg5 Bf8**



*All White's pieces are ideally placed*

Il the white pieces are placed on the most active squares available, while Black is bound to defence. Nevertheless, invading at d7 or elsewhere is not so easy, so White must find ways to improve his position. Demchenko does not hurry.

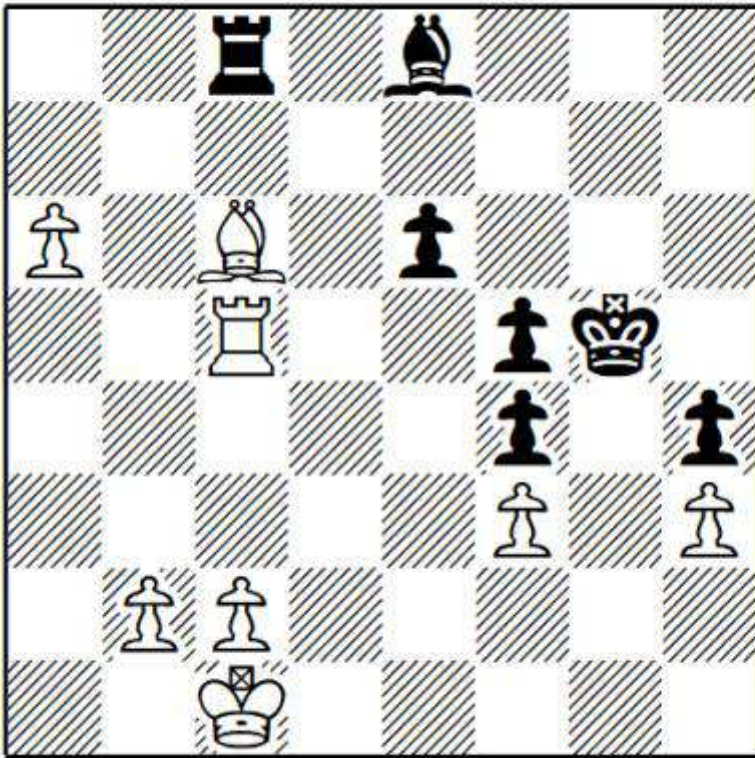
**18 f3 a5 19 a4 h6 20 Bh4 g5 21 Bf2 Bf5 22 g4!**



*Where to retreat?*

very strong move. Black now faces the painful quandary whether to go all the way back to c8 or retreat his bishop to g6, allowing the white rook to enter the seventh rank. It is hard to say which is the lesser evil; White keeps a large advantage in either case.

**22 ... Bg6 23 Rd7 e6 24 Red1 Bg7 25 Bg3 h5 26 h3 h4 27 Bf2 Kh7 28 Be3 Kh6 29 Rc7 Rec8 30 Rdd7 Be5 31 Rxc8 Rxc8 32 Ra7 c5 33 Rxa5 Bf4 34 Bxf4 gxf4 35 Ra6 Kg5 36 Bb5 Rd8 37 Rc6 f5 38 Rxc5 Kf6 39 g5+ Kxg5 40 a5 Bh5 41 Bc6 Rc8 42 a6 Be8**



*Pinned bishop*

**Question:** White is a pawn up and the a6-pawn is especially strong. Can you find a direct win despite the pin on the c-file?

**Answer: 43 Bxe8!**

This wins easily. Another option is simply 43 a7! Bxc6 44 Rxc6 Ra8 45 Rc7, followed by pushing the b-pawn for a convincing victory.  
**43 ... Rxc5 44 b4 Rc8 45 Bd7 Rc7 46 Bxe6 Rc6 47 b5 Rxe6 48 a7 Re1+ 49 Kb2 Rh1 50 a8Q 1-0**

# Chapter Two

## Anti-Najdorf: 5 ... e5 6 Nb3 d5!?

### Introduction

In this chapter we will dive into the main lines of our Anti-Najdorf repertoire, analysing a quick central breakthrough by Black. In general, every Sicilian player is familiar with the rule of thumb that “Black is okay when ... d7-d5 is achieved successfully”. In my opinion this rough knowledge is the reason why many players, especially at club level, go for this variation without caring too much.

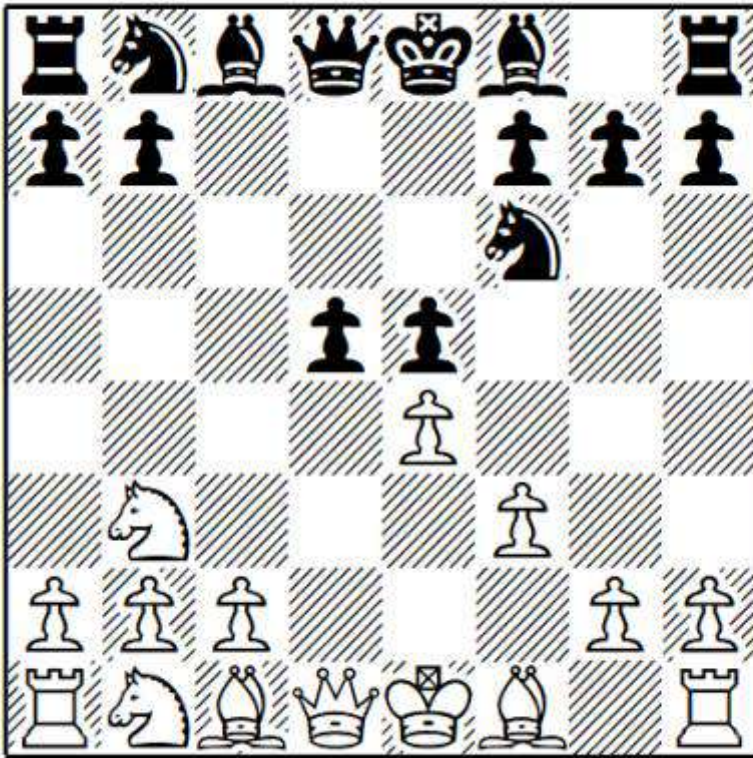
However, White keeps a slight edge in many variations, and the plans are easy to remember. In addition, Black must find a few accurate moves and one single mistake could harm his position immensely.

Taking all these points into consideration, I think this line is very enjoyable to play as White, and it gives you good chances to obtain an advantage out of the opening.

First, we will study the most important theoretical branches, before going more deeply into the different systems by analysing a bunch of sample games.

We arrive in the starting position of this chapter after the following opening moves:

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3!? e5 6 Nb3 d5!?**



*An early central break*

## 7 Bg5

This is played almost universally by White and for good reason. The only sensible-looking alternative 7 exd5 does not offer anything if Black answers with 7 ... Nxd5, as we'll see below.

With 7 Bg5 we have reached a big branching point and this chapter will be divided into two sections from here.

The main move is 7 ... **Be6**, which leads to a very typical endgame. I will call this the "Endgame Variation" henceforth. White has some dynamic chances here due to the lead in development, as well as some strategic advantages arising from a superior pawn structure. The Endgame Variation will be discussed in the first subchapter, followed by a set of illustrative games on the topic. 7 ... Be6 has been played in more than 60% of all games and has scored an average of about 60% for White.

After 8 Bxf6 gxf6 9 exd5 Black can choose between two versions of the endgame, by playing either 9 ... Qxd5 or 9 ... Bxd5. In my opinion 9 ...

Qxd5 is the better choice, because 9 ... Bxd5 allows White to prohibit Black from castling as an extra advantage.

The risky 7 ... dxe4 leads to a similar endgame, though in a bit more dynamic version. I will cover this in the Endgame Variation section as well.

The main alternative is 7 ... d4, which is the most challenging line in this chapter. We must take this move seriously since White scores just 49%, but I will offer you an easy and good practical way to play the position. You will find more details in the second subchapter, where there will be a theoretical discussion of the move, followed by another selection of sample games.

## **Endgame Variation**

In this subchapter we will analyse one of my favourite variations in the Anti-Najdorf. The Endgame Variation is easy to understand, yet is still ambitious and sound. It starts with the following opening moves:

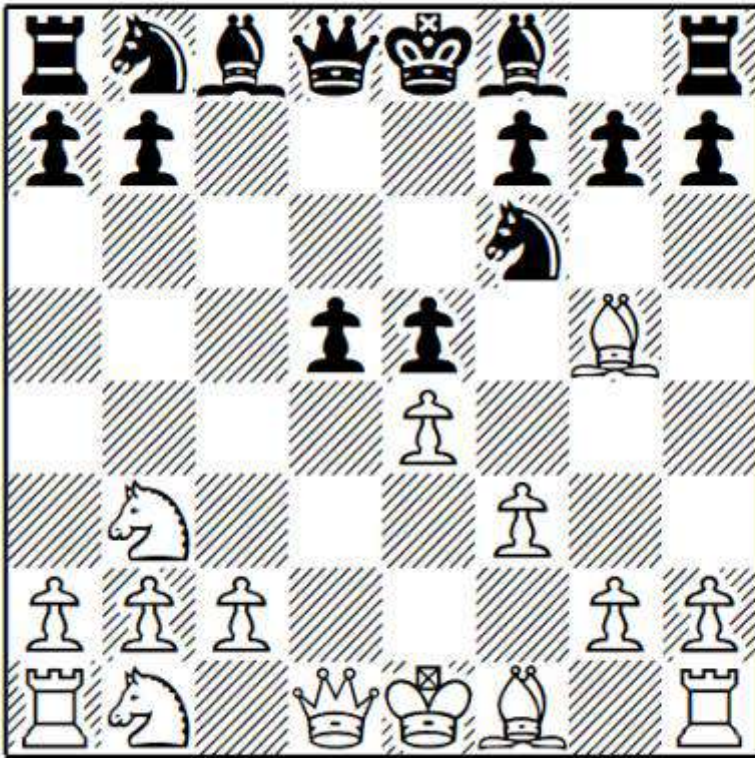
**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3 e5 6 Nb3**

Here 6 Bb5+ is a major alternative, but I do not recommend it for two reasons. First, Black has an excellent score after this move; second, the resulting positions are full of piece activity for Black and thus quite easy for Black to play. Meanwhile White must be quite careful; e.g. 6 ... Nbd7 7 Nf5 d5 8 exd5 a6 9 Ba4 b5 10 Bb3 Nb6 11 Ne3 Bc5 and Black is ready to regain the pawn.

**6 ... d5**

Black is not obliged to push the d-pawn immediately, perhaps preferring a slow positional game. But in this case, White will likely clamp down on the d5-square with 7 c4, as we'll see in the next chapter. For now, let's have a look at the d-pawn break.

**7 Bg5!?**



### *Pressure on Black*

This is by far the main line here, played in roughly 90% of all games, and usually lead to Black's pawn structure being damaged. As a result, White has decent chances of obtaining a risk-free, long-lasting, positional edge.

Nevertheless, let's briefly check the alternative 7 exd5, which can also end well for White if Black does not play accurately:

a) 7 ... Qxd5?! is imprecise as White can then gain time with Nc3. In some cases 10 Qe2 may follow, when Black is under pressure and e5 may become vulnerable; e.g. 8 Bd3 Nc6 9 Nc3 Qd8 10 Qe2 and White was slightly better in M.Tazbir-J.Bjerre, Roquetas de Mar 2017.

b) 7 ... Nxd5! is the correct response and gives Black a comfortable game; e.g. 8 c4 Bb4+ 9 Ke2 Nf4+ 10 Bxf4 Qxd1+ 11 Kxd1 exf4 and Black is fine.

### **7 ... Be6**

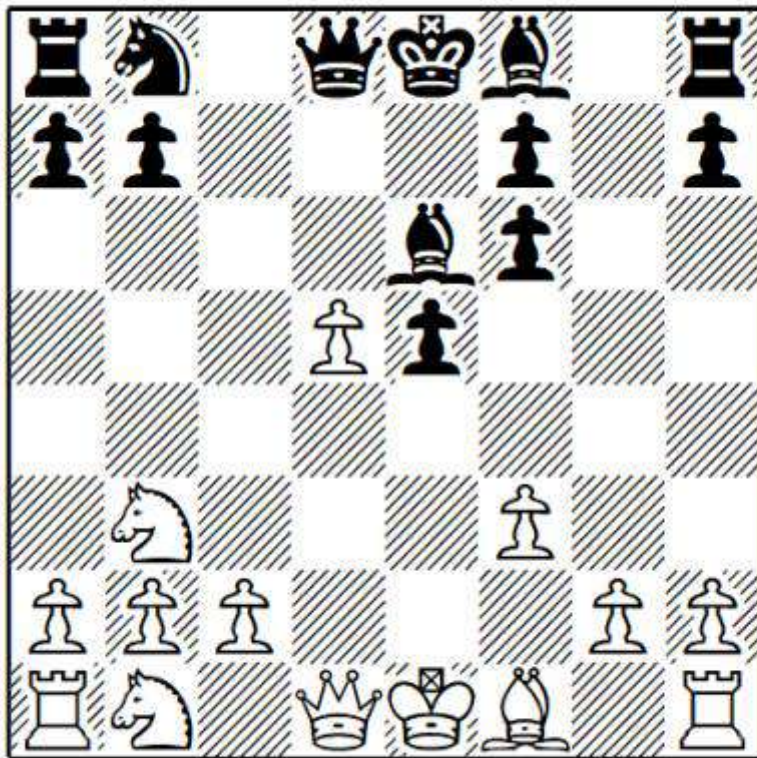
As mentioned above, 7 ... dxe4!? is a risky alternative. The general characteristics are quite similar because the queens are off the board here

too. However, if Black holds on to the pawn, White gains an even bigger lead in development which can lead to a crushing initiative. For example: 8 Qxd8+ Kxd8 9 Nc3 exf3 (the consistent approach; if Black plays anything else, such as 9 ... Be6, White will simply regain the pawn with f3xe4 or 10 0-0-0+ followed by f3xe4 as in Game 13) 10 0-0-0+ Bd7 11 gxf3 and White has great compensation with ideas like Bh3, or f3-f4, opening the position.

### 8 Bxf6 gxf6

Not 8 ... Qxf6? 9 exd5 and the extra pawn is quite a good one, so White is just much better here.

### 9 exd5



*How to recapture?*

Black now has a choice between 9 ... Bxd5 and 9 ... Qxd5.

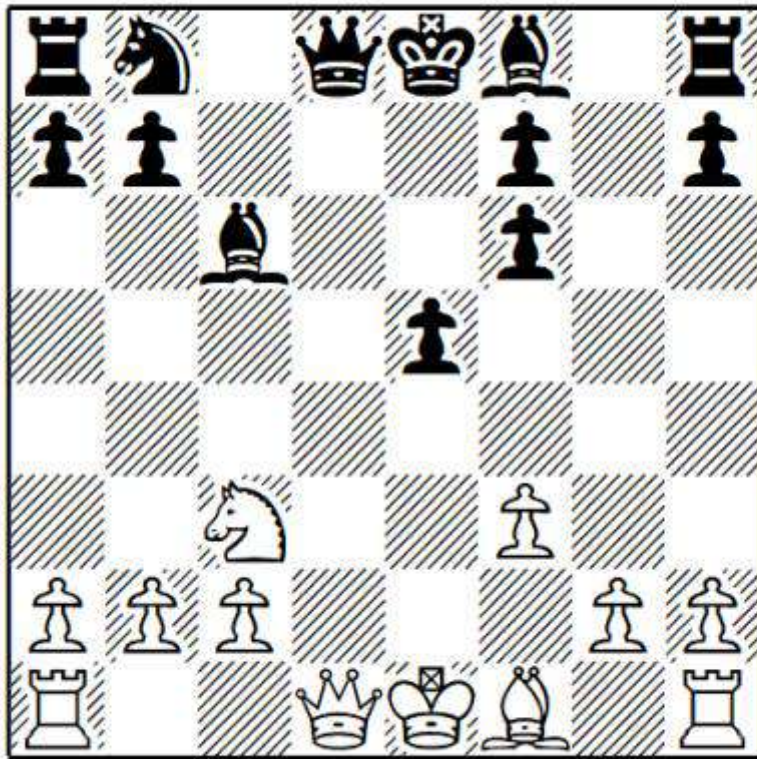
### 9 ... Qxd5

The alternative 9 ... Bxd5 is met by 10 Nc3 and then:

a) 10 ... Bb4!? is the only independent approach for Black after 9 ... Bxd5. Even so 11 Qd3 Nc6 (for 11 ... Bxc3+ see Game 12) 12 0-0-0 Bxb3

13 axb3 Qxd3 (not 13 ... Qa5?? 14 Qd7+ Kf8 15 Bc4 and White wins) 14 Bxd3 Bxc3 15 bxc3 is good for White, as the black knight has rather poor prospects.

b) 10 ... Bc6? is a typical mistake.



*Typical mistake by Black*

White plays 11 Qxd8+ Kxd8 12 0-0-0+ Kc7 13 Na5! and stands much better. After this you simply adopt a light-squared strategy; for example, finding nice outposts for your minor pieces on e4 or f5.

**Remember:** The bishop belongs on e6 rather than c6 in 99% of cases. Usually we exploit the mistake of ... Bc6 by playing Na5 at some point. The bishop cannot move because it must defend b7, so we can exchange it. Black also struggles to develop the b8-knight because it would also risk getting a damaged queenside structure after Nxc6 bxc6.

c) 10 ... Bxb3? is simply bad for Black. White gets a close to winning position after 11 Qxd8+ Kxd8 12 axb3 Nc6 13 0-0-0. In contrast to the variation with the king on e8, there is no pin against the c6-knight; but as a

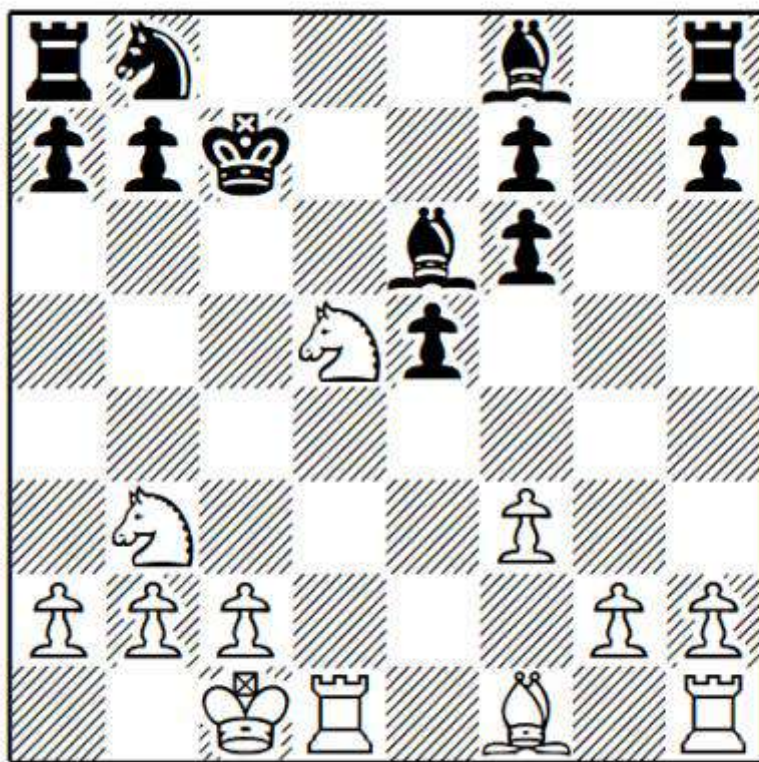
downside Black has weak light squares and a more vulnerable king, which makes things even worse.

d) 10 ... Be6 11 Qxd8+ Kxd8 12 0-0-0+ is just an inferior version for Black of 9 ... Qxd5 lines and thus not to be recommended:

d1) 12 ... Nd7 13 Bb5 Rc8 (not 13 ... a6? 14 Bxd7 Bxd7 15 Nd5 and White wins material) 14 Nd5 Bg7 15 Kbl and Black has trouble completing development, while White can bring the h1-rook into the game and try to open the position.

d2) 12 ... Kc8 13 Nd5 (13 Ne4 is the maximalist try but a lot more complicated) 13 ... Nd7 14 Be2 and again you can play very simple chess here because Black's queenside is simply stuck.

d3) 12 ... Kc7 can be answered by 13 Nd5+!



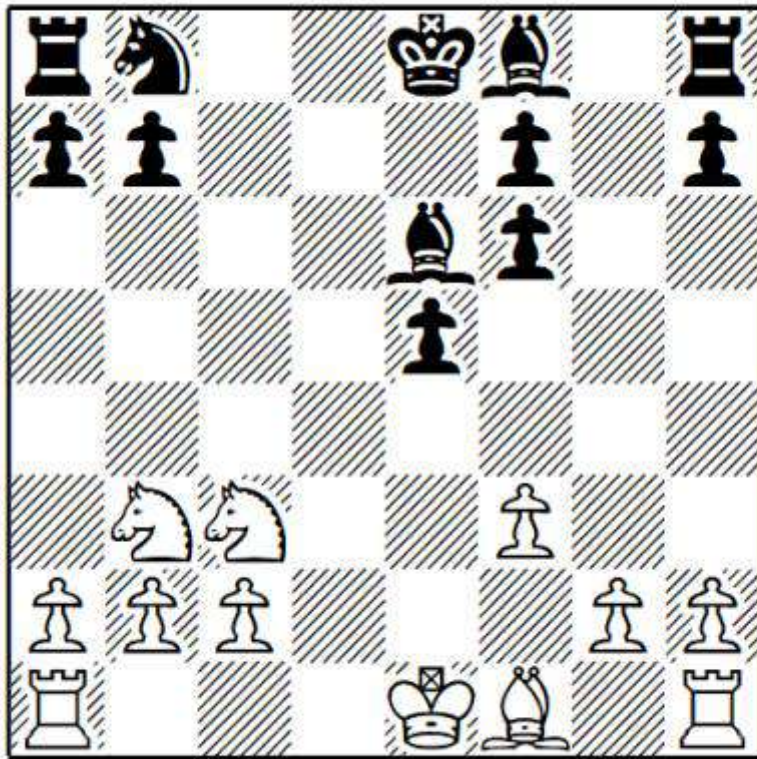
### *Forcing a favourable trade*

13 ... Bxd5 14 Rxd5 Nc6 15 Bc4 Rd8 16 Rdd1! and White is slightly better.

**Remember:** You can always be happy when Black has to exchange the light-squared bishop for your knight on d5, as White then has superior

control over the light squares. In particular, minor pieces appearing on d5, e4 or f5 can be really annoying for Black, whereas White can easily restrict Black's outpost on d4 by playing c2-c3 at any given moment.

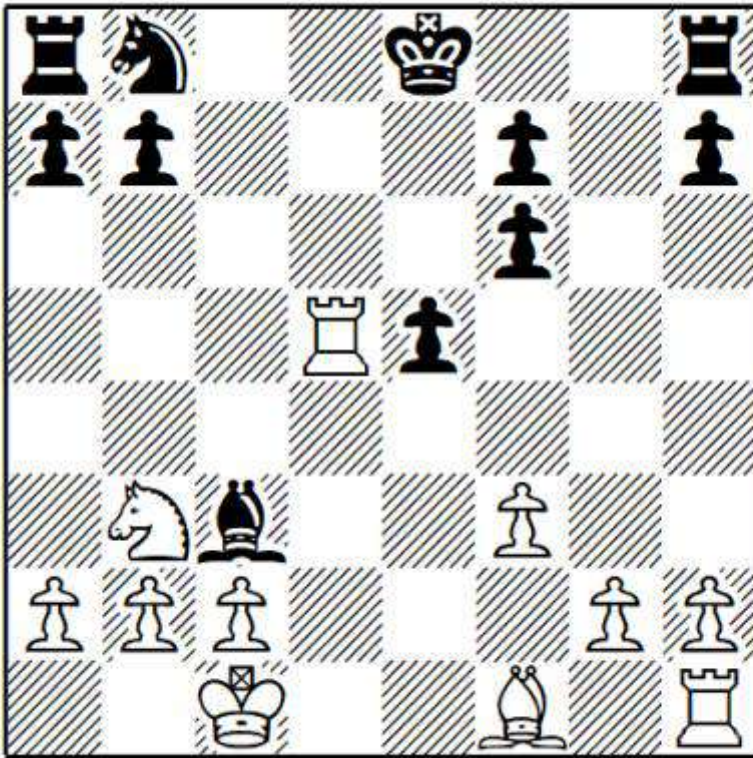
**10 Qxd5 Bxd5 11 Nc3 Be6!**



*Correct retreat by Black*

This is the main move here. Other moves are just much worse and we will try to refute them or at least get a big advantage.

a) 11 ... Bb4? can now be met by 12 0-0-0! Bxc3? (but 12 ... Bxb3 13 axb3 Bxc3 14 bxc3 gives White a very nice ending, as we'll see in Game 8) 13 Rxd5!



*A nice zwischenzug*

... and White has a winning position after only 13 moves played; e.g. 13 ... Bb4 14 Rb5 Nc6 15 Rxb7 and so on.

b) 11 ... Bc6? is again a mistake, and let's punish it again: 12 0-0-0 Nd7 (or 12 ... Be7 13 Na5!, as in Game 7) 13 Na5! Bb4 14 Nxc6 Bxc3 15 Bb5 and White has a huge advantage.

c) 11 ... Bxb3 12 Bb5+! (a clever intermediate check, after which we plan to ruin Black's structure even more!) 12 ... Nc6 13 axb3 Bb4 14 Ke2 (the king stays in the centre because the rook on the a-file is well placed) 14 ... Bxc3 15 Bxc6+ bxc6 16 bxc3 and the arising double rook ending is very problematic for Black due to all his pawn weaknesses. I think White should be happy to reach this risk-free and advantageous position! The game might continue 16 ... Kd7 17 Ra4 Kc7 18 Rha1 Kb7 19 Rb4+ Kc7 20 Ra6 and White is winning.

**12 0-0-0**

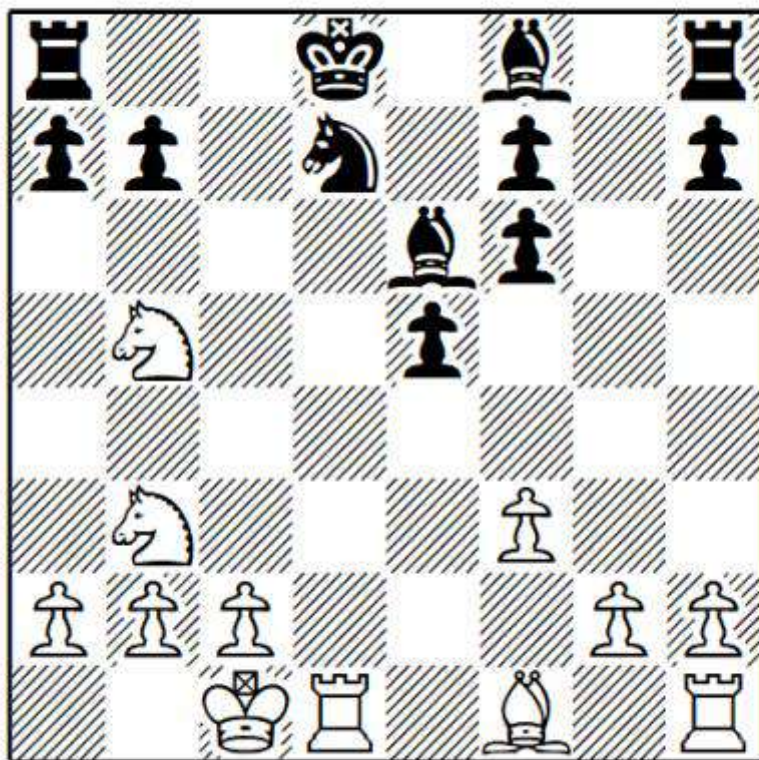
This is the best position Black can reach after 7 ... Be6 8 Bxf6 gxf6 9 exd5. We should therefore expect to get here regularly and be prepared for Black's two main set-ups, 12 ... Nd7 and 12 ... Nc6.

Note that White can also try playing 12 Nb5!? straight away. We'll take a look at this in Game 9.

### 12 ... Nd7

12 ... Nc6 is a tricky move and should be treated carefully with 13 Bb5! (instead, 13 Nd5? might look natural, but after 13 ... 0-0-0! White's position is very unstable; e.g. 14 Nxf6 Bh6+ 15 Nd2 Nb4 or 14 c4 f5 15 Bd3 Rg8 16 Rhg1 Nb4 17 Nxb4 Bxb4 18 g3 h5 and Black is already much better, S.Kasparov-E.Bozzali, Venice 2007) 13 ... Rc8 (not 13 ... Rd8? 14 Na5 and White wins) 14 Nd5. This is a good point to end the theoretical discussion. White is a bit more comfortable, and Black must find a few accurate moves before we reach a balanced position. We'll examine this further in Game 10.

### 13 Nb5 Kd8



*A nice initiative*

This is the best move here, but we can continue creating threats with Na5, after which Black's position is a bit cramped while White has natural play. We'll see how this might work out in practice in Game 11.

## **Illustrative Games**

In this section we will look at a few sample games in order to understand the arising endgames better.

First of all are two of my own. In Game 7 my opponent went wrong by retreating 11 ... Bc6?, after which he already was in big trouble. In Game 8, Black steps into another trap with 11 ... Bb4?, allowing White to seize the initiative with 12 0-0-0! and a big plus.

Then we move on to the main line. In Game 9 White comes up with a very creative idea, 12 Nb5!?, which leads to unexplored paths early. The next two games see the standard 12 0-0-0. In Game 10 Black opts for 12 ... Nc6 and defends well, showing us perfectly what can happen if we misplay our position. Game 11 features 12 ... Nd7 and White tries to keep the black king in the centre. This is a good example of how to create practical problems in a theoretically balanced position.

In Game 12 Naiditsch comes up against the rare 9 ... Bxd5 10 Nc3 Bb4, the only sideline in the Endgame Variation which does not lead to an exchange of queens.

Finally, the pawn-grabbing 7 ... dxe4 is seen in Game 13. As it turns out Black was mainly bluffing, giving back the pawn immediately, but we will also check the more principled and risky approach of keeping the extra pawn.

### *Game 7*

**J.Hacker-T.Ulusoy**

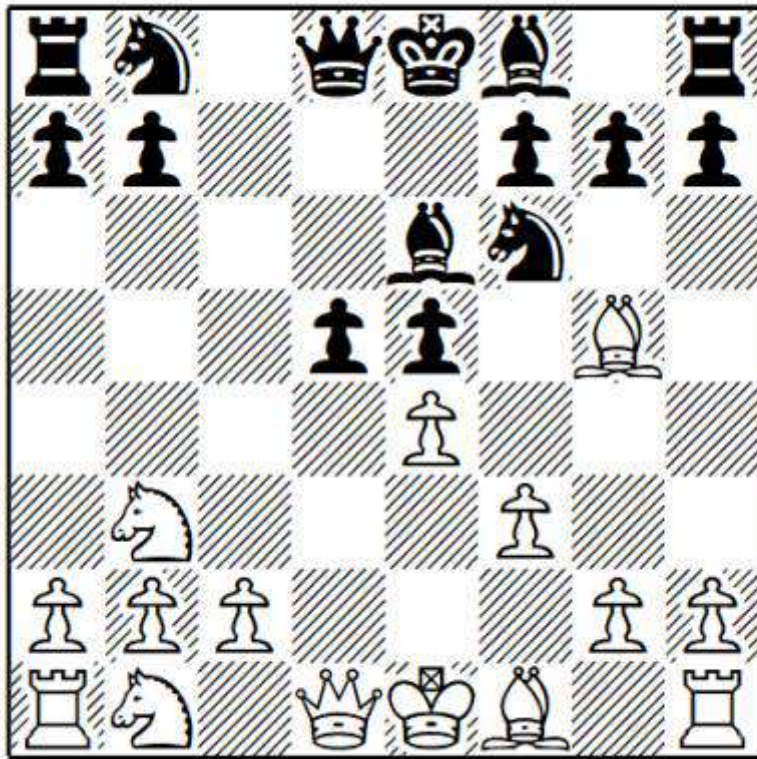
Nuremberg 2019

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3!? e5 6 Nb3 d5**

This is a common choice for Black and for good reasons. White has wasted time playing 5 f3, instead of developing naturally and controlling the centre with 5 Nc3. There is no more straightforward approach than trying to punish White's opening play by breaking through in the centre. This may not sound very convincing to anyone who wants to play this

position from the White side, but we will soon see that, despite achieving the thematic freeing move early on, Black is still facing problems.

**7 Bg5 Be6**



*Initial position*

**Question:** Black has just defended his d5-pawn, but his last move also has a slight disadvantage. Do you remember how White should continue here?

**Answer: 8 Bxf6!**

After we take on f6, Black cannot recapture by queen because the d5-pawn would drop and White would have a very solid extra pawn, while taking with the g-pawn weakens Black's pawn structure.

Playing 8 exd5? first might look similar, but this allows 8 ... Qxd5! (rather than 8 ... Bxd5 9 Bxf6 gxf6, when Black has been move ordered into the 9 ... Bxd5 variation) 9 Bxf6 (after 9 Qxd5 Nxd5 Black managed to keep a compact pawn formation and can be very happy) 9 ... Qxd1+ 10 Kxd1

gxf6 and we have had to move our king, which is a clear disadvantage compared to the main line.

**8 ... gxf6 9 exd5 Qxd5**

The alternative 9 ... Bxd5 is covered in Game 12.

**10 Qxd5 Bxd5 11 Nc3 Bc6?**

11 ... Be6 is the most natural retreat and the best move available for Black. Here the bishop cannot easily be attacked by a white knight, whereas 11 ... Bc6 gives White immediate ideas of Na5. Another drawback is that the bishop takes the ideal c6-square away from the b8-knight.

**12 0-0-0**

Not yet 12 Na5? due to 12 ... Bb4 13 Nxc6 Bxc3+ and Black already has the better position.

**12 ... Be7**

12 ... Bb4 looks like a logical move as it prevents Na5, but White can play 13 Nd5 instead, and Black must give up his light-squared bishop.

**13 Na5 Bd8 14 Nxc6 Nxc6 15 Bb5**

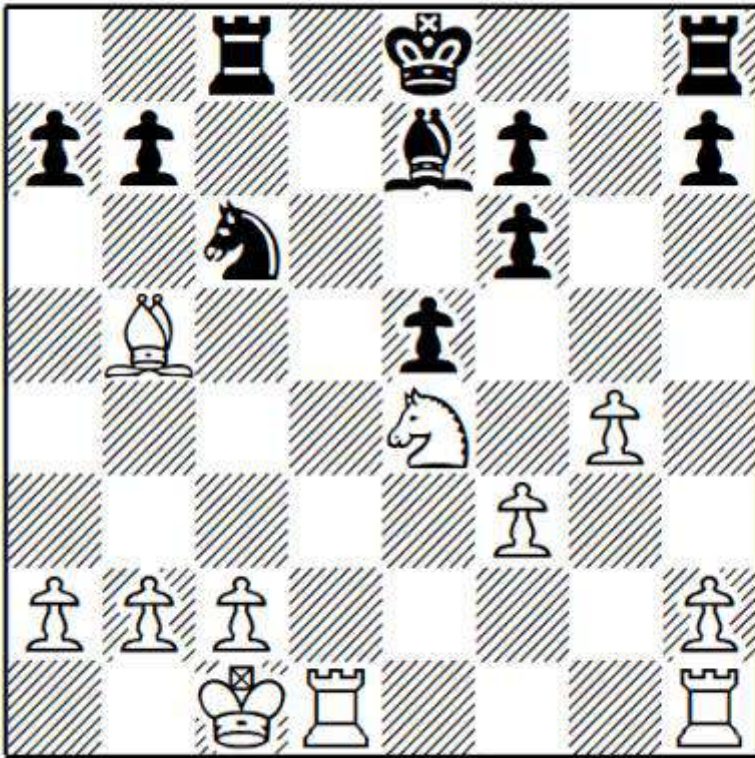
White has a couple of alternatives here: 15 Nd5, with the idea of pinning Black's bishop to the passive d8-square; or 15 Bd3, with a lot of control over the weakened light squares.

However, the game continuation secures a long-lasting advantage for White, who reaches a very favourable position, having a strong knight versus a bad bishop. If you do not play 15 Bb5 right now, Black would have the chance to keep his second minor piece and thus more possibilities of getting counterplay.

**15 ... Rc8**

Practically forced, in order not to weaken the pawn structure further.

**16 Ne4 Be7 17 g4!**



*Positionally winning*

This sets up a blockade of Black's weak kingside pawns and prevents any active plans. White has huge advantage here and may already have a technically winning position with the dominating knight versus the poor bishop on e7.

Whereas 17 Ng3, with the same plan, would allow Black to create some pressure on the g-file with 17 ... Rg8. White is still better, but Black is starting to get tactical possibilities; for example, after 18 Rd2 f5!? and the dark-squared bishop will come to g5.

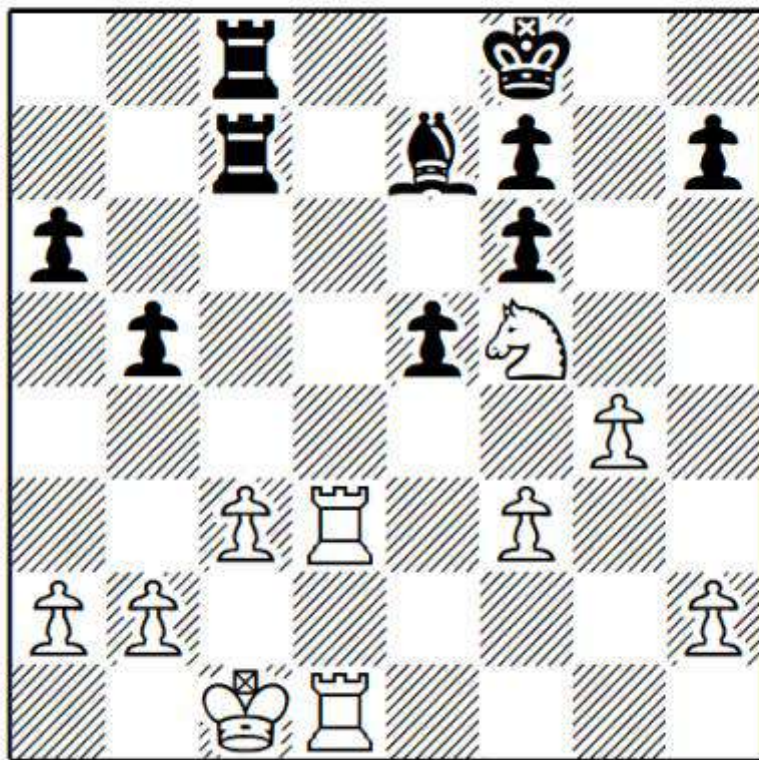
**17 ... a6 18 Bxc6 Rxc6 19 Ng3**

I think this move is more accurate than the sensible-looking alternative 19 Rd3, because Black is prevented from playing ... h7-h5, getting rid of one of his isolated pawns.

**19 ... Rc7 20 Rd3 0-0 21 Rhd1 Rfc8 22 c3 Kf8 23 Nf5 Ke8**

This is necessary, otherwise 24 Rd7 would follow with devastating effect. We can see this in the following variation, if Black had started his

counterplay with 23 ... b5? straight away.



*White invades at d7*

**Question:** Can you spot how to finish the game after 24 Rd7 Ke8 - ?

**Answer:** White wins a piece with 25 Nxe7! Rxd7 26 Nxc8.

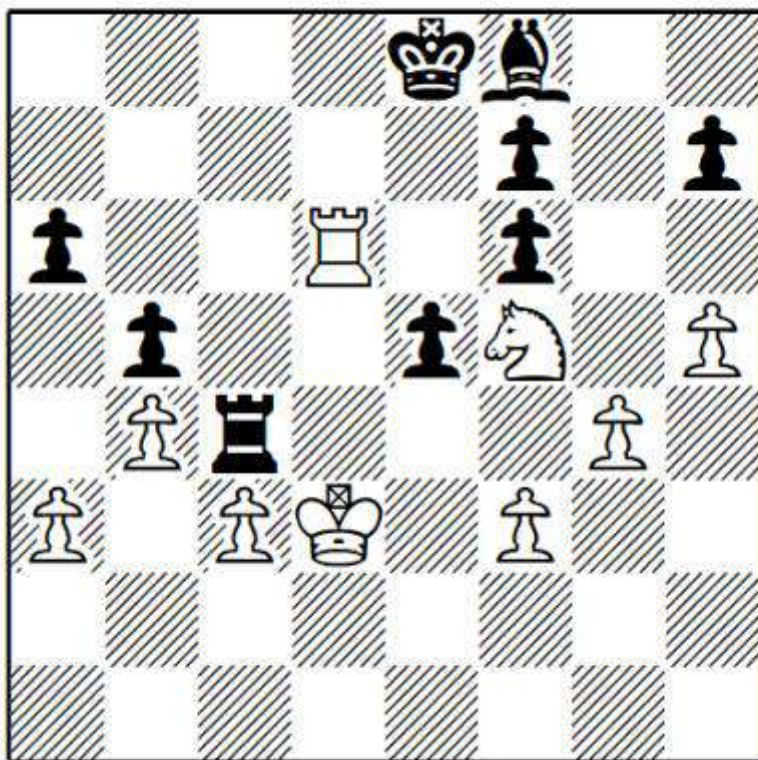
Returning to the game: White has placed all his pieces on ideal squares, but Black has also protected all the important squares and prevented invasion. White must find a plan to improve his position while simultaneously restricting Black's counterplay.

**24 a3**

Prophylaxis! Black's only active chance is creating kind of a minority attack with ... b7-b5, ... a6-a5 and ... b5-b4, so White takes some precautions to prevent this. If Black now follows up with 24 ... b5 anyway, White can play 25 Rd5, preventing further expansion with 25 ... a5, when Black is almost running out of moves.

**24 ... Bf8 25 Re1 Rd8 26 Rxd8+ Kxd8 27 Rd1+ Ke8 28 Kd2 Rc4 29 Ke2 Rc6 30 h4 Rb6 31 Rd2 Rc6 32 h5 b5 33 Rd5 Bc5 34 Kd3 Bf8 35 b4 Be7**

If Black tries to get active counterplay with 35 ... Rc4 (intending ... Rf4 and ... e5-e4 to undermine the white pawns), White always has 36 Rd6!, when the rook finally enters the position.



*Invasion with 36 Rd6!*

Black cannot capture because the pawn ending after 36 ... Bxd6 37 Nxd6+ Kd7 38 Nxc4 bxc4 39 Kxc4 is winning for White.

**36 a4 bxa4 37 Ra5 Bd8 38 Rxa4 Kd7 39 c4 Ke6 40 Ne3 Rd6+ 41 Ke2 Rb6 42 c5 Rc6 43 Kd3 a5 44 bxa5 Ra6 45 Kc4 Rxa5 46 Rxa5 Bxa5 47 Kb5 Bd8 48 Kc6 e4 49 fxe4 Ke5 50 Kd7 1-0**

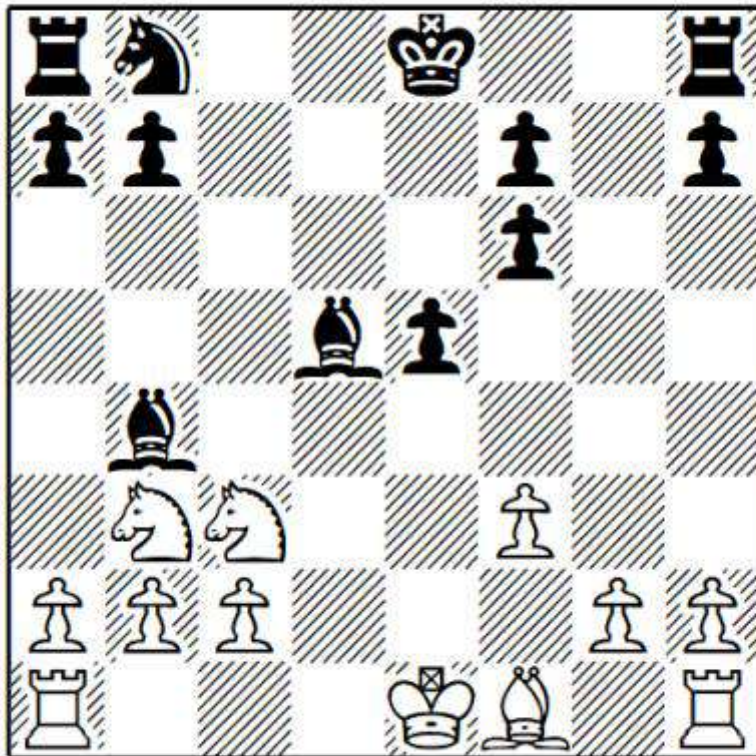
*Game 8*

**J.Hacker-K.Lutz**

German League 2019

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3 e5 6 Nb3 d5 7 Bg5 Be6 8 Bxf6 gxf6 9 exd5 Qxd5 10 Qxd5 Bxd5 11 Nc3 Bb4?

This looks appealing at first sight, since Black is threatening 12 ... Bxc3 13 bxc3 which would leave White's structure in horrible shape. But when you look deeper you will realize that 11 ... Bb4? is a quite a bad move and White gets a huge advantage.



*How to punish 11 ... Bb4 - ?*

**Question:** Do you remember how White should proceed?

**Answer: 12 0-0-0!**

Counterattacking the bishop on d5 and simultaneously unpinning the c3-knight.

Trying to secure the structure with 12 Kd2? Ke7 13 a3 Bxc3+ 14 Kxc3 just wastes a lot of time, and 14 ... Nc6 followed by ... Rac8 gives Black a strong initiative against the exposed white king.

## **12 ... Bxb3**

Instead:

a) 12 ... Bxc3? is even worse: 13 Rxd5 Bb4 14 Rb5 Black is lost.

b) 12 ... Be6 also gives White a huge plus after 13 Nd5, attacking the b4-bishop and f6-pawn as well as threatening a fork on c7. So 13 ... Bxd5 14 Rxd5 is forced, when the bishop on b4 is just exposed and will cost Black another move. Moreover White has exchanged Black's light-squared bishop for a knight, which is always a big achievement for us in this variation!

**Remember:** Exchanging one of our knights for one of Black's bishops is always a strategic goal for us – especially the light-squared bishop, as then Black will not be able to cover the holes on d5 and f5 sufficiently anymore.

## **13 axb3**

Another option is 13 Bb5+ Nc6 14 axb3 Bxc3 15 bxc3 Ke7 16 Rhe1 Rad8 17 Bxc6 bxc6 18 Re4 with a very nice rook endgame for White.

## **13 ... Bxc3 14 bxc3 Ke7 15 Bd3!**

White is already much better. The bishop will dominate the knight who struggles to find a safe outpost; note that it can go neither to d4 nor to b4.

## **15 ... Nd7**

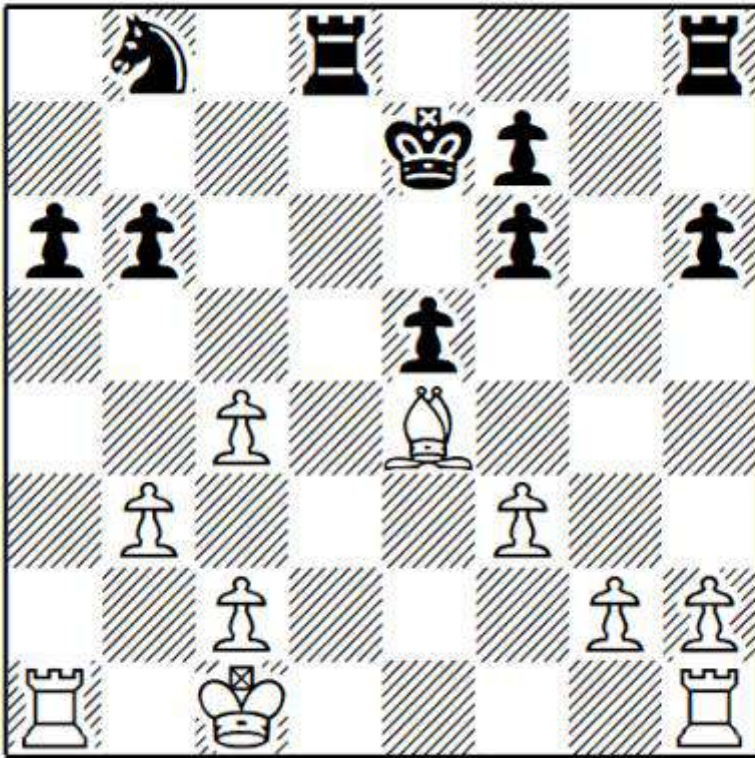
After 15 ... Nc6 16 Be4 the knight has no future.

## **16 Bf5 Rad8 17 Rd5 h6**

If 17 ... Nb6 then 18 Rc5 Kd6 19 b4 gives White a great initiative with 20 Rd1+.

## **18 Rhd1**

Here 18 Ra5! was stronger, as after 18 ... a6 19 c4 Nb8 20 Be4 b6 21 Ra1 the knight will be stuck on b8. White can slowly improve and try to win a pawn on the queenside.



*Ongoing pressure*

### **18 ... Nb8**

18 ... Nb6 leads to a forced sequence: 19 Rxd8 Rxd8 20 Rxd8 Kxd8 21 Be4! Kc7 22 c4 Nc8 23 Bd5 Nd6 24 c5 Nf5 25 g4 Nh4 26 Kd2 and White will soon win the f7-pawn.

### **19 Rb5**

After 19 c4 Rxd5 20 cxd5 Rd8 White has a passed pawn, but Black has good chances to install a blockade on the dark squares.

### **19 ... b6 20 Rb4 Rxd1+ 21 Kxd1 Nc6 22 Ra4 a5 23 Be4 Kd6 24 Bxc6**

Here 24 b4 was another try for an edge. I was afraid of 24 ... b5, but White has 25 Ra1! and is much better because 25 ... axb4? just loses to 26 Ra6 Rc8 27 cxb4.

### **24 ... Kxc6 25 Rh4**

The advantage has vanished for now, though White later gets a second chance.

### **25 ... Kd5 26 Rh5 b5 27 Kc1 a4 28 Kb2 Ke6 29 g4 Rg8 30 h3**

30 Rxh6 is no good because after 30 ... e4 31 fxe4 Rxc4 White cannot win due to the exchange of too many pawns.

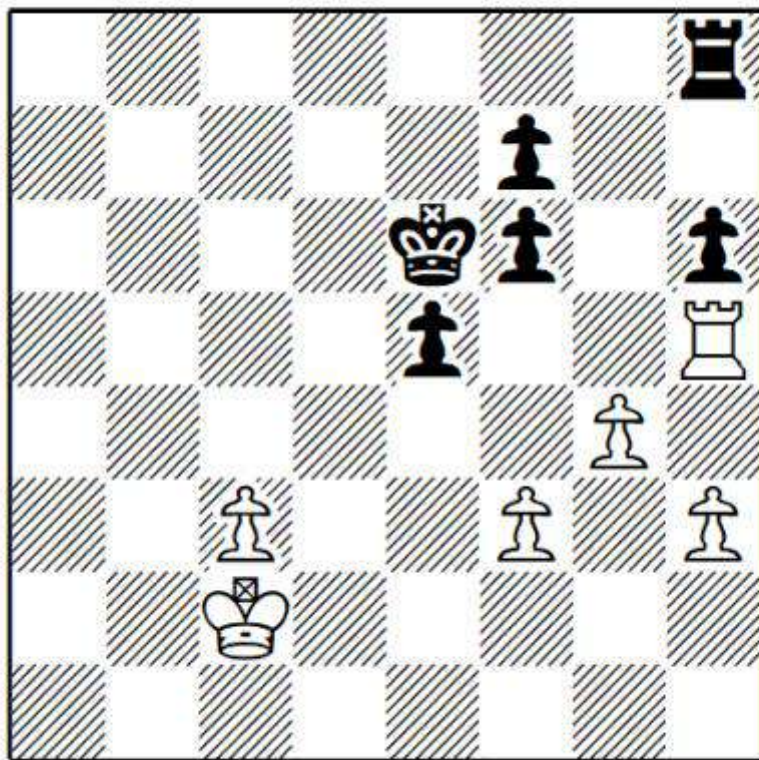
**30 ... Rh8 31 c4**

If 31 h4 immediately, Black gets counterplay with 31 ... Rg8 32 Rxh6 e4! 33 fxe4 (not 33 g5? e3 34 Rxf6+ Ke7 35 Rf4 Re8, which would change the evaluation drastically) 33 ... Rxc4, although 34 c4 axb3 35 cxb5 bxc2 36 Kxc2 Rxe4 37 Kc3 keeps some chances alive.

**31 ... axb3 32 Kxb3 bxc4+ 33 Kxc4 Rc8+ 34 Kd3 Rd8+ 35 Ke3 Rc8 36 Kd2 Rd8+ 37 Kc1 Rh8?**

Better was 37 ... Rd4! 38 Rxh6 (38 Rf5 Rd8 leads to nothing either) 38 ... Rf4 and the position is completely equal.

**38 c3 Rc8 39 Kc2 Rh8**



*Where to make progress?*

**Question:** White still enjoys the better position but it is not so easy to get anything significant out of it. Can you find a way to make progress?

**Answer: 40 h4!**

Preparing g4-g5, since Black's h-pawn is pinned.

**40 ... Ra8 41 Rxh6 Ke7 42 Rh5 Ra2+ 43 Kd3 Rh2 44 Rh8?**

Instead, 44 Rf5! intending h4-h5 would be White's dream. And it indeed worked because 44 ... Rxh4 runs into 45 Rh5!, forcing a won pawn endgame for White.

**44 ... f5**

After a few more inaccuracies the game ended in a draw.

**45 c4 Rh3 46 gxf5 Rxf3+ 47 Ke4 Rf4+ 48 Kxe5 Rxc4 49 h5 Rc5+ 50 Kf4 Kf6 51 Rh6+ Kg7 52 Rd6 f6 53 h6+ Kxh6 54 Rxf6+ Kg7 55 Rb6 Rc2 56 Ke5 Re2+ 57 Kd5 Kf7 ½-½**

*Game 9*

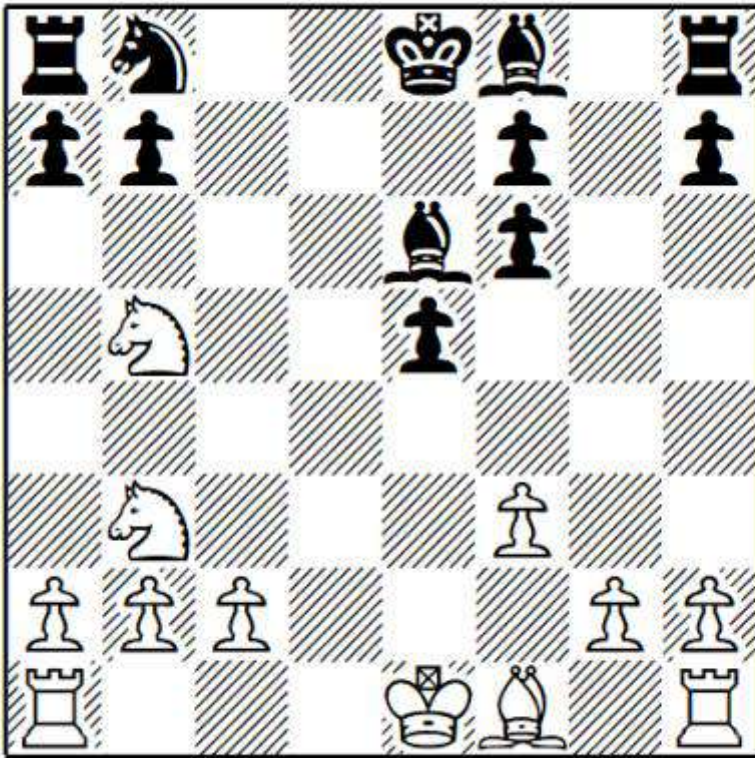
**T.Nabaty-S.Sjugirov**

European Championship, Batumi 2018

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3 e5 6 Nb3 d5 7 Bg5 Be6 8 Bxf6 gxf6 9 exd5 Qxd5 10 Qxd5 Bxd5 11 Nc3 Be6**

That is one of the toughest defences in the Endgame Variation as we saw in the theoretical section. Now our main line is 12 0-0-0, when Black can play either 12 ... Nc6 and 12 ... Nd7 (see the next two games). Nabaty comes up with a different idea, which leads to original play.

**12 Nb5!?**



*The initial position after 12 Nb5*

This knight sally is usually made after 12 0-0-0 Nd7. Sending it in straight away is a sideline and you can count on its surprise value, as it is seen only 20% as often as the main line. In addition it scores about 63% for White which sounds appealing. Let's try to understand the ideas behind this move.

### **12 ... Kd8**

I am sure many players would rather opt for 12 ... Na6 than move the king which will then be checked by 13 0-0-0. However, amongst grandmasters there is a tendency to prefer the king move. Objectively both are fine; the difference is that Black must solve different kind of problems in order to be equal.

After 12 ... Kd8 13 0-0-0+ Kc8 (supposing Black doesn't want to transpose to the 12 0-0-0 Nd7 main line with 13 ... Nd7, for which see Game 11), the question to solve is how to bring the queenside pieces into play, while after 12 ... Na6 the main concerns are the a7-pawn and the knight on the rim of the board.

Let's have a concrete look at what White can try after against 12 ... Na6.

a) 13 0-0-0 Bh6+ 14 Kb1 Ke7 15 a3 (not 15 Na5? Nb4 which is good for Black; and 15 Nd6!? Rad8 16 Bxa6 bxa6 17 Nb7 Rxd1+ 18 Rxd1 leads to double-edged play, but Black is objectively fine) 15 ... Rhd8 16 Be2 f5 17 Rxd8 Rxd8! (this is a very thematic pattern here; Black must not stay passive) 18 Nxa7 Nc7 19 Nb5 Nxb5 20 Bxb5 Be3 and Black has positional compensation.

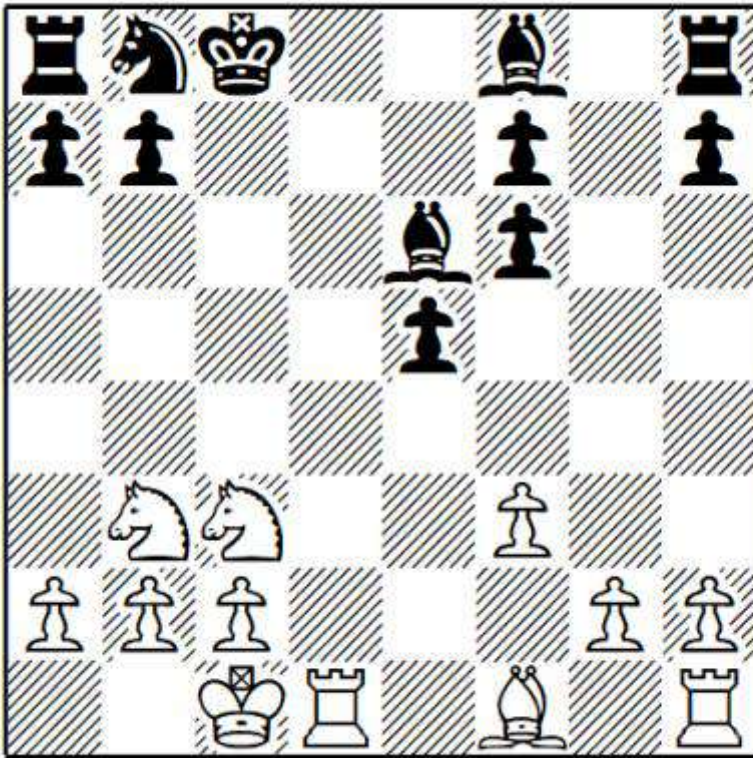
b) 13 Bd3!? is an interesting alternative, leaving the knight on b5 and keeping the rooks on the board for the moment. After 13 ... Ke7 14 c3 f5 15 0-0-0 Bh6+ 16 Kb1 Rhd8! White has perhaps a tiny plus.

### **13 0-0-0+ Kc8**

After 13 ... Bd7 14 Bc4 the f7-pawn becomes a target and White is clearly better. And as noted above, 13 ... Nd7 transposes to the 12 0-0-0 Nd7 13 Nb5 Kd8 main line seen in Game 11.

### **14 Nc3!?**

When I saw this knight manoeuvre and the resulting position it reminded me of the variation 9 ... Bxd5 10 Nc3 Be6 11 Qxd8+ Kxd8 12 0-0-0+ Kc8 which we looked at in the introductory notes.



*Position with 9 ... Bxd5 move order*

Basically, the position is the same but with Black to move. This again shows that 9 ... Bxd5 is inferior to the immediate 9 ... Qxd5, but also that we can avoid the main line with 12 0-0-0 Nc6 if we do not mind being a tempo down.

In an earlier game Nabaty tried 14 Bd3 h5 15 Be4 Nc6 16 Bd5 Rh7 17 f4 a6 18 Nd6+ Bxd6 19 Bxe6+ Kc7 20 Bf5 Rg7 21 fxe5 Nxe5 and reached a slightly more convenient position, though the game was eventually drawn, T.Nabaty-A.Zubov, Ordu 2017.

Note that 14 Nd6+ is not advisable, as after 14 ... Bxd6 15 Rxd6 Kc7 Black was fine in I.Salgado Lopez-Ma.Andersen, Baku Olympiad 2016.

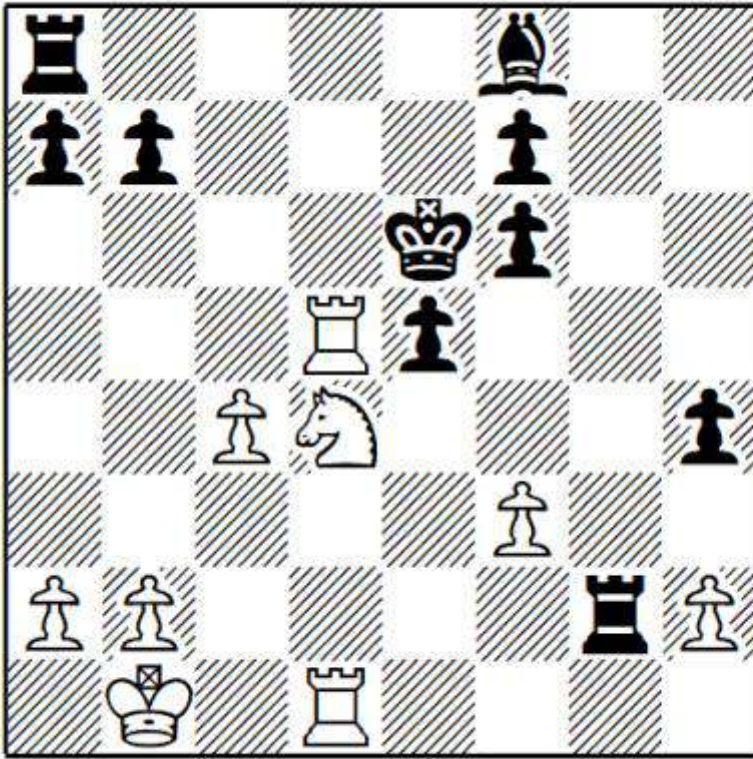
**14 ... Nd7 15 Nd5 h5 16 Bb5 Bxd5 17 Bxd7+ Kxd7 18 Rxd5+ Ke6 19 Rhd1 h4 20 Kb1 Rg8**

Black has generated counterplay on the kingside. How should White defend?

**21 c4!?**

White is giving up the g-pawn but keeps the position balanced with an inventive attack.

**21 ... Rxc2 22 Nd4+!**



*A creative attack*

**22 ... Ke7**

Of course not 22 ... exd4?? 23 Re1+ and Black is mated.

**23 f4 Rxc2 24 Nf5+ Ke6**

And not 24 ... Ke8?? 25 fxe5, when the black king is in terrible danger.

**25 Nd4+ Ke7 26 Nf5+ Ke6 ½-½**

White cannot play for more than a draw here.

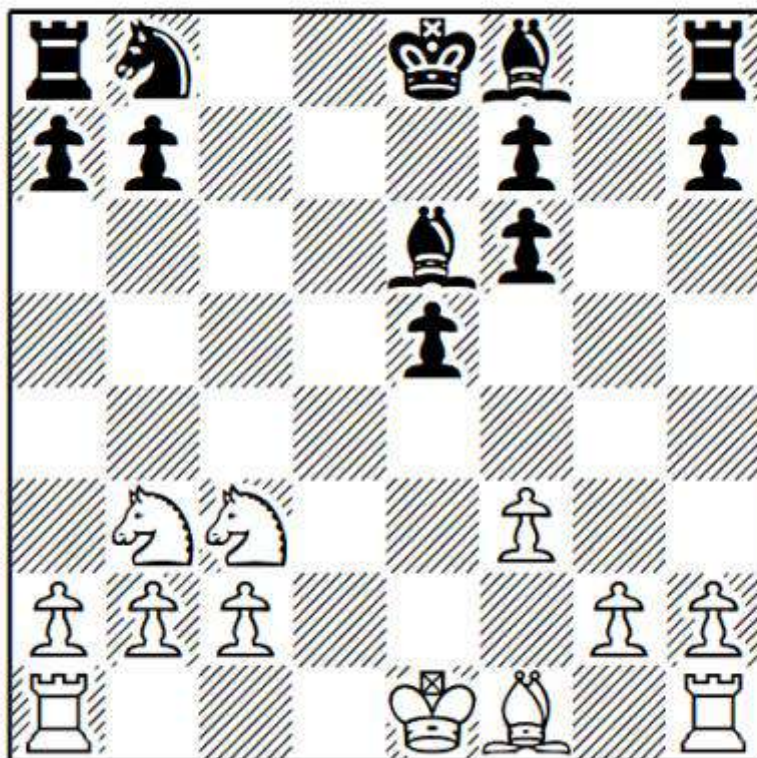
We continue with a fine positional masterpiece by Anish Giri, showing us the limitations of our system and how things can go wrong should we act carelessly.

*Game 10*

**P.Harikrishna-A.Giri**

Shenzhen 2017

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3 e5 6 Nb3 d5 7 Bg5 Be6 8 Bxf6 gxf6 9 exd5 Qxd5 10 Qxd5 Bxd5 11 Nc3 Be6!**



*Black's best choice*

Now we will have a more detailed look at Black's most resilient option in the Endgame Variation.

**12 0-0-0 Nc6**

As mentioned above, this is a branching point for Black. The alternative 12 ... Nd7 is examined in the next game.

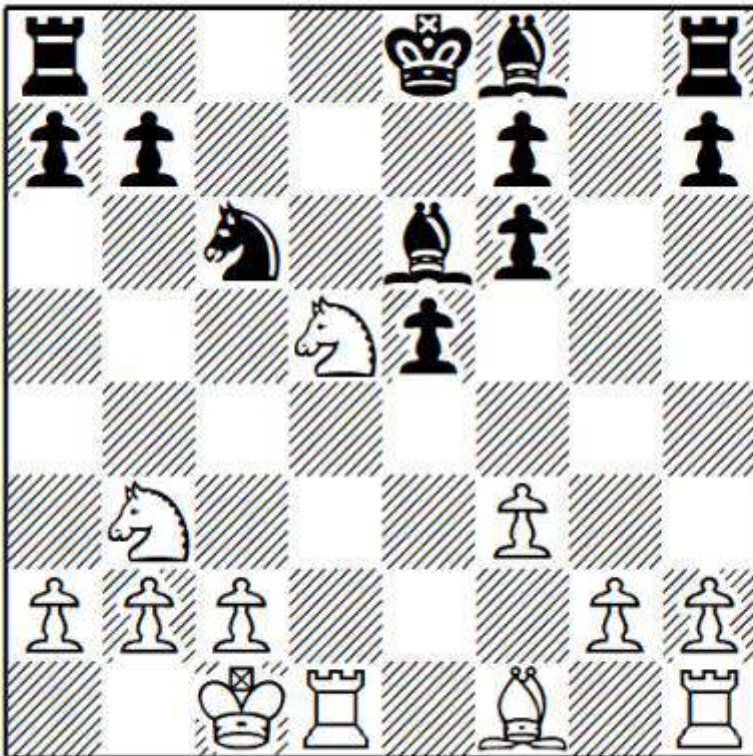
**13 Bb5**

With his last move White is ready for two different types of plans.

1) Tactical plan: Grab some material with a well-timed Na5, threatening Nxc6 as well as Nxb7.

2) Strategic plan: Take on c6 at some point when Black must reply ... bxc6. Then Black will have many pawn islands and we can start transferring a knight to the c5-square or immediately begin playing against the pawn weaknesses.

Instead, 13 Nd5? looks even more aggressive than 13 Bb5 because it attacks both c7 and f6. However, this is not the case. Black can defend successfully and obtain an excellent position.



*White just blundered*

**Question:** Can you see how Black should respond?

**Answer:** Simply developing with 13 ... 0-0-0!, when Black is already slightly better. 14 ... Bh6+ is in the air and the pin on the d-file is not easy for White to handle; e.g. after 14 Nxf6 Bh6+ 15 Nd2 Nb4.

**13 ... Rc8!**

With his last move, Black prevents both of our ideas for the moment, but we can continue the fight. Other continuations allow us to employ our

plans in an excellent way:

a) 13 ... Rd8? 14 Na5 and White can successfully employ plan number one, which in this case means that we are already winning material.

b) 13 ... a6?! 14 Bxc6+ bxc6 15 Ne4 employs plan number two with a slight initiative, proving that 13 ... a6 was just a waste of time.

### **14 Nd5**

This is a logical move and has been played several times.

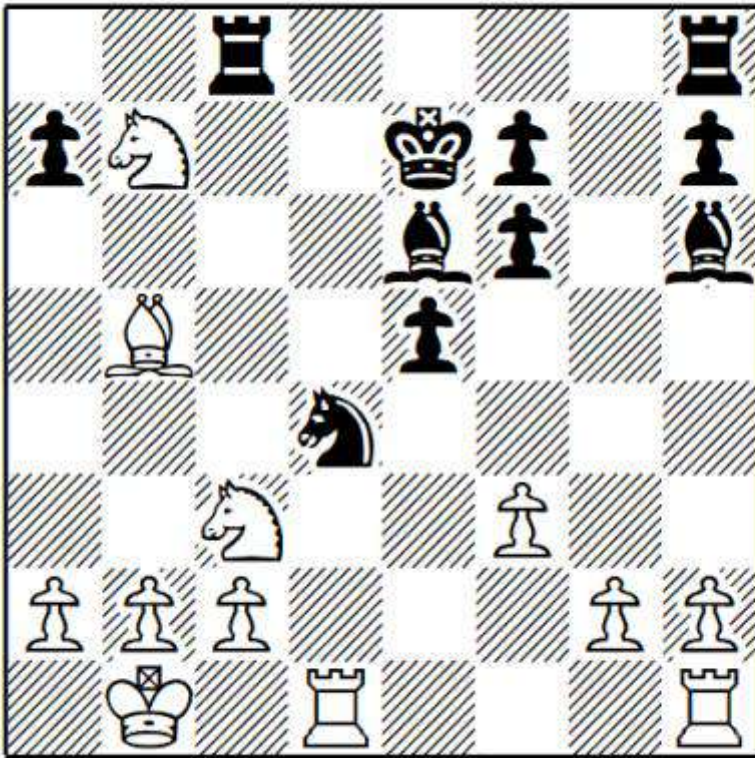
While looking for alternatives I came across 14 Na5 which I believe is an interesting and profound idea. Some years ago, I thought this knight move was premature and thus simply a mistake, but when I did some deeper analysis I found that it is a viable option.

If Black defends correctly, the position will be equal; if not, we have an excellent position. So, from a practical point of view, this is very satisfactory because it is Black who has to solve the problems. As a general thing to remember, the plan of ... Ke7 and developing the dark-squared bishop at h6 gives Black equality, while others leave White on top. Let's have a look at the details:

a) 14 ... Bb4?! 15 Nxb7 Ke7 the only move, otherwise White wins. 16 Bxc6 Rxc6 17 Nd5+ Bxd5 18 Rxd5 Rb8 19 Na5 Ra6 20 Nb3 Rxa2 21 Rhd1 White controls the d-file while the rook on a2 makes a weird impression. White is better.

b) 14 ... Ke7 15 Bxc6 bxc6 employs our plan number two, creating isolated pawns and trying to play around them with our knights.

Note that grabbing the b-pawn is inadvisable in view of 15 Nxb7? Bh6+ 16 Kb1 Nd4!.



*Black has good counterplay*

Black has a lot of counterplay on the b- and c-files and our minor piece is in danger. This is too much for a single pawn, very hard to play and thus not recommendable for White.

c) 14 ... Bh6+ 15 Kb1 Ke7 16 Bxc6 (not 16 Nxb7? Nd4! again) 16 ... bxc6 is similar to line 'b', though slightly less accurate, as Black has ruled out the useful option of pushing the h-pawn without moving the bishop again.

**14 ... f5 15 Na5!?**

The same plan as before, but with the difference that Black no longer has ... Ke7 because of our knight on d5. However, Giri is well prepared and finds the most accurate defence.

A calm alternative is 15 Nf6+!? Ke7 16 Nd5+, "threatening" Black with a potential draw by repetition after 16 ... Ke8 17 Nf6+ Ke7 18 Nd5+, as in R.Lagunov-S.Vaibhav, Barcelona 2019. If Black is determined to play on,

he must give up his light-squared bishop with 16 ... Bxd5 17 Rxd5 Ke6 18 Rd3, when the resulting position is equal but easier for White.

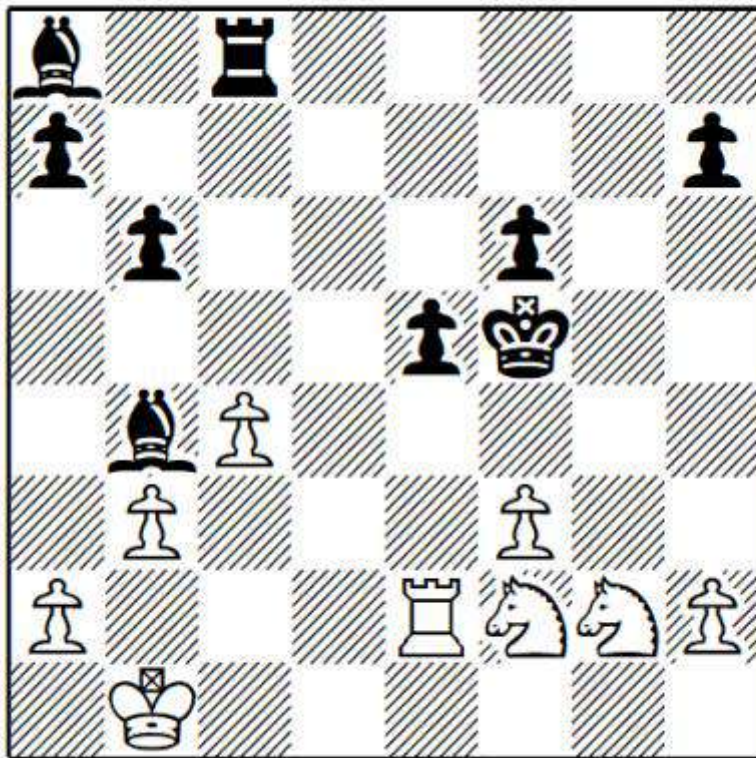
**15 ... Bh6+ 16 Kb1 Kf8**

This is the only way to keep the balance. Sadly, we cannot hope for an opening advantage any longer, but we can go for our positional strategy with 17 Bxc6 bxc6 with an equal game and a clear plan in mind.

**17 Nb3?! Kg7 18 Rhe1 Rhd8 19 Nc3?! Rxd1+ 20 Nxd1 Kf6**

The last few moves by Harikrishna were a bit passive, so Black is better now – his centre is strong and the bishops do an excellent job.

**21 Bxc6 Rxc6 22 Nf2 Rc4 23 Re2 b6 24 Nc1 Bf8 25 Ncd3 Bd6 26 b3 Rc8 27 g4 Bd5 28 Ne1 Bb4 29 gxf5 Kxf5 30 Ng2 Ba8 31 c4 f6**



### *Strong bishops*

The knights have no outposts, so the bishops are clearly superior, and in trying to improve his knights Harikrishna ends up making things worse.

**32 Ne4 Ke6 33 Ne3?! f5 34 Ng5+ Kf6 35 Rg2 Rc7 36 Nc2 Bc5 37 b4 Bf8 38 Nh3 Bxf3 39 Rg8 Bh6 40 c5 bxc5 41 b5 Rb7 42 a4 a6 43 Rc8**

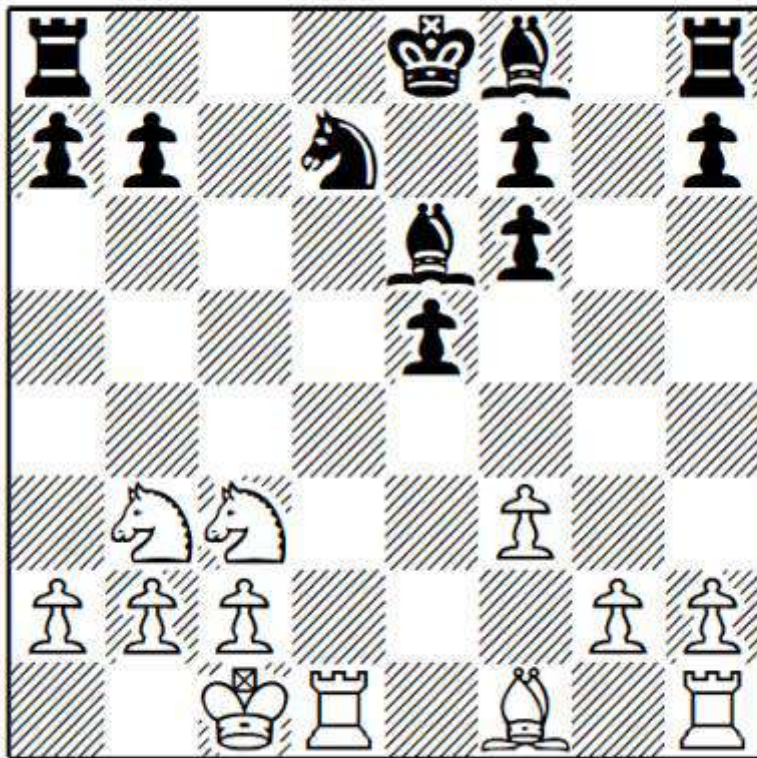
**axb5 44 a5 Ra7 45 Rxc5 Rxa5 46 Nf2 Bf8 47 Rc7 Be7 48 Ne3 f4 49  
Neg4+ Bxg4 50 Nxc4+ Ke6 51 Nf2 Ra4 52 Rb7 Rb4+ 53 Kc2 f3 54 Nd3  
Rc4+ 55 Kd1 Rd4 56 Kc2 b4 0-1**

*Game 11*

**A.Czebe-M.Nayhebaver**

Bojnice 2016

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3 e5 6 Nb3 d5 7 Bg5 Be6 8  
Bxf6 gxf6 9 exd5 Qxd5 10 Qxd5 Bxd5 11 Nc3 Be6 12 0-0-0 Nd7**



*How to prevent 13 ... 0-0-0 - ?*

This is the alternative to 12 ... Nc6 which we saw in the previous game. Although played more often, and the computer being happy with the move, my feeling is that Black is in an uncomfortable situation over the board after 12 ... Nd7. His pieces are not yet in play and it is not easy to decide how to free them. In addition, there are natural tries which go quite wrong.

### **13 Nb5!**

This prevents Black from castling without giving up the a7-pawn (which no one has ever tried). 13 Nd5 is not seen often as then 13 ... 0-0-0 leaves Black with no problems at all.

### **13 ... Kd8**

Others:

a) 13 ... Rc8? is a mistake in view of 14 Nxa7 Ra8 15 Nb5 Rxa2? 16 Kb1 and White is winning because the rook has no good retreat square; e.g. 16 ... Ra4 (or 16 ... Bxb3 17 cxb3 Ra5 18 Nc7+ Kd8 19 Nd5 Kc8 20 g3 Rc5 21 Bh3 and Black is lost because of the annoying pin) 17 Nc7+ Ke7 18 Nxe6 Kxe6 19 Rxd7! and White won a piece in D.Bisby-T.O'Gorman, London 2017.

b) 13 ... Ke7 should be answered by 14 Nc7! Rd8 (or 14 ... Rc8; inserting ... Bh6+ at any point makes no difference) 15 Nd5+, forcing Black to give up the light-squared bishop with 15 ... Bxd5 16 Rxd5, when White has all the chances due to the superior structure, even if Black would still expect to draw.

### **14 Na5 Rb8**

14 ... Kc8 is an alternative but then the a8-rook will be stuck for a long time. White continues with the same plan of 15 Bc4. This kind of situation is very good for White in a practical sense. Black can harm his position with many moves and so must defend really accurately. If he fails, White has an easy and big advantage. That such thing can happen quickly can be seen by the following line: 15 ... a6 (this looks quite normal but brings Black into a difficult situation; while after 15 ... Nb6 16 Nd6+ Bxd6 17 Bxe6+ fxe6 18 Rxd6 Re8 19 Rd3 Black struggles to bring the a8-rook into the game) 16 Bxe6 fxe6 17 Nd6+ Bxd6 18 Rxd6 Kc7 19 Rhd1 Nf8 20 R6d3 with a huge initiative for White.

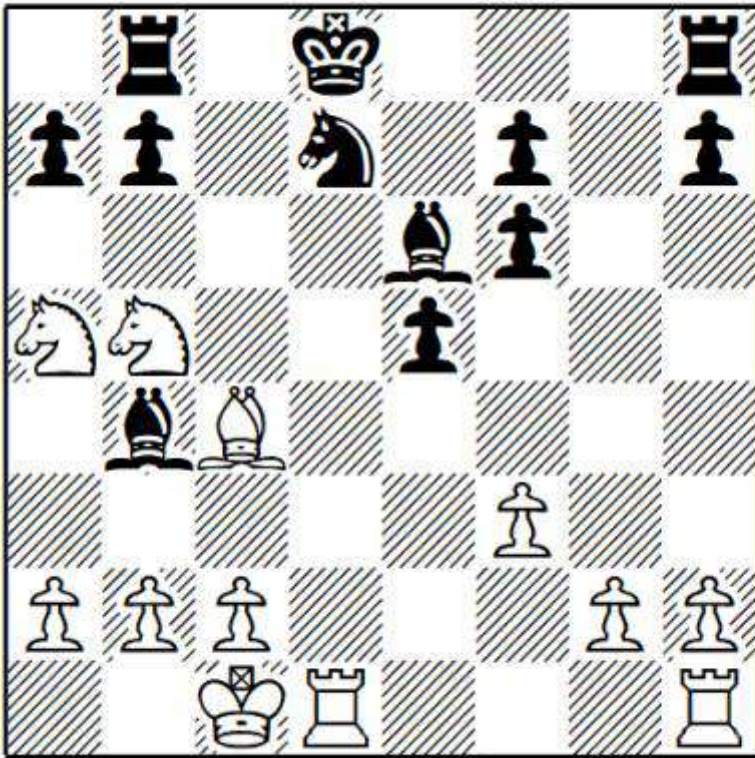
### **15 Bc4 a6?**

Instead:

a) 15 ... Bxc4? is simply bad because the knights will invade and the light squares offer great outposts; e.g. 16 Nxc4 Bc5 17 Ncd6 Rf8 18 Nf5!.

b) 15 ... Bh6+ 16 Kb1 Ke7 is a viable option, though Black must still be careful; for example, 17 Rd6 a6? 18 Bxe6 fxe6 19 Rhd1 Nc5 20 b4 also gives White a huge plus.

c) 15 ... Bb4! is the correct plan.



*Forced to take on e6*

Black should be happy to see White exchange on e6 as then ... f7xe6 covers a lot of important light squares. Nevertheless, White is still more active and can try for a plus; e.g. 16 Bxe6 fxe6 17 Nb3 a6 18 a3 Be7 19 Rd3! b6 20 Rhd1 Rb7 21 Nd6 with only slight pressure.

**16 Nd6**

Now Black has real problems keeping the position and material balanced.

**16 ... Rg8**

16 ... Bxd6 17 Rxd6 Kc7 18 Rhd1 is also promising for White.

**17 Nxf7+?!**

Here 17 Ndx7+! was stronger. Possibly White was afraid of not being able to move either of his knights after 17 ... Kc7 18 Bxe6 fxe6, but 19 Rd3! solves all the problems.

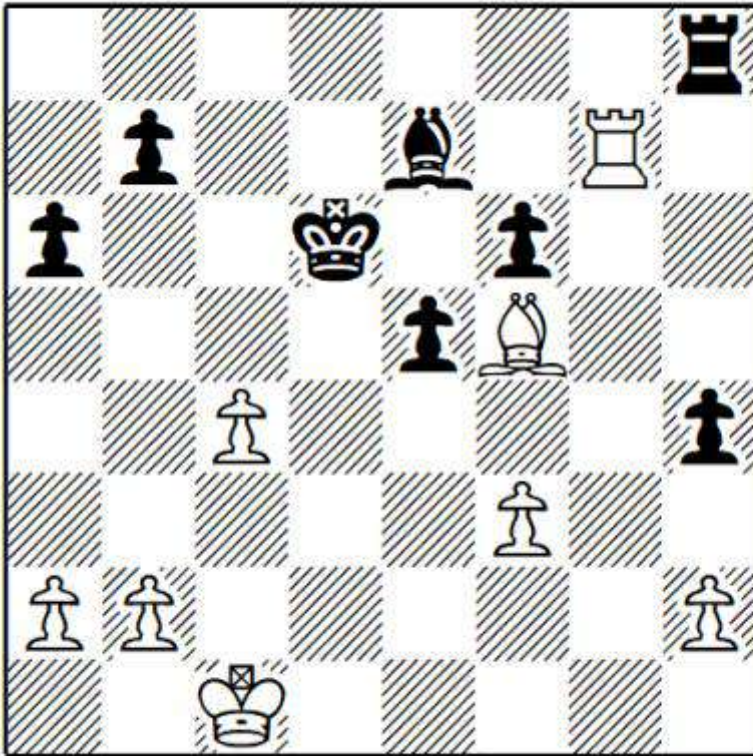
**17 ... Bxf7 18 Bxf7 Rxd6 19 Be6 Rg7 20 Nc4 Kc7 21 Ne3 Nb6 22 Nf5 Rg2 23 Rhg1 Rxd6**

After 23 ... Rxh2 24 Rd3 Black remains under pressure. White's control of the light squares easily makes up for the missing pawn.

**24 Rxc1 Nc8 25 Bg8 h5 26 Bf7 Ne7 27 Nxe7 Bxe7 28 Rg7**

In this opposite-coloured bishop endgame White has a small advantage, but the way he converts it is excellent.

**28 ... h4 29 Bg6 Kd6 30 Bf5 Rh8? 31 c4!**



*32 c5+ is a threat*

Maybe Black missed this tactical idea. White is now threatening to win a piece.

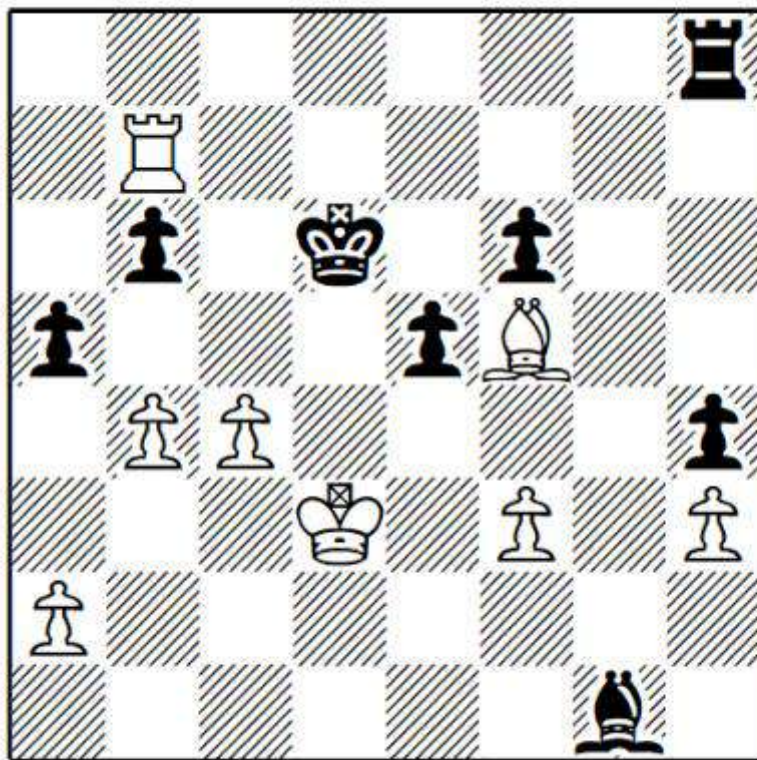
**31 ... b6 32 b4 Bf8**

32 ... Re8 is too passive. White can slowly improve his king before thinking about concrete measures. Note that a subsequent ... Kc7 would always fail to Bg6, so Black is basically running out of moves.

**33 Rb7 Bh6+ 34 Kc2 Be3 35 Kd3**

Or 35 Rd7+ Kc6 36 a4 b5 (36 ... Rg8? 37 b5+ Kc5 38 Kb3 leads to mate) 37 axb5+ axb5 38 c5 and White has great winning chances.

35 ... Bg1 36 h3 a5?



*A blunder by Black*

**Question:** Can you find a way to mate Black immediately?

**Answer:** 37 Rd7+! Kc6 38 b5+ Kc5 39 a3! and the game is over due to the threat of 40 Rd5 mate. (Not 39 Kc3? because 39 ... Bd4+ 40 Kb3 a4+! solves all Black's problems.)

In the game White let the opportunity slip and gave Black a fighting chance.

**37 c5+?! bxc5 38 b5 e4+**

Black has to return pawns since mate in one move was the threat.

**39 fxe4 c4+ 40 Kxc4 Rd8 41 Rh7 Bf2 42 a4 Ke5 43 Re7+ Kf4?**

Now Black cannot stop the b-pawn. 43 ... Kd6! was necessary, and if 44 Re6+ Kc7 45 Rxf6 Rd4+ 46 Kb3 Rb4+ 47 Ka3 Kb7 Black would keep some drawing chances because of the opposite-coloured bishops.

**44 Bd7! Rg8 45 Re6 Kg5**

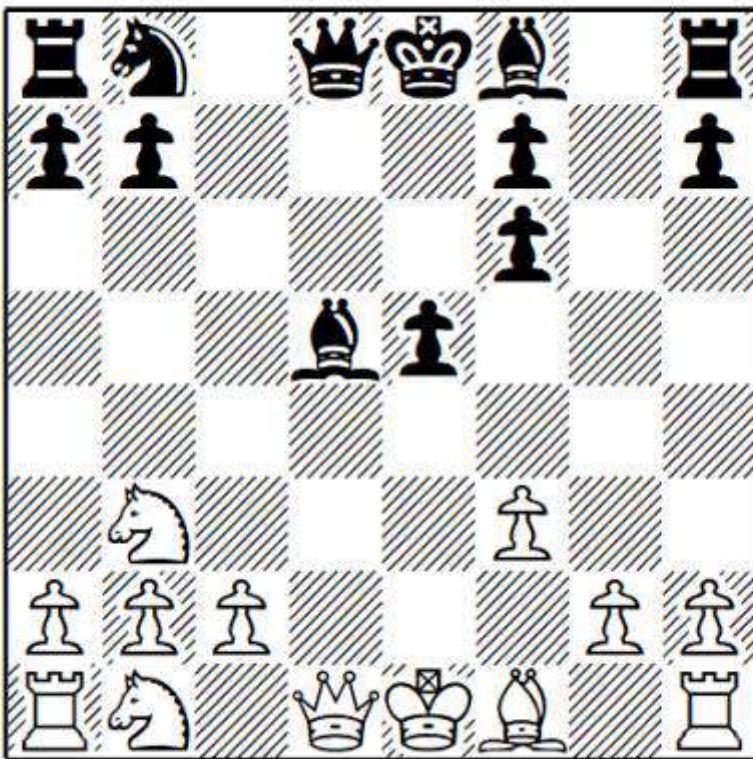
45 ... Rd8 46 Rxf6+ Ke3 47 Rf7 does not help Black either.  
46 b6 Rd8 47 b7 1-0

*Game 12*

**A.Naiditsch-T.L.Petrosian**

Moscow 2005

1 e4 c5 2 Ne2 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3 e5 6 Nb3 d5 7 Bg5 Be6 8  
Bxf6 gxf6 9 exd5 Bxd5



*A convenient position for White*

This is inferior to recapturing with the queen, in my opinion, and gives White convenient chances to gain an opening advantage.

**10 Nc3 Bb4!?**

Perhaps the only way to justify the previous move. If Black steps back with 10 ... Be6, White obtains an advantageous version of the Endgame Variation after the exchange of queens on d8.

## **11 Qd3!**

A very thematic reply to 10 ... Bb4. White secures his pawn structure against damage from ... Bxc3 and also prepares to castle queenside, when the pin on the d5-bishop would be annoying for Black.

### **11 ... Bxc3+**

Black gives up the pair of bishops and aims for some simplifications, since the options of unpinning the bishop after 11 ... Nc6 12 0-0-0 are not too convincing:

a) 12 ... Be6 13 Qe4 Qc8 14 Nd5 with a big advantage for White.

b) 12 ... Bxb3 13 axb3 Qxd3 (not 13 ... Qa5? 14 Qd7+ Kf8 15 Bc4 Ne7 16 Kb1 Bxc3 17 bxc3 Qxc3 18 Qd6 and White has a crushing initiative) 14 Bxd3 and White is clearly better due to the superiority on the light squares.

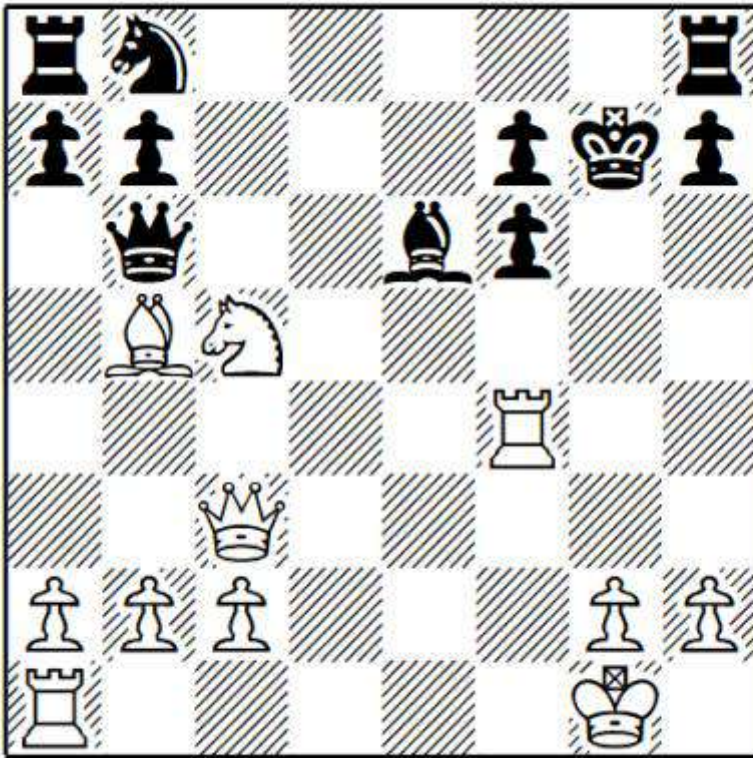
### **12 Qxc3 Be6**

This looks like a sensible move, temporarily preventing 13 0-0-0. However, after White's reply it will soon become obvious that the whole variation is unsound and that Black is in big trouble.

### **13 Bb5+ Kf8 14 Nc5 Kg7 15 f4!**

White aggressively opens diagonals and files to grant his pieces maximal freedom. Meanwhile Black has only developed one piece so far.

### **15 ... exf4 16 0-0 Qb6 17 Rxf4!**



*White's attack is too strong*

White activates his rook since the bishop on b5 is untouchable. Basically, we can say that the game is already over after a mere 17 moves, and Naiditsch does not allow his opponent any chances.

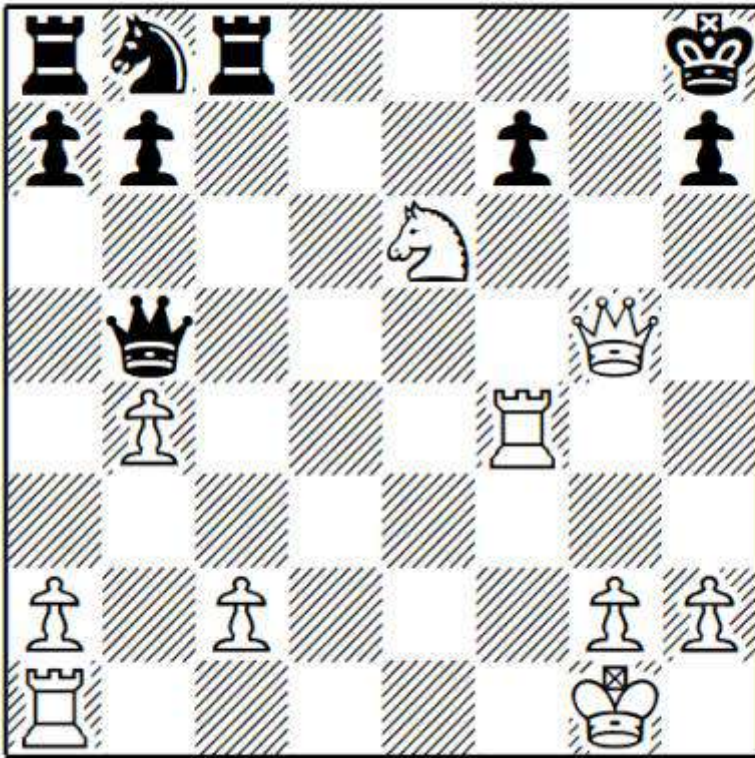
**17 ... Rc8**

If 17 ... Qxb5? then 18 Nxe6+ leads to mate in three.

**18 b4 Kg8 19 Qxf6 Qxb5 20 Qg5+ Kh8**

20 ... Kf8 is not possible due to 21 Nxe6+.

**21 Nxe6!**



*White is winning*

White wins the piece back and reduces to an easily winning endgame, with all the activity plus extra pawns.

**21 ... Qxg5 22 Nxg5 Nc6 23 Rxf7 Re8 24 Rxb7 h5 25 h4 Nb8 26 Nf7+ 1-0**

Black has no hope and therefore resigned.

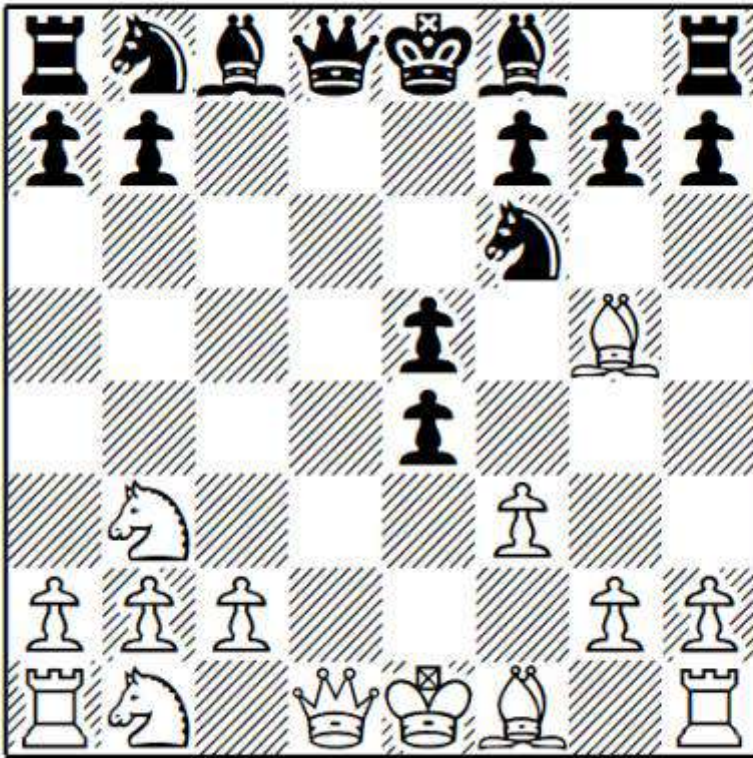
*Game 13*

**M.Oleksienko-H.B.Halldorsson**

Icelandic Team Championship 2014

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3 e5 6 Nb3 d5 7 Bg5 dxe4**

This is a rarely played move, but it leads to similar structures as the pure form of our Endgame Variation.

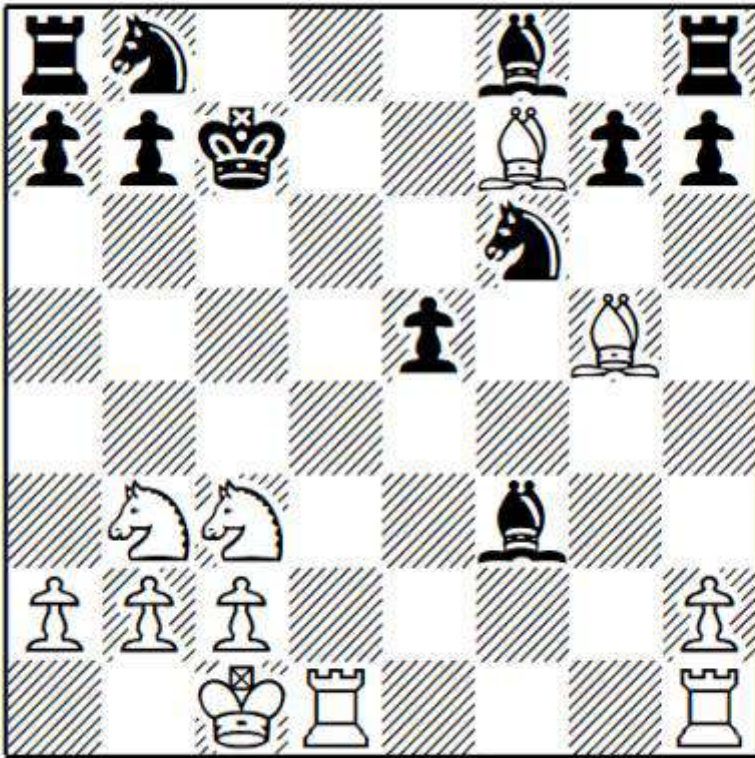


*A rarely seen option*

### **8 Qxd8+ Kxd8 9 Nc3 Be6**

9 ... exf3 has only been played five times so far and only by lower-rated players. In my opinion it is both too risky and objectively unconvincing, as White has many routes to obtain an advantage. White has scored a fantastic 90% from this position, which shows that it is incredibly hard for Black to handle. The best try is probably 10 0-0-0+ Bd7 11 gxf3 and then:

a) 11 ... Kc7 is the computer's choice but from a human perspective this seems uncritical because we immediately regain the pawn with 12 Bc4, after which White is just better. Note that 12 ... Bc6 13 Bxf7 Bxf3? is not advisable for Black.

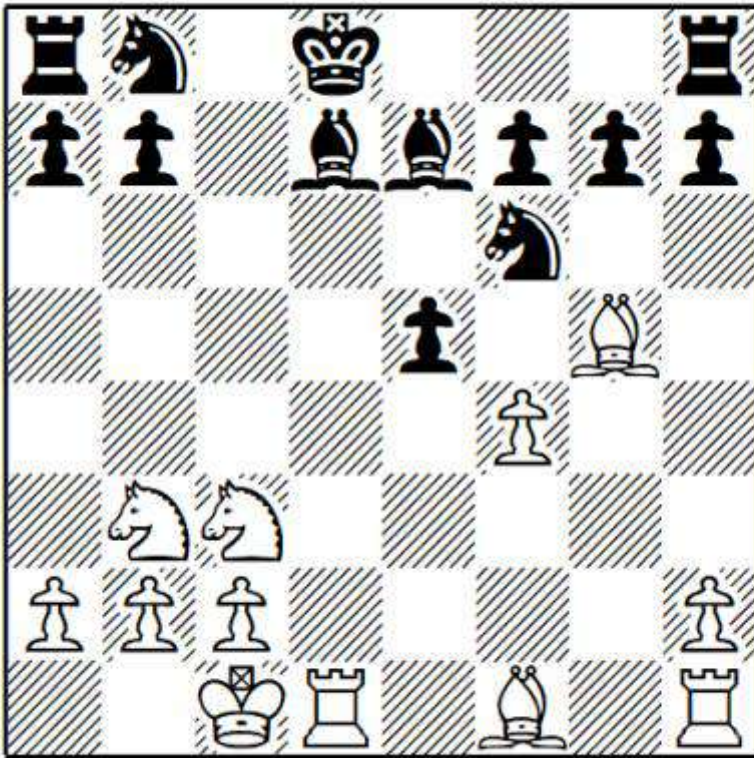


*Black is in serious trouble*

**Question:** How should White continue?

**Answer:** 14 Nb5+ Kb6 (the critical path; after 14 ... Kc6 White can simply play 15 N5d4+ exd4 16 Nxd4+ Kb6 17 Nxf3, regaining the pawn once more with a huge plus) 15 a4! and Black is in great difficulty. If 15 ... Bxd1 then 16 Be3+ Kc6 17 Na5+ Kd7 18 Rxd1+ Ke7 19 Bc4 Nbd7 20 Nxb7 a6 (or 20 ... Rc8 21 N7d6 Rc6 22 Nxa7!) 21 N5d6 and Black cannot move. White combines mating threats with advancing the queenside pawns; e.g. 21 ... g6 22 Na5 Bg7 23 Nc6+ Kf8 24 Rf1 h6 25 b4 and wins.

b) 11 ... Be7 is more natural because White is still a pawn down. In general, I think it is important to study what to do if Black tries to keep the material as stubbornly as possible. In the introduction we mentioned that White's ideas include Bh3 and f3-f4, opening the position. We'll start with 12 f4!



### *Opening the position*

12 ... exf4 (Black cannot simply develop with 12 ... Nc6?! because of the pin on the d-file; i.e. 13 Bxf6 gxf6 14 Bh3 Nb8 15 Rxd7+! Nxd7 16 Rd1 and White wins) 13 Bg2! (trying to provoke ... Nc6) 13 ... Kc8 (13 ... Nc6 is the same as before: 14 Bxf6 gxf6 15 Bh3 Ne5 16 Rxd7+! Nxd7 17 Rd1 and White should win the game, though Black's f-pawns mean some accuracy will be required) 14 Na5 f3 15 Bxf3 Bc6 16 Nxc6 Nxc6 17 Bg2 and White has an ongoing initiative for a mere pawn.

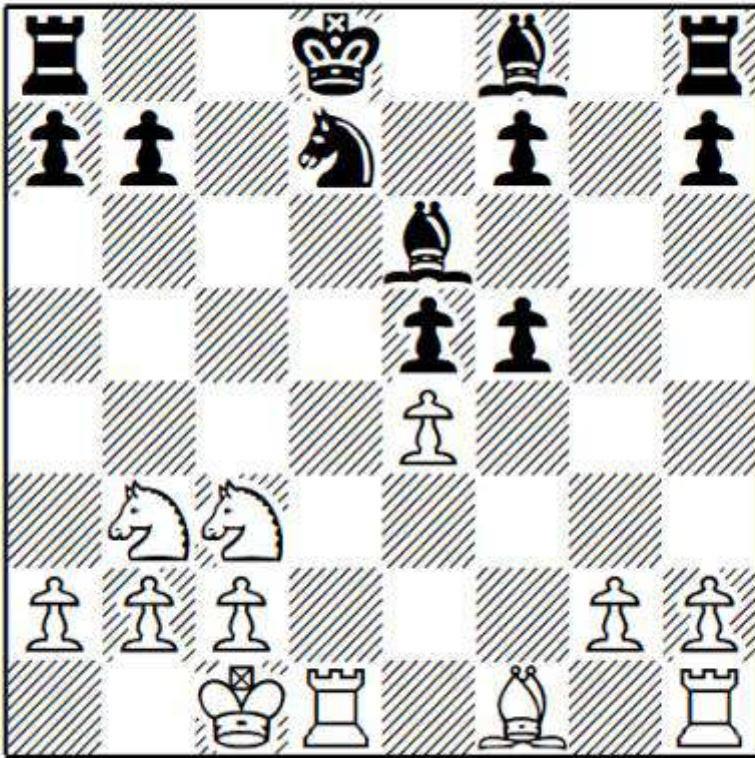
**10 0-0-0+ Nbd7 11 Bxf6+**

White captures on f6 before Black has time for ... Be7, keeping his structure intact.

**11 ... gxf6 12 fxe4 a6**

This rules out the annoying 13 Bb5 but also weakens the b6-square irreversibly, which White immediately begins to exploit.

At first 12 ... f5 looks like a normal developing move, intending to get rid of the doubled pawn, but White can smoothly refute this.



*Position after 12 ... f5?*

**Question:** How can White win material?

**Answer:** 13 Bb5! a6 (Black has no time for 13 ... fxe4? because of 14 Rxd7+! Bxd7 15 Rd1 and White wins; 13 ... Kc8 is also too slow due to 14 exf5 Bxf5 15 Rhf1 Be6 16 Bxd7 Bxd7 17 Rxf7) 14 Bxd7 Bxd7 15 exf5, winning an important pawn.

**13 Nd5 Bxd5**

As we know, it is not desirable for Black to give up the light-squared bishop, but when you look at the alternative 13 ... Kc8, you realize that neither the knight nor the a8-rook will be able to move for a long time, so Black is really stuck with his development.

**14 exd5 Kc7 15 Bd3 h5 16 Bf5 Nc5?! 17 d6+! Bxd6**

Forced, because 17 ... Kc6?! 18 Nxc5 Kxc5 19 d7 Rd8 20 Rhf1 is hopeless for Black. The d7-pawn is too strong and the f1-rook will soon join via in the third rank.

**18 Nxc5 Bxc5 19 Rd7+ Kb6 20 Be4!**

Well played. White does not hurry regaining the material, but instead plays for a maximum of activity.

**20 ... Rab8 21 Rf1 Be3+ 22 Kb1 Bg5 23 Rf3 Rhd8 24 Rb3+ Kc5 25 Rbxb7 Rxb7 26 Rxd8 Rb4 27 Rc8+ Kd6 28 c4**

Now it is obvious that only White can win. Black is unable to do anything with his pawn majority on the kingside, which is a long-term result of 11 Bxf6 gxf6.

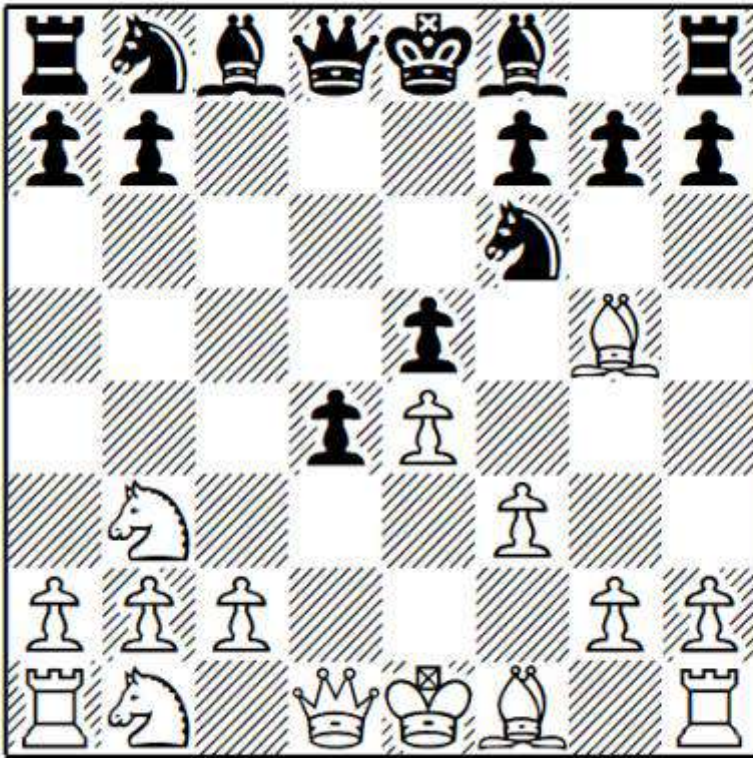
**28 ... Be3 29 a3 Rb6 30 Kc2 a5 31 Ra8 Kc5 32 Bd3 e4 33 Rxa5+ 1-0**

White wins everything, since 33 ... Kd4 would allow mate in one.

**7 ... d4**

Now we will move on to a strong and ambitious alternative for Black after achieving the central break. By pushing the d-pawn again, resolving the central tension, Black avoids the kingside pawn structure being compromised by 8 Bxf6 gxf6 as in the Endgame Variation. The potential drawback is that White can try to target the advanced d4-pawn with a quick c2-c3. Enough of general considerations; let us start with the concrete initial position we reach after the following moves.

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3 e5 6 Nb3 d5 7 Bg5 d4!?**



### *Advance in the centre*

#### **8 c3**

White needs to put immediate pressure on Black's centre because it is seriously hindering our development. Of course Black is not yet ready to open the position.

#### **8 ... Nc6**

The only logical reply. Black has no alternatives: 8 ... dxc3 is clearly weak due to 9 Qxd8+ Kxd8 10 Nxd3, while 8 ... h6 loses a pawn for insufficient compensation after 9 Bxf6 Qxf6 10 cxd4.

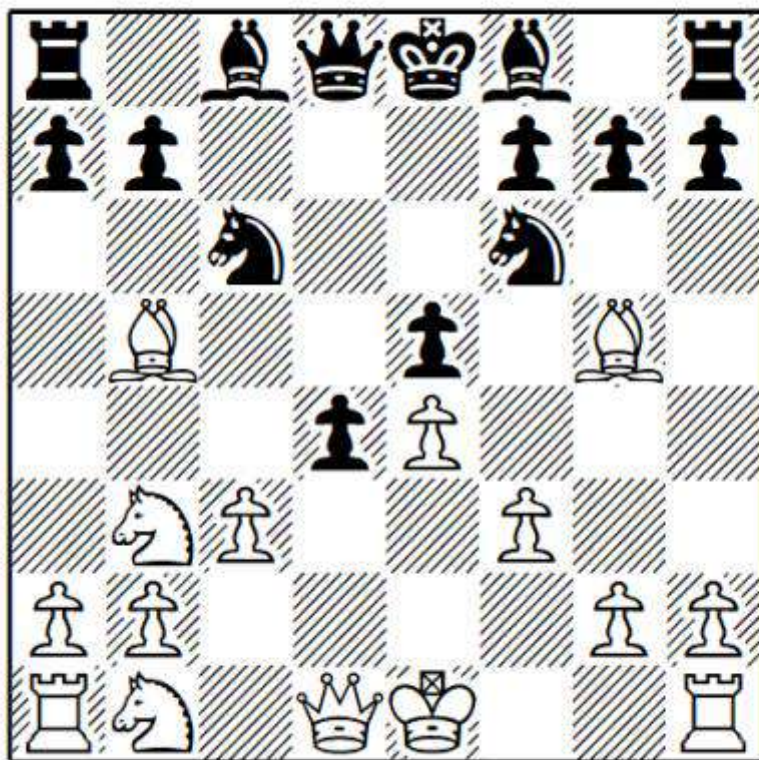
From this point you have a choice between two serious attempts to put Black under pressure: 9 Bb5 and 9 cxd4. In the following we will discuss them in detail.

#### **9 cxd4!?**

I think this is the critical test of Black's system. If we start with 9 Bb5 instead, Black can make use of the fact that he is not obliged to recapture on

d4 later on, often gaining time instead, for example by attacking our bishop. As a result, it seems clever to ask the question whether Black wants to recapture immediately because otherwise d4-d5 might be a threat! We would be happy to see 9 ... exd4, as after 10 Bb5 we enter a more comfortable version of the 9 Bb5 line.

Let's try to understand the differences by playing 9 Bb5 immediately.



### *Tension in the centre*

After this Black can try several moves.

a) 9 ... a6? 10 Bxc6 bxc6 11 cxd4 and White wins a pawn.

**Remember:** ... a7-a6 tends to be wrong – and in general not just in this position. It both wastes a tempo and takes the a6-square away from the c8-bishop which is, in most cases, the biggest source of counterplay for Black.

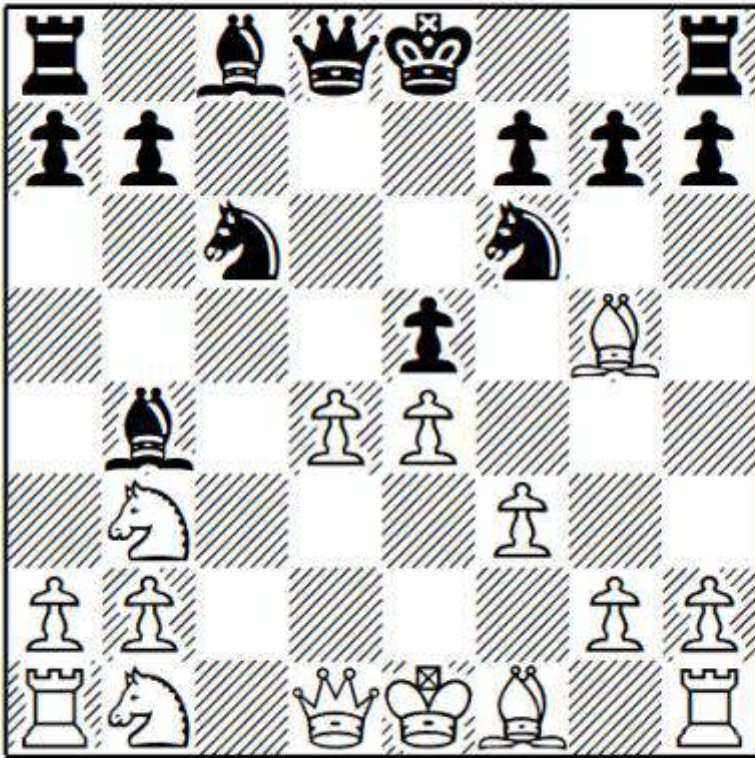
b) 9 ... Qb6!? 10 Bxc6+ bxc6! is a very common motif. Black will soon be a pawn down and so needs some compensation which is based on placing the bishop on a6 to slow down White's development and prevent him from castling (whereas 10 ... Qxc6 11 cxd4 leaves Black with nothing

to show for the pawn). I faced a similar situation in one of my own games. After 11 cxd4 Ba6 White has to treat this really carefully because our king must find a safe spot in order not to be worse. The computer suggests 12 Na3 as a solution, but it is not at all clear and I think that it is difficult to play for White.

c) 9 ... h6 10 Bxf6 (if 10 Bh4?, the idea of 10 ... Qb6 has even more venom than in line 'b', as the e3-square is no longer protected; e.g. 11 Bxc6+ bxc6 12 cxd4 Ba6 and Black begins to take over the initiative, while White has to be very careful with the king stuck in the middle) 10 ... Qxf6 (10 ... gxf6 11 cxd4 does not solve Black's problems) 11 cxd4 Bb4+ 12 Nc3 0-0 13 Bxc6 (after 13 0-0 Nxd4 14 Nd5 Qd6 15 Nxd4 Bc5 or 13 d5 Nd4 14 Bd3 Nxb3 15 Qxb3 Bc5! Black is more than okay with his long-term dark-squared superiority) 13 ... bxc6 14 dxe5 Qxe5 15 Qd4 Qe7 and the position is balanced.

To conclude, I think the main line is a better try for an advantage, as after 9 Bb5 neither the 9 ... Qb6 nor 9 ... h6 variations fully satisfy me as White.

**9 ... Bb4+!**



### *An important insertion*

This move is very tricky for both sides and has already been played by strong grandmasters like Navara and Cheparinov. At the first sight nothing special seems to be going on, and you might get the impression that after the normal 10 Bd2 the position is quiet and White enjoys a slight edge, but this is not the case here.

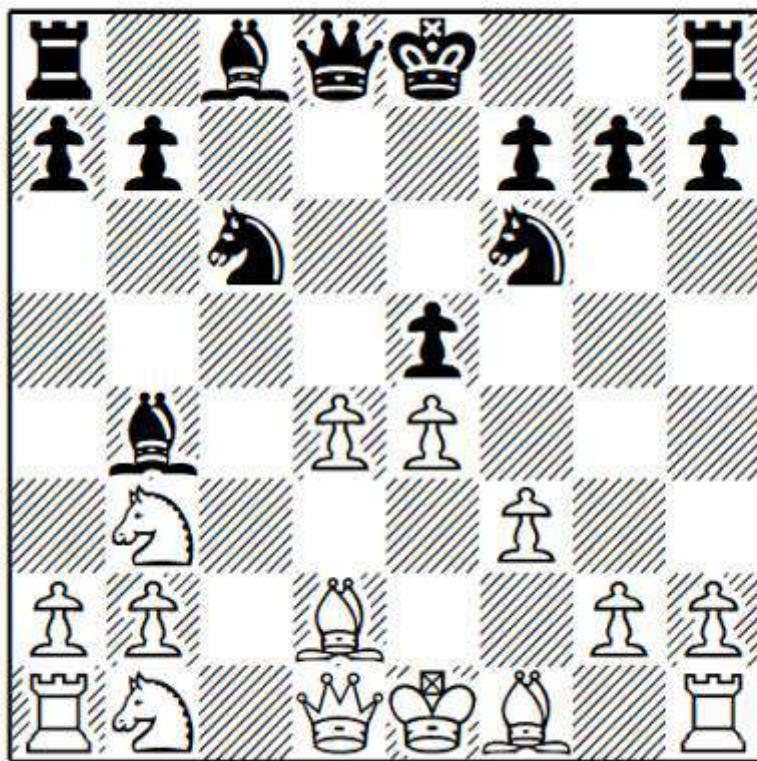
Instead, we would be pleased to see Black play 9 ... exd4, as after 10 Bb5 Bb4+ (in this scenario 10 ... Qb6? is just too slow, and 11 Bxc6+ bxc6 12 Qxd4 leaves White much better!) 11 Bd2 White is solid, the king will be safe, and we have clear targets on the c- and d-files. This position is examined in Games 14 and 15.

#### **10 Bd2**

The only try for an advantage, as alternatives are answered both forcingly and convincingly:

a) 10 N1d2 Nxd4 11 a3 Bxd2+ 12 Bxd2 allows Black to equalize by means of 12 ... Nxe4! 13 Nxd4 Nxd2.

b) 10 Nc3 exd4 11 a3 Be7 is also fine for Black. Not 11 ... dxc3? 12 Qxd8+ Nxd8 13 axb4 cxb2 14 Rb1 and White's much greater activity ensures a big advantage.



*Is Black just a pawn down?*

**Question:** Which hidden tactical resource does Black have here?

**Answer: 10 ... Nxe4!**

It is amazing how sharp the position has become in the last couple of moves. Now both sides must be very accurate and find a series of only moves in order not to lose. Being well prepared for such a scenario gives you huge practical winning chances because for the average player it is hardly possible to navigate through the complexities correctly. If your opponent is not especially prepared against this line and not a strong grandmaster, I am sure they will not go into this forcing variation over the board.

Yet if Black plays anything else, we can be very happy. For instance, 10 ... Bxd2+? would be a mistake because of 11 Qxd2 Nxd4 12 Nxd4 exd4 13 Bb5+ Bd7 14 Qxd4! and White has won a pawn by tactics as 14 ... Bxb5 15 Qe5+ regains the piece.

Returning to 10 ... Nxe4!, if you want to train your calculation skills, stop here for a while and try to find the only moves for both sides.

**11 Bxb4 Qh4+**

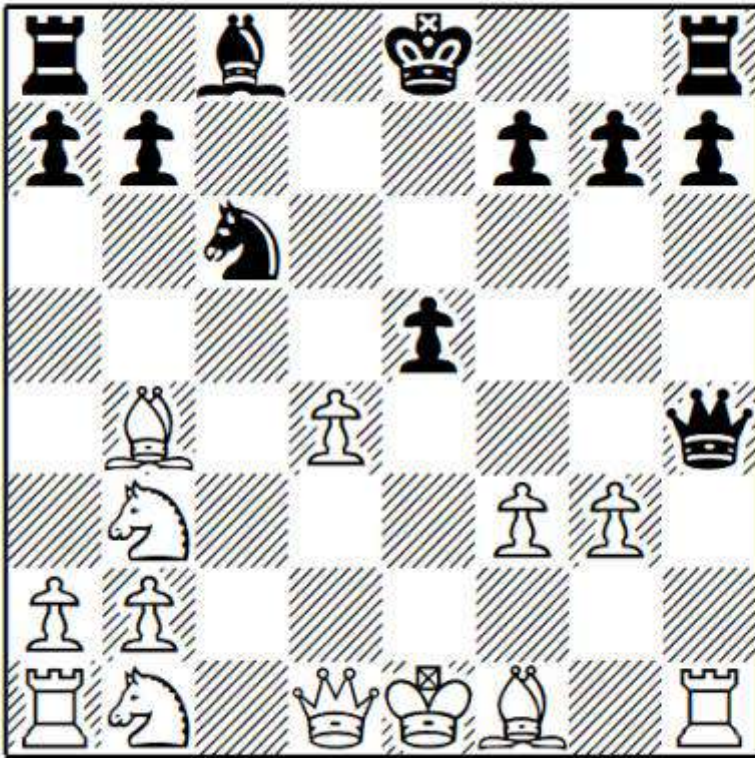
**Question:** The recapture 11 ... Nxb4? would be wrong. How to win after this inaccuracy?

**Answer:** White throws in 12 Bb5+! Nc6 13 fxe4 Qh4+ 14 Kf1 and wins because the king is safe. It is worth remembering this standard idea of vacating the f1-square!

**12 g3**

After 12 Ke2? White is either mated or loses tons of material; e.g. 12 ... Qf2+ 13 Kd3 Nxb4+ 14 Kxe4 f5+ 15 Kxe5 Qe3+ 16 Kd6 Qe7 mate

**12 ... Nxg3 13 hxg3**



*An important branching point*

So far everything has been forced and you can be very satisfied if you discovered all this correctly. Now Black faces a difficult but important choice.

**Question:** Should Black capture the rook in the corner or take the g3-pawn and continue the attack?

**Answer:** Both moves are technically playable, but from an objective perspective Black should prefer 13 ... Qxh1.

**13 ... Qxh1**

This is the best continuation for Black, but we are in no discomfort either.

After 13 ... Qxg3+ (which we will see in Game 16) the situation becomes messy, yet with precise play White can secure a big plus: 14 Ke2!

Nxb4 15 Nc3 b6!? (the most dangerous idea, trying to activate the bishop; if 15 ... exd4? 16 Qxd4 or 15 ... 0-0 16 Ne4 Qg6 17 Qd2, White has more or less consolidated and is a piece up) 16 a3 Bb7 (after 16 ... Ba6+ 17 Ke3 White is close to winning; e.g. 17 ... Bxf1 18 Rxf1 exd4+ 19 Nxd4 Qe5+ 20 Ne4 Nd5+ 21 Kf2) 17 d5 Ba6+ 18 Ke3 Bxf1 19 Qxf1 (not now 19 Rxf1? Qf4+ 20 Ke2 Qc4+ 21 Ke1 Nd3+ 22 Kd2 Nxb2) 19 ... Nc2+ 20 Kd3 Nxa1 21 Nxa1 0-0 22 Kc2 and White is clearly better.

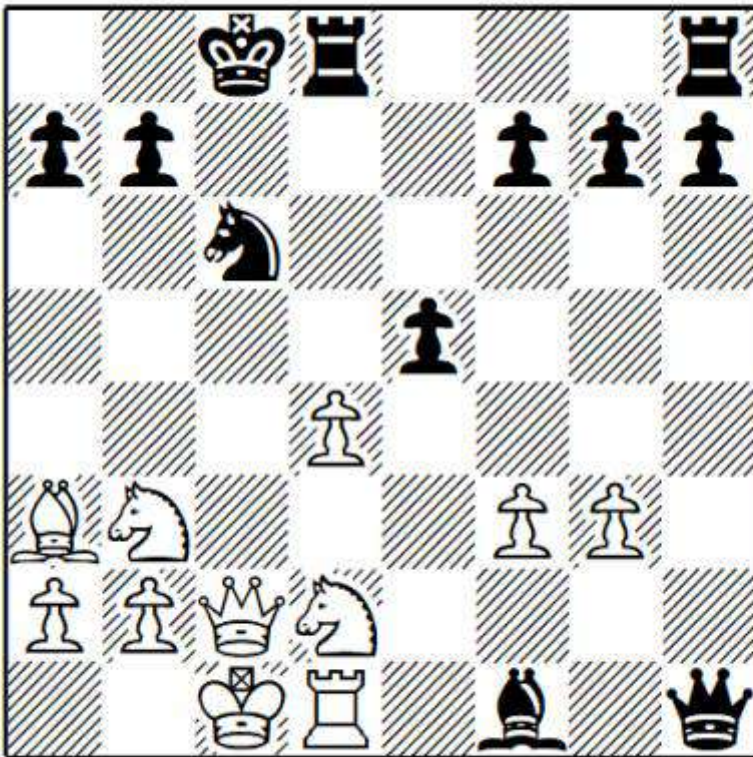
### 14 Ba3 Bh3

After 14 ... Qh2 15 Qe2 Qxg3+ 16 Qf2 Qxf2+ 17 Kxf2 our pieces are stronger than the rook, especially with the black king kind of stuck in the centre.

### 15 N1d2!

Improving on 15 Qe2?! as played in Game 17.

15 ... 0-0-0 16 Qc2 Bxf1 17 0-0-0



*Two pieces vs. rook and pawn*

We have complex game ahead and can try to outplay our opponent with two

minor pieces versus a rook and pawn. We'll look at this further in the notes to Game 17.

## **Illustrative Games**

We will now look at a few illustrative games, showing interesting plans as well as difficulties which may arise.

We start with Game 14, where Black avoids our main lines by playing 9 ... exd4 immediately. According to our theoretical assessment, this should offer White an advantage, though Grischuk was unable to prove it.

Game 15 reaches the same position after Black plays 9 ... Bb4+! 10 Bd2, but then 10 ... exd4 anyway. This time White won after the strong idea 12 Ba5!.

In the next two games we follow the theoretical paths with 10 ... Nxe4!. In Game 16, Navara opts to take on g3 at move 13 and soon finds himself in trouble, when Mastrovasilis shows an excellent practical plan of exchanging queens.

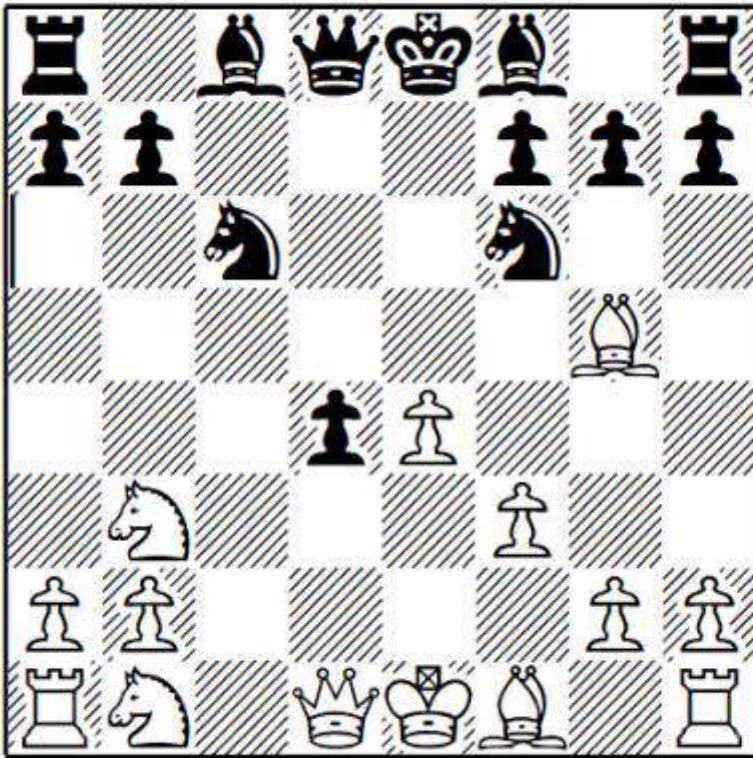
In the final game of this chapter, Black correctly takes the rook on h1, and this time White experiences some problems after inaccurate play.

### *Game 14*

**A.Grischuk-M.Vachier-Lagrave**

FIDE Grand Prix, Khanty-Mansiysk 2015

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3 e5 6 Nb3 d5 7 Bg5 d4!? 8 c3 Nc6 9 cxd4 exd4?!**



### *Black recaptures on d4*

Vachier-Lagrave answers in a straightforward way by recapturing on d4. In my opinion, this is not as strong as 9 ... Bb4+!, which we will examine in subsequent games.

Note that 9 ... Nxd4? would be a mistake as it exchanges pieces and simplifies the position while the d4-pawn remains weak. For example, after 10 Nxd4 exd4 11 Bb5+ Bd7 12 Qxd4! White wins a pawn with a small combination, as 12 ... Bxb5 is met by 13 Qe5+ Be7 14 Qxb5+.

### **10 Bb5 Bb4+ 11 Bd2**

With the moves 9 ... exd4 and 10 Bb5 inserted Black cannot go for tactics with 11 ... Nxe4 anymore, so he needs to answer the threat to his bishop.

### **11 ... Bd6**

The best continuation for Black.

a) 11 ... Nxe4?? just loses a piece to 12 fxe4 and if 12 ... Qh4+ then 13 Kf1 (now that the white bishop has vacated the square) or even 13 g3

Qxe4+ 14 Qe2.

a) 11 ... Be7? is not very clever either because of 12 Ba5!, as we'll see in the next game

b) 11 ... Bxd2+?! 12 Qxd2 simplifies the position too much, so White has an easy task picking up the weak d4-pawn; for instance after 12 ... 0-0 13 Bxc6 bxc6 14 Qxd4.

### **12 Na3**

Grischuk opts to play the position positionally, leaving the black d-pawn as a long-term weakness. The immediate 12 Nxd4 would be met by 12 ... 0-0 13 Be3 Nxd4 14 Qxd4 Qc7 15 Nc3 Be6 with good counterplay for Black.

However, 12 Ba5! looks like an interesting and aggressive possibility. After 12 ... Qe7 13 Qxd4 White wins the pawn again and it's not clear that Black receives sufficient compensation.

**12 ... 0-0 13 Nc4 Be6 14 Nxd6 Qxd6 15 0-0 a6 16 Bxc6 bxc6 17 Rc1 Nd7 18 Nc5! Nxc5?!**

Rather obliging. Either 18 ... a5 or 18 ... Bxa2 should be okay for Black.

**19 Bb4 Rfd8 20 Bxc5 Qb8 21 b3 a5 22 Rf2 Qb5 23 Rd2 a4 24 Bxd4**

Here 24 b4!? was a chance to keep a slight edge; e.g. 24 ... a3 25 e5 Bf5 26 f4 (not 26 Rxd4?! Rxd4 27 Qxd4 Qe2!) 26 ... d3 27 Qf3, intending to push on the kingside. In the game any advantage will soon vanish.

**24 ... axb3 25 axb3 Bxb3**

Now White remains with only a nominal edge and Vachier-Lagrave has no problems drawing the game.

**26 Qe1 f6 27 Qe3 Ra2 28 Rxa2 Bxa2 29 Qa3 Bf7 30 h3 h6 31 Qc3 Qa4 32 Bf2 Rd1+ 33 Rxd1 Qxd1+ 34 Kh2 Qd6+ 35 Bg3 Qe6 36 Qd4 Kh7 37 Bd6 Qd7 38 f4 f5 39 exf5 Qxf5 40 Be5 Bd5 41 Qa7 Qf7 42 Qxf7 1/2-1/2**

We will continue our journey through the 6 ... d5 variation with an easy win for White. This game underlines how quickly things can go wrong for Black if unprepared.

### *Game 15*

**S.Kasparov-Gö.Richter**

Berlin 2015

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3 e5 6 Nb3 d5 7 Bg5 d4 8 c3 Nc6 9 cxd4 Bb4+!

Black starts with the strongest move.

**10 Bd2 exd4?!**

But doesn't follow it up correctly. He should have played 10 ... Nxe4! as in the next two games.

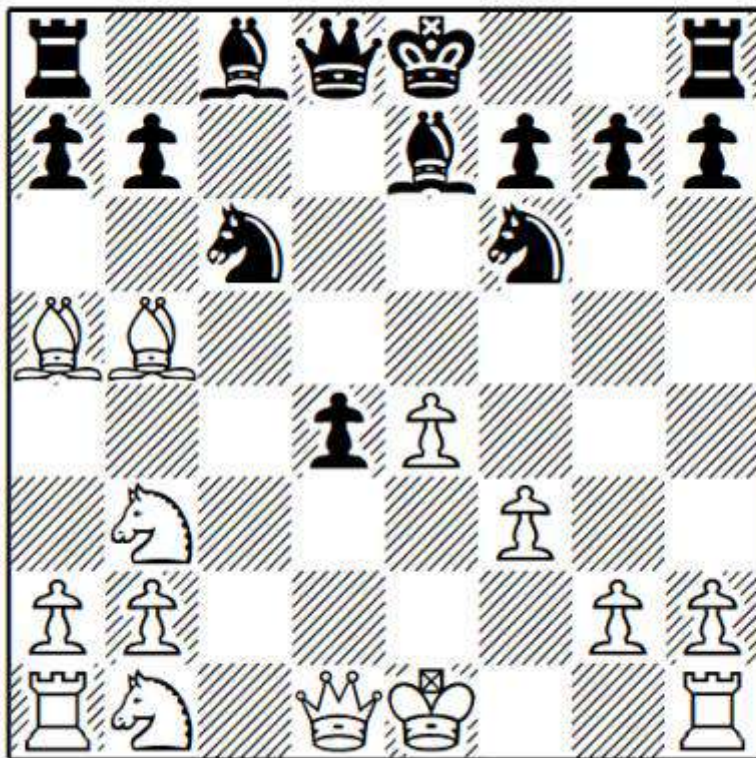
**11 Bb5**

This transposes to the 9 ... exd4 10 Bb5 Bb4+ 11 Bd2 line. Another option was 11 Bxb4 Nxb4 12 Qd2 a5 (or 12 ... Nc6 13 Bb5) 13 Bb5+ Bd7 14 Nxd4 and the onus appears to be on Black to prove compensation for the pawn.

**11 ... Be7?**

11 ... Bd6 was preferable, keeping the queens on, as in the previous game.

**12 Ba5!**



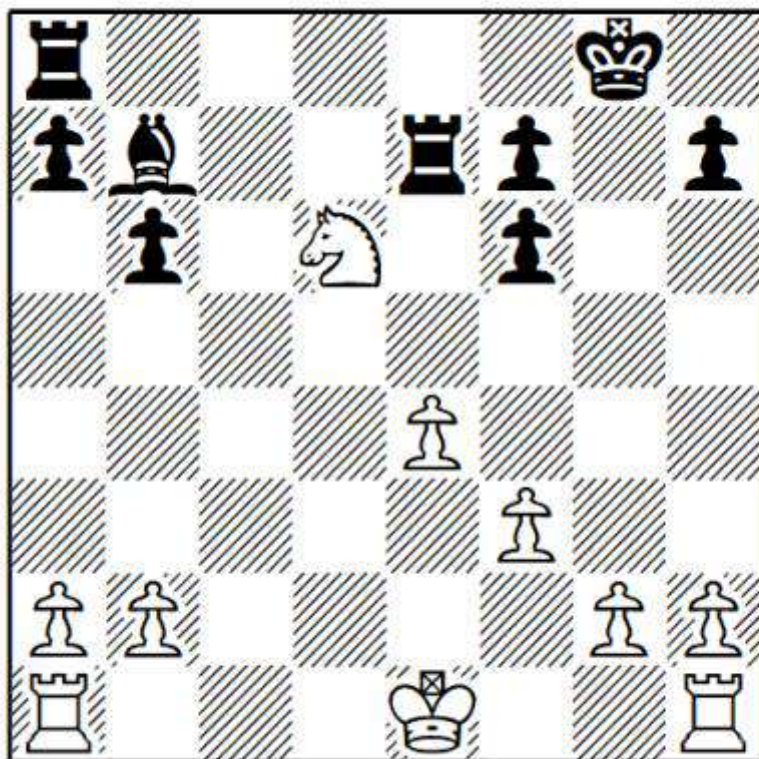
*Surprising and strong*

An uncommon but strong idea, uncovering an attack on the d4-pawn. The bishop is clearly untouchable.

**12 ... Qd6 13 Qxd4**

Black has absolutely no compensation, especially when the queens come off the board.

**13 ... Bd7 14 Qxd6 Bxd6 15 Bxc6 Bxc6 16 Bc3 0-0 17 N1d2 b6 18 Nc4 Be7 19 Nd4 Bb7 20 Nf5 Rfe8 21 Ncd6 Bxd6 22 Nxd6 Re7 23 Bxf6 gxf6**



*Technically winning*

White is already winning: the extra pawn in combination with Black's damaged pawn structure and a possible outpost on f5 are enough to win the game.

**24 Rd1 Bc8 25 Kf2 Be6 26 b3 Rc7 27 Rd2 a6 28 Rhd1 Kf8 29 Ke3 Raa7 30 h3 Rc5 31 g4 a5 32 Rd3 a4 33 b4 Rc2 34 a3 Rh2 35 Nb5 Re7 36 Rd8+ Re8 37 Nc7?!**

Likely both players were in time trouble by this stage. 37 Rxe8+ Kxe8 38 Rd6 was a simpler way to attack b6 and win.

**37 ... Rxd8 38 Rxd8+ Ke7 39 Rb8 Ra2 40 Rxb6 Rxa3+ 41 Kf4 Bc4 42 Nd5+ Kf8?**

Black's last hope was in the rook endgame after 42 ... Bxd5 43 exd5 Rb3; e.g. 44 h4 a3 45 Ra6 Rxb4+ 46 Kf5 Rd4 47 Ra7+ Kf8 48 Rxa3 Rxd5+ 49 Kxf6 Rd6+ 50 Ke5 Rb6 with chances to draw.

**43 Rb8+ Kg7 44 Ne7 Be6? 45 Rg8+ Kh6 46 h4 1-0**

Since mate is coming soon.

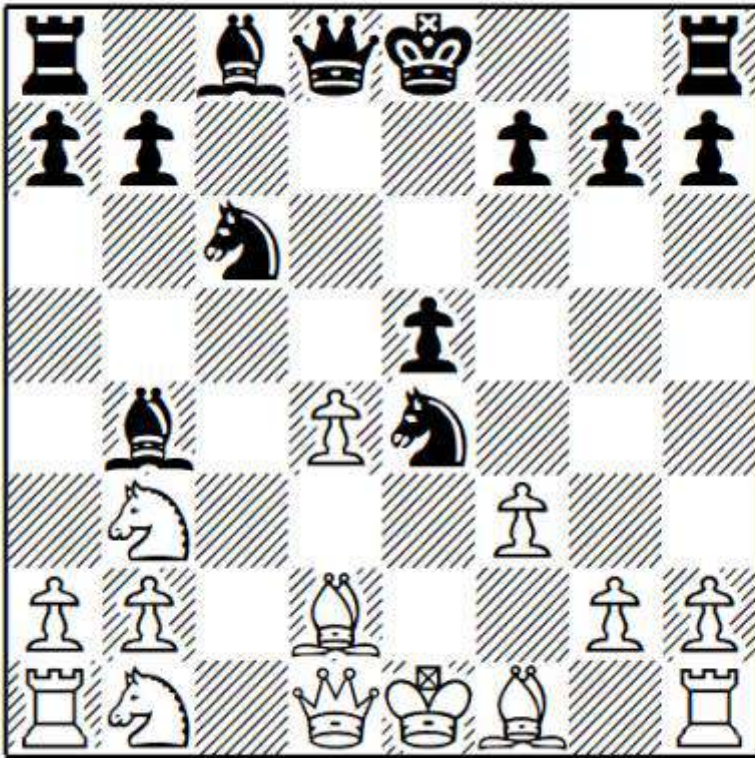
We conclude this chapter with two games featuring the sharpest line available: 9 ... Bb4+ 10 Bd2 Nxe4!. In the first Black goes for 13 ... Qxg3+, which is probably inaccurate; the second will discuss the stronger 13 ... Qxh1.

### *Game 16*

**D.Mastrovasilis-D.Navara**

Polish Team Championship 2017

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3 e5 6 Nb3 d5 7 Bg5 d4 8 c3 Nc6 9 cxd4 Bb4+ 10 Bd2 Nxe4!**



*The sharp main line*

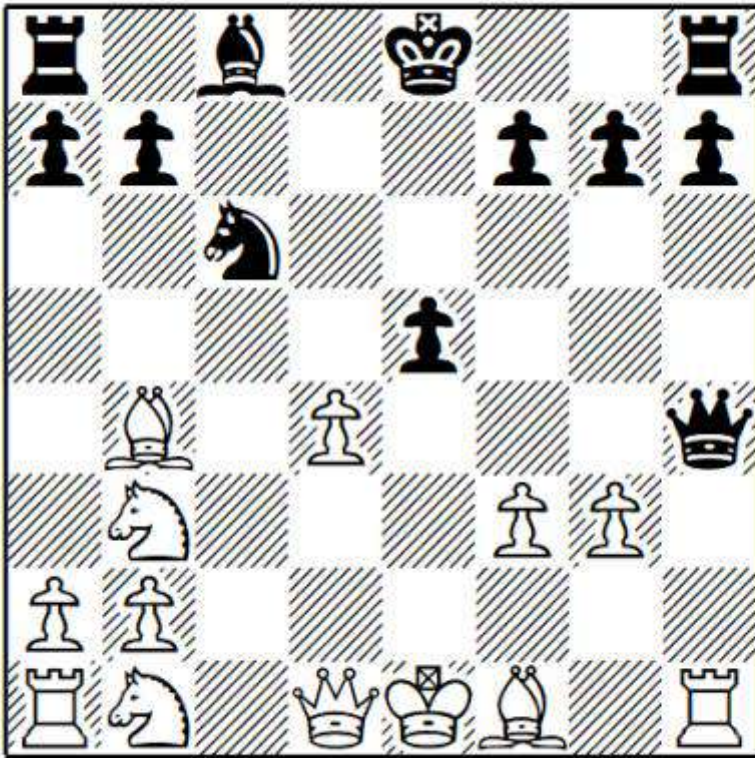
### **11 Bxb4**

Not 11 fxe4?? Qh4+ and White loses on the spot.

### **11 ... Qh4+ 12 g3**

Not 12 Ke2??, which loses to 12 ... Qf2+ 13 Kd3 Nxb4+ 14 Kxe4? (but after 14 Kc4 the king is a sitting duck anyway, and Black is not even material down) 14 ... f5+ 15 Kxe5 Qe3+ 16 Kd6 Qe7 mate.

### **12 ... Nxc3 13 hxg3**



*Another branching point*

**13 ... Qxg3+**

13 ... Qxh1 is objectively preferable and will be examined in the next game.

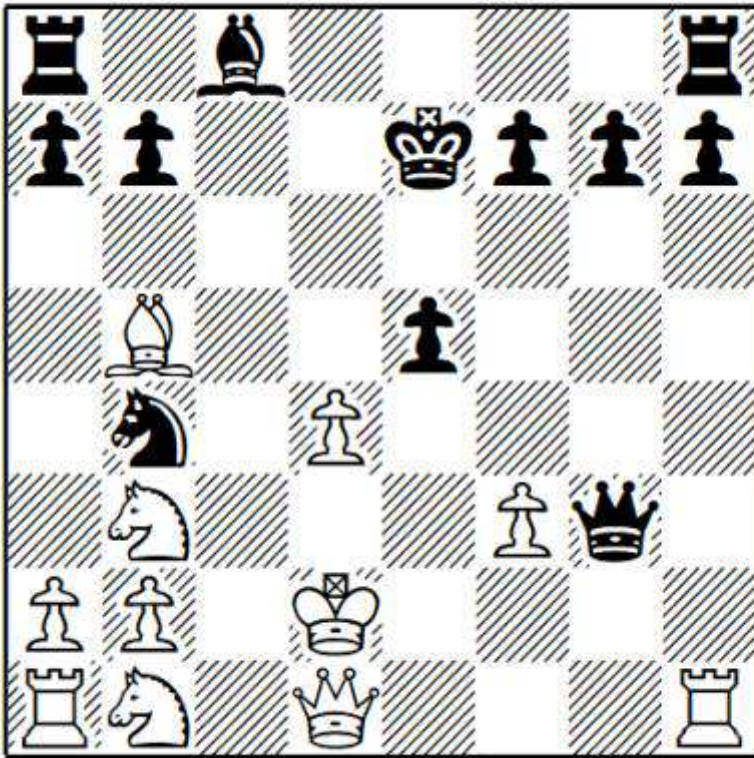
**14 Kd2**

14 Ke2! is the move we analysed in the theoretical section. 14 Kd2 is probably not as good, though White can hope for an advantage here too.

**14 ... Nxb4**

Not 14 ... Qf4+? 15 Ke2 Nxb4 16 Qd2, when Black is forced to exchange queens after which he is lost.

**15 Bb5+ Ke7**



*How to simplify?*

**Question:** Can you find a way to simplify the game and thus reduce the amount of counterplay against our king?

**Answer: 16 Qc1!**

With this move, threatening to invade on c7 or c5, White practically forces the exchange of queens. 16 Qe1 Qg2+ 17 Be2 is an alternative, but in this case the queens remain on the board.

**16 ... Qg2+**

After 16 ... Rd8? 17 Qc5+ Kf6 18 Nc3!, White is suddenly the one with all the threats, and is a piece up as well.

**17 Be2**

Black is now forced to swap the queens off, after which his few extra pawns are not worth White's extra piece.

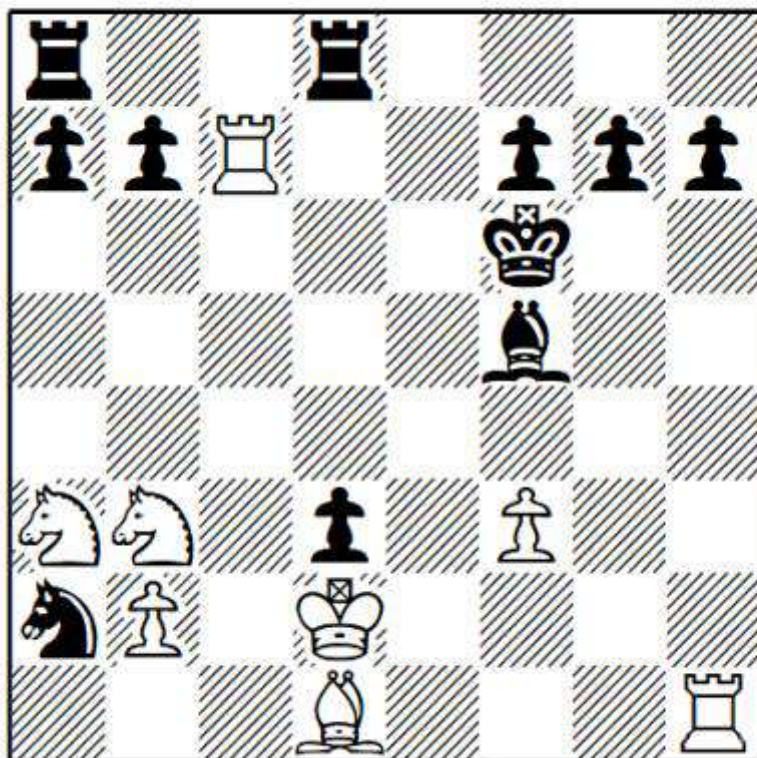
**17 ... Qg5+**

Not 17 ... Na6? 18 Nc3 Rd8 19 Qg1 and the queens come off under worse circumstances for Black.

**18 Kd1 Qxc1+ 19 Kxc1 Bf5 20 Na3 Rhd8 21 Kd2 exd4 22 Rac1 d3 23 Rc7+ Kf6**

23 ... Kd6? 24 Nb5+ would only help White.

**24 Bd1 Nxa2**



*Where should White attack?*

**25 Na5**

I think 25 Nc5! was better. White plans the opening of the f-file after 26 Ne4+, when all the kingside pawns would become targets; for instance, 25 ... Rac8 26 Ne4+ Bxe4 27 Rxc8 Rxc8 28 fxe4 and Black is either losing the f- or h-pawn. I believe White has reasonable winning chances, even if Black has hopes of a draw due to the reduced number of pawns. Anyway, I would be happy to play such a position with White as the game practically has only two possible results.

**25 ... Rac8 26 Rxc8 Rxc8 27 Bb3 Nb4 28 Nxb7 Nc6 29 Nd6 Rb8 30 Bd5 Ne7 31 Nxf5**

Here 31 Bb7 Ke6 32 Nac4 is the computerish way to keep the b2-pawn on the board, but from human perspective this looks too artificial.

**31 ... Nxd5 32 Nd4 Rxb2+**

Now the number of white pawns is too few in order to play for a win, so the players they soon agreed a draw.

**33 Kxd3 h5 34 Ke4 Nc3+ 35 Kd3 Nd5 36 Ke4 Nc3+ 37 Kd3 ½-½**

### *Game 17*

**A.Danin-A.Volokitin**

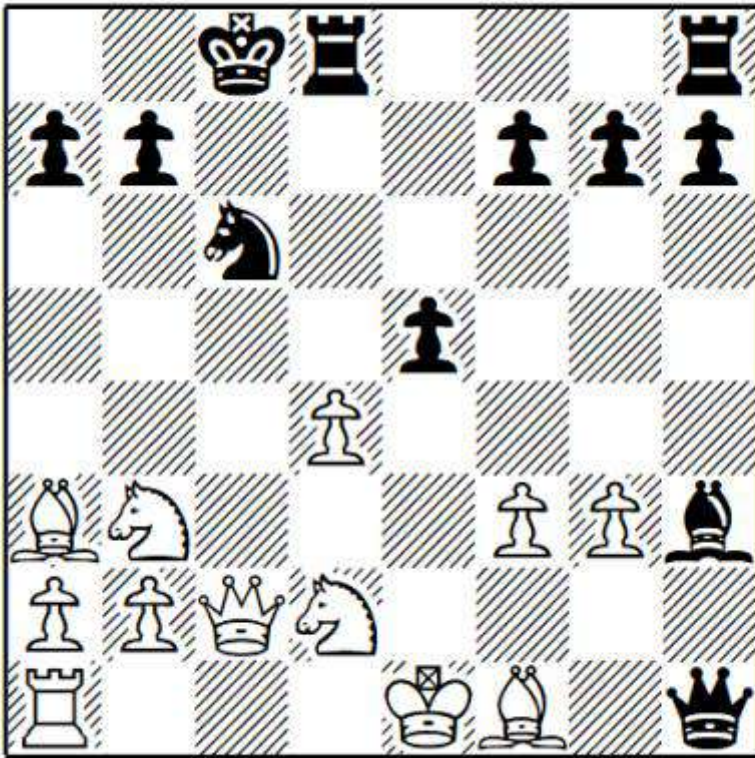
Austrian League 2017

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3 e5 6 Nb3 d5 7 Bg5 d4 8 c3 Nc6 9 cxd4 Bb4+ 10 Bd2 Nxe4 11 Bxb4 Qh4+ 12 g3 Nxc3 13 hxg3 Qxh1!**

The strongest move. White gets the advantage after 13 ... Qxc3, as we saw in the previous game.

**14 Ba3 Bh3 15 Qe2?**

Now White starts getting in trouble. He should aim for a set-up with his queen on c2, where it is aiming at the f7- and h7-pawns; i.e. via a possible Qf5+ after Black castles long. Therefore we should start with 15 N1d2! 0-0-0 (15 ... Bxf1!? 16 Nxf1 0-0-0 also leads to interesting and complex play; e.g. 17 d5 e4 18 f4 h5 and it is very tricky to evaluate who has the easier task) 16 Qc2!



*Two pieces vs. rook and pawn*

This is the main difference from the game continuation. On c2 the queen has more prospects and it is not exposed to ideas like ... Rhe8 or similar. The position may be equal but my personal tendency would be to prefer the two pieces. For example, 16 ... Bxf1 (after 16 ... exd4 17 0-0-0 Bxf1 18 Qf5+ Kb8 19 Rxf1 White has a slight plus) 17 0-0-0 (this is the line we saw in the introduction) 17 ... Qh5 18 Rxf1 exd4 19 Kb1 Rhe8 and there is no initiative for Black.

**15 ... 0-0-0 16 N1d2 Bxf1 17 Nxf1**

17 Qxf1 Qxf1+ 18 Kxf1 is also possible. The position is balanced, but there is plenty of scope to outplay your opponent. I do not believe that White has problems here at any rate.

**17 ... exd4 18 0-0-0 Rhe8**

Now Black is slightly better.

**19 Qd3?!**

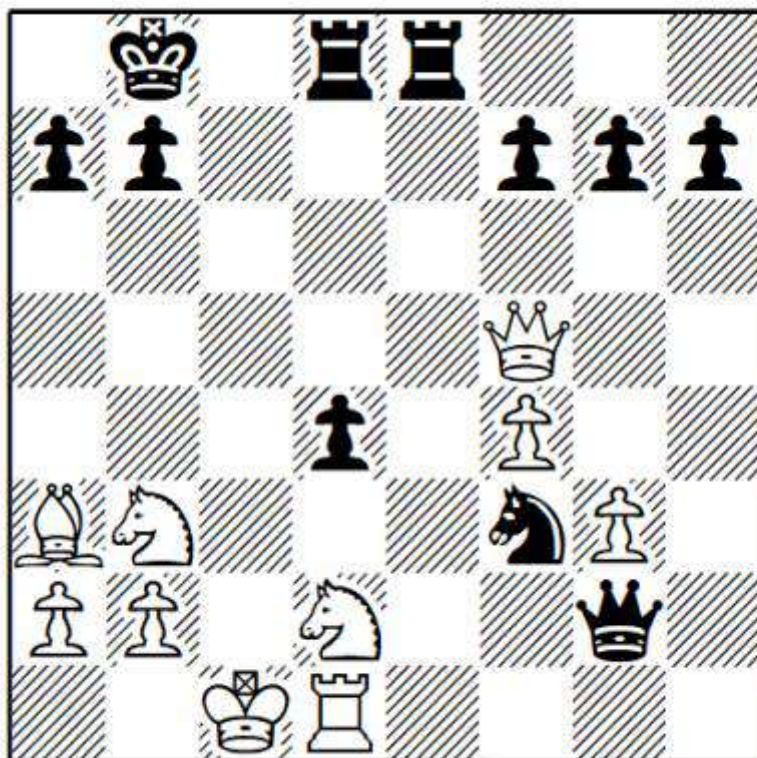
19 Qf2 would be more solid.

**19 ... Kb8 20 Qf5**

The white queen has taken three moves to reach the f5-square; via c2 it would have been one move fewer. In effect Black has been given a free move to pursue his initiative.

**20 ... Ne5 21 Nfd2 Qg2 22 f4 Rc8+?!**

Inserting this check just here does not help Black at all, whereas the immediate 22 ... Nf3! would have offered him excellent winning chances.



### *Concrete threats*

For example: 23 Qd3 (after 23 Nxf3? Qxf3 Black is winning due to the threat of ... Rc8+) 23 ... Re3 24 Qf1 (not 24 Qf5? Nxd2+ 25 Nxd2 Qe2!, threatening ... Rc8+ again) 24 ... Qxg3 with a huge plus for Black.

**23 Kb1 Nf3 24 Qd3 Re3 25 Qf5 Nxd2+ 26 Nxd2 Qc6**

Both 26 ... Qe2?? and 26 ... Qxd2?? lose on the spot to 27 Bd6+.

**27 Qxh7**

The situation is still enormously complicated, so even in a game between two grandmasters there is a lot of scope to go wrong.

**27 ... d3 28 Qh1 Rxd3 29 Qf1 Qc2+ 30 Ka1 Rg2 31 Nb1 Qe2 32 Bd6+ Ka8 33 Be5 a6 34 Re1 Qxf1 35 Rxf1 Rcc2 36 Rd1 f6 37 Bc3 b5 38 a3 a5 39 Rxd3 Rg1 40 Bd2 g5 41 fxd5 fxd5 42 Ka2 Kb7 43 Bxa5**

The tables have turned again and White is now better, but after some further ups and downs the game ends in a draw.

**43 ... g4 44 Rd7+ Kc8 45 Rd8+ Kb7 46 Rd7+ Kc8 47 Rg7 g3 48 Kb3 Rgg2 49 Bc3 Rcf2 50 Be5 Re2 51 Rxd3 Rxd3+ 52 Bxd3 Re3+ 53 Nc3 Rxd3 54 Kb4 Rg2 55 b3 Kb7 56 Kxb5 Rg3 57 Kc4 Rg4+ 58 Kc5 Rg5+ 59 Kd4 Rg4+ 60 Kc5 Rg3 ½-½**

# Chapter Three

## Anti-Najdorf: 5 ... e5 without ... d6-d5

### Introduction

In this chapter we will deal with another possibility for Black after our usual starting moves of the Anti-Najdorf. Instead of opening the centre instantly with 6 ... e5 as in the previous chapter, Black can also settle for a positional game by keeping the position closed. The arising positions tend to be complex middlegames keeping a lot of scope to play, and we will figure out how to handle the positions correctly.

Before starting with the concrete analysis, I would like to give you an overview of all the possibilities Black has. In principle it is possible to divide the possible set-ups into two groups: the ones allowing 7 c4 and just aiming for a positional game (henceforth “Main Lines”) and those possibilities either preventing 7 c4 or trying to punish it immediately (henceforth “Sidelines”).

The Main Lines include 6 ... Be6, 6 ... Be7 and 6 ... Nc6, connected with a slow positional battle rather than immediate pressure against our c4-pawn. This line can be considered completely sound for Black. Nonetheless, I enjoy playing White in these kinds of structure and believe the positions are quite easy to handle.

The Sidelines contain all the concrete responses such as 6 ... a5!?, preventing 7 c4 completely, but also 6 ... Be6 followed by 7 ... Nbd7 and 8 ... Rc8, targeting the c4-pawn as quickly as possible. Those sidelines are not met that often and I think White can fight for an advantage and create early problems for Black in some cases.

In this chapter you will see the theoretical discussion about the two different approaches in separate subchapters, Main Lines and Sidelines, each followed by a set of illustrative games.

### Sidelines

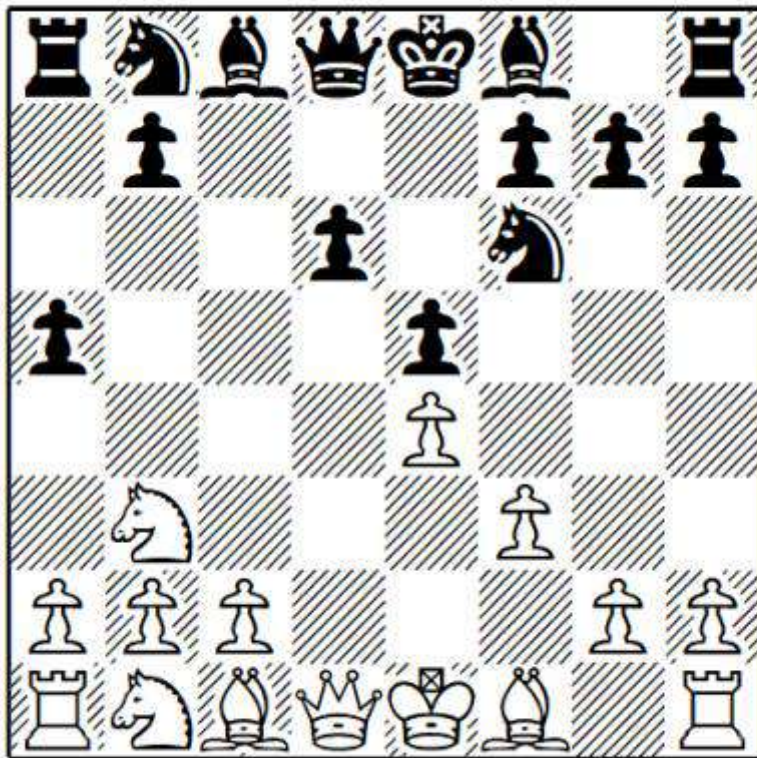
**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3 e5 6 Nb3**

We have again reached our usual starting position. In this section we will have a look at 6 ... a5!? and 6 ... Be6, followed by an immediate attack on the c4-pawn.

## 6 ... Be6!?

This move should not be underestimated; it is the most frequent one and has a very flexible nature. Black has not committed to any plan yet and can choose between the concrete 7 ... Nbd7, 8 ... Rc8 (which we will analyse here) or the quiet 7 ... Be7, 8 ... 0-0 (which is the subject of the next section).

The other concrete approach is the tricky 6 ... a5!? which prevents us from playing 7 c4. It is one of Black's major alternatives, an active move with tactical ideas. On the downside, it weakens the complex of light squares, especially b5 and d5.



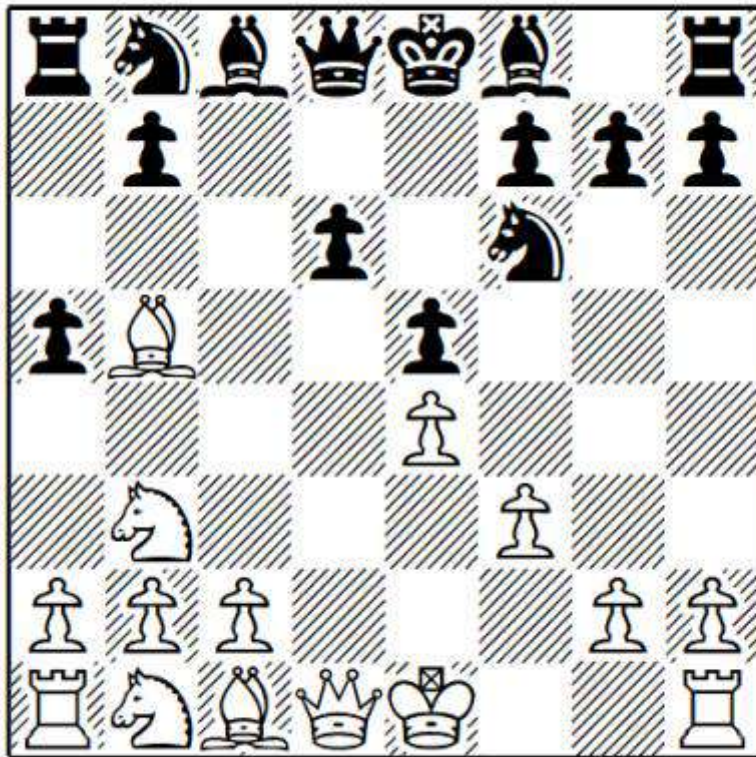
*Why not 7 c4?*

**Question:** Why can't we play 7 c4 as usual here? What does Black have in mind?

**Answer:** Unfortunately, after 7 c4? Black can sacrifice the f6-knight for a huge initiative! After 7 ... Nxe4! 8 fxe4 (White can play 8 Be3 instead, but

then Black retains the extra pawn, so I see no motivation to go for this variation) 8 ... Qh4+ 9 Kd2 a4! (this is the point) the b3-knight has no retreat squares, so Black regains the piece with interest. In practice this position should be horrible for White: first, Black has already restored the material balance; second, White must solve the ugly problem of where to place the king.

Since 7 c4 is effectively ruled out, we should instead go for 7 Bb5+! and try to play around the holes on Black's queenside.



*A good answer to 6 ... a5*

Now Black has several possible replies:

a) 7 ... Nbd7 is rarely played and for good reason: Black will need a lot of time to challenge the b5-bishop, while his own is stuck on c8 for the moment. Furthermore, after 8 Nc3 White has excellent control over the d5-square, and Black cannot really fight for it; e.g. 8 ... Be7 9 Be3 0-0 10 Na4 and White controls everything!

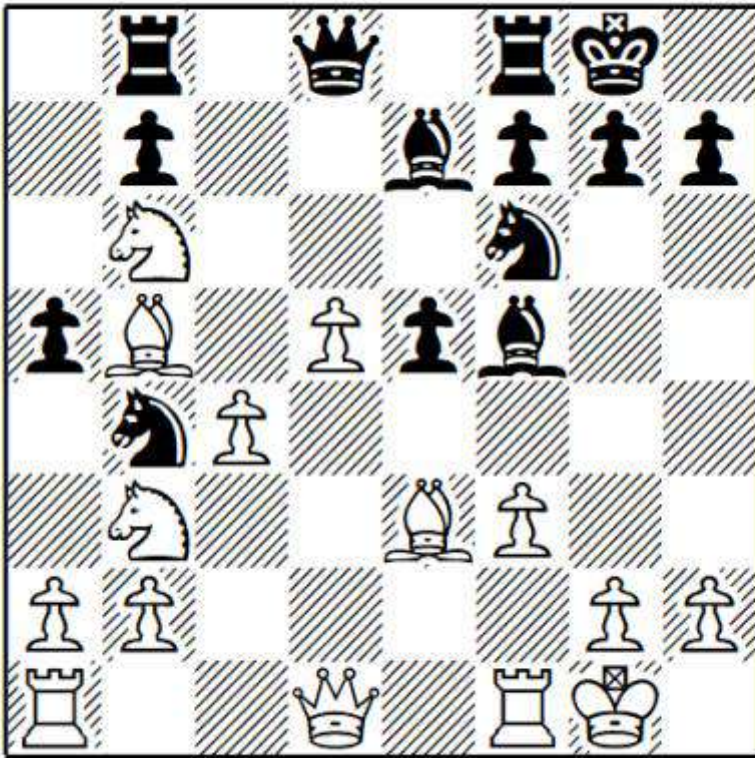
b) 7 ... Bd7 prepares another ... d6-d5 break with 8 a4 Bxb5 (or 8 ... d5 first) 9 axb5 d5, but after simply 10 exd5 Black still has problems to solve; e.g. 10 ... Qxd5? 11 Qxd5 Nxd5 12 c4 and the a5-pawn is lost, while 10 ... Nxd5 11 0-0 a4 12 Re1 f6 13 f4 sees White taking the initiative in the centre. We'll look at this more deeply in the notes to Game 21.

c) 7 ... Nc6 8 Nc3 Be7 9 Be3 0-0 10 Na4! is a recurring theme and asks Black a difficult question: Whether to protect the b6-square from invasion by playing 10 ... Nd7 or just let the white knight get inside?

At first sight 10 ... Nd7 looks logical, but it comes at a cost: giving up some control over the d5-square and shutting in the c8-bishop. Black is doomed to passivity and White can slowly improve with, for example, 11 Qd2 12 0-0. You can afford to wait for 12 ... f5 which is the only active thing Black can do. Our reaction is simply to take and then exploit the weak squares on d5 and e4. For a similar plan with a slightly different move order please consult Game 22.

The developing move 10 ... Be6, allowing 11 Nb6, will be discussed in Game 21.

The other approach is the active 10 ... d5!?, again allowing the knight in but seeking counterplay in the centre. We respond with 11 Nb6 Rb8 12 exd5 Nb4 13 c4 Bf5 14 0-0!.



### *Strong central pawns*

With this precise move White secures the advantage. Black can win the exchange, but White's protected passed pawn makes more than up for it: 14 ... Nc2 15 Qd2 Nxa1 16 Rxa1 and White is much better with the stable central pawn mass.

#### **7 c4 Nbd7!?**

This is not a very well-known variation at club level. Black asks a question about the c4-pawn early and, unless White is prepared, it is hard not to commit a mistake. I will offer you two possibilities to meet Black's idea. First, the materialistic approach for those who do not like giving up a pawn. Second, which I consider more promising, an interesting pawn sac with loads of counterplay. This is also the way many super-grandmasters have played, so I conclude that is completely sound and objectively best.

#### **8 Nc3**

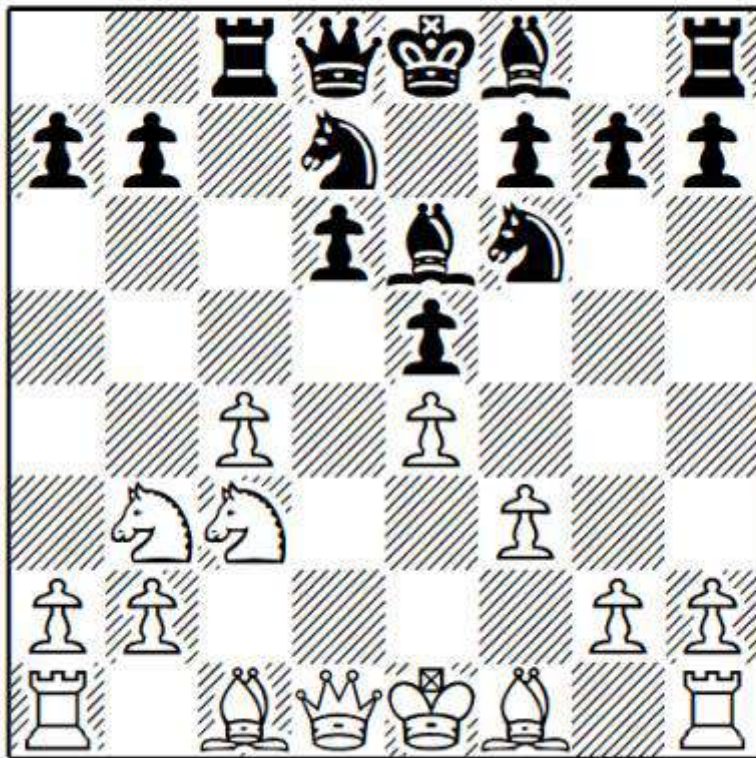
The way to play the materialistic variation is 8 Be3, when Black has two interesting plans:

a) 8 ... b5!? 9 Na3 (9 cxb5 d5! gives Black enough central counterplay)  
9 ... a6 10 cxb5 d5 11 bxa6 dxe4 12 Bb5 was seen in N.Vitiugov-J.K.Duda,  
Czech League 2018, but Black was fine all the time.

b) 8 ... Rc8 9 Na3 a6 10 Be2 is an inferior version of our usual structure,  
as the knight is a bit misplaced on a3. For more details on this check, Game  
20.

Taking these two variations into consideration, I believe that it is not  
possible to reach anything special with the materialistic option, so let's  
concentrate on the pawn sacrifice.

**8 ... Rc8**



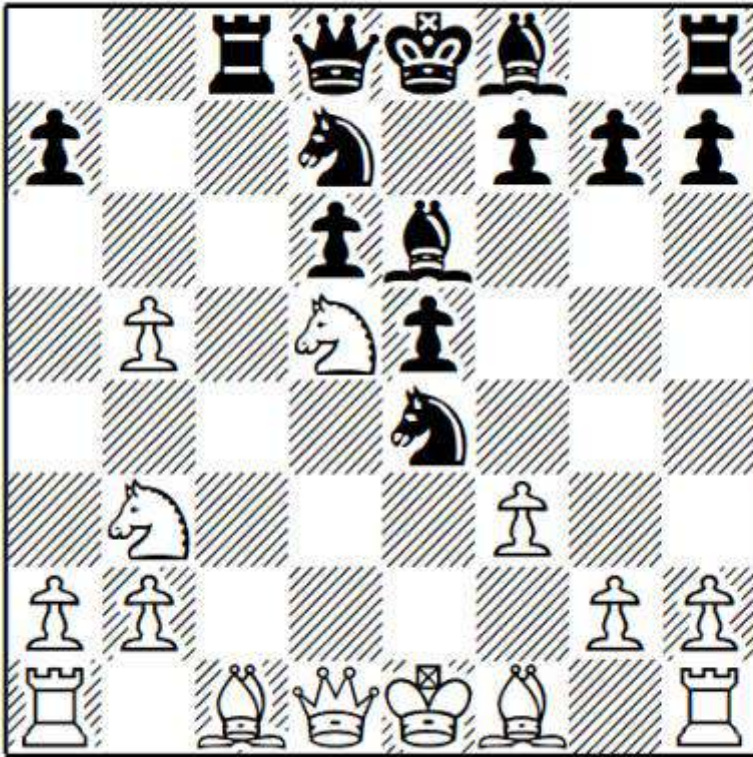
*Ready to sac the pawn*

**Question:** How exactly should White sacrifice the c4-pawn?

**Answer: 9 Be3!**

This is the most appropriate way. After an exchange on c4 White aims  
for a quick Qd3, followed by 0-0-0.

Honestly speaking, we would rather play 9 Nd5 with a stable advantage and equal material. Sadly, this is not possible here for tactical reasons: 9 Nd5? is met by 9 ... b5 and if 10 cxb5 then 10 ... Nxe4! with a great position for Black.



*A blunder to avoid*

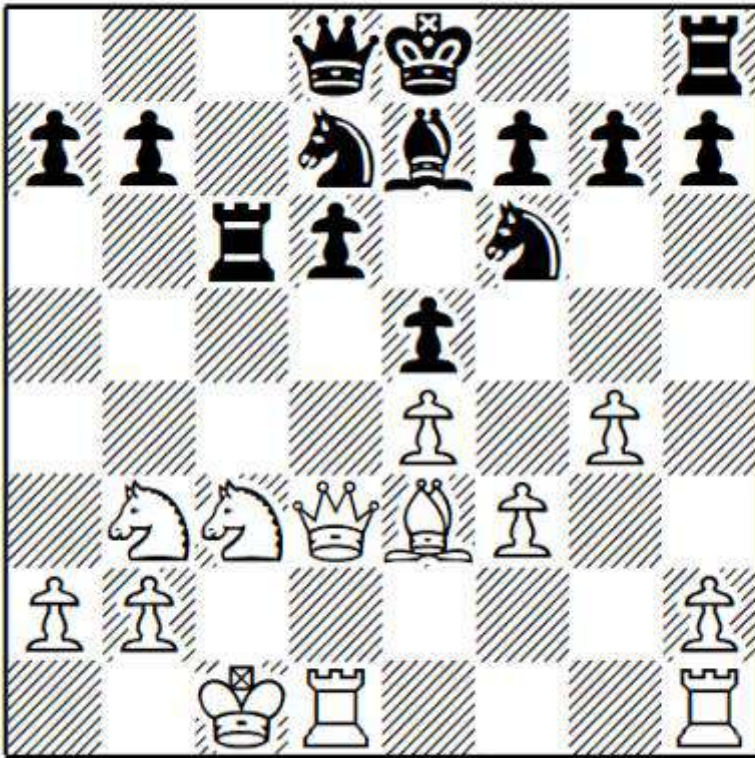
### **9 ... Bxc4**

Taking the pawn is the only consistent move. If Black does not do so immediately, White will sooner or later be able to implement Nd5 with a normal edge.

**10 Bxc4 Rxc4 11 Qd3 Rc6**

11 ... Rc8 is another viable option which we will discuss in Game 19.

**12 g4 Be7 13 0-0-0**



### *Great compensation*

White has great compensation with excellent play on the d-file and the kingside, as well as around the d5-square, while Black's extra pawn is not actually that useful. For a good illustration of how to maintain the pressure while being a pawn down, see Game 18 below.

### **Illustrative Games**

We will start with a couple of games featuring the typical c-pawn sacrifice. In Game 18 Anand goes for long-term compensation and keeps up the pressure in a very instructive way. Black deviates with 11 ... Rc8 in Game 19, leading to some differences in the play. In Game 20, Ivanchuk does not sacrifice the pawn but anyway succeeds in creating some problems for his opponent.

Then we switch our attention to the 6 ... a5!/? line in Games 21 and 22. Both feature 7 Bb5+ Nc6 8 Nc3, where White puts the pressure on with the nice 10 Na4!. In the first game White wins convincingly; but even in the

second, in a slightly different situation, the plan remains effective and Black is unable to overcome all problems.

We start with a game by the former world champion Viswanathan Anand.

### *Game 18*

**V.Anand-R.Jumabayev**

World Rapid Championship, Doha 2016

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3 e5 6 Nb3 Be6**

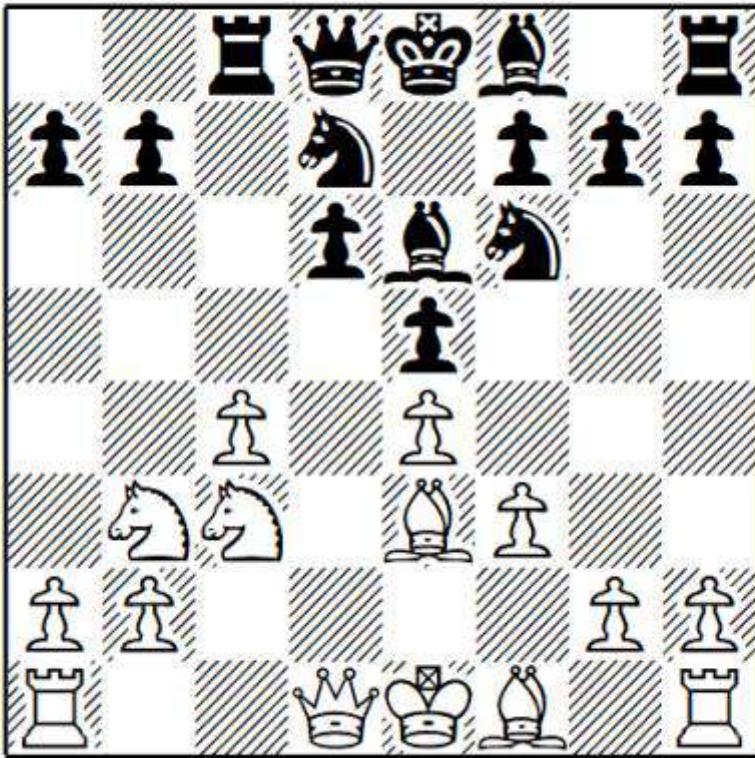
This move begins something like a poisoned pawn variation in our Anti-Najdorf repertoire. We of course want to go for our usual 7 c4. The point of Black's play to follow up with 7 ... Nbd7 and 8 ... Rc8, attacking our c-pawn as quickly as possible and we are basically unable to defend it. Fortunately, we have a good chance to sacrifice the pawn. I am convinced it is objectively sound to do so. This sacrifice has been used successfully by such elite players as So and Rublevsky, as well as Anand, which makes it more trustworthy. Let us begin and check the details.

**7 c4 Nbd7 8 Be3**

Usually White develops the knight first, but it makes no difference, since after 8 Nc3 Rc8 White will play 9 Be3 anyway.

**Remember:** 9 Nd5? b5! 10 cxb5 Nxe4! is the kind of pitfall we should better avoid!

**8 ... Rc8 9 Nc3!**



*A positionally sound pawn sac*

**9 ... Bxc4 10 Bxc4 Rxc4 11 Qd3 Rc6**

11 ... Rc8 is the only real alternative. We will look at this in the next game.

**12 0-0-0**

This is the long-term positional way I would recommend you play. 12 Bxa7 has also been seen numerous times, but after 12 ... b6 the position becomes messy and the bishop is stuck on a7 which is not to my taste.

**12 ... Be7 13 Kb1 0-0**

One might well ask where White's compensation for the pawn is and how we should continue here. The first point is that the extra pawn is just the weak one on d6, and Black practically never succeeds in playing ... d6-d5. Furthermore, we have the plan of 14 g4 and 15 g5 with even more restriction of Black's pieces. After having expelled the black knight from the f6-square, we are ready for Nd5 and Na5, putting pressure on the

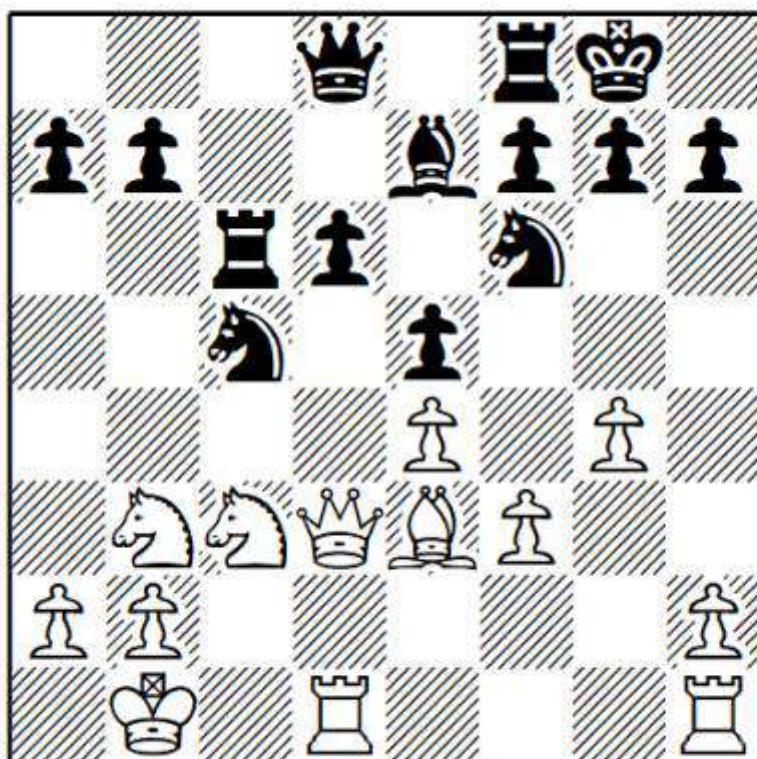
queenside where Black is coordinated poorly. As a general rule, we will stand better as soon as the queenside pawns become loose.

**14 g4! a6**

Of the alternatives:

a) 14 ... h6 is questionable because it creates a hook. White can go for a direct kingside attack with h2-h4, followed by g4-g5, when files are getting opened quickly.

b) 14 ... Nc5 is more interesting, vacating the d7-square for the other knight.



*Problems solved?*

**Question:** Black's last move looks logical, but White has a nice way to exploit it.

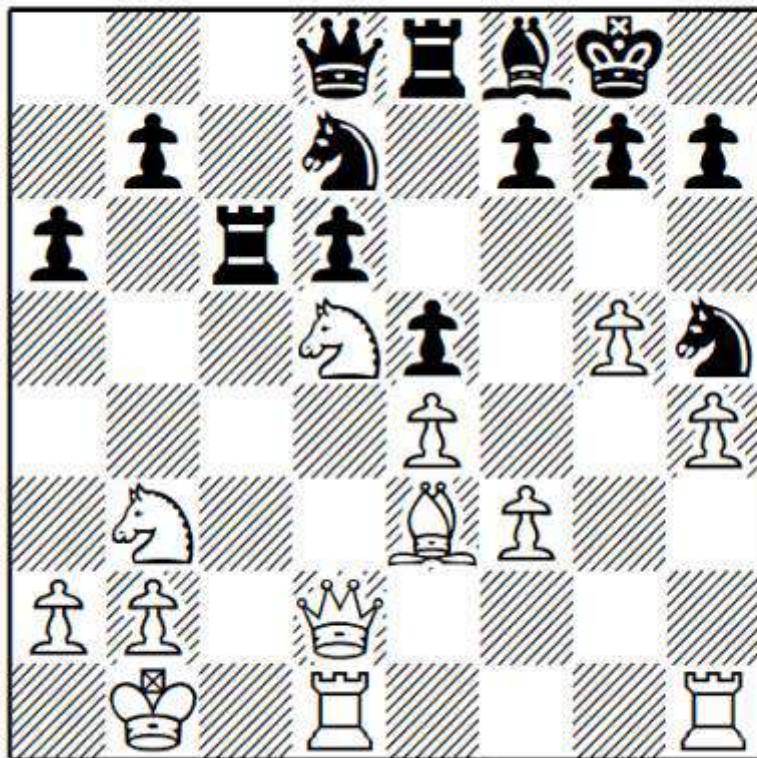
Can you see how?

**Answer:** 15 Nxc5! dxc5 16 g5! and now Black is trouble because White will invade on the seventh rank, after either 16 ... Nh5 17 Qd7! or 16 ...

Qxd3+ 17 Rxd3 Ne8 18 Rd7! Rc7 19 Rhd1. White has a huge advantage in either case.

**15 g5 Nh5 16 h4 Re8 17 Nd5 Bf8 18 Qd2!**

A slow but very effective move. White prepares to creating threats against the black queenside with Na5.



*Queenside threats becoming real*

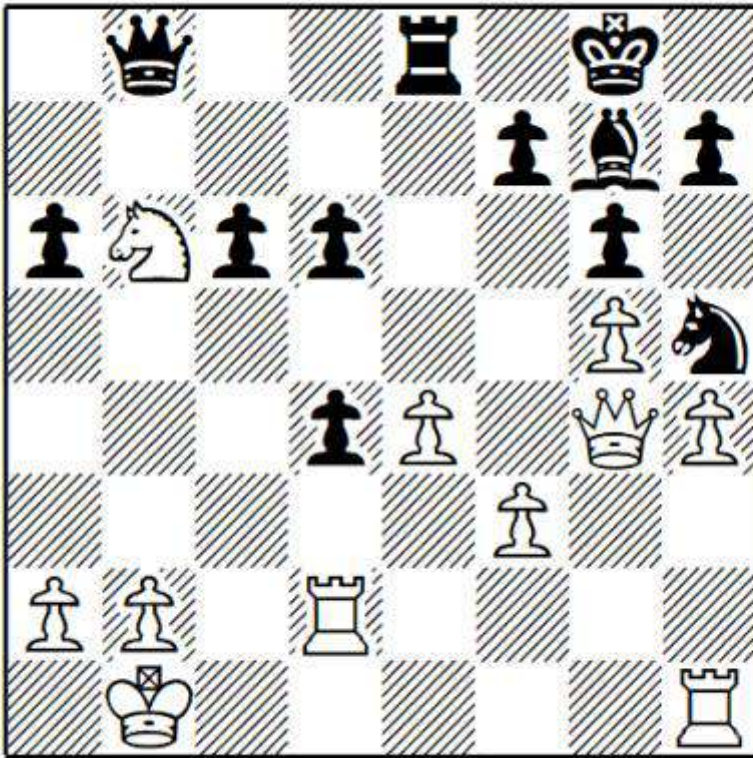
**18 ... Qb8 19 Qg2 g6 20 Na5 Rcc8 21 Qg4 Nc5 22 Nc4 Rc6**

After 22 ... b5 23 Ncb6 White is winning an exchange at least; e.g. 23 ... Rc6 24 Bxc5 dxc5 25 Nd7 Qc8 26 N5f6+ Nxf6 27 Nxf6+ Rxf6 28 gxf6.

**23 Ncb6 Bg7 24 Rd2 Ne6 25 Nb4 Nd4**

25 ... Rc7 was more resilient, though White is still much better here; e.g. 26 N4d5 Rc6 27 a4 Qd8 28 a5 f6 29 Rhd1 and White continues increasing the pressure while Black remains passive.

**26 Nxc6 bxc6 27 Bxd4 exd4**



### *Winning for White*

Objectively White is winning and Anand converts his advantage in an excellent way.

**28 Qd7!**

Securing the d5-outpost for the knight.

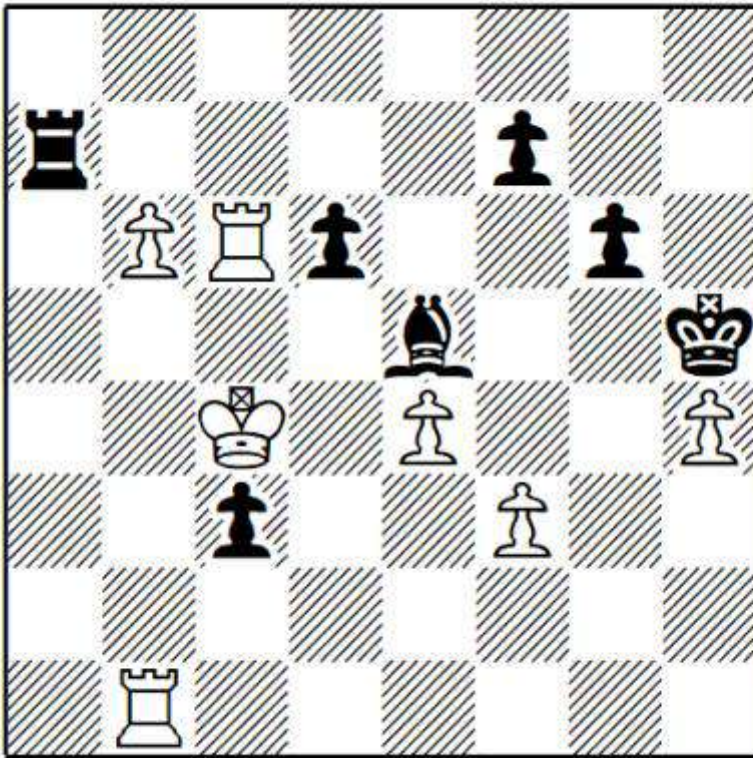
**28 ... c5 29 Nd5 Be5 30 Rc1 Qb5 31 Qxb5 axb5 32 b4 c4 33 a4**

White's aggressive play might look a bit risky, but Anand knows what he's doing and succeeds in softening the black pawn chain.

**33 ... c3 34 Ra2 Nf4 35 Nxf4 Bxf4 36 Rd1 Be3 37 axb5 Rb8 38 Ra5 Kg7 39 Kc2**

The king takes over the light-squared blockade, freeing the second rook to supporting his own passed pawn. The game will soon be over.

**39 ... h6 40 gxh6+ Kxh6 41 Rb1 Rc8 42 Ra2 Rb8 43 Kd3 Kh5 44 Ra6 Bf4 45 Rc6 Rxb5 46 Kxd4 Be5+ 47 Kc4 Rb7 48 b5 Ra7 49 b6**



*White's pawn runs*

**49 ... Ra4+ 50 Kd3 Ra2 51 Rxc3 Bxc3 52 b7 1-0**

In the next game we will look at another option by Black, who retreats his rook to c8 rather than to c6. We will discover and discuss differences between the two options and then figure out how to proceed in the new situation.

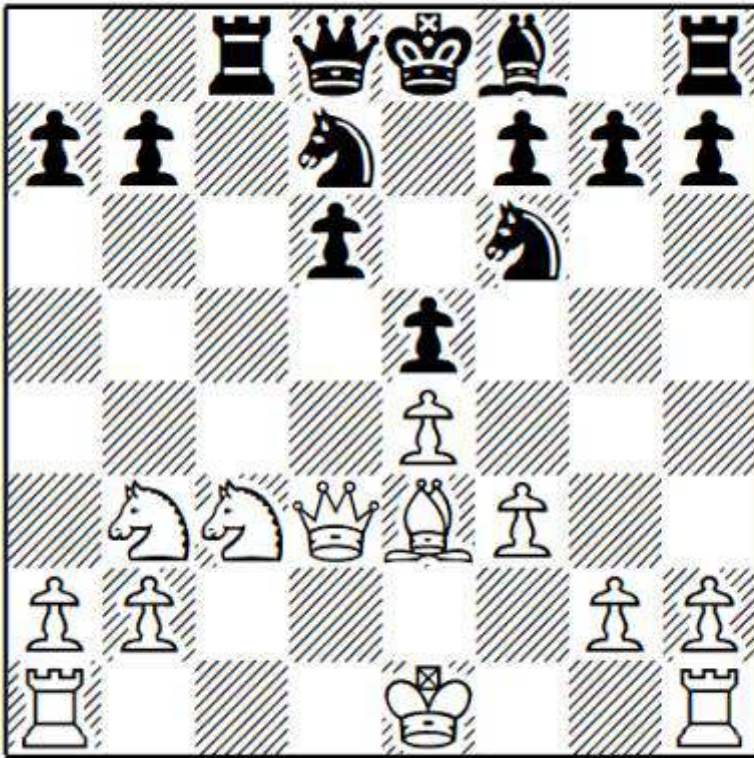
*Game 19*

**P.Michalik-S.Sethuraman**

Czech League 2016

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3 e5 6 Nb3 Be6 7 c4 Nbd7 8 Be3 Rc8 9 Nc3 Bxc4 10 Bxc4 Rxc4 11 Qd3 Rc8**

Deviating from 11 ... Rc6, which we saw in the previous game.



### *Another retreat*

#### **12 0-0-0!?**

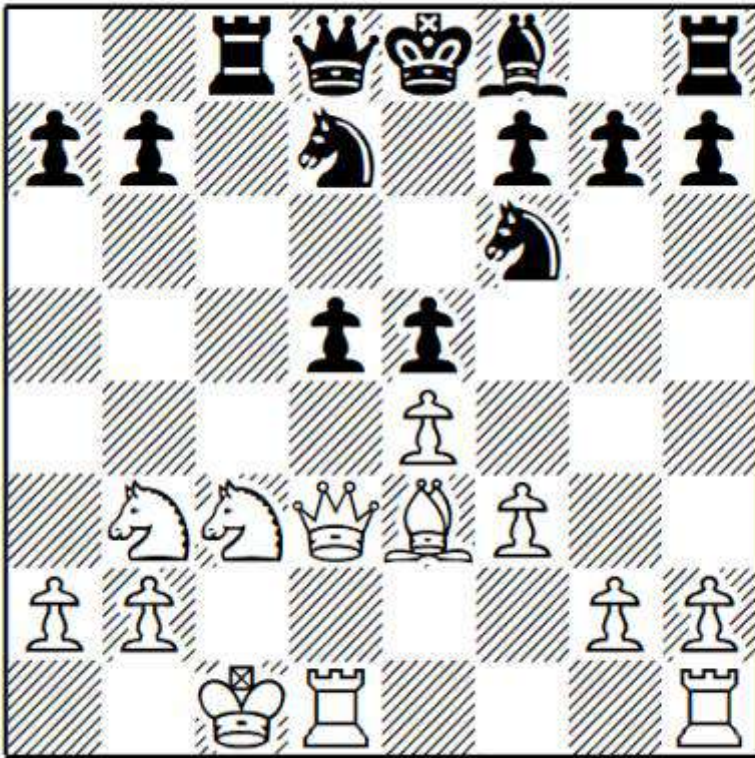
White castles long anyway but must be aware of the differences.

Taking the a-pawn with 12 Bxa7 is more popular here, though after 12 ... b6 we need to be accurate because of the trapped bishop: 13 0-0 Be7 (instead, 13 ... d5 14 exd5 Bb4 looks critical, though after 15 Nb5 0-0 16 d6 Black still has problems to solve) 14 a4 0-0 15 a5 bxa5 16 Nxa5 Qc7 17 Be3 was better for White, who has control of d5 and a passed b-pawn, D.Kokarev-A.Gabrielian, Voronezh 2008.

#### **12 ... a6?!**

Surprisingly, the strong Indian grandmaster does not take this chance to free his position, but instead plays a quiet move, after which White fights for the advantage.

Black had the option of 12 ... d5!, which is the main difference from the 11 ... Rc6 line.



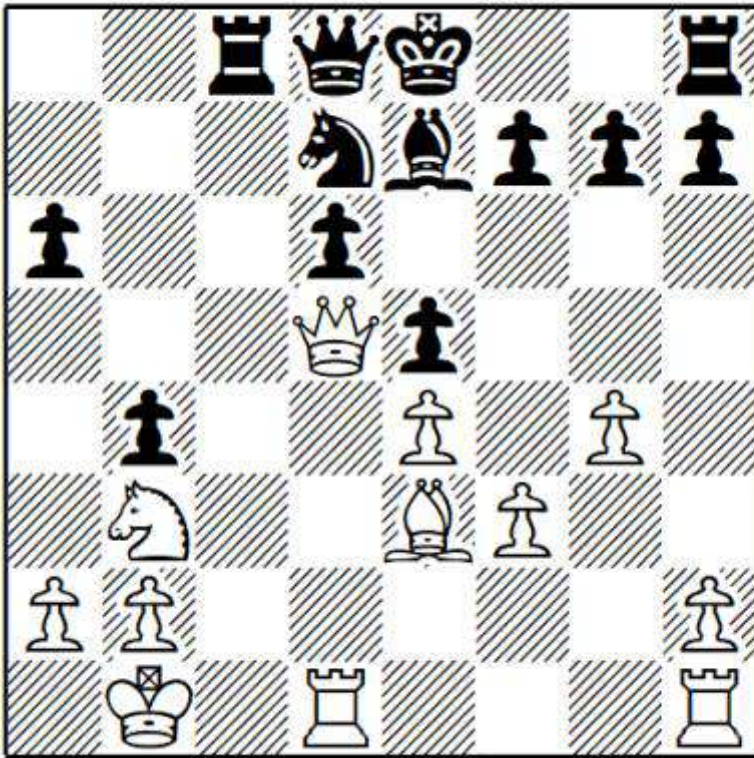
*Black is equal*

The advantage of having retreated all the way is that 13 exd5 does not gain time attacking the rook, so Black can quickly develop his forces; e.g. 13 ... Bb4 14 Bd2 0-0 15 Kb1 Nb6 and a roughly balanced position arose on the board in D.Mastrovasilis-B.Esen, World Team Championship, Bursa 2010.

**13 g4**

I would prefer the move order 13 Kb1!?, ruling out any further ... d6-d5 ideas because the knight could just take it.

**13 ... b5 14 Kb1 b4 15 Nd5 Nxd5 16 Qxd5 Be7**



*White has good compensation*

Now White has the usual kind of compensation for the pawn and can apply the following ideas:

- a) Win the pawn back immediately.
  - b) Exchange the queenside defenders and invade later.
- See the next note for an implementation of each plan.

**17 Na5**

Also possible were:

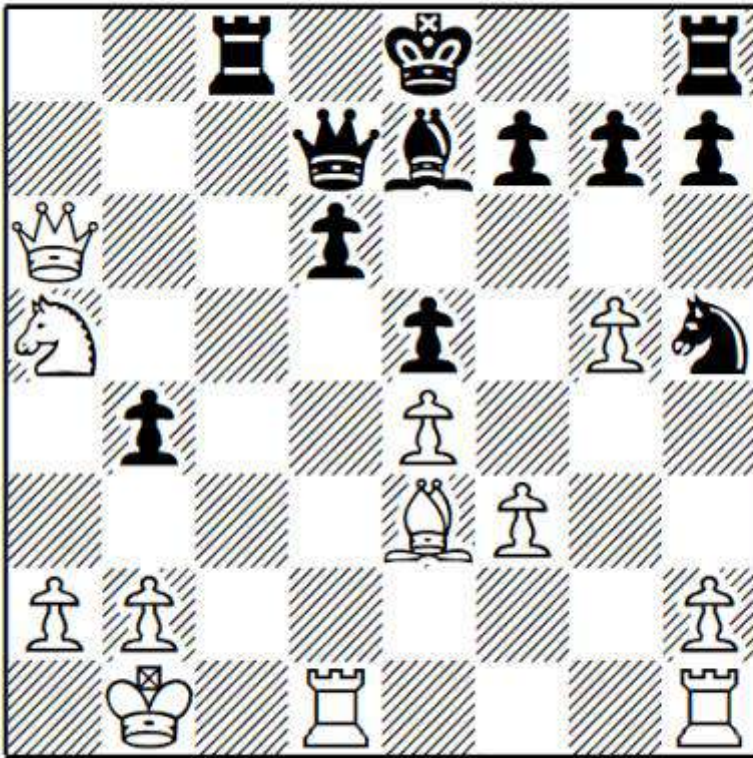
a) 17 Qb7 Qc7 18 Qxa6 0-0 19 Rc1 and White has regained the pawn with a slight edge.

b) 17 Rc1 0-0 18 Rxc8 Qxc8 19 Rc1 Qd8 20 Qa5, when White's activity provides excellent compensation; e.g. 20 ... Qxa5? 21 Nxa5 Ra8 22 Rc7 and White is much better.

**17 ... Nf6 18 Qb7 Qd7**

18 ... 0-0? drops an exchange after 19 Nc6.

**19 g5 Nh5 20 Qxa6**



*White regained the pawn*

**Remember:** When White regains the pawn, he is usually better in this variation since his activity is superior. The quality of the pawns also makes a difference. Black still has the backward pawn on d6, while White has a majority on the queenside which can be a big plus in possible endgames.

The only thing to watch out for is not to allow any counterplay on the a-file, but the white minor pieces keep the important squares under control here.

**20 ... 0-0 21 Nc4!**

Having a concrete calculation in mind. Black must be careful since both 22 Nxe5 and 22 Nb6 are serious threats; thus he must allow the exchange of queens.

**21 ... Ra8**

Alternatives are no better. For example: 21 ... Rb8? 22 Nxe5 just wins, while if 21 ... Qc6 22 Qxc6 Rxc6 23 Nb6, White's advantage in the

endgame is indisputable with the superior pawn structure, more active king, and a strong outpost on d5.

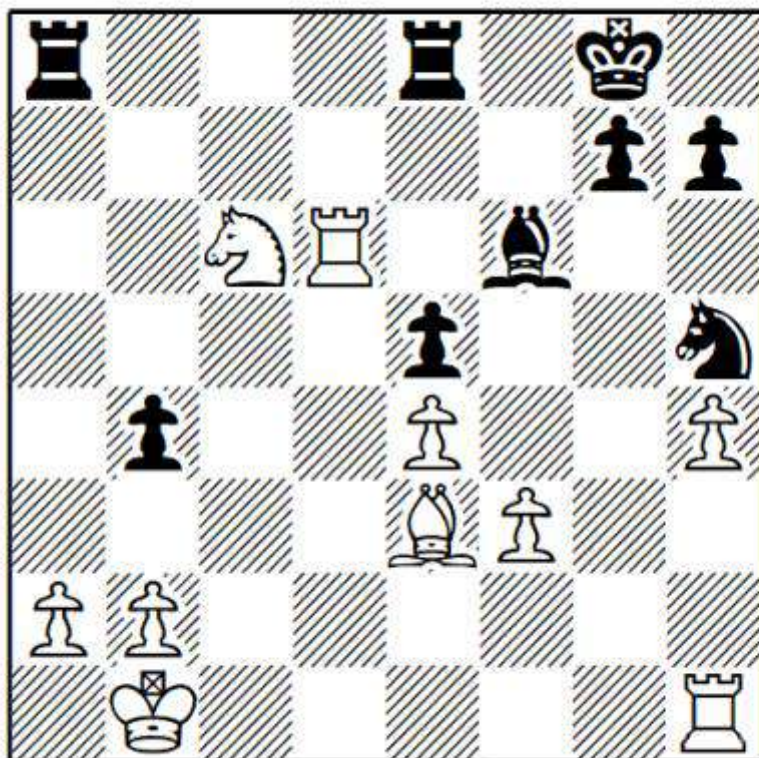
**22 Nb6 Rxa6 23 Nxd7 Re8**

In case of 23 ... Rd8 24 Nb6 Nf4 25 h4 White is also better.

**24 h4 Bd8?**

Trying to trap the knight, but there is another way out.

**25 Nb8 Ra8 26 Nc6 f5 27 gxf6 Bxf6 28 Rxd6**



*Black is lost*

White has won a pawn and the game is objectively over.

**28 ... Ng3 29 Rh3 Ne2 30 Rd2 Rec8 31 Rd6 Rc7 32 Nxb4 Rac8 33 Rd1 Kf7 34 Rh2 Ng3 35 h5 Rb7 36 Nd5 g6 37 hxg6+ hxg6 38 Nxf6 Kxf6 39 Rd6+ Kg7 40 Rg2 Rc3 41 Rxc3 Rxe3 42 Rxc3 Rxe3 43 Rh6+ Kg7 44 Rxc3 Rxe3 45 Rh7+!**

Exchanging rooks is the best way to avoid any kind of counterplay.

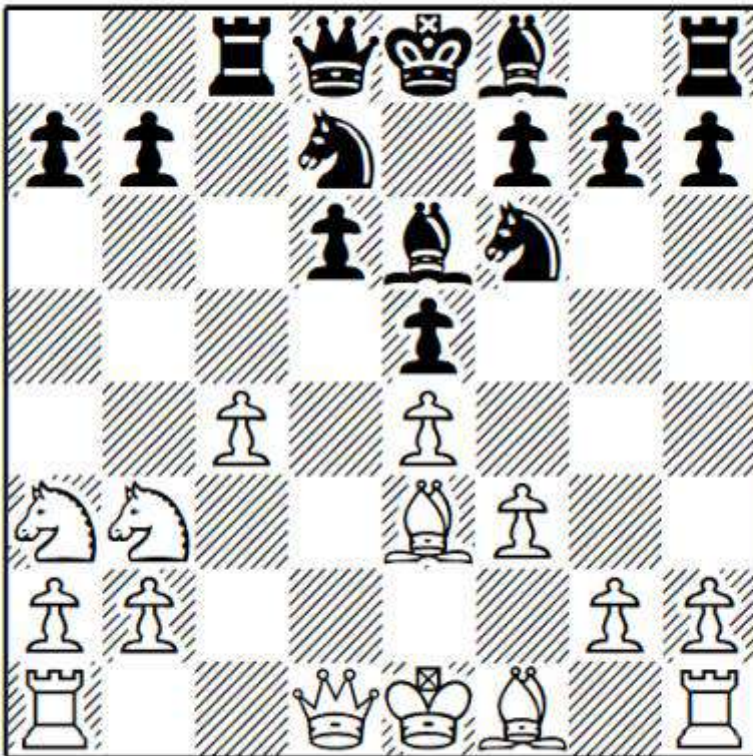
**45 ... Kxc3 46 Rxb7 Rxf3 47 a4 Re3 48 Rb4 Kg5 49 a5 Kf4 50 a6 Re1+ 51 Ka2 1-0**

Game 20

V.Ivanchuk-M.Sebag

Cap d'Agde (rapid) 2012

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3 e5 6 Nb3 Be6 7 c4 Nbd7 8  
Be3 Rc8 9 Na3



*White secured the pawn*

Ivanchuk decides not to sacrifice the pawn. In my opinion this is a less critical option and Black should be fine afterwards. Nonetheless, White gets a fully playable game as well, and if you do not like to sac a pawn early you can apply this approach.

**9 ... a6 10 Be2 Be7 11 0-0 0-0**

So far, normal developing moves by both sides. Maybe you wondered whether the breakthrough with ... b7-b5 and ... d6-d5 was possible, but White's queenside pawns are much more dangerous after 11 ... b5 12 cxb5

d5 13 bxa6 dxe4 14 fxe4 Nxe4. Although the situation remains messy, the computers consider that White is winning here already.

**12 Qd2 h6**

Preparing the exchange of dark-squared bishops.

**13 Rfd1 Qc7 14 Rac1 Rfd8 15 Bf1**

A bit slow; it does not really matter if the bishop is on e2 or f1. White could instead improve his knight which is still standing on the rim: 15 Nb1!? (in order to bring it to d5!) 15 ... Qb8 16 Nc3 Bxc4 17 Bxc4 Rxc4 18 Nd5! Rxc1 19 Nxe7+ Kf8 20 Nxc1 Kxe7 21 Ne2 with good compensation for the pawn.

**15 ... Nh7 16 Nc2 Nc5 17 Nb4 Nxb3 18 axb3 Bg5 19 Rc3 Bxe3+ 20 Qxe3 Qc5?**

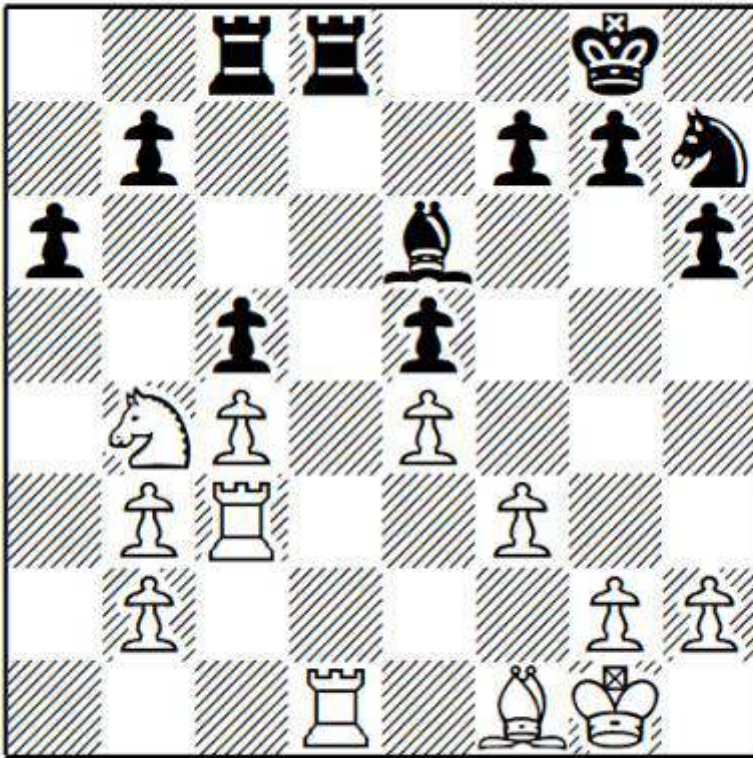
This is a tactical oversight, though the alternatives also leave White on top:

a) 20 ... Qa5 21 Nc2 is slightly better for White. He can increase the pressure against the d6-pawn while maintaining his space advantage.

b) 20 ... Nf6 is more or less okay for Black, since he can cover his weakness on d6 without problems. Nonetheless, I still prefer White because it is up to him what to do and when to do it. Black has almost no active plans.

**21 Qxc5 dxc5?!**

21 ... Rxc5 was necessary, allowing White's continued pressure against the d6-pawn.



*How to win material?*

**Question:** How can White win material?

**Answer: 22 Rxd8+ Rxd8 23 Nd3!**

Forking the c- and e-pawns. White will pick up one of them.

**23 ... b6 24 Nxe5 Rd2 25 Rd3 Rxd3**

25 ... Rxb2 would be a more active defence. Unfortunately, it loses a piece after 26 Rd8+ Nf8 27 f4; e.g. 27 ... g6 (or 27 ... f6 28 Ng6) 28 g4 Kg7 29 f5 gxf5 30 exf5.

**26 Nxd3**

White is winning – a healthy extra pawn in a minor piece ending should be enough with accurate play.

**26 ... a5 27 Nf4 Nf6 28 Kf2 Kf8 29 Ke3 Nd7 30 Nd5 f5 31 Bd3 fxe4 32 Bxe4 Bxd5 33 Bxd5 Ke7 34 Ke4 Kf6 35 f4 Ke7 36 Kf5 Nf8 37 g4 g6+ 38 Ke4 Kf6 39 h4 g5 40 fxg5+ hxg5 41 h5 Nd7 42 h6 Kg6 43 Be6 Nf6+**

Or 43 ... Nf8 44 Bf5+ Kxh6 45 Kd5 and wins, since the bishop dominates the knight.

**44 Ke5 Ne8 45 Bd7 Nc7 46 Bb5 1-0**

After having discussed various ways to handle the ... Be6 and ... Rc8 system, we will now focus on the other sideline: 6 ... a5!?

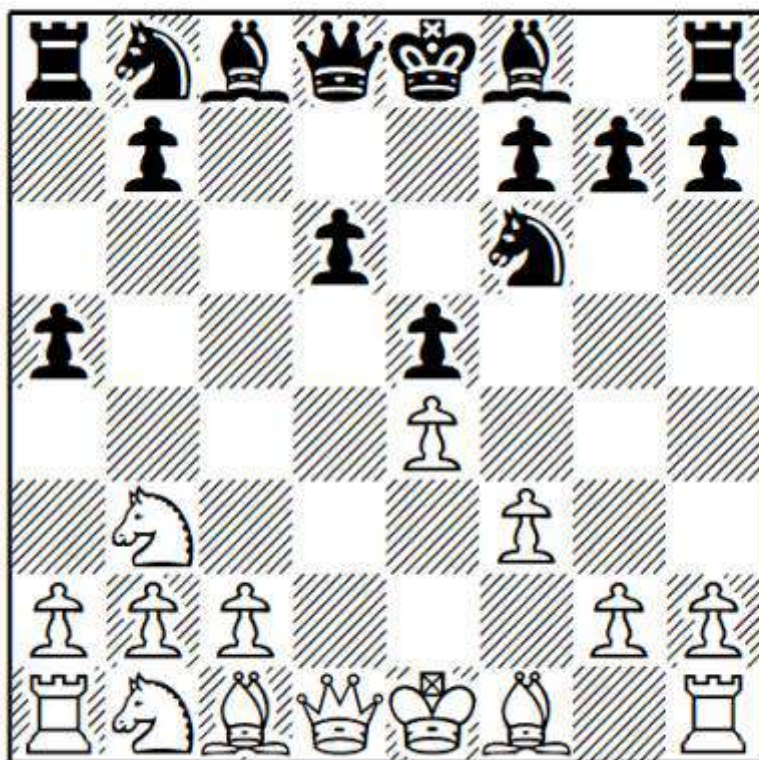
*Game 21*

**D.Kryakvin-D.Khismatullin**

Kolomna 2016

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3 e5 6 Nb3 a5!?**

Black is setting up a trap in case we carelessly play 7 c4.



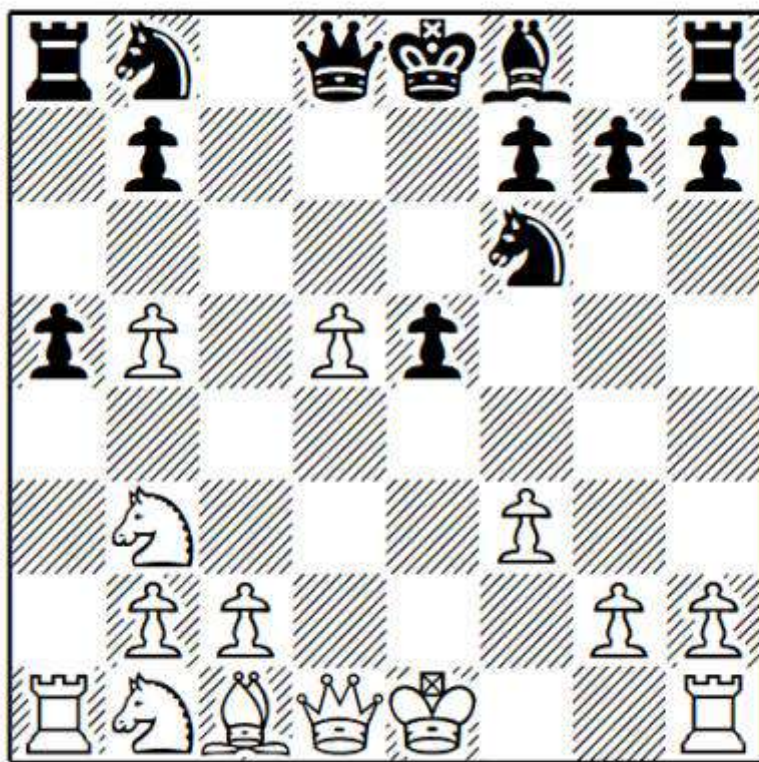
*A little trap*

**7 Bb5+**

**Remember:** 7 c4? is a mistake due to 7 ... Nxe4 8 fxe4 Qh4+ 9 Kd2 a4 and Black regains the piece with interest, as explained in the theoretical section.

### 7 ... Nc6

Here 7 ... Bd7 is a significant alternative. Although the exchange of light-squared bishops would make it easier for White to install a knight on d5, Black can pre-empt this by following up with a quick ... d6-d5 break: 8 a4 Bxb5 (or 8 ... d5 9 exd5 Bxb5 10 axb5 transposing; whereas after something like 8 ... Be7 9 Nc3 White has a pleasant position) 9 axb5 d5 (better than 9 ... a4? 10 Nc3 d5 11 Nxa4 dxe4 12 Qxd8+ Kxd8 13 fxe4 Nxe4 14 Be3 Nd7 15 Ke2 Kc7 16 Rhd1 with a great initiative) 10 exd5 (instead, 10 Bg5 dxe4?! 11 Qxd8+ Kxd8 12 Bxf6+ gxf6 13 fxe4 gives White a small plus, but simply 10 ... Nbd7 is equal)

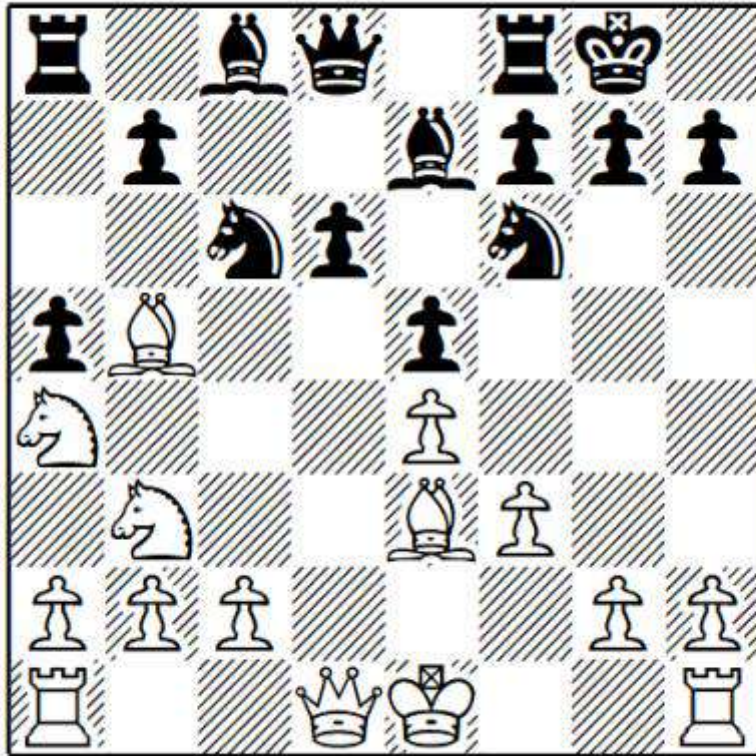


*Has Black equalized?*

0 ... Nbd7 (not 10 ... Qxd5? 11 Qxd5 Nxd5 12 c4 Nf6 13 Nxa5 and White regains the pawn, D.Mastrovasilis-R.Gajek, Krakow 2012; while after 10 ...

Nxd5 11 0-0 a4 12 Re1 f6 13 f4 White is already taking action in the centre)  
 11 Nc3 Bb4 12 0-0 Qb6+ (or 12 ... 0-0 13 Na4) 13 Kh1 and I prefer White;  
 e.g. 13 ... Bxc3? 14 bxc3 Qxb5 15 Ba3! lands Black in trouble, who  
 suddenly cannot castle, while 13 ... 0-0 14 Qd3 Bxc3 15 bxc3 keeps the  
 extra pawn.

**8 Nc3 Be7 9 Be3 0-0 10 Na4!**



*A strong motif*

So far, we should be familiar with the position. If you do not remember the details, you can have a look at the theoretical analysis at the beginning of the chapter. In this game Black allows the white knight to enter his position, planning to free himself with a later ... d6-d5.

Instead, after 10 0-0 Black can complete his development more easily. Also, the idea of 10 ... Na7 is quite annoying, as after 11 Bd3 Nc6 and it is not so easy for White to avoid the repetition here. For example, 12 a4 gives Black the b4-square, while 12 Na4 allows 12 ... d5, since 13 Nb6?! can be met by 13 ... d4!.

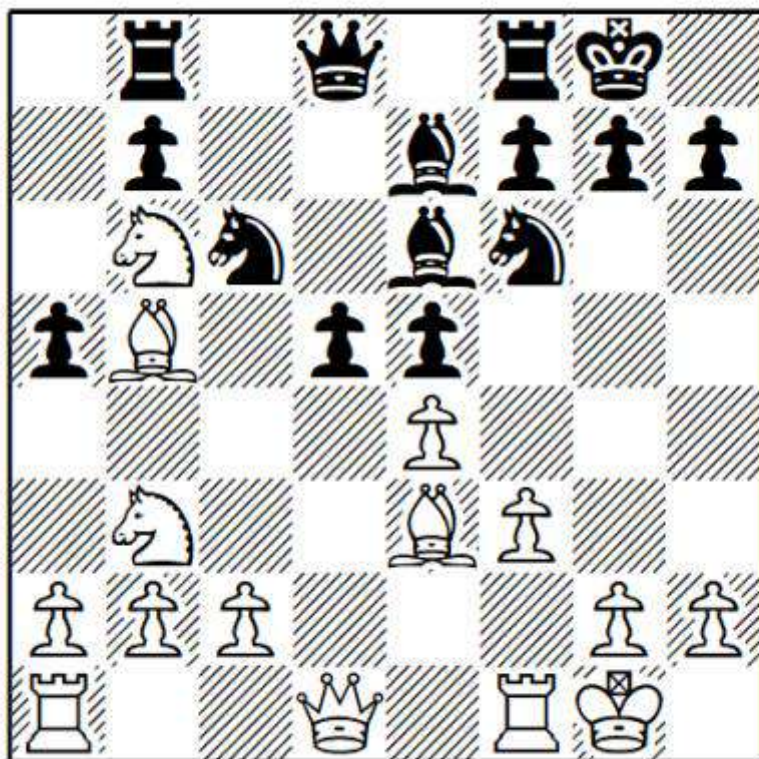
## 10 ... Be6

Other moves are worse:

a) 10 ... Nd7 covers b6 but is too passive as discussed before.

b) 10 ... d5 seems premature, as after 11 Nb6 Rb8 (not now 11 ... d4? because of 12 Nxa8 dxe3 13 Qxd8! Bxd8 14 0-0-0 and White is winning, as the knight on a8 cannot be trapped) 12 exd5 Nb4 13 c4 Bf5 14 0-0 Nc2 15 Qd2! Nxa1 16 Rxa1 White has excellent chances thanks to his strong pawns.

**11 Nb6 Rb8 12 0-0 d5**



*How to answer 12 ... d5*

This is a critical position because Black changes the nature of the battle drastically. Now we must make a choice how to react to the central breakthrough.

**13 exd5 Nxd5 14 Nxd5 Bxd5 15 c4!**

Well played. Now White forces the transition into an endgame where he has a queenside majority, plus a lot of chances to exploit the weak squares

in the enemy camp. Although Black may be close to equality in objective terms, White soon starts to create some problems.

**15 ... Be6 16 Qxd8 Rfxd8 17 Bb6 Rdc8 18 Rfd1 h5**

In the case of 18 ... a4 White secures the pair of bishops and a slight edge with 19 Nc5 Bxc5+ 20 Bxc5.

**19 a4**

Sooner or later White tries to win the a5-pawn; for instance, with 20 Rc1 and then simply 21 Nxa5 as the c4-pawn is protected.

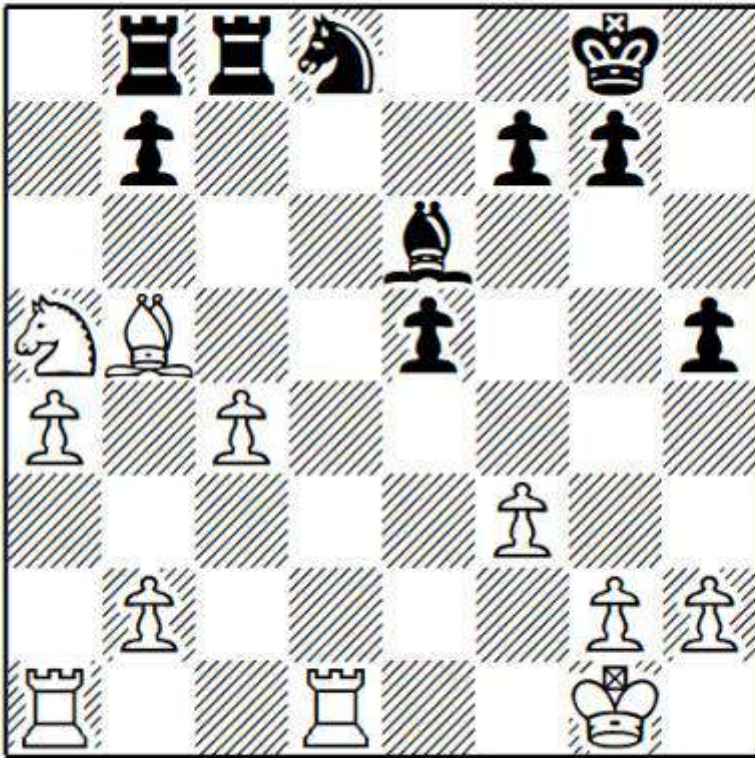
**19 ... Bd8?**

Obviously the bishop on b6 is annoying, but this is quite a big mistake. White was not threatening to capture the a5-pawn yet. Black should have played 19 ... f6, luring White into 20 Nxa5?! Nxa5 21 Bxa5 Bc5+ 22 Kf1 Bd4 with counterplay.

**20 Bxd8 Nxd8**

20 ... Rxd8 does not solve the problems because White wins a pawn after 21 Rxd8+ Rxd8 (21 ... Nxd8 22 Nxa5 is similar to the game) 22 Bxc6 bxc6 23 Nxa5 and White's passed queenside pawns should be enough to win.

**21 Nxa5**



*White wins a pawn*

**21 ... Nc6**

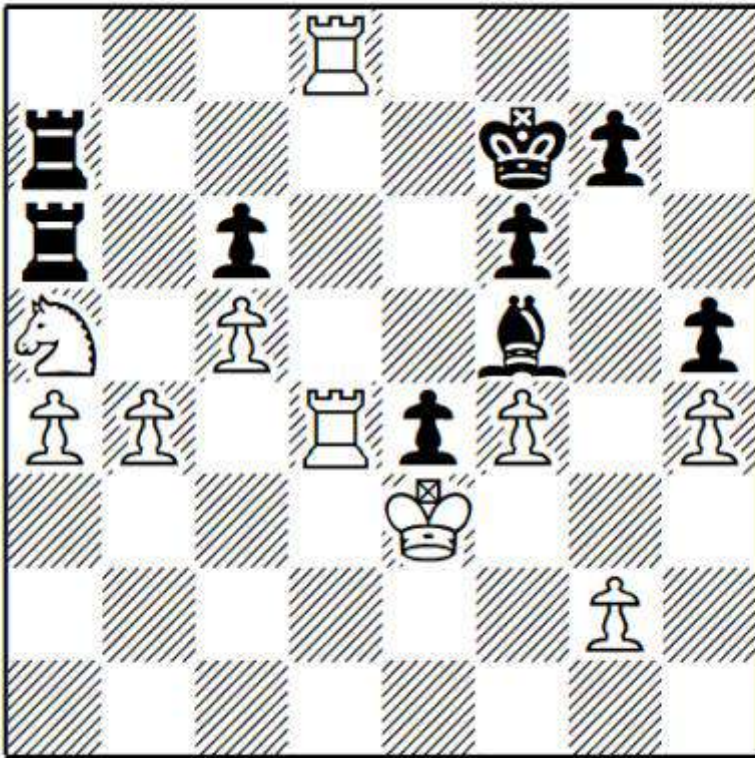
**Question:** How would you meet the idea of 21 ... b6, intending to capture on c4 afterwards?

**Answer:** With just 22 Nb3!, since 22 ... Bxc4 fails to 23 Rxd8+! Rxd8 24 Bxc4, picking up two minor pieces for a rook.

**22 Bxc6 bxc6 23 b3 Rb6 24 Rd6 Kf8 25 Rad1 Ke7 26 b4 Ra6 27 c5 Rc7 28 h4 f6 29 f4 e4**

After 29 ... exf4?? 30 Re1 White wins a whole piece.

**30 Kf2 Kf7 31 Ke3 Bf5 32 Rd8 Rca7 33 R1d4**



*Healthy extra pawn*

White has consolidated his extra pawn. Black tries to obtain counterplay with an exchange sacrifice but it turns out to be insufficient.

**33 ... Rxa5 34 bxa5 Rxa5 35 Rc4 Be6 36 Rxe4 Rxc5 37 Rb4 Ra5 38 Rd6 Bd5 39 Rd7+ Kg6 40 f5+ Kxf5 41 Rxc7 Ke6 42 Rf4 f5 43 Rg5 Bb3 44 Rxc5 Bxa4 45 Rh6+ Ke7 46 g3 Re5+ 47 Kf2 Bb5 48 Rb4 Kd7 49 Kf3 Kc7 50 Kf4 Rd5 51 Rf6 Bd3 52 h5 1-0**

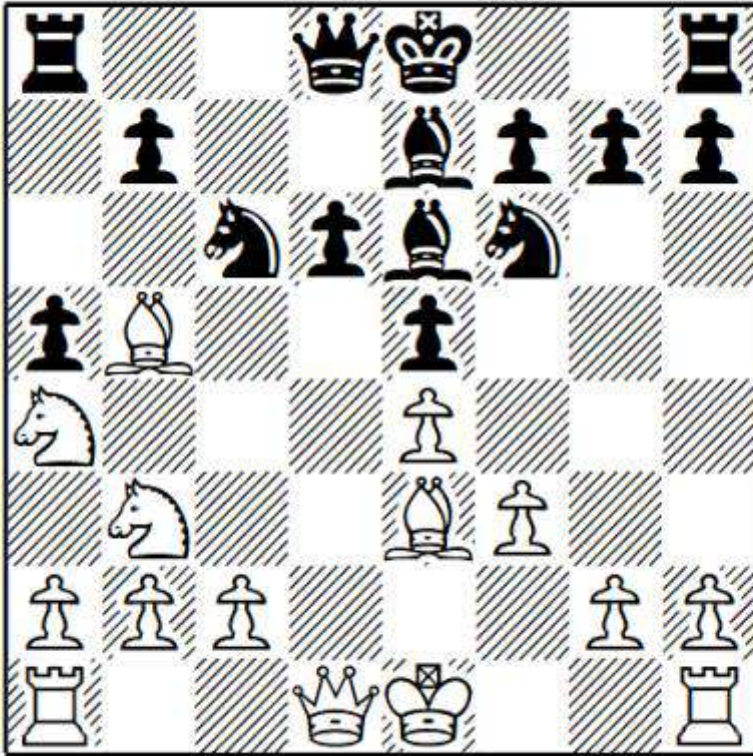
We continue with a nice miniature where Black found himself struggling against the plan of an early Na4.

*Game 22*

**J.Hacker-L.Laustsen**

Ballerup 2019

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3 e5 6 Nb3 a5 7 Bb5+ Nc6 8 Nc3 Be6 9 Be3 Be7 10 Na4



*Prevent 11 Nb6 or not?*

This is similar to our preparation in the introduction, and I was happy to apply the variation myself. Black must decide whether or not he wants to allow the white knight to enter the b6-square.

**10 ... Nd7**

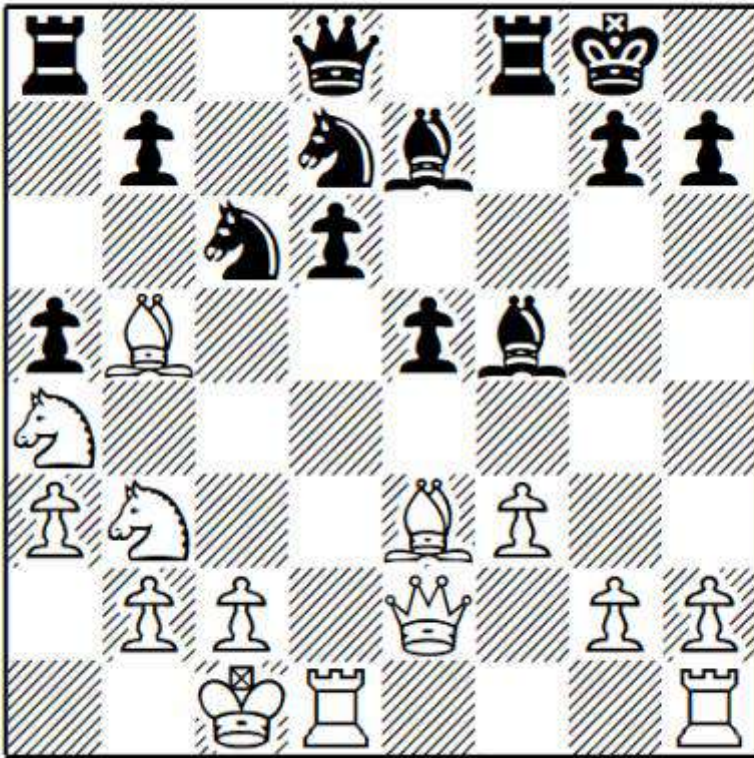
We should also check other moves:

a) 10 ... 0-0 transposes to the previous game.

b) 10 ... d5 11 Nb6 a4!? (11 ... d4? fails to 12 Nxa8 dxe3 13 Qxd8+! again, when Black will not be able to pick up the knight, so White is winning; e.g. 13 ... Bxd8 14 Bxc6+ bxc6 15 Nc5 Bc8 16 Rd1) 12 Nxa8 Qxa8 13 Nd2 and Black has some play but White must be better.

**11 0-0**

The computer wants to castle queenside with 11 Qe2 0-0 12 0-0-0 f5 13 exf5 Bxf5 14 a3.



### *Long castling*

Black can hardly move here, while White can put more pressure on the d-file. Although long castling is quite rare in this line, it fits in perfectly, and from a human perspective too. White has excellent outposts on a4 and b5, so Black will never be able to launch an attack on this wing.

**11 ... 0-0 12 Qd2**

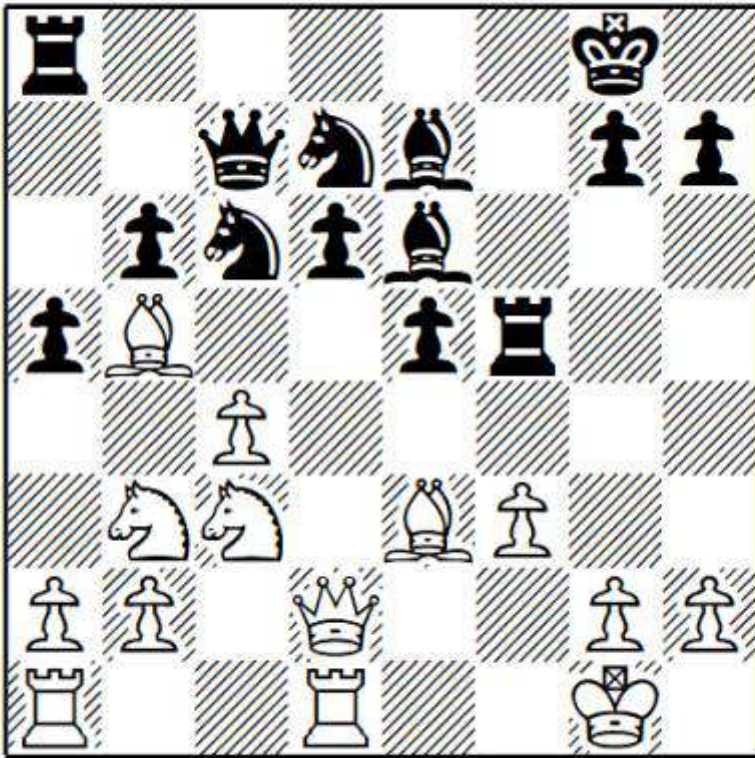
I consider 12 c4 to be premature as the bishop on b5 might get stuck. My plan in the game was to await ... f7-f5 and only then fix the pawns in the centre with c2-c4.

**12 ... Qc7 13 Rfd1 f5**

If Black commits to nothing, playing 13 ... Rfd8 say, White can try to penetrate with 14 Qf2 b6 15 Nc3 and obtains a big positional plus; Nd5 is coming soon.

**14 exf5 Rxf5 15 c4 b6 16 Nc3**

Exploiting the weak central squares.



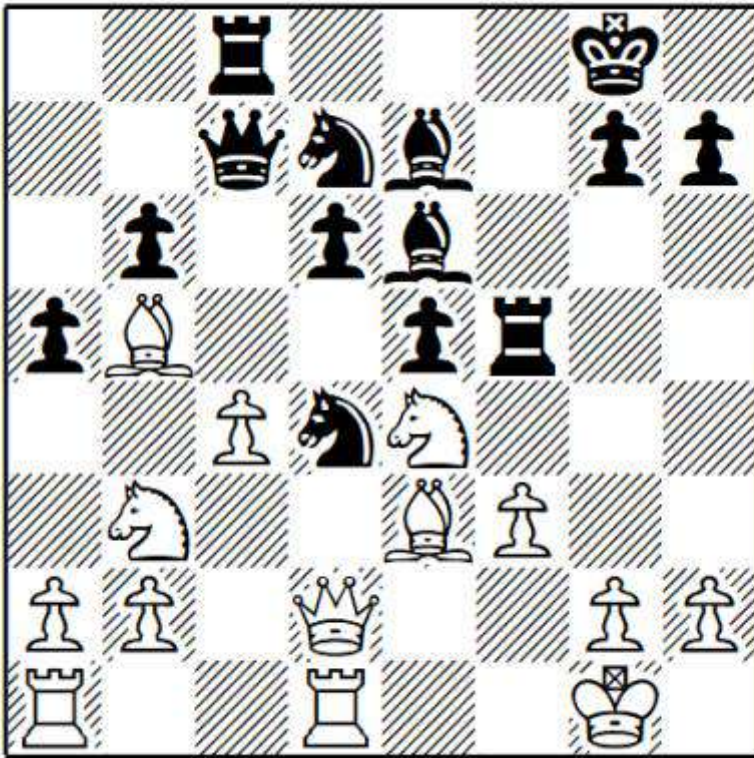
*17 Nd5 expected*

**16 ... Rc8 17 Ne4**

The computer's top choice is 17 Nd5 Bxd5 18 cxd5, but I see no reason why White should give up the possibility to attack the d6-pawn.

**17 ... Nd4?**

Here 17 ... Rd8 18 Nxd6 Rff8 (if 18 ... Nf6?! then 19 Nxf5! is an easy tactical justification; i.e. 19 ... Rxd2 20 Nxe7+ Qxe7 21 Rxd2 and White is winning) 19 Ne4 Nc5 is a tougher defence, but White remains with an extra pawn.



*How to win?*

**Question:** How to finish the game in the most convincing way?

**Answer: 18 Bxd4!**

18 Nxd4 wins as well, but after 18 ... exd4 19 Bxd4 Bxc4 20 Bxc4 Qxc4 21 Rc1 Qa6, there would still be work to do.

**18 ... exd4 19 Nxd4 1-0**

Black loses at least an exchange, so he resigned.

### Main Lines

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3 e5 6 Nb3**

We now go on to the positional options, where Black does not go for a direct confrontation but instead develops the pieces first. This usually leads to slower games where White has a space advantage but Black also has a healthy position. So, let's start examining the lines in detail.

**6 ... Be7**

I consider this move more accurate than 6 ... Be6. If Black goes for a closed set-up there is a point in delaying ... Be6 for a while. First, it can be useful if a possible capture on d5 by White does not gain time against the bishop; second, Black has the strategic plan of transferring the e7-bishop to b6 in order to exchange it. The faster he can do that, the better, so there is no reason to waste a move on ... Be6. Nonetheless, I will give a short recommendation on how to handle such set-ups as White.

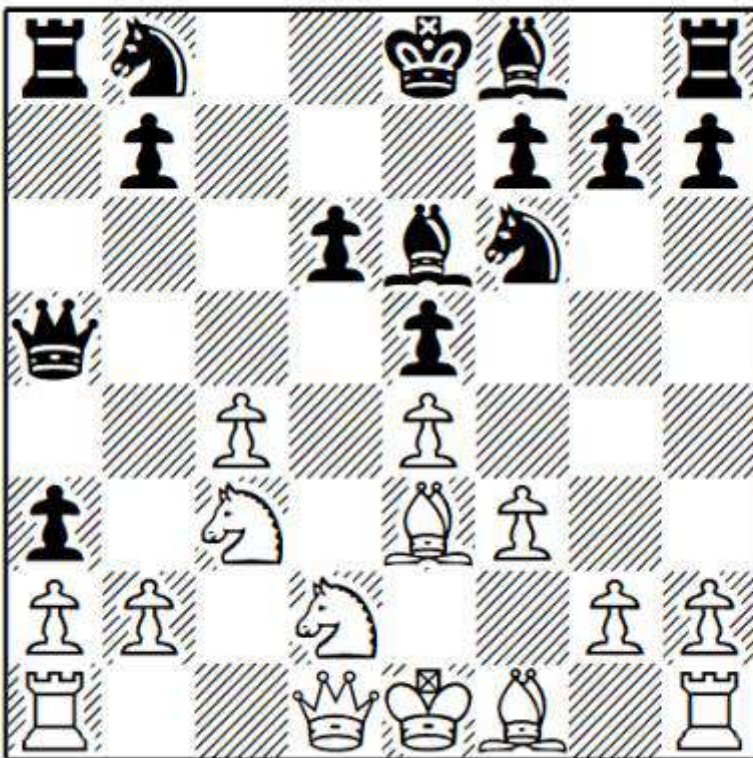
After 6 ... Be6 7 c4 there are the following branches:

a) 7 ... Nbd7 8 Nc3 Rc8 was covered in the previous section.

b) 7 ... Be7 and ... 0-0 transposes to a main line with ... Be6.

c) 7 ... a5 is quite a frequent choice, but I think this idea is better applied without inserting 6 ... Be6 first. Here after 8 Be3 a4 9 N3d2 (covering c4 looks most natural; then Black usually develops the queen) 9 ... Qa5 10 Nc3! and now:

c1) 10 ... a3? looks tempting, but there is a tactical problem with it.



*How to refute 10 ... a3?*

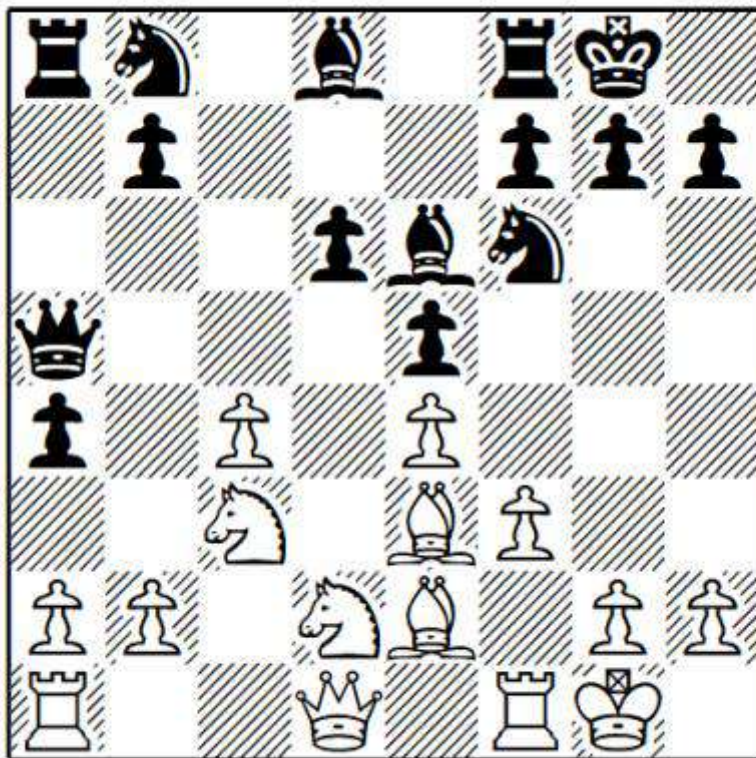
**Question:** Can you see how White should reply?

**Answer:** 11 b4! Qxb4 12 Nd5! (this is always the point!) 12 ... Bxd5 13 cxd5 and White is winning despite being a pawn down. The central pawn chain cuts off all the black pieces from the queenside, where White will develop a crushing initiative and easily regain the pawn; e.g. with 14 Rb1 and 15 Rxb7.

c2) 10 ... Be7 11 Be2 (for 11 Bd3 see Game 27) 11 ... 0-0 12 0-0 and now:

c21) 12 ... Nbd7 13 Nd5! secures a slight plus, because Black can only capture with the bishop; e.g. 13 ... Bxd5 14 cxd5 b5 15 Rc1 Rfc8 16 Nb1 Rxc1 17 Qxc1 Nc5 18 Na3 b4 19 Nc4 and so on.

c22) 12 ... Bd8! is a stronger plan.



*Preparing an exchange*

This is a recurring theme which we must always have in mind. Black wants to exchange bishops via 13 ... Bb6 in order to exploit the dark-squared holes in our camp. In response 13 Kh1 is an interesting prophylaxis. Then 13 ... Bb6?! would lose a pawn to 14 Bxb6 Qxb6 15 Nxa4 and Black's compensation is not entirely clear; or in the case of 13 ... Nbd7 White proceeds with 14 Nd5 and has prevented ... Bb6 successfully.

Let's return to the main line with 6 ... Be7.

### **7 c4 a5!?**

At first sight you might wonder why it is justified to play such a move which weakens the b5-square forever. However, ... a7-a5 is quite useful. First of all, Black gains some space while trying to disturb White's coordination with a further ... a5-a4, harassing the knight on b3. In addition, I think it is not only a possibility but a necessity for Black to do something active. We'll see the consequences of Black adopting a more passive set-up with ... Be6 and ... a7-a6 in Game 28.

### **8 Be3 0-0**

Naturally there are transpositional possibilities. Black could push the a-pawn again before castling or, equivalently, castled before pushing the a-pawn at all.

### **9 Nc3 a4**

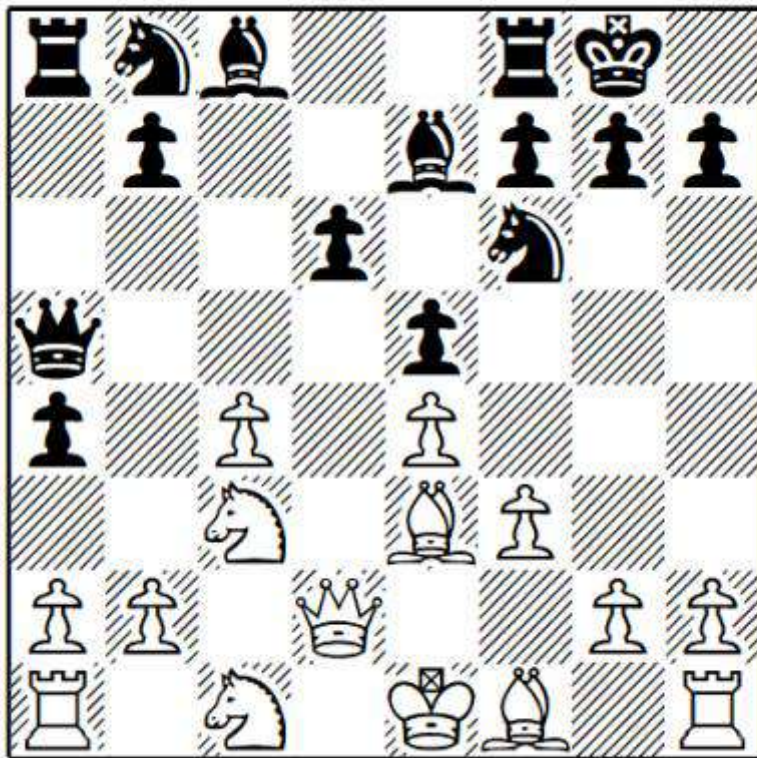
As mentioned above there is no special point to 9 ... Be6 and we are doing fine by normal developing moves; e.g. 10 Be2 Nc6 (10 ... a4 11 Nd2 Qa5 12 0-0 a3 13 Nd5 shows that the bishop is not ideally placed on e6) 11 0-0 a4 12 Nd2 Qa5 13 Nd5 with a small but stable plus for White.

### **10 Nc1**

This was Carlsen's choice in his match with Karjakin; we will see the whole game below.

The alternative is 10 Nd2 Qa5 11 Be2 Nc6 12 0-0 Bd8, when we can again employ our prophylactic 13 Kh1! with a more convenient position. However, I prefer 10 Nc1 because then Black has problems implementing the plan of ... Bd8, since the d6-pawn would often drop.

### **10 ... Qa5 11 Qd2**



### *Typical play*

We will stop our theoretical section here and continue exploring different middlegame strategies in the illustrative material below. Games 23-26 all arrive at this position via varied routes.

### **Illustrative Games**

First of all we have a decisive game from a recent World Championship match. We'll see Carlsen slowly outplay his opponent after 9 Nc1 and the typical plan of Rb1 followed by b2-b4, which Karjakin exacerbates by playing 11 ... Na6 and ... Nc5.

In Game 24, Black develops the knight to c6 instead, yet struggles to find a good plan after White again plays Rb1 and b2-b4. Later on we see the interesting idea of c4-c5, opening the queenside for the bishop pair.

Games 25 and 26 both feature 11 ... Be6, which allows a sharper implementation of White's idea: 12 b4 without prior preparation, justified by tactics. In the first game Black declines to capture en passant, allowing

White a significant space advantage which he slowly nurtures. In the second, where Black does take the pawn, White develops an initiative on the open files instead.

We conclude the chapter with two games where Black plays an early ... Be6. In Game 27 he combines it with the advance of the a-pawn. This time White retreats his knight to d2 and later instructively regroupes it to b5, pointing out where Black's weaknesses are.

In Game 28, Black holds the a-pawn back on a6, and White has a lot of freedom implementing his own ideas. When Black seeks counterplay on the kingside White is able to slow it down with the typical g2-g3.

### *Game 23*

#### **Ma.Carlsen-S.Karjakin**

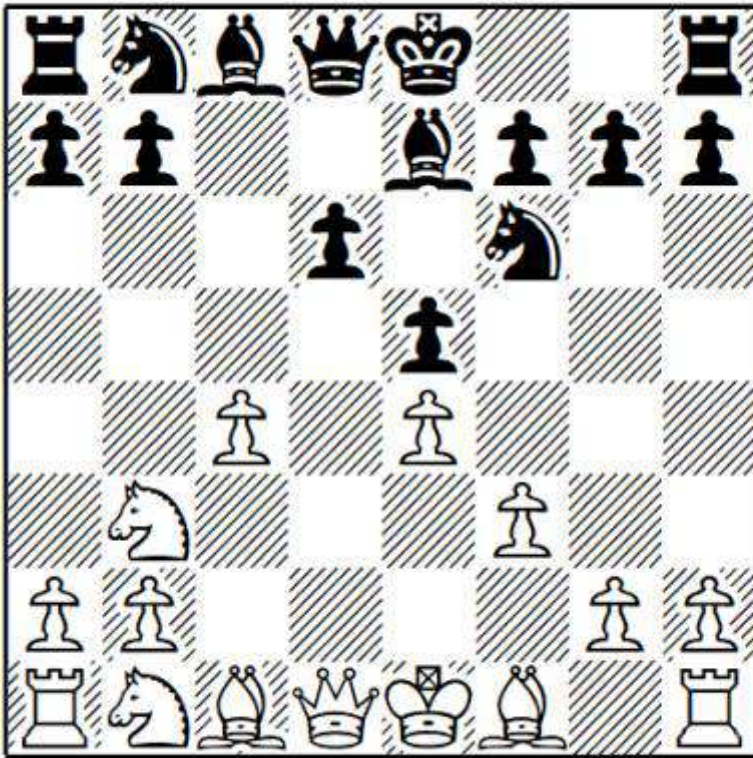
World Championship (rapid tiebreak), New York 2016

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3!?**

Even Magnus Carlsen plays our move 5 f3!, showing that it is not just a tricky sideline.

In response Sergey Karjakin opts for a slow and positional approach, allowing 7 c4, and follows up with an early 7 ... a5, trying to disrupt White's coordination as well as threatening some tactical tricks. But Carlsen is well prepared and shows us how to handle the resulting positions.

**5 ... e5 6 Nb3 Be7 7 c4**



### *Clamping down on d5*

Of course this our main idea! When we have the chance to play c2-c4 and set up our strong and stable centre, we should almost always go for it.

**Remember:** If Black does not break in the centre immediately with 6 ... d5, we should be looking to play 7 c4 next. The only exception is 6 ... a5, which sets a trap against pushing the c-pawn automatically. As we saw in the first section of this chapter, 7 c4? runs into 7 ... Nxe4! 8 fxe4 Qh4+ 9 Kd2 a4 and Black wins the piece back with interest.

#### **7 ... a5**

With this typical advance Black gains space and intends to disrupt White's coordination with ... a5-a4, harassing the knight on b3, as well as clearing the a5-square again for his queen and gaining influence on the queenside.

When we consider the other possible pawn moves available to Black, we see that they simply do not work well:

a) ... d6-d5 is clearly impossible against our set-up.

b) ... f7-f5 after a preparatory ... 0-0 and ... Nh5 is hard to achieve and is not really a satisfactory plan anyway, because Black will be left with his weak pawns on d6 and e5 after a potential exchange on f5, while White obtains perfect outposts on d5 and e4.

c) ... a7-a6 intending ... b7-b5 is a possible plan, but it takes a lot of time and Black almost never succeeds.

Concluding that none of these plans are anything to worry about can make us happy, since we do not need to worry about any pawn pushes too much. Black can instead try to get an active game by good piece play, but White remains slightly better.

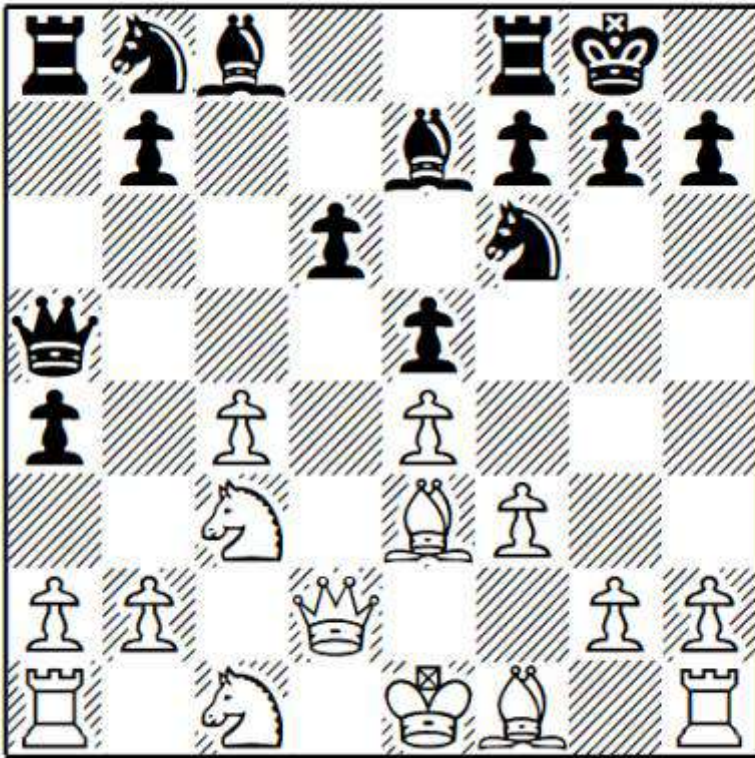
**8 Be3 a4 9 Nc1**

9 N3d2 is a sensible alternative, reinforcing the c4-pawn and planning to develop the other knight to the natural c3-square. We'll see White adopt this set up in Game 27. However, it does have an annoying drawback. With the knight on d2, White's queen lacks a good square because c2 does not make much sense and other squares are just not available. Whereas after 9 Nc1, the queen will be placed excellently on d2.

**9 ... 0-0**

Referring to the "other pawn moves" mentioned above, note that 9 ... b5!?, with the idea of 10 cxb5 d5, can be met by 10 Nc3! bxc4 11 Bxc4 and White keeps a grip on the d5-square.

**10 Nc3 Qa5 11 Qd2**



*The best square for White's queen*

Carlsen defends his c3-knight because ... a4-a3 was in the air. Now after 11 ... a3? the simple 12 b3 is fully satisfactory, and the a3-pawn may prove to be a liability in the endgame. But we have an even stronger continuation available.

**Question:** Can you spot the specific answer White has in this exact position?

**Answer:** With 12 b4! White immediately gains space on the queenside and pre-empts any blockade Black could set up on the b4-square with ... Nc6 next move. The tactical point is that 12 ... Qxb4?? loses instantly to 13 Rb1 Qa5 14 Bb6 Qa6 15 c5 and the black queen is trapped.

**11 ... Na6?!**

The knight is heading for the nice-looking outpost on c5 where it reinforces the a4-pawn; but this just encourages White's standard plan of

Rb1 and b2-b4. So 11 ... Nc6 might be preferred, as in the next game, or else 11 ... Be6 as in Games 25 and 26.

**12 Be2 Nc5 13 0-0 Bd7 14 Rb1 Rfc8 15 b4**

This is the most natural plan here. White is expanding slowly on the queenside while Black has no real counterplay.

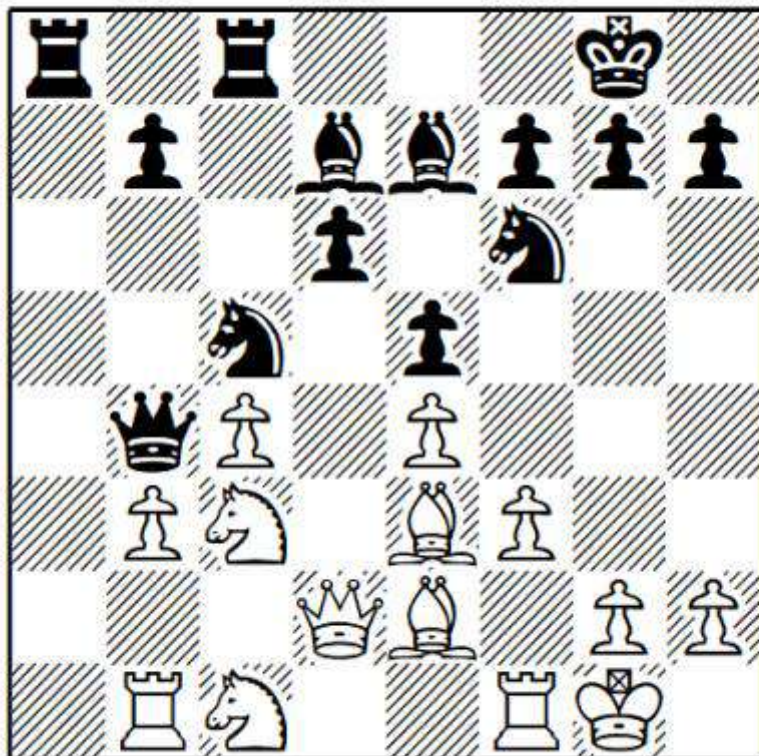
**15 ... axb3 16 axb3**

The fork on the queen and knight meant Black had to take en passant, and now he has to answer the threatened second fork.

**16 ... Qd8**

Solid but passive, so one might wonder what reasons Karjakin had for choosing it.

**Question:** What is wrong with the plan of 16 ... Qb4 and 17 ... Ra3, in order to block and pressurize the b3-pawn?



*Intending 17 ... Ra3 - ?*

**Answer:** 16 ... Qb4 is quite okay, but Black cannot increase the pressure with 17 ... Ra3 because 18 N1a2 wins; e.g. 17 Rd1 Ra3? 18 N1a2 Qa5 19 b4 forks after all, or if 18 ... Qb6 19 b4 Black loses the pinned knight.

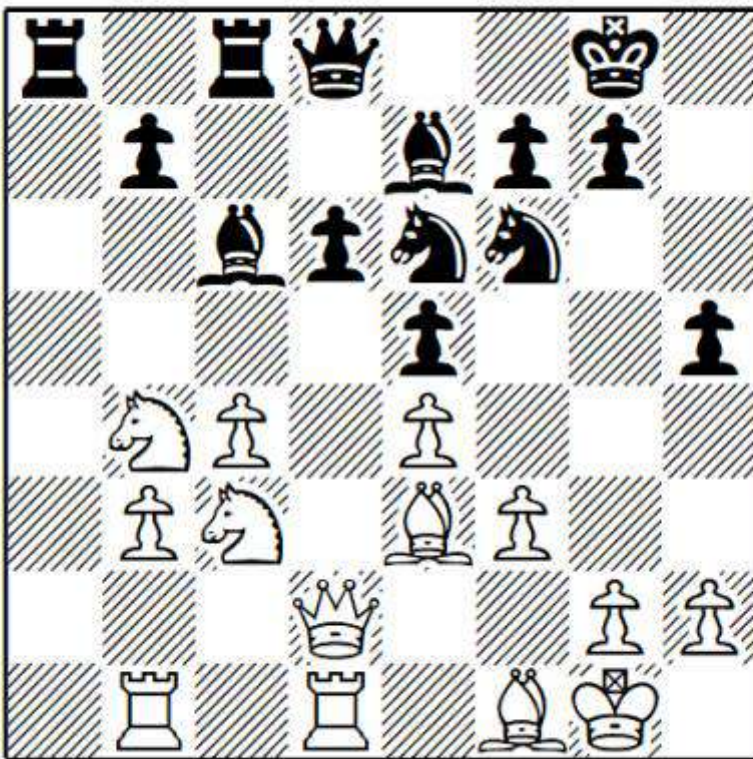
**17 Nd3 Ne6 18 Nb4**

A common theme with our c2-c4 pawn structure is to regroup our minor pieces towards the strong d5-outpost. The knights are best suited for such manoeuvres and you should keep this recurring pattern in mind!

**18 ... Bc6 19 Rfd1**

19 Nbd5 is certainly possible but White is in no rush to force matters. With 19 Rfd1 Carlsen is improving the placement of his pieces before commencing concrete actions.

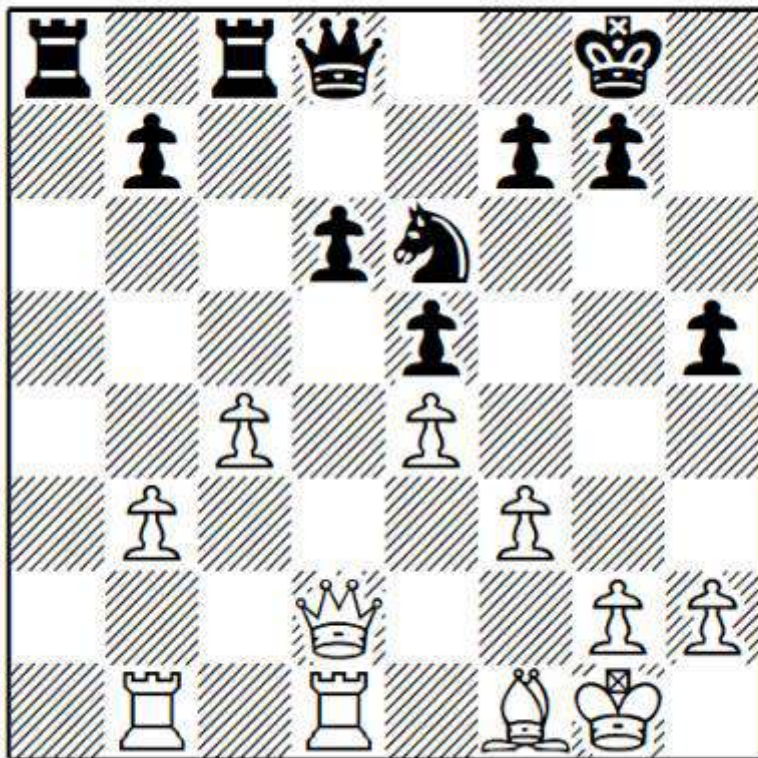
**19 ... h5 20 Bf1**



*The f1-bishop lacks activity*

When we have a look at the diagram above, we see another recurring theme in

our system: a limited light-squared bishop – in this case on f1 – closed in by our pawns on c4, e4 and f3. With so many minor pieces on the board this is nothing tragic, but there is the positional risk of ending up with *only* the light-squared bishop. So always keep in mind that we must avoid such a scenario!



### *Worst case scenario*

In the game we will see a way of activating the bishop by playing g2-g3 and Bh3. This regrouping is not always necessary, but sometimes it can be employed to great effect.

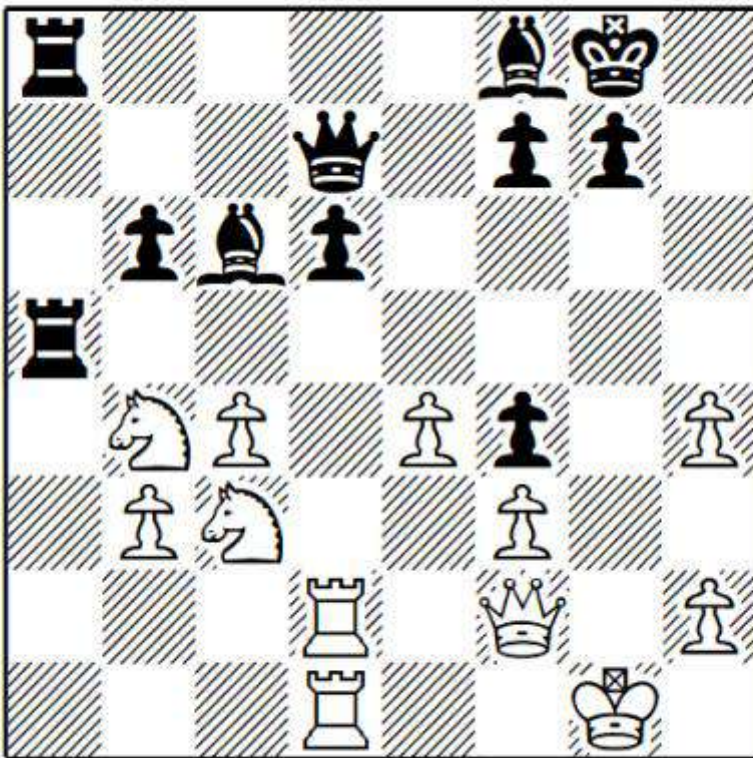
**20 ... h4 21 Qf2 Nd7 22 g3 Ra3 23 Bh3 Rca8 24 Nc2 R3a6 25 Nb4 Ra5 26 Nc2**

Well played by Carlsen! There is absolutely no need to exchange or challenge Black's "active" rooks on the a-file, as the white knights are doing an excellent job preventing the rooks from ever invading White's position.

26 ... b6 27 Rd2 Qc7 28 Rbd1 Bf8 29 gxh4 Nf4 30 Bxf4 exf4 31 Bxd7 Qxd7

Over the past few of moves Carlsen switched to concrete action, transforming his strategic advantage. The resulting position is very favourable for White because knights are tremendously strong against weak pawn structures. Here they have excellent outposts available on b5, d5 and f5 and we will see how Carlsen makes use of them. Meanwhile the still largely closed nature of the position makes it hard for the bishops to create any real counterplay.

**32 Nb4!**



*Heading to d5*

Our familiar pattern of transferring a minor piece to d5. Now it is especially effective as Black only has one minor piece with influence on the light squares, so we can be sure to remain with a stable knight on d5!

The computer wants to play 32 Qxb6, but this is less attractive from a human point of view, as it would open files and remove the queen from

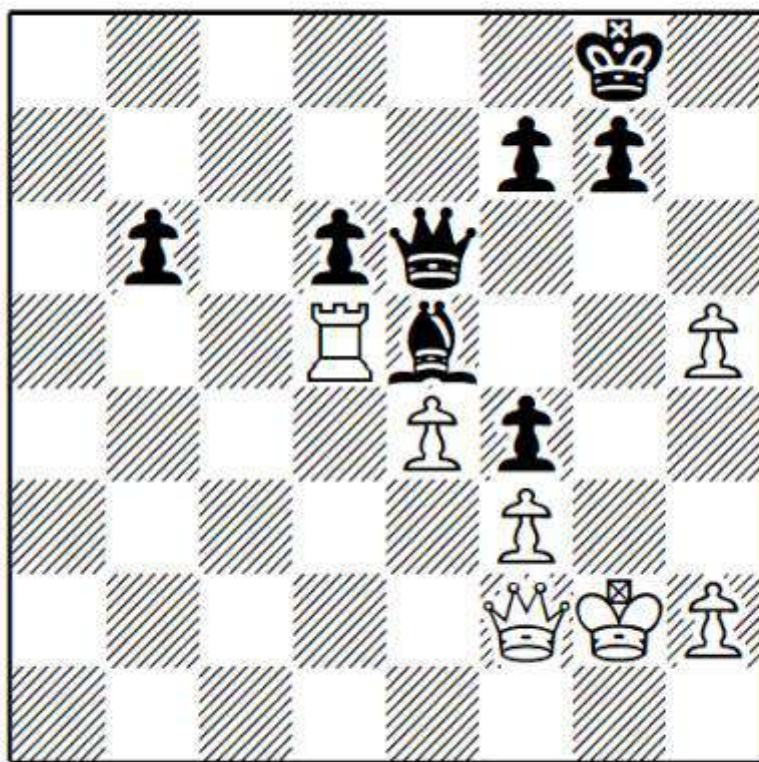
defending the kingside, which might be a source of counterplay for Black.

**32 ... Ra3 33 Nxc6 Qxc6 34 Nb5**

A very practical decision by the world champion. Karjakin was a point behind in the tiebreak and needed to win this game to keep the match alive. Now he is blackmailed by the prospect of a draw at best after 34 ... Ra1, or sacrificing the exchange in the small hope of complicating matters. Karjakin naturally goes for the latter.

**34 ... Rxb3 35 Nd4 Qxc4 36 Nxb3 Qxb3 37 Qe2 Be7 38 Kg2 Qe6 39 h5 Ra3 40 Rd3 Ra2 41 R3d2 Ra3 42 Rd3 Ra7?**

Objectively 42 ... Ra5 43 Rd5 Rxd5 44 Rxd5 Bf6 45 Qf2 Be5 was a much better defensive try than giving up the fifth rank without a fight.



### *Tougher resistance*

The bishop on e5 holds everything together and it is far from obvious how White will break through decisively. But a draw was no good to Karjakin.

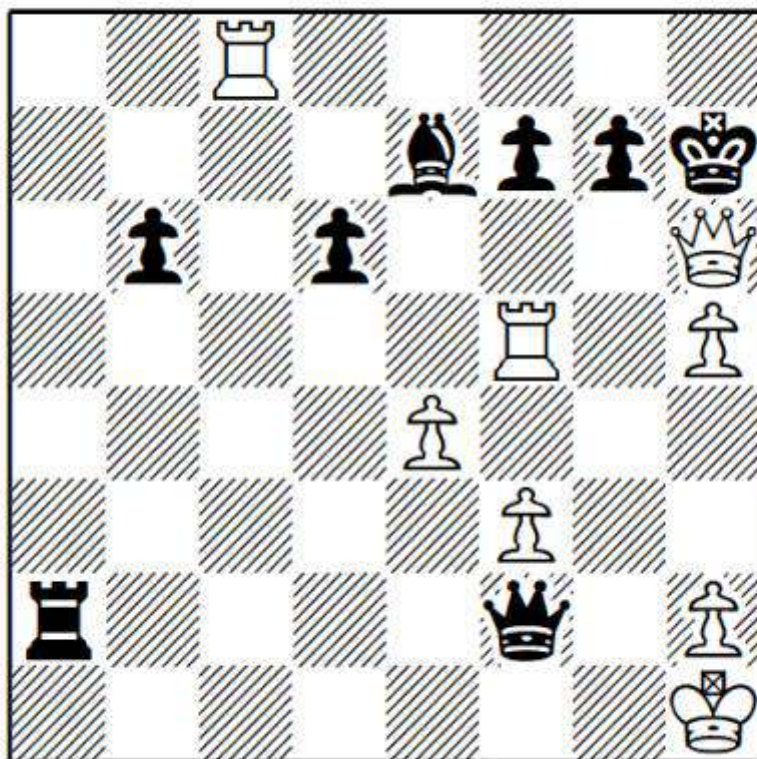
**43 Rd5 Rc7 44 Qd2 Qf6 45 Rf5 Qh4 46 Rc1 Ra7 47 Qxf4 Ra2+ 48 Kh1 Qf2**

**Question:** Can you spot how White finishes the game in a very nice way?

**Answer: 49 Rc8+ Kh7**

Or 49 ... Bf8 50 Rxf8+ Kxf8 51 Rxf7+ Ke8 52 Rf8+ Kd7 53 Qf7+ and mate is inevitable.

**50 Qh6+! 1-0**



*A beautiful finish*

Mate follows with either 50 ... Kxh6 51 Rh8 or 50 ... gxh6 51 Rxf7.

*Game 24*

**D.Kokarev-G.Oparin**

Russian Championship, Novosibirsk 2016

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3 e5 6 Nb3 Be7**

**Remember:** If Black does not intend to go for the c4-pawn straight away, they tend to start with 6 ... Be7 rather than 6 ... Be6. The main reason is that the insertion of ... Be6 might bother Black in some variations, whereas ... Be7 must be played anyway in order to prepare castling.

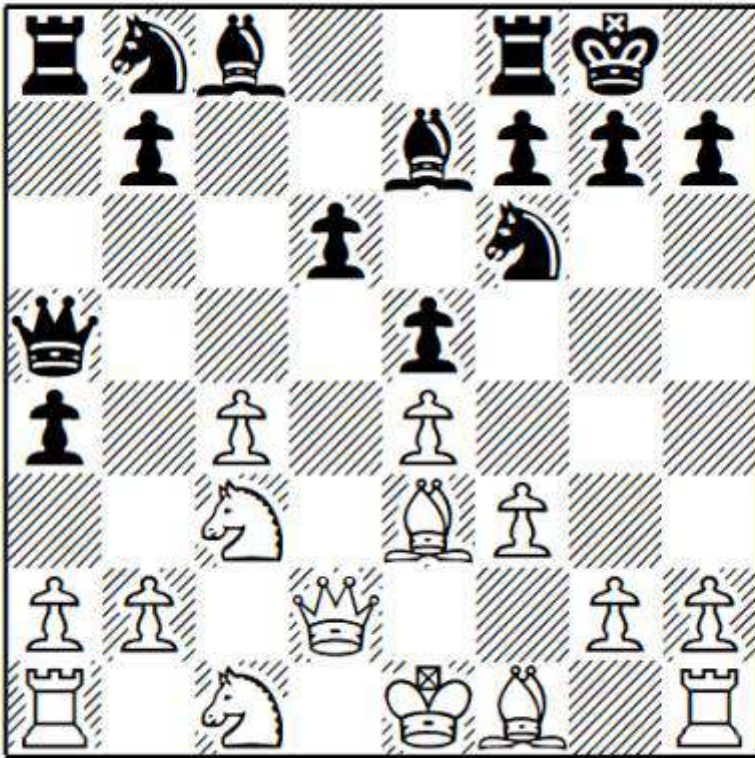
**7 c4 a5 8 Be3 a4 9 Nc1**

This move was considered “a very odd choice” when Ivanchuk played in it 2011, but we have seen its efficacy in the previous game. This one was actually played a month earlier.

**9 ... Qa5+ 10 Nc3**

More usually Black castles before bringing the queen out. With this move order White has the extra option of 10 Qd2, offering the exchange of queens for a slight plus. I think the nature of this is very static, so Black will face problems with a space shortage and chronically weak pawns on d6 and a4 in the long run. For example, V.Ivanchuk-E.Sutovsky, FIDE World Cup, Khanty-Mansiysk 2011, continued 10 ... Bd8 (10 ... Qxd2+ 11 Kxd2 Bd8 would be much the same) 11 Ne2 Be6 12 Na3 Qxd2+ 13 Kxd2 Ba5+ 14 Nc3 Nc6 15 Nab5 Ke7, and now 16 Kc2!, threatening simply 17 Nxa4, would have been good for White.

**10 ... 0-0 11 Qd2**



*Harmonious White pieces*

### **11 ... Nc6**

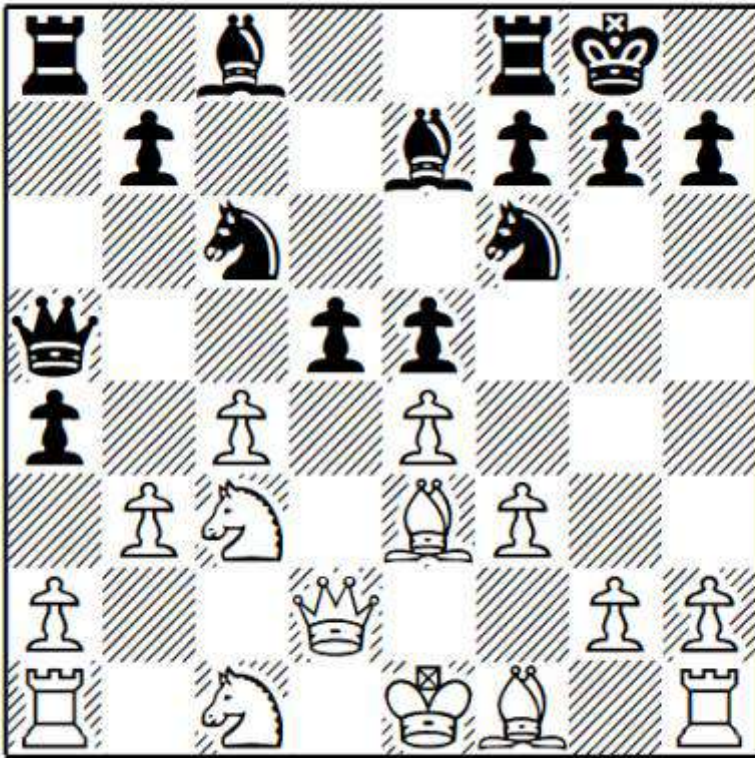
This knight development is better than ... Na6-c5, as Karjakin played.

### **12 Rb1**

Preparing the thematic push b2-b4.

a) 12 b4?! immediately is not advisable with the black knight already out. After 12 ... Nxb4! (not 12 ... Qxb4?? 13 Rb1 Qa5 14 Bb6 etc) 13 Rb1!? Nd7 and White does not have sufficient compensation.

b) 12 b3 cannot be recommended either because of the strong and sharp reply 12 ... d5.



### *Tactics!*

White cannot play 13 exd5? or 13 cxd5? because of 13 ... Bb4 14 N1e2 Nd4! 15 Bxd4 exd4 16 Qxd4 axb3 or 15 Rc1 axb3 16 axb3 Nxb3 and Black wins.

So 13 Nxd5 is the only move, but then White becomes very passive. After 13 ... Bb4! (not 13 ... Nxd5? 14 Qxa5 and White is much better) 14 Nxb4 Nxb4 (threatening ... Nc2+) 15 Kf2 Rd8 and Black has a lot of activity for the pawn.

c) 12 Be2 Be6 13 0-0 is a solid alternative, but I prefer 12 Rb1, clarifying the situation on the queenside before Black gets additional options like ... Bd8-b6 or ... Nd4.

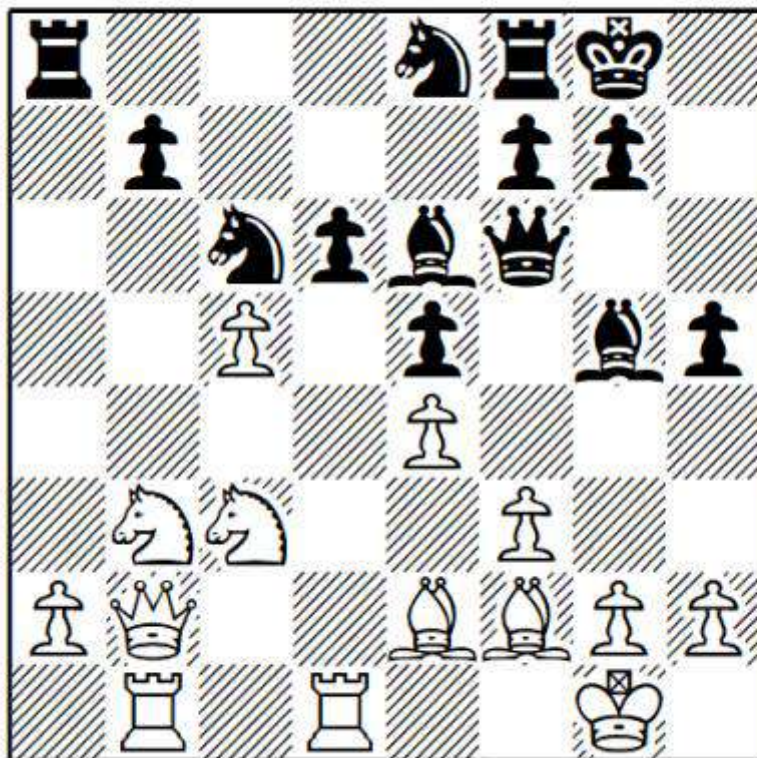
**12 ... Be6 13 b4 axb3 14 Nxb3 Qd8**

Without the rook on a1, 14 ... Qa3 becomes more interesting as Nb5 then requires preparation.

**15 Be2 h6 16 0-0 Ne8 17 Qb2 Bg5 18 Bf2**

Preserving our good bishop.

18 ... h5 19 Rfd1 Qf6 20 c5



*White opens the queenside*

**20 ... Bxb3 21 Qxb3 Nd4 22 Qxb7 Nxe2+ 23 Nxe2 Rxa2 24 Nc3 Rxf2 25 Nd5**

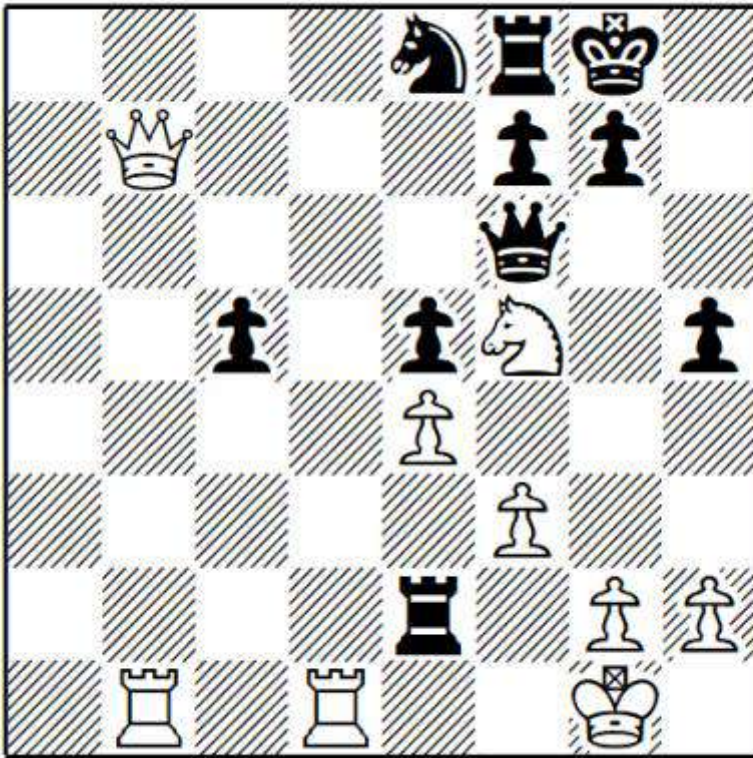
After the simple 25 Kxf2?! Qf4 26 Kg1 Qe3+ Black can offer a lot of resistance.

**25 ... Be3 26 Nxe3?**

It is hard to understand why the Russian grandmaster refrained from taking the queen. Maybe he thought that the outcome would be a fortress after 26 Nxf6+ Nxf6 27 Kh1 Bxc5 28 Rb2 Rxb2 29 Qxb2, but with just two pieces and a pawn for the queen, this would be quite surprising.

**26 ... Re2 27 Nf5 dxc5?**

Perhaps both players were in time trouble, since they now swap mistakes. Here 27 ... g6 would have equalized the game.



*What did Black miss?*

**Question:** Can you spot a way for White to win?

**28 Qb5?**

**Answer:** 28 h4! and the queen will be trapped by Rb6. Or if 28 ... g6 (not 28 ... Qg6 29 Ne7+, and 28 ... Qe6 29 Rd5! doesn't help Black at all) 29 Rb6 Qh8 then 30 Ne7+ Kh7 31 Nxc6 and White wins.

**28 ... Ra2 29 Qc4 Ra5 30 Qc3 Ra2 31 Qc4 Ra5 32 Qc3 Ra2 ½-½**

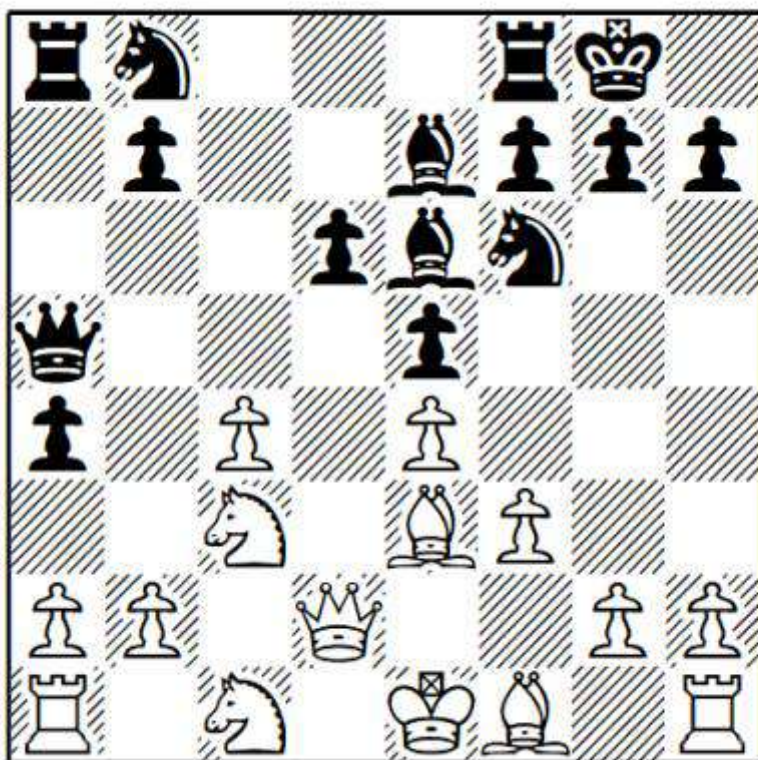
Since 33 Qc4 repeats the position for the third time.

*Game 25*

**K.Piorun-B.Socko**

Warsaw 2016

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3 e5 6 Nb3 Be7 7 c4 0-0 8 Be3 a5 9 Nc3 a4 10 Nc1 Qa5 11 Qd2 Be6**



... *Be6* instead of ... *Nc6*

So far everything is quite ordinary and one could expect 12 Rb1, preparing b2-b4, or a developing move like 12 Be2 or 12 Bd3. Piorun has a sharper battle in mind.

### 12 b4! Qd8

Perhaps taken by surprise, Socko retreats the queen.

a) 12 ... Qxb4?? loses to 13 Rb1 Qa5 14 Bb6 Qa6 15 Nd5! (15 c5 Bc4 keeps Black in the game) 15 ... Bd8 16 c5 and White wins the queen.

b) 12 ... axb3 is objectively best, when White plays 13 Nxb3. We'll look at this in the next game.

### 13 Bd3

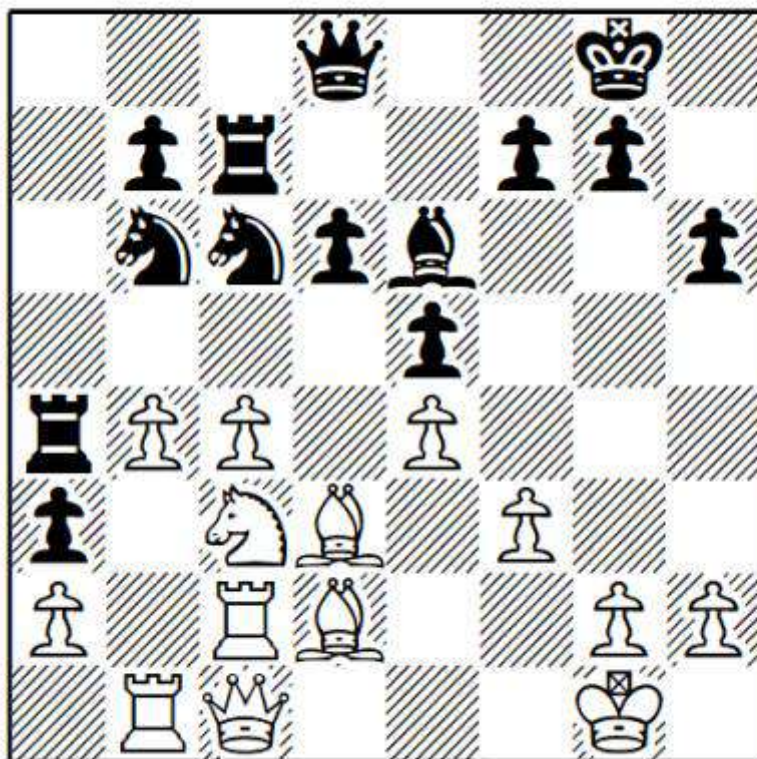
White has gained space on the queenside and already stands better. Note that the a4-pawn tends to be weak, whereas the c4-pawn is quite safe. If Black attacks it with ... Rc8, then Nd5 is always a good answer.

13 ... Nfd7 14 Nd5 h6 15 Nxe7+ Qxe7 16 Ne2 Rc8 17 Rc1 a3 18 0-0 Nc6 19 Rc2 Qd8 20 Rb1

The next question is how to make further progress.

**20 ... Nb6 21 Qc1 Ra4 22 Bd2 Rc7 23 Rb3**

White had a good opportunity here to bring the other knight to d5 with 23 Nc3!.



*What's wrong with ... Rxb4 - ?*

**Question:** What happens if Black takes the b-pawn?

**Answer:** After 23 ... Rxb4 24 Nd5! Rxb1 25 Qxb1 Black loses the exchange, since 25 ... Bxd5? 26 cxd5 Nd4 27 Qxb6 Nxc2 28 Bxc2 is even worse.

**23 ... Rc8 24 Rb1 Rc7 25 Qe1 Qc8 26 Qf2**

And here 26 Be3 was better, securing a big plus, as the computer demonstrates; e.g. 26 ... Nd4 27 Nxd4 exd4 28 Bxd4 Nxc4 29 Qg3! Ne5 30 Rxc7 Qxc7 31 f4 Bxa2 32 fxe5! Bxb1 33 Qxg7+! Kxg7 34 exd6+ f6 35 dxc7 Ra8 36 Bxb1 and White wins.

In the game Black slowly took over the initiative but missed his chances as well, and the game finally ended in a draw after a long fight (117 moves).

*Game 26*

**D.Andreikin-M.Tazbir**

Kazan 2013

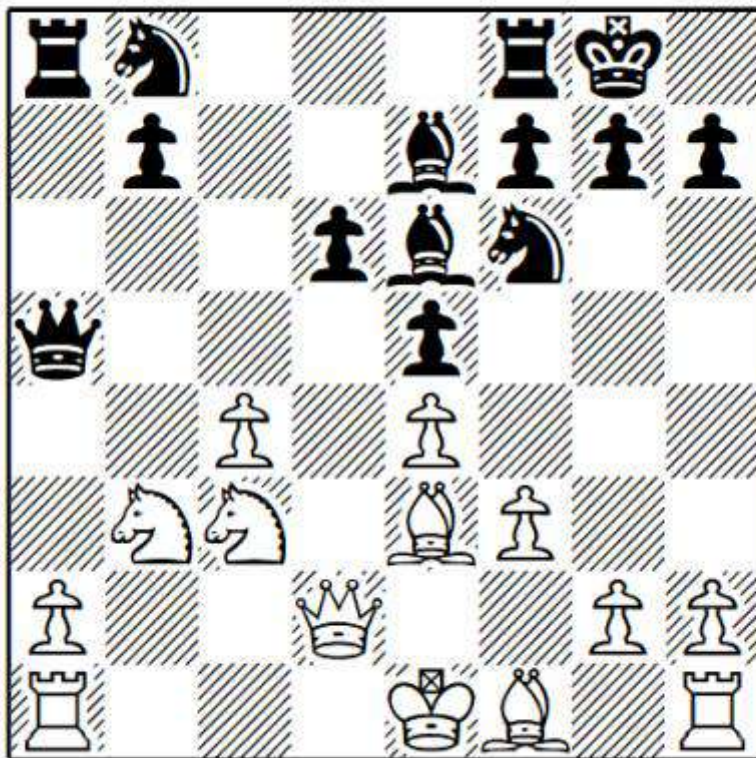
**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3 e5 6 Nb3 Be7 7 c4 0-0 8 Nc3 a5 9 Be3 a4 10 Nc1 Qa5 11 Qd2 Be6**

If Black wants to prevent an immediate b2-b4 and force White to spend time on Rb1, then 11 ... Nc6 is the way to go, as in Game 24.

**12 b4 axb3**

This time rather than retreat the queen Black takes en passant.

**13 Nxb3**



*Activating the c1-knight*

An interesting pawn structure has arisen. At first sight it appears that White now has more weaknesses, but this is not the case. He can play Nd5 at some point and recapture with the c-pawn if Black exchanges on d5. Then both players have one weak pawn on the queenside, but White has more pieces to join the fight because the central pawn chain cuts off Black's minor pieces from that flank.

### **13 ... Qd8**

After 13 ... Qc7 the queen is more exposed to ideas of Nb5 or Nd5.

Instead, 13 ... Qa3 14 Nb5 Qa4 is an interesting way to keep the queen more active. 15 Nc7 looks good, but then Black sacs the exchange with counterplay; e.g. 15 ... Nbd7 16 Nxa8 Rxa8 17 Qd1 b5 18 Nd2 with a dynamic balance.

Note that the immediate sac 14 ... Qxb3? is insufficient, as after 15 axb3 Rxa1+ 16 Kf2 Nbd7 17 Rg1! White is ready to unpin the bishop, so Black does not have enough compensation.

### **14 Be2 Na6 15 0-0 Nd7 16 Nb5**

The immediate 16 Nd5 does not achieve much, since Black switches to a typical dark-squared strategy with 16 ... h6!? 17 Qb2 Bg5 18 Bf2 and, in contrast to the game, White has no pressure on the d-file.

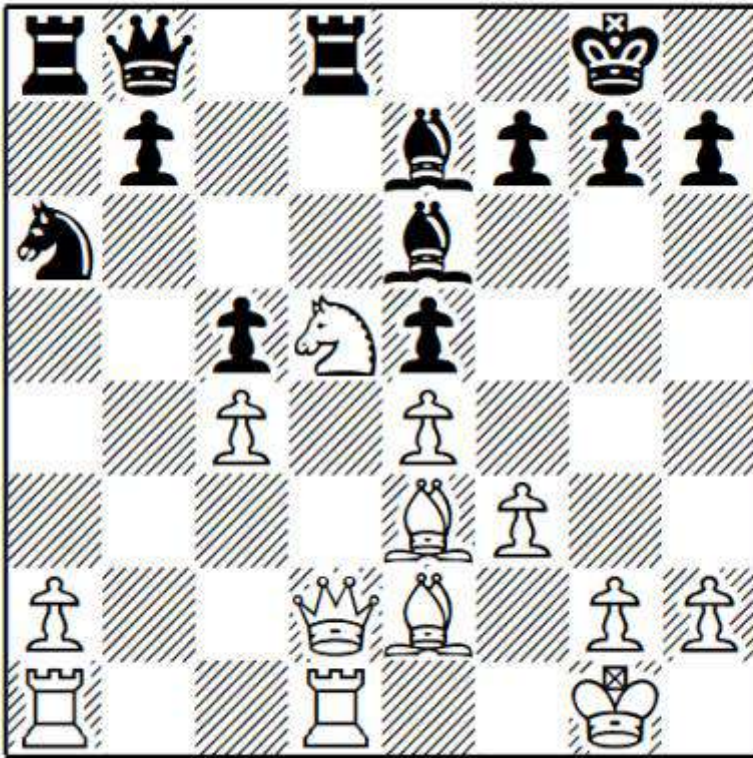
### **16 ... Ndc5 17 Rfd1 Qb8 18 Nxc5 dxc5?!**

Here 18 ... Nxc5 was better, allowing White to take the d-pawn, as after 19 Nxd6 Qxd6 20 Qxd6 Bxd6 21 Rxd6 Nb3! 22 Rb1 Rxa2 23 Bd3 Na5 Black is close to equality.

### **19 Nc3**

Now that there is no target on the d-file, White sends his knight back round to the outpost on d5.

### **19 ... Rd8 20 Nd5**



*A strong knight*

**20 ... Bf8 21 Qb2 Nb4**

In similar fashion Black starts to bring his knight to d4, but to achieve that he must give up a pawn.

**22 Rdb1 Nc6**

Here 22 ... Ra7!? is an interesting try to prepare 23 ... Nc6 without sacrificing the b7-pawn. White can win the exchange with 23 Nxb4 cxb4 24 Bxa7 Qxa7+ 25 Kh1 and must be slightly better, but it wouldn't be easy to make progress.

Obviously not 22 ... Nxd5? 23 cxd5 and White has a strong protected passed pawn to go with his pressure on the b-file.

**23 Qxb7 Nd4 24 Qxb8 Rdx8**

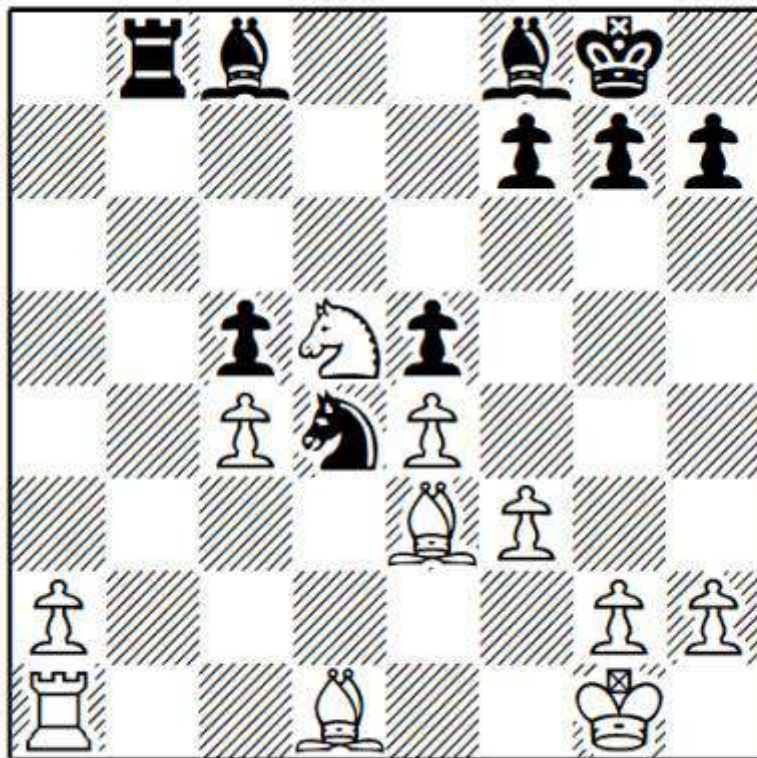
Black threatens to win the pawn back, so White must find a way to prevent it

**25 Rxb8 Rxb8**

Not 25 ... Nxe2+ 26 Kf2 Rxb8 27 Kxe2, as exchanging the strong knight only makes things worse for Black.

### 26 Bd1 Bc8

Planning to target the c4-pawn. 26 ... Rb2 has no threat and White simply pushes the a-pawn.



*How best to proceed?*

### 27 Ba4

Another possibility was 27 Bd2, intending 27 ... Ba6 28 Bb3! Bc8 (not 28 ... Nxb3? 29 axb3 and the a6-bishop is attacked) 29 Kf2 Be6 (not 29 ... Nxb3? 30 axb3 and the pawn still cannot be captured due to 30 ... Rxb3 31 Ra8 Be6 32 Ne7+ and wins) 30 Bc3 with an edge for White.

### 27 ... Rb2

On 27 ... Ba6, White planned 28 Bxd4 cxd4 29 Bb5! Bxb5 30 Rb1 and wins.

### 28 Bd1 Ba6 29 Bc1 Rb8 30 Ne3 g6 31 Bb3 Kg7

I would prefer 31 ... Bh6!, improving the bishop according to the principle that everybody must join the game. After 32 Kf2 Kg7 Black has one more active piece than in the game.

**32 Kf2 Bd6 33 Bd2 f5 34 exf5 gxf5 35 Bc3 Kg6 36 Rd1 Bf8 37 g4 fxg4 38 Nxc4 Nxb3??**

Entirely the wrong moment to take the bishop. After 38 ... Kf5 Black is only slightly worse.

**39 Nxe5+!**

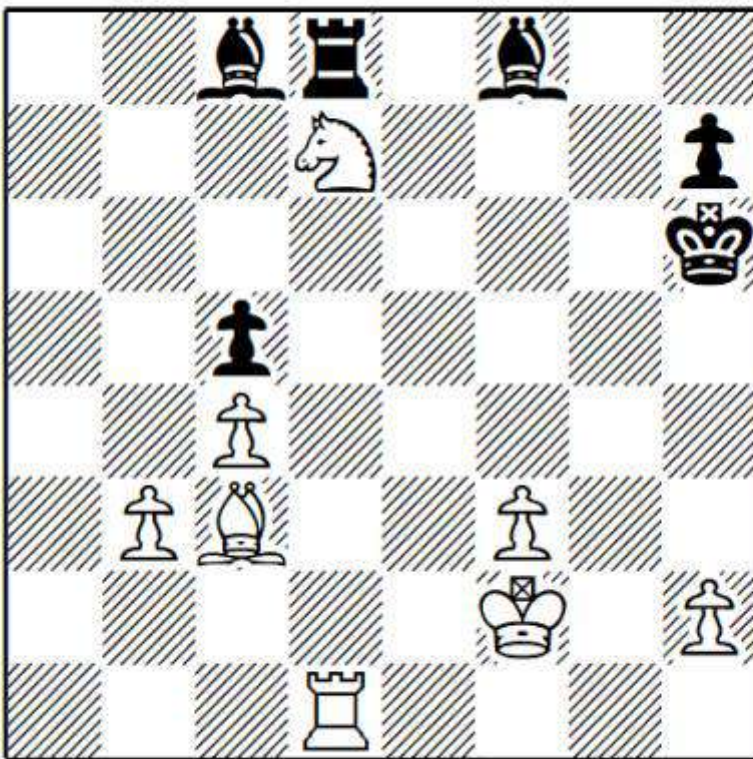
A nice zwischenzug, which wins.

**39 ... Kh6 40 Nd7**

And one more zwischenzug.

**40 ... Rd8 41 axb3 Bc8**

It looks as if White has got in trouble with his pinned knight, but actually there is a good solution.



*How to unpin?*

**Question:** Can you spot how to solve the problem with the pin?

**Answer: 42 Bd2+! Kh5**

Now the knight can move again and White enjoys his two extra pawns.

**43 Nf6+ Kg6 44 Nd5 Bf5 45 Ra1 Bc2 46 Ra6+ Rd6 47 Ra3 Rd7 48 Ra6+ Rd6 49 Ra8 Kf7 50 Ra7+ Ke6 51 b4 Bb3 52 bxc5 Rc6 53 Nf4+ Kf6 54 Bc3+ Kg5 55 Kg3 Bxc4 56 Rxh7 Rh6 57 Rxh6 Bxh6 58 Be5 Kf5 59 Bd6 1-0**

*Game 27*

**VI.Kovalev-Li Ruifeng**

St. Louis 2017

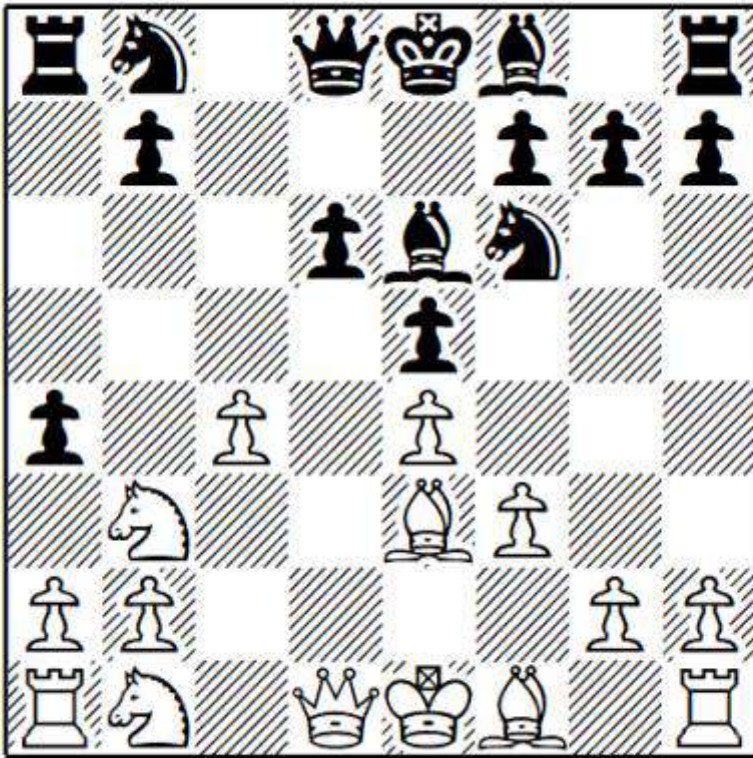
**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3 e5 6 Nb3 Be6 7 c4 a5**

With this move Black shows that his ambitions are not to win the c4-pawn but to aim for a positional game as in the Kalashnikov Variation. This approach is not bad, since all the black pieces find good squares. However, I believe that White has the easier task and is objectively slightly better here.

**8 Be3**

Not 8 Nc3?! because 8 ... a4! 9 Nd2 would then shut in the c1-bishop.

**8 ... a4**



*Where should the knight go?*

### 9 N3d2

In contrast to the variation with 6 ... Be7 from the previous games, it is better to retreat the knight to d2 here. That's because 9 Nc1 can be met by 9 ... b5!, intending 10 cxb5 d5 with strong counterplay, and 10 Nc3? dxc4 is clearly not an option for White because the e6-bishop defends the c-pawn.

**9 ... Qa5 10 Nc3 Be7**

**Remember:** 10 ... a3? is a mistake. At first sight undermining the defender of the c3-knight seems quite logical, and you could get the impression that White overlooked something, but in fact Black is committing a non-obvious blunder. White can get a close to winning position with 11 b4! Qxb4 12 Nd5! Bxd5 13 cxd5 and the queenside is dominated by White who will regain the b7-pawn easily after 14 Rb1.

### 11 Bd3

We looked at 11 Be2 in the theoretical notes. It is hard to say whether the bishop is better on e2 or on d3. Even at grandmaster level both moves

are played, so you can choose your own way.

### **11 ... Nbd7**

This is not the most typical move here but at this point Black already has several plans available. A common idea is exchanging dark-squared bishops, which Black can try after mutual castling or immediately:

a) 11 ... Bd8 (after this White should count on faster development in order to get a better position) 12 Nd5! is not the only move to fight for an advantage, but I like the resulting queenside initiative by White; e.g. 12 ... Bxd5 13 cxd5 Bb6 14 Bxb6 Qxb6 15 Nc4 Qc7 16 Qd2 Nbd7 17 Be2 0-0 18 Qb4 Nc5 19 Qb6.

b) 11 ... 0-0 12 0-0 Bd8 is more frequently seen, and here you can consider 13 Kh1 as in the 11 Be2 line given in the introduction.

### **12 0-0 Nc5**

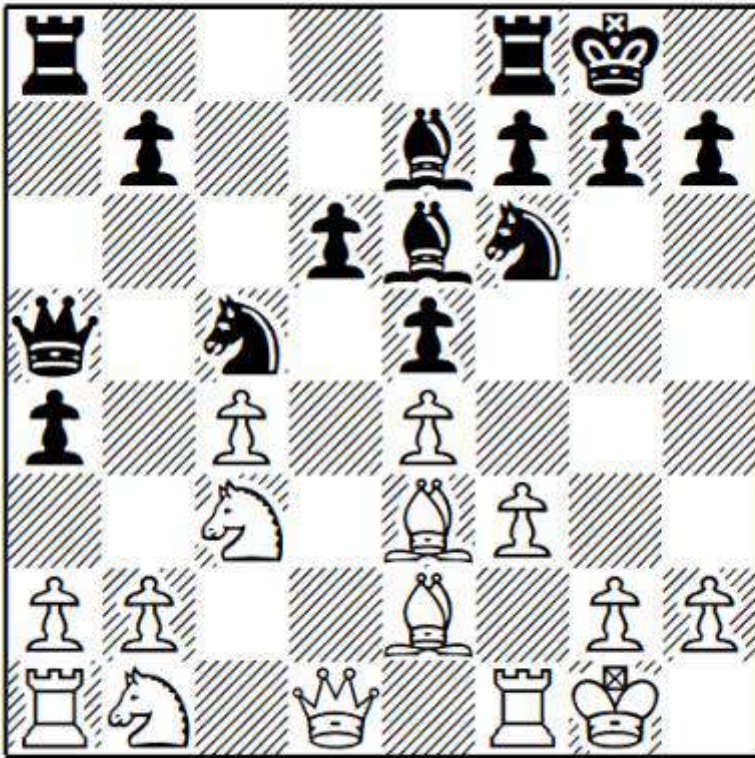
This is an original move by Black, intending to show that our bishop is misplaced on d3. However, it is not clear what else the knight is doing on c5 and White can force it back later.

### **13 Be2 0-0**

Even at this moment, when Black is almost fully developed, 13 ... a3? does not work. White's queenside control is simply too strong, and he can again reply with 14 b4 Qxb4 15 Nd5 Nxd5 16 cxd5 Bd7 17 Rb1 and is clearly better.

### **14 Qc2**

Since I was not entirely happy with the plan in the game, I looked for some alternative and found that after 14 Ndb1! Black is really suffering.



*A manoeuvre to remember*

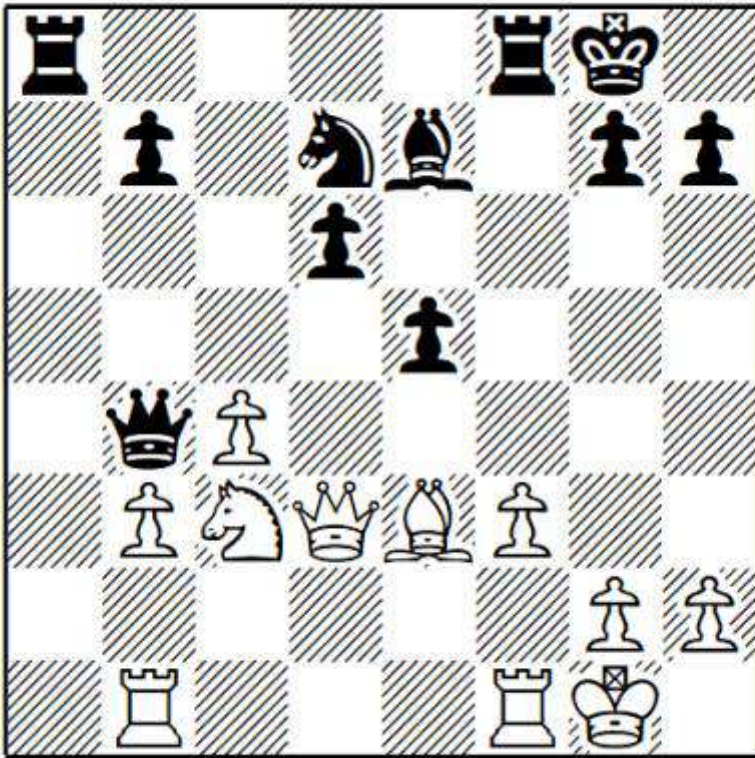
White transfers the knight to b5, meanwhile preventing all ... a4-a3 and ... b7-b5 ideas. Black struggles to find a plan; e.g. 14 ... Nh5 (hoping to achieve ... f7-f5; after 14 ... Rfc8 15 Na3 Black has no active play) 15 g3 g6 16 Na3 Ng7 17 Nab5 and now if 17 ... f5? then 18 Nd5 gives White an overwhelming advantage.

**14 ... Nfd7 15 Rab1 Qd8**

Here too 15 ... f5? is not a good idea for Black.

**Remember:** The move ... f7-f5 often makes our task easier, especially when Black must recapture on f5 with a piece. Black is just weakening himself and we have a clear plan of exploiting the holes on e4 and d5.

After 16 b3 axb3 17 Nxb3 Nxb3 18 axb3 Qb4 19 exf5 Bxf5 20 Bd3 Bxd3 21 Qxd3



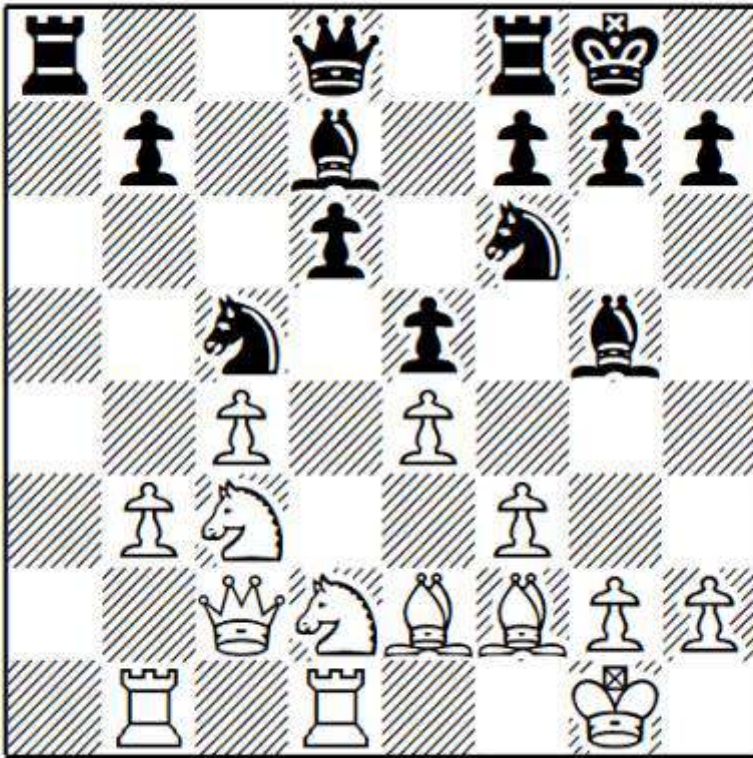
*Outposts on e4 and d5*

White has a very comfortable position with excellent outposts and can play against the weak central pawns.

**16 b4 axb3 17 axb3 Bg5 18 Bf2!**

Of course we want to keep this bishop if possible.

**18 ... Nf6 19 Rfd1 Bd7**



*White is in control*

**Question:** Which piece can we improve?

**Answer: 20 Nf1!**

Improving our knight by rerouting it to the d5-square.

**20 ... Qe7 21 Ne3 Bxe3 22 Bxe3 Rfd8 23 Qd2 Bc6 24 b4 Ncxe4?**

This sacrifice is no good at all. 24 ... Na4 was more resilient, but after 25 Nd5 Bxd5 26 exd5 White is close to winning anyway because the black knight is stranded on the rim.

**25 fxe4 Nxe4 26 Nxe4 Bxe4 27 Ra1 Rxa1 28 Rxa1 h6 29 Bb6 Rc8 30 Rd1 Rc6 31 Bf2 b5 32 c5 d5 33 Bxb5 Rg6 34 Bg3 f5 35 Bd3 Kh7 36 Bxe4 dxe4 37 Qd5 1-0**

Black resigned, probably because 37 ... f4 38 Qxe4 fxg3 39 Rd6 leads to a lost pawn ending.

In the final game of this chapter we'll look at what can happen if Black just tries to develop normally against our c2-c4 set-up.

*Game 28*

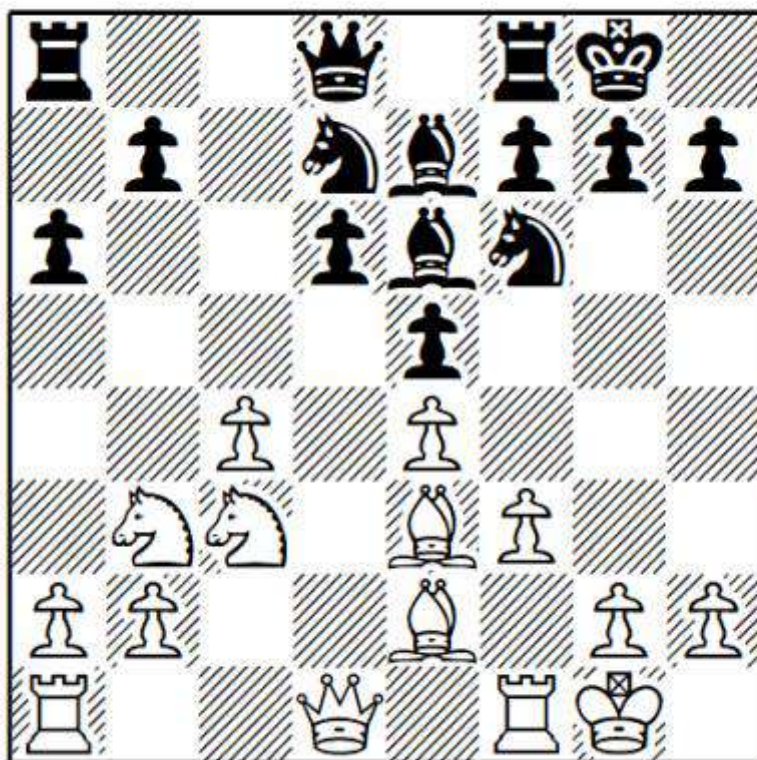
**J.Hacker-M.Dobrikov**

Neustadt 2019

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3 e5 6 Nb3 Be6 7 c4 Be7**

During the game I was thinking about 7 ... Nxe4? which works in some other scenarios but not here. After 8 fxe4! Qh4+ 9 Kd2 Qxe4 10 Nc3 White will soon consolidate, since the king is in no real danger. Overall it is the material advantage which counts.

**8 Nc3 0-0 9 Be3 a6 10 Be2 Nbd7 11 0-0**



*White is better*

The position shown in the diagram above is very typical for our variation. White has a typical space advantage, which means a very solid and long-

term advantage. Nevertheless, this position is encountered quite frequently, and it is not so surprising because Black simply developed all pieces in a Najdorf-style. Let's quickly discuss a few plans for both sides:

Black usually aims for the ... f7-f5 break after ... Nh5, ... g7-g6, trying to create some counterplay on the kingside. Another possibility is ... Nh5 and ... Nf4, often connected with a pawn sacrifice to obtain dark-squared compensation. A very strong antidote to this plan is g2-g3, despite it appearing to weaken White's king position. We will see this in the main line below.

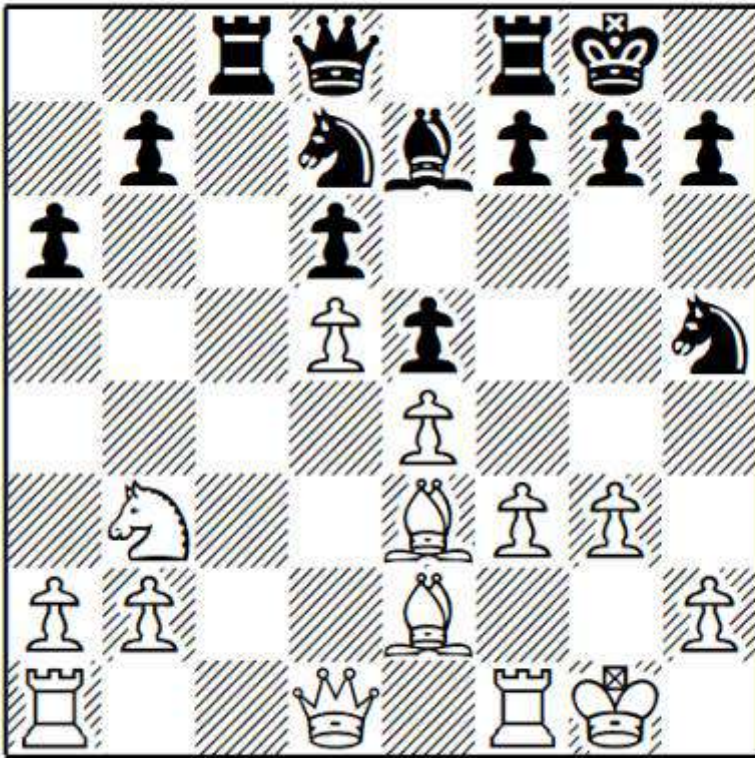
The plan of pressuring c4 with ... Rc8 is often seen in practice. White will be obliged to play Nd5 at some point, and Black then exchanges on d5 in most cases. But in my opinion, after c4xd5, White's space advantage confers a zero-risk long-term advantage with the closed structure in the centre.

### **11 ... Rc8 12 Nd5 Bxd5 13 cxd5**

Not 13 exd5? and Black gets counterplay with his kingside majority after 13 ... Nh5, followed by ... g7-g6 and ... f7-f5.

### **13 ... Nh5 14 g3**

Now 14 ... Nf4 is no longer possible. Note that Black cannot play 14 ... f5 either, because after 15 exf5 Rxf5 16 g4 White would win material.



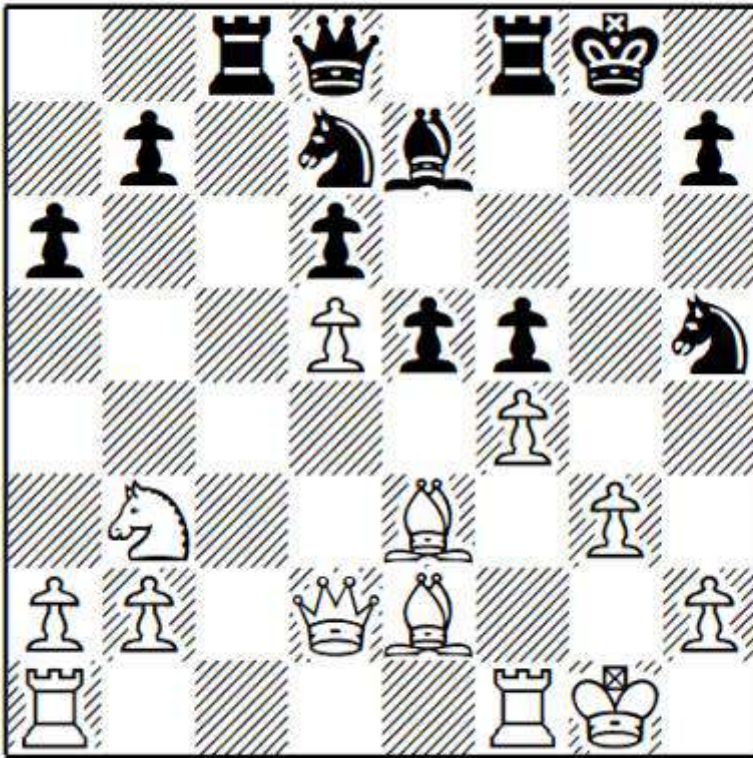
*Precautions against ... Nf4 and ... f5*

**14 ... g6**

Preparing ... f7-f5 again, but White has no worries about this and just goes on slowly improving his position.

**15 Qd2 Qc7?**

Having spent several move preparing it, Black probably ought to have tried 15 ... f5 16 exf5 gxf5, though after 17 f4! (another benefit of g2-g3) White keeps an edge.



*Black has many weaknesses*

For example, 17 ... Nhf6 18 Rae1 and Black will be under pressure for a long time. He can play neither ... e5-e4 nor ... e5xf4 due to Nd4-e6, plus the f5-pawn is becoming a target.

**16 Rac1 Qb8 17 Na5**

Another option was 17 Qb4 Rxc1 18 Rxc1 Rc8 19 Rxc8+ Qxc8 and then 20 Na5, since 20 ... Qc2 21 Qd2 Qb1+ 22 Kg2 Qxa2 23 Nxb7 is very good for White.

**17 ... Rxc1 18 Rxc1 Rc8**

If 18 ... Bd8 19 Qb4 Bxa5 20 Qxa5, White can be very happy to play with the two bishops.

**19 Rxc8+ Qxc8 20 Qc3**

After this, Black loses a pawn by force and has no chances of survival in the endgame. **20 ... Qxc3**

Moving the queen was no better: 20 ... Qb8 21 Qb4 b5 (or 21 ... Nc5 22 Bxc5 dxc5 23 Qxb7, while if 21 ... Bd8 22 Nxb7, Black has no activity and

so cannot exploit the pin) 22 Nc6 Qe8 23 Qa5 and White wins.

**21 bxc3 b6 22 Nc6 Bf8 23 Bxa6 Nhf6 24 Bc8 Bg7 25 g4 Nc5 26 Bxc5  
dxc5 1-0**

# Chapter Four

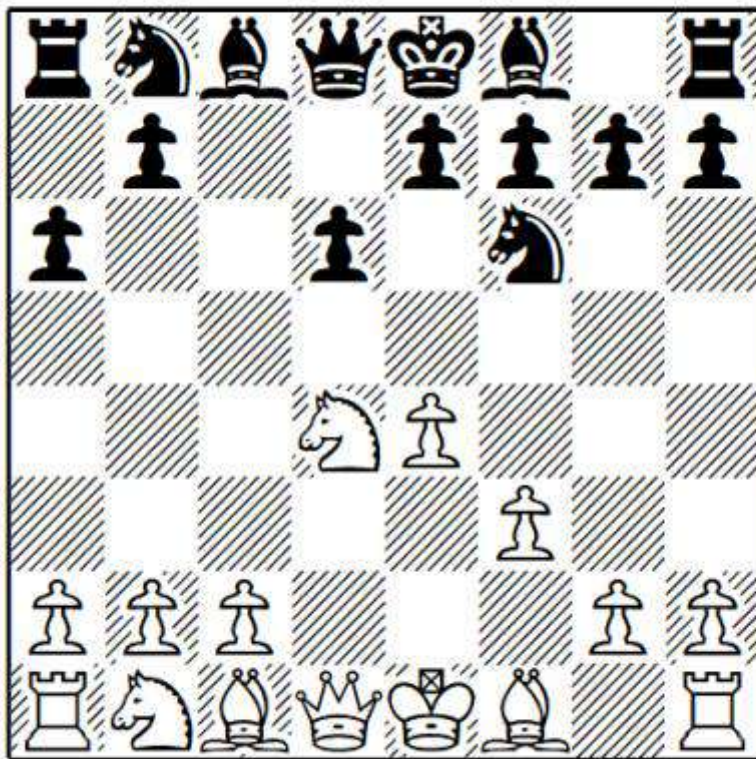
## Anti-Najdorf: 5 ... a6

### Introduction

In this chapter we will examine 5 ... a6!?, a variation which is seen in practice from time to time, especially at club level. The reasons for choosing 5 ... a6 can be the desire to enter a Hedgehog position or simply to play the Najdorf move anyway. In my opinion, neither are dangerous for us, and we have good prospects of achieving an opening advantage.

We reach our initial position after the following moves.

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3 a6!?**



*Black allows 6 c4*

As just mentioned, this is an approach which is mainly employed by

Najdorf players who try to stick to their Najdorf set-up anyway. White can now comfortably play 6 c4 and I do not consider the Black plan critical at all. Nonetheless, we will have a look at the different approaches Black can employ from here and try to find the best antidotes against them.

### 6 c4!

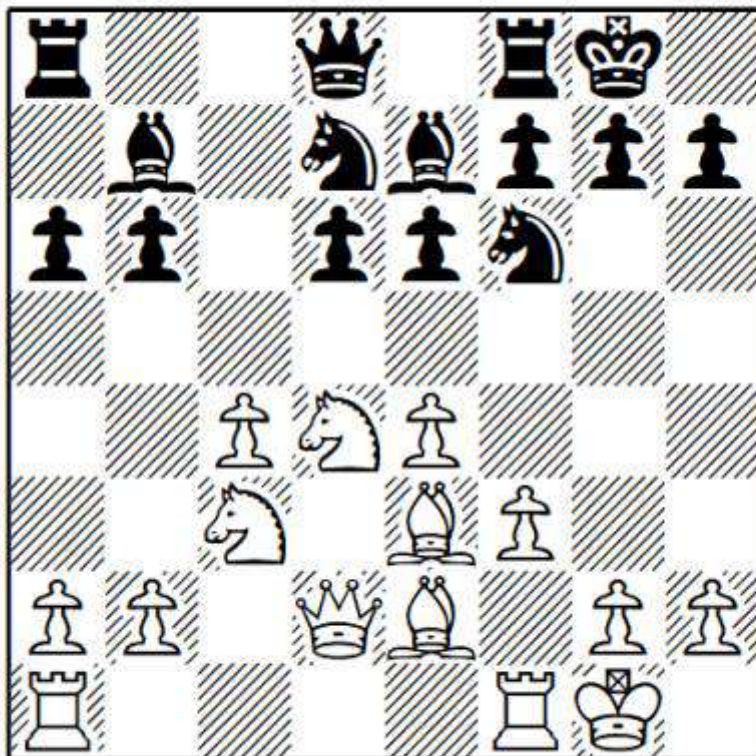
In the style of our repertoire we go for 6 c4 whenever it is possible.

### 6 ... e6

This is the most popular move in this position, which is sensible for several reasons.

If Black wants to play ... e7-e5, it is far better to do so on move five and combine it with ... a7-a5 rather than ... a7-a6, as we saw in the previous chapter. Similarly, ... g7-g6 lines are more efficient without ... a7-a6 included.

The moves ... a7-a6 and ... e7-e6 complement one another well and Black reaches a harmonious, if slightly passive, Hedgehog set-up, such as in the following diagram.



## *The Hedgehog*

One practical advantage from White's perspective is that the average Najdorf player does not usually have a deep knowledge about Hedgehog positions, because if Black likes them it is easier to reach them via Kan or Taimanov move orders.

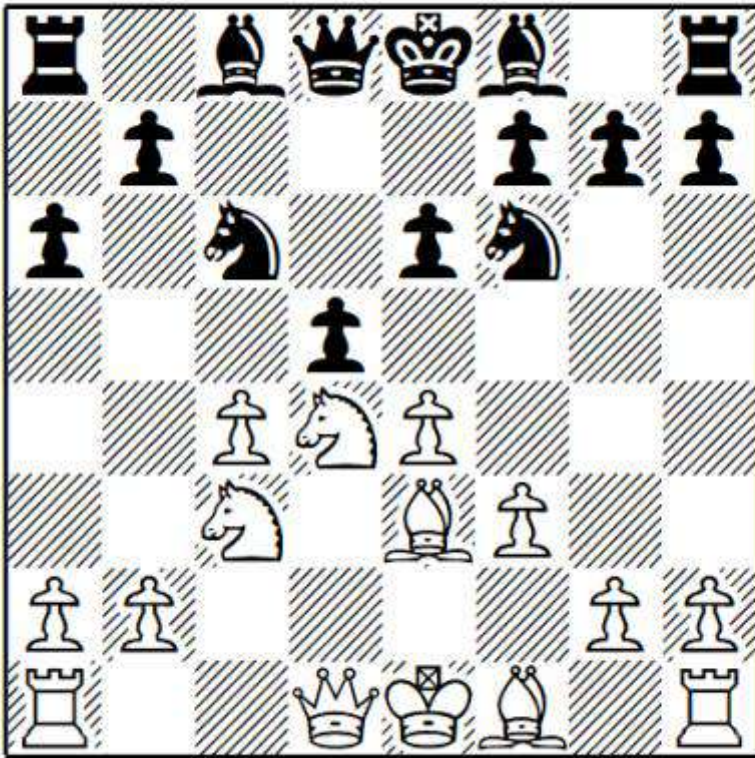
Enough general considerations; let's have a look at the alternatives:

a) 6 ... e5?! is answered by 7 Nc2!, when it already becomes obvious that Black's move order is bad, because we have an additional square available for our knight, and it is a pretty good one! The knight is better placed on c2 than on b3 because we can head for the d5-square via b4 or e3 far more easily. We get a pleasant advantage after a normal set-up with Nc3, Be3, Be2 and 0-0 as in Game 29, so you do not need a lot of theoretical knowledge here.

However, I should mention that the logical-looking plan of 8 Nc3, 9 Ne3 and 10 Ned5 is a bit too slow, since Black is ahead in development and can get a comfortable position after 7 ... Be6 8 Nc3 Be7 9 Ne3 0-0 10 Ned5 Nxd5 11 cxd5 Bc8, followed by a quick ... f7-f5.

b) 6 ... g6 is not critical at all, because ... a7-a6 is not generally a useful move in Maróczy Bind Dragon positions. For more information about this see Chapter Five.

c) 6 ... Nc6 develops a piece towards the centre so needs to be taken seriously, but it does not fit in very well with ... a7-a6 either. After something like 7 Be3 e6 8 Nc3 Be7 Black gets a Hedgehog set-up with the knight on c6, rather than d7, which is a slight disadvantage (see Game 30 for more details). The only independent way to justify ... Nc6 is to play 8 ... d5!?.



*An independent idea*

But then 9 cxd5 exd5 10 Nxc6 bxc6 11 Qa4 gives White the advantage, due to the pressure on the central pawns and the superior pawn structure.

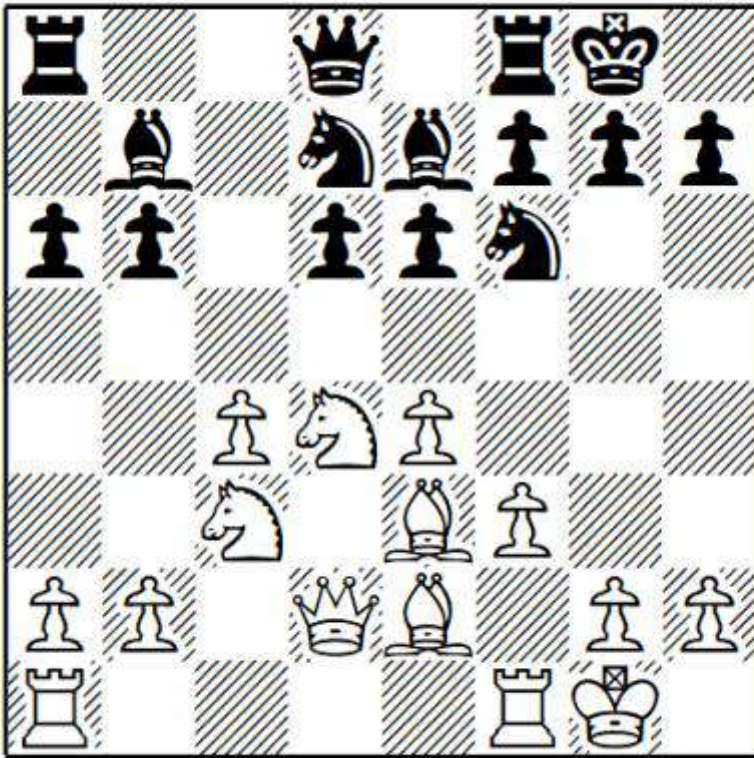
**7 Nc3 Be7 8 Be3 0-0 9 Be2 b6**

Developing the queen first is an equally good option, and 9 ... Qc7 is likely to transpose after, for example, 10 0-0 Nbd7 11 Qd2 b6 and so on, as in Games 31 and 32.

**10 0-0 Bb7**

There are not many tricks with move orders, except that 10 ... Nbd7? would obviously be a mistake in view of 11 Nc6 with a huge plus for White.

**11 Qd2 Nbd7**



*A typical position*

his is the kind of position we can easily get out of this opening and I like it for several reasons. First, it is easy to remember for White. Second, we have a pleasant advantage because Black does not have active plans, whereas we do. We are aiming to expand on the queenside and then open some files or diagonals there; at the same time we will leave our kingside as it is, in order not to create weaknesses. The most important thing to watch out for is a central ... d6-d5 breakthrough, but fortunately that is the only dangerous idea and we will see a way how to handle it.

### **Illustrative Games**

We will now continue deepening our knowledge about the 5 ... a6 set-ups by having a look at some sample games.

In Game 29, the inferior choice 6 ... e5?! leads to an excellent game for White with normal developing moves.

Developing the knight to c6 is also suboptimal in a Hedgehog structure and potentially risks falling for tactical tricks as we see in the notes to Game 30. In the game itself Black avoids trouble by exchanging knights on d4, but this gives White easier play on the semi-open d-file, where his own knight was in the way.

We then move on the mainline Hedgehog with ... e7-e6 and ... Nbd7. In Games 31 and 32, we encounter an easy but effective plan connected with a quick a4-a5 by White, creating interesting possibilities on the queenside.

### *Game 29*

**Z.Varga-J.Gunnarsson**

Budapest 2008

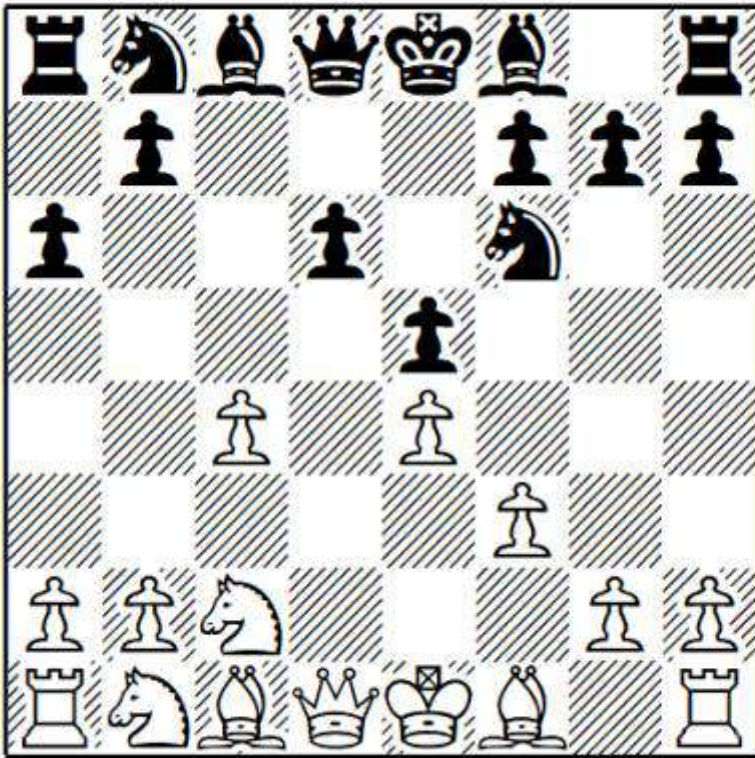
**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3 a6**

As we've already noted, if Black wants to play ... e7-e5 it is better to so straightaway; in particular before White has played c2-c4, since we cannot go to c2 with our knight then.

**6 c4 e5?!**

This has not been seen very often and for good reasons. White scores an excellent 65% from here, and the position is very easy for White to handle. In my opinion Black just gets an inferior version of the set-ups we saw in the previous chapter.

**7 Nc2!**



*Best retreat for the knight*

Since we have the choice, we step back to c2 instead. From here we only require two moves to reach the d5-square, whereas after Nb3 this would take much longer.

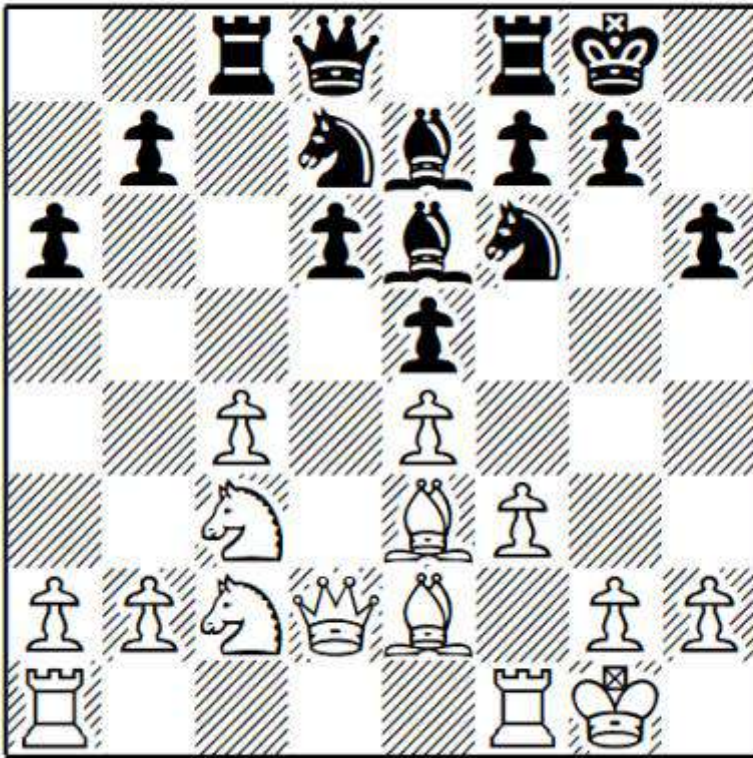
**7 ... Be7**

The sacrifice 7 ... Nxe4? does not work at all here. After 8 fxe4 Qh4+ 9 Kd2 Qxe4 10 Nc3 White consolidates the material plus very easily.

**8 Nc3 0-0 9 Be3**

Transferring the knight to d5 at once via 9 Ne3 might come to mind, but this neglects development, and Black is fine after 9 ... Be6 10 Ned5 Nxd5 11 cxd5 Bc8, followed by a quick ... f5-f5.

**9 ... Be6 10 Qd2 h6 11 Be2 Nbd7 12 0-0 Rc8**



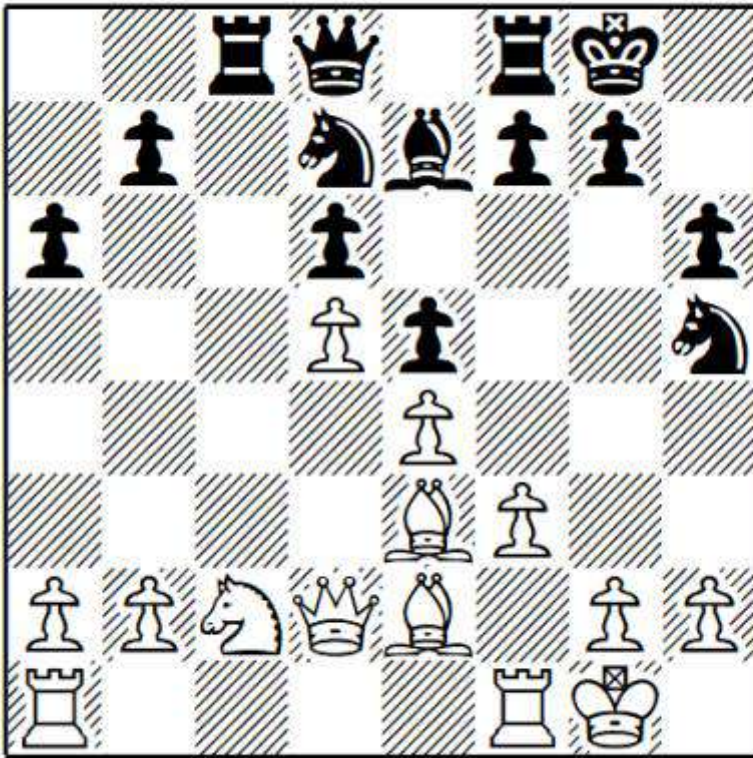
*A perfect position*

This is a dream position for White, who has brought all his pieces to decent squares and is ready for 13 Nd5, gaining more space. Meanwhile Black lacks counterplay as both ... b7-b5 and ... f7-f5 are far from realistic. In short, White already stands much better.

**13 Nd5 Bxd5**

Of course 13 ... Nxd5 is not possible.

**14 cxd5 Nh5**



*Preparing ... Nf4 or ... f7-f5*

### 15 g3!

We've seen this move before in Game 28. It's a strong reaction and a pattern worth remembering. Black has ideas of implementing ... f7-f5 at some point as well as playing ... Nf4, sacrificing a pawn for great dark-squared compensation. 15 g3 prevents the latter, and ... f7-f5 is not possible either, since White would just take it.

Alternatively, 15 Rfc1 is also good. For example, after 15 ... Bg5 (Black can play 15 ... Nf4, but there is no obligation to capture; instead, 16 Bf1!, followed by g2-g3 and Bh3, looks nice for White) 16 Bxg5 Qxg5 17 Qxg5 hxg5 18 Ne3 Nhf6 19 Nf5 Rxc1+ 20 Rxc1 Ne8 21 b4 White's activity, plus the weakness on d6, grant him a close to decisive advantage.

### 15 ... Bg5 16 Bxg5 hxg5

As we saw above, the exchange of queens would give White an even bigger advantage.

### 17 Ne3 g6 18 Rac1 Nhf6

If 18 ... Nc5 then 19 b4 Na4 20 Rxc8 Qxc8 21 Rc1 leaves the a4-knight misplaced. Black plays the same way in the game, while also sacrificing two tempi to encourage White to weaken the kingside with h2-h3 and Kh2.

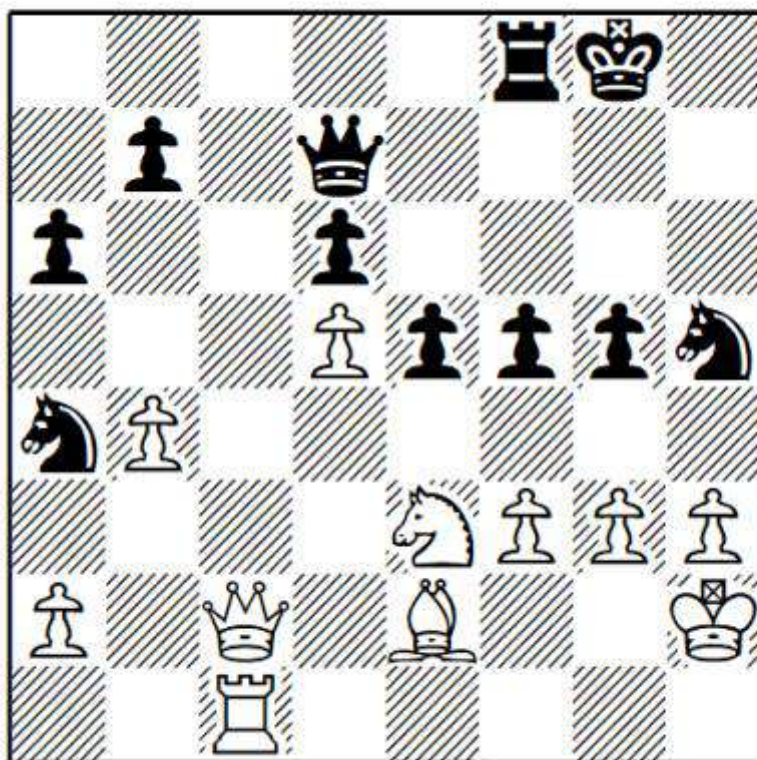
### 19 h3

Directed against possible ... g5-g4 ideas. 19 Rxc8 Qxc8 20 Rc1 was also possible, but exchanging rooks helps Black to untangle his pieces more quickly.

### 19 ... Nc5 20 Kh2 Nh5 21 b4 Na4 22 Rxc8 Qxc8 23 Rc1 Qd7 24 Qc2

Here 24 Nc4 (discovering an attack on the g5-pawn) 24 ... f6 25 Bd1 b5 26 Bxa4 bxa4 27 Qe3 is close to winning for White.

### 24 ... f5 25 exf5 gxf5



*Black plans ... f5-f4*

### 26 Qc7?

Seeing Black about to gain some counterplay with ... f5-f4, White rushes to exchange the queens, but this is a mistake. Instead, 26 Bd3! points

at Black's weaknesses and he can no longer hold the position together; e.g. 26 ... f4 27 gxf4 Nxf4 28 Bf5 Qe8 29 Rg1 and White is winning.

**26 ... Qxc7 27 Rxc7 f4 28 gxf4 Nxf4?**

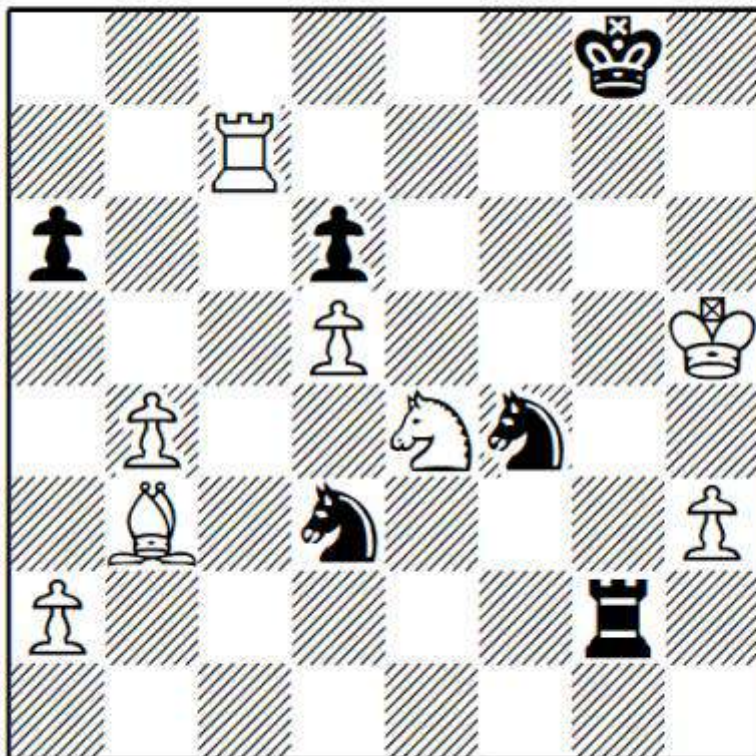
Missing 28 ... Rxf4 with very good drawing chances. The point is that after 29 Rxb7 there is always 29 ... Nc3, picking up the f3-pawn in return.

**29 Bd1 Nb2 30 Bb3?**

Another mistake. After 30 Bc2! the bishop can stabilize the centre and simultaneously join an attack against the black king; e.g. 30 ... Nh5 31 Bg6 Nf4 32 Bh7+ Kh8 33 Be4 and White threatens Ng4 and Nh6+, while allowing no counterplay at all.

**30 ... Nh5 31 Rxb7 Rxf3 32 Ng4 Nf4 33 Nf6+ Kf8 34 Nh7+ Ke8?**

Probably Black was just too ambitious here. After 34 ... Kg8 the draw would be forced; e.g. 35 Nxg5 Rf2+ 36 Kg3 Rg2+ 37 Kh4 Nbd3 38 Rc7 e4! is very strong, so White must take the pawn and allow the perpetual: 39 Nxe4 Ng6+ 40 Kh5 Ngf4+ 41 Kh4 (not 41 Kh6?? Rg6 mate) 41 ... Ng6+ etc.



*Caught in the perpetual*

**35 Nxg5 Rf2+ 36 Kg3 Rg2+ 37 Kh4 Ng6+**

If Black tries 37 ... Nbd3 now, then 38 Ne6 wins. White threatens Ba4 mate, and there is no perpetual after 38 ... Ng6+ 39 Kh5 Ngf4+ 40 Kh6.

**38 Kh5 Nf4+ 39 Kh6 Rh2 40 Ne4 Rxh3+ 41 Kg7 Nh5+ 42 Kg8 1-0**

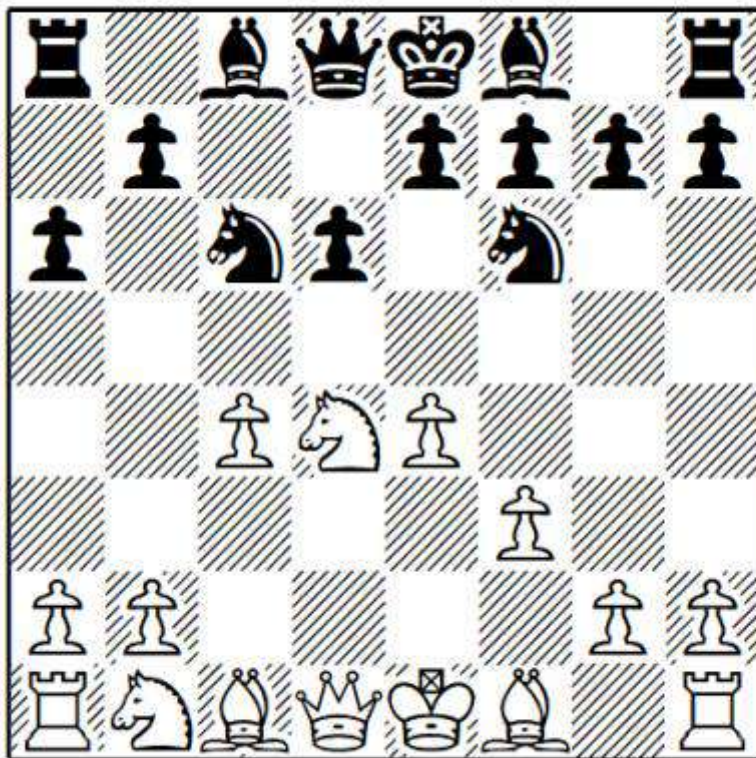
We continue with a game where Black decides to develop his knight to c6, before we move on to the mainline Hedgehog with ... Nbd7.

*Game 30*

**D.Kokarev-A.Pridorozhni**

Russian Rapid Championship, Khanty-Mansiysk 2018

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3 a6 6 c4 Nc6**



*The c6-knight is ideal*

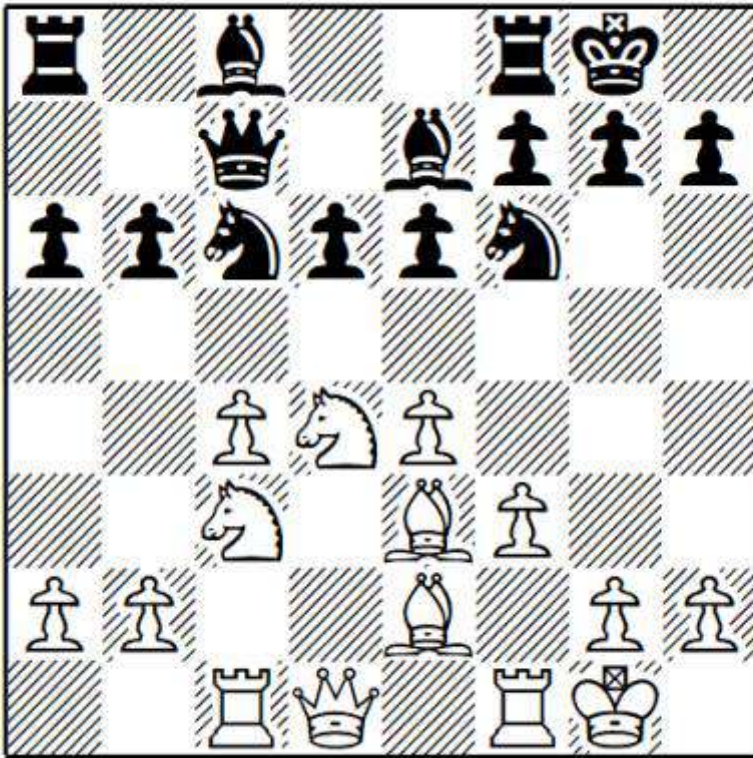
This move should always be considered, but when aiming for a Hedgehog set-up it is not ideal for a couple of reasons. Firstly, it makes it difficult for Black to bring fianchetto the c8-bishop because ... b7-b6 would leave the knight en prise. Secondly, an exchange of knights is more likely, which rather helps White, whose pieces are then aiming directly against the weaknesses at d6 and b6.

**7 Be3 e6 8 Nc3 Be7 9 Be2 0-0 10 0-0 Nxd4**

Instead:

a) 10 ... d5!? is an independent try to justify the placement of the c6-knight, but after 11 cxd5 exd5 12 Nxc6 bxc6 13 e5 Nd7 14 f4 White is slightly better with chances for a kingside attack. The game B.Firat-M.Sokac, Zadar 2014, continued 14 ... Bc5 15 Bxc5 Nxc5 16 Rc1 Rb8 17 b3 Rb4 18 a3 Rb8 19 b4 Ne6 20 f5 and White indeed had a nice attack.

b) 10 ... Qc7 is another idea, trying to make 11 ... b6 work. However, White has a strong solution to cross Black's plans, beginning with 11 Rc1!, when 11 ... b6 is exactly what White wants to see. (11 ... Nxd4 is the lesser evil but the position remains better for White for the same reason as in the main game.)

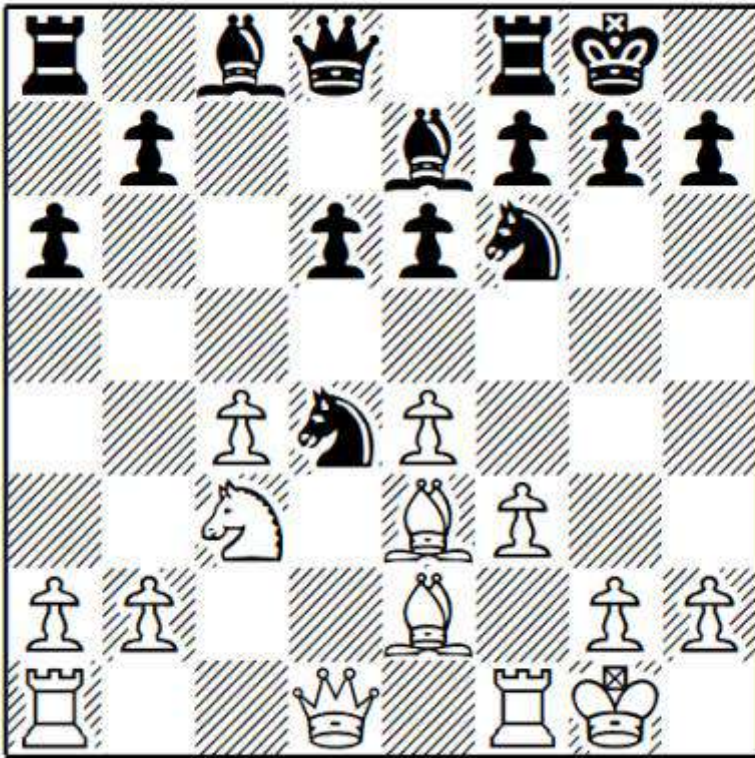


*What should White play?*

**Question:** Probably Black did not even consider White's next move. Can you find the idea?

**Answer:** 12 Nd5! is very effective. A capture on d5 will open the c-file, when White wins the piece back with interest; i.e. 12 ... exd5 (12 ... Qb7 does not help since 13 Nxc6! is untouchable and 13 ... exd5 14 cxd5 again leaves White with a huge plus) 13 cxd5 and White has won an important pawn while maintaining the positional pluses. Objectively Black is lost after just 13 moves. In another of the Russian grandmaster's games, White went on to win convincingly: 13 ... b5 14 Nxc6 Bb7 15 Qd4 Bxc6 16 Rxc6 Qa5 17 a3 Nd7 18 b4 Qd8 19 f4 Bf6 20 Qd3 Nb8 21 Bb6 Qe7 22 Rc7 Nd7 23 Bg4 Nxb6 24 Rxe7 Bxe7 25 e5 1-0 D.Kokarev-O.Kozlitin, Russian Cup, Samara 2002.

Returning to 10 ... Nxd4 at last:



*How to recapture?*

### **11 Qxd4!**

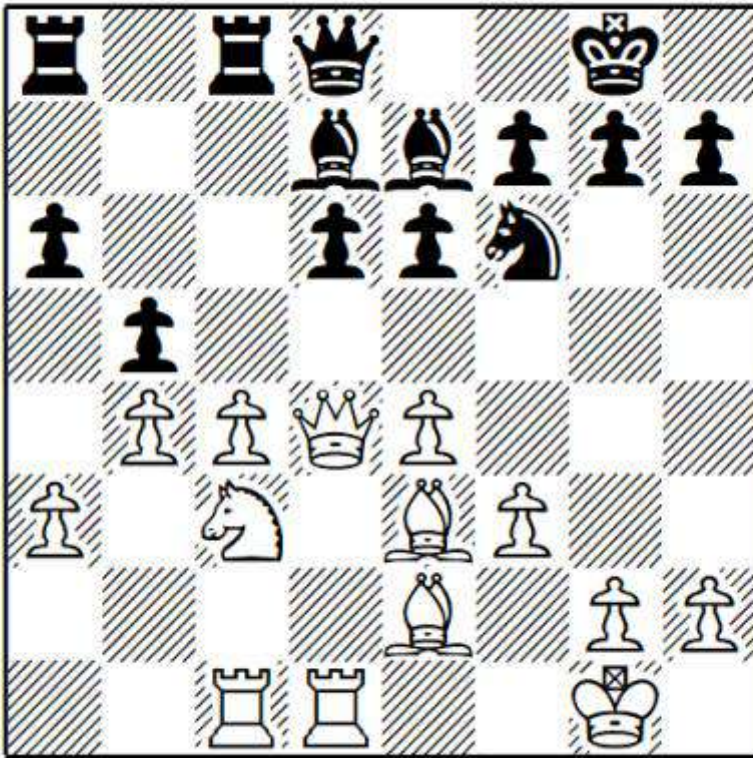
Stronger than taking with the bishop. Now Black cannot play ... b7-b6 without further preparation, while White has an easy game since the d4-knight is no longer in the way.

**11 ... Bd7 12 Rfd1 Qa5**

After 12 ... Bc6 13 b4! White has no problems expanding on the queenside.

**13 a3 Rfc8 14 b4 Qd8 15 Rac1 e5**

Here 15 ... b5 seems worth a try because the a3-pawn becomes vulnerable as well;



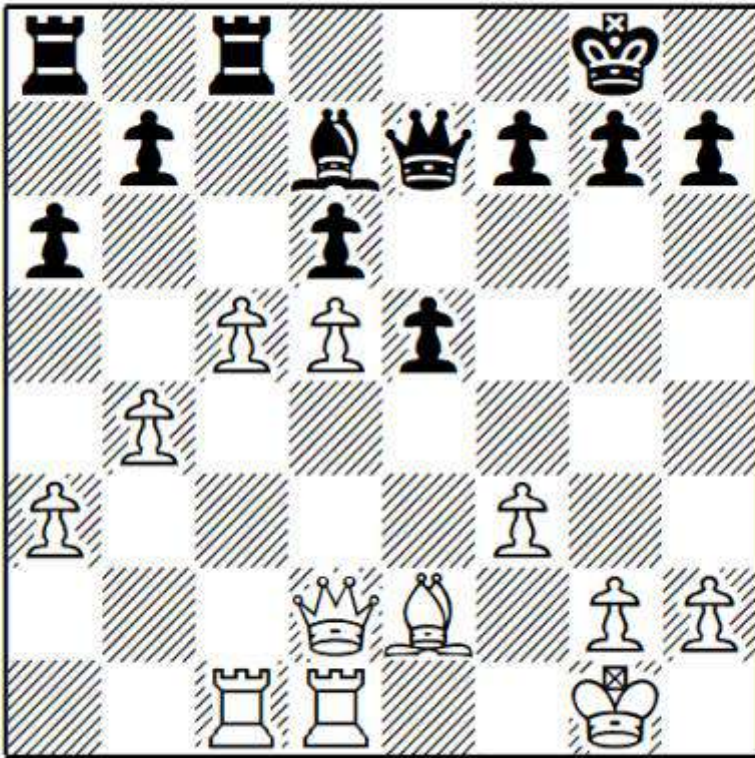
*Typical ... b7-b5*

For example, 16 cxb5 axb5 17 Nxb5 Bxb5 18 Bxb5 Rxa3 reduces the material on the queenside; but White keeps a slight advantage after 19 Rxc8 Qxc8 20 Rc1 Qd8 21 Bf1, due to his now passed b-pawn.

**16 Qd2 Qe8 17 Bg5 Be6**

Black might try 17 ... h6 18 Bxf6 Bxf6 19 Qxd6 Bg5, but the dark-square control should not be enough for the missing pawn.

**18 Nd5 Nxd5 19 exd5 Bd7 20 Bxe7 Qxe7 21 c5!**



*A typical breakthrough*

**21 ... a5**

21 ... dxc5 22 bxc5! gives White dangerous connected pawns, since 22 ... Rxc5? is impossible due to 23 d6 and White wins material.

**22 c6 bxc6 23 dxc6 Bxc6 24 Qxd6 Qe8**

After 24 ... Qxd6 25 Rxd6 Bb7 26 Rxc8+ Rxc8 27 bxa5 the white a-pawns are too strong, while the tactical solution 25 ... axb4!? 26 Rdx6 Rxc6 27 Rxc6 bxa3 fails to 28 Bc4! g6 29 Ba2 and White is in control of everything.

**25 bxa5 e4**

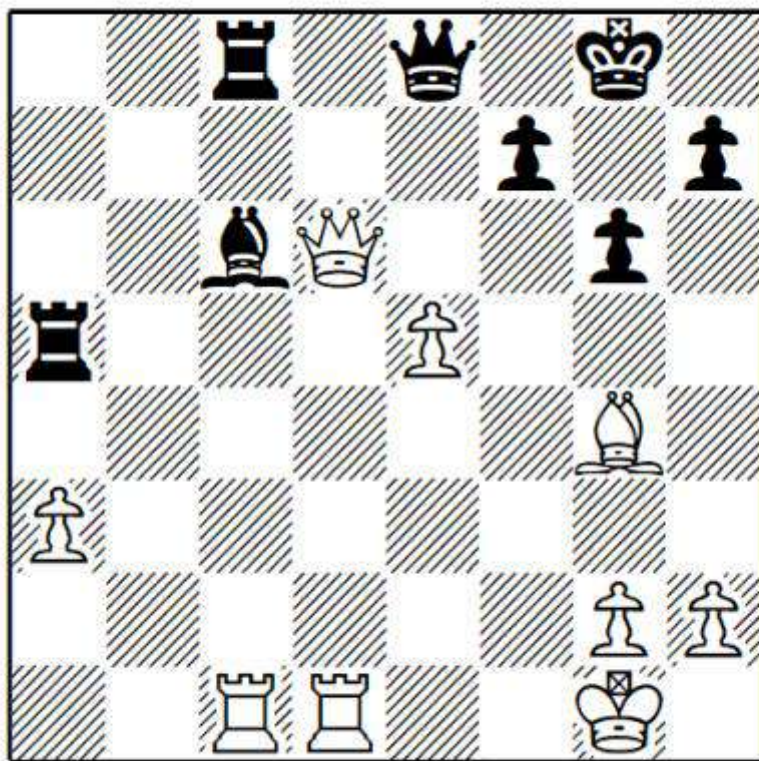
There was no time for 25 ... Rxa5? because of 26 Rxc6 Rxc6 27 Qxc6 and White wins.

**26 fx4 g6**

And here 26 ... Qxe4 fails to 27 Rxc6 Rxc6 (or 27 ... Qxc6 28 Qxc6 Rxc6 29 Bf3) 28 Qd8+ Qe8 29 Qxe8+ Rxe8 30 Bb5, picking up one of the rooks.

Black's back rank has been too weak in all these tactics; unfortunately, fixing the problem gives White time to consolidate.

**27 e5 Rxa5 28 Bg4**



*Black loses material*

Now it's all over. The rest is just a desperate try by Black.

**28 ... f5 29 exf6 Qe3+ 30 Kh1 Bxg2+ 31 Kxg2 Qe4+ 32 Bf3 Rg5+ 33 Kf2 Qh4+ 34 Kf1 Qh3+ 35 Kf2 Qh4+ 36 Ke2**

36 Qg3! would have won nicely and instantly.

**36 ... Re8+ 37 Kd3 Qh3 38 f7+ Kxf7 39 Rc7+ Kg8 40 Qf6 Qf5+ 41 Qxf5 Rxf5 42 Rf1 Ra5 43 Rc3 Kg7 44 Bc6 Rd8+ 45 Kc2 Rd6 46 a4 Rh5 47 Rf2 Re5 48 Bb5 h5 49 Kb3 Kh6 50 Kb4 Re1 51 Rc6 Rd4+ 52 Kc5 Rg4 53 Ra2 h4 54 a5 h3 55 Ra3 1-0**

Now we move on to the classical Hedgehog systems where Black brings the b8-knight out to d7 and thus keeps more tension. We will study, in particular, the interesting plan of an early a4-a5 push with the idea of

freeing this square for our knight.

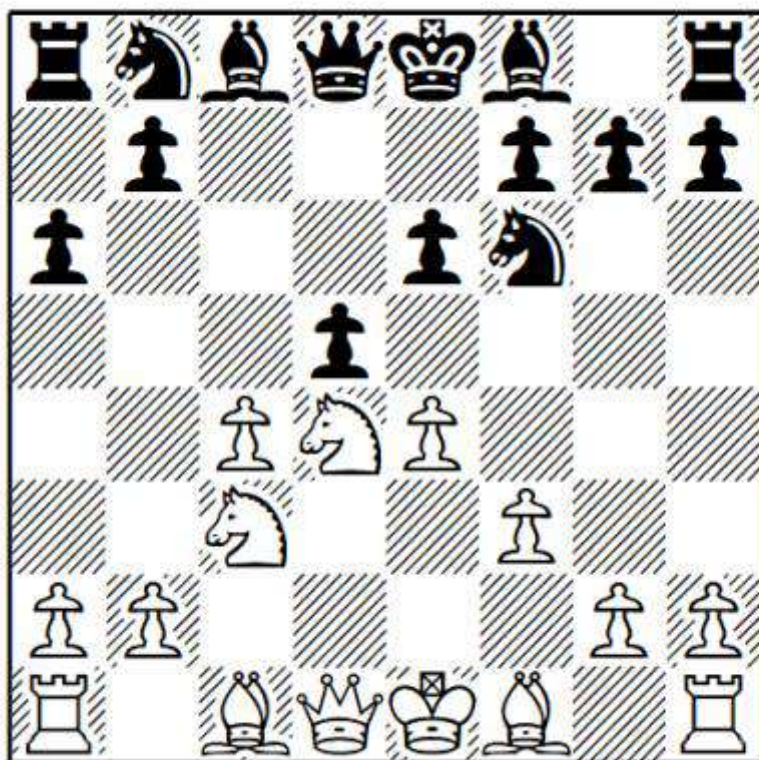
### Game 31

**I.Kovalenko -J.Stocko**

Budapest 2017

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3 a6 6 c4 e6 7 Nc3 Be7**

It is always important to ask whether Black can break effectively with ... d7-d5 and punish White for the early 5 f3. For instance, Black might consider play 7 ... d5 here.



*All problems solved?*

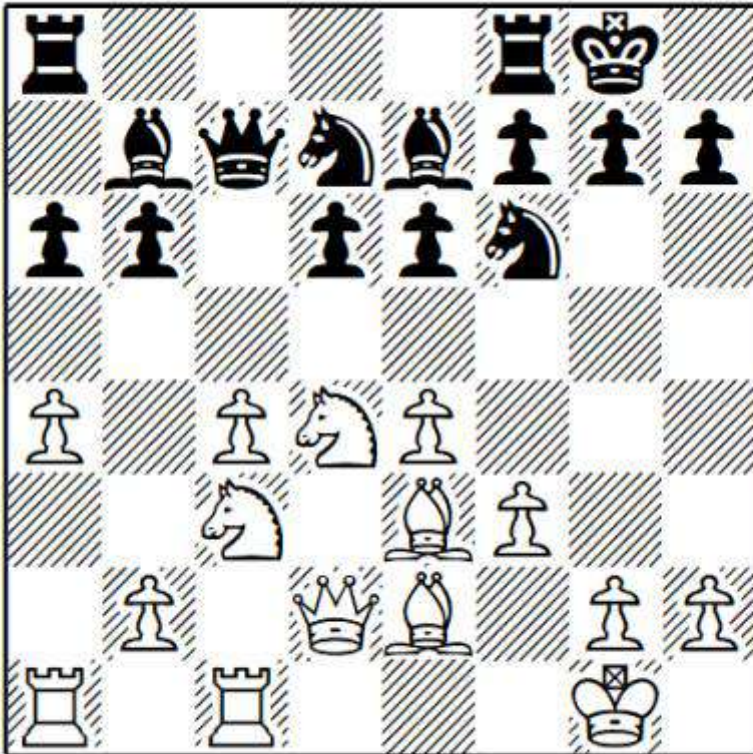
**Question:** What do you think? Does 7 ... d5 solve Black's problems?

**Answer:** No, it doesn't, because White answers with the typical 8 cxd5 exd5 9 e5! and gains a big positional advantage.

**8 Be3 Qc7 9 Be2 0-0 10 0-0 Nbd7 11 Qd2 b6 12 Rfc1**

White often plays 12 Rac1, followed by 13 Rad1, centralizing both rooks which looks very natural. However, I prefer the text. 12 Rfc1 scores 64% in practical games, which is an excellent indicator of its strength, and the ideas behind it are simple and strong.

**12 ... Bb7 13 a4!**



*Simple and strong*

he key move in the plan with 12 Rfc1. White intends to push again with 14 a5 (thus having left the other rook on a1 makes a lot of sense), trying to soften up Black's queenside structure, as well as to create an excellent outpost for Nb3-a5. Black must make a major decision on how to handle this. In the next game we'll see White temporizing with the non-committal 13 Bf1 before deciding to push the a-pawn.

**13 ... Rfc8**

At this point Black had several alternatives, of which 13 ... Rfb8 was perhaps the strongest. Let's have a look at a few ideas:

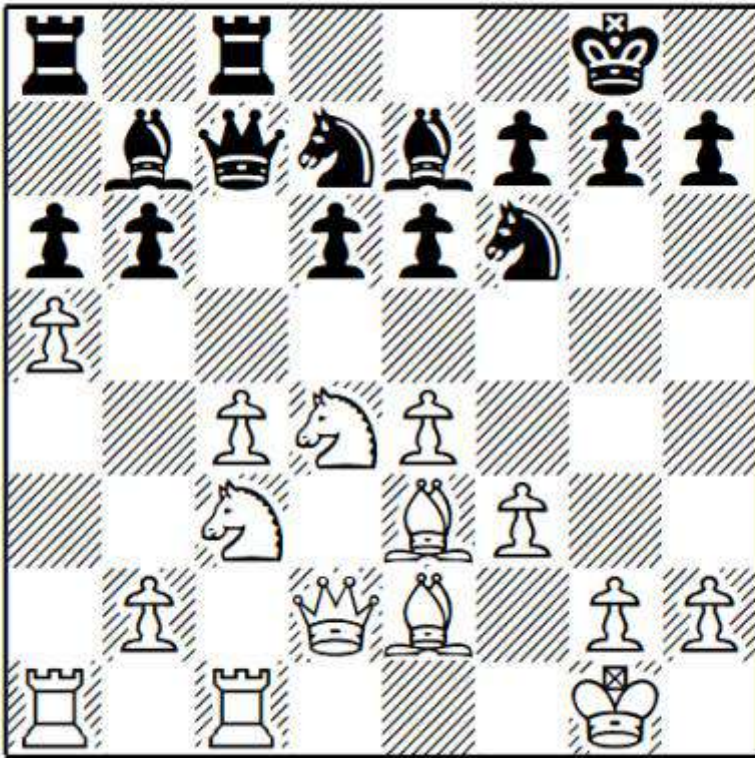
a) 13 ... a5, despite preventing a4-a5 forever, would be a bad choice, as after 14 Ndb5 the game is very one-sided. With ... b6-b5 ruled out completely, White only has to watch out for possible ... d6-d5 breaks, and can easily keep these under control. Meanwhile the pressure on the d-file is going to increase with natural moves.

b) 13 ... Rab8 prepares to meet 14 a5?! with 14 ... bxa5 and 15 Nb3 Bxe4!, exploiting the temporarily loose knight. So White should switch to 14 b4 Rfc8 15 Nd1. Now the b4-pawn is protected, Black has no real chances for either ... d6-d5 or ... b6-b5, so White can shuffle his pieces around before doing something concrete. Another drawback of ... Rab8 is that the queen is then stuck on c7.

c) 13 ... Rfb8 also enables 14 a5?! bxa5 15 Nb3 Bxe4, while 14 b4 can now be met by 14 ... Qd8, after which ... a6-a5 makes rather more sense, or if 15 a5 then 15 ... bxa5 16 Rxa5 d5! and Black frees his position successfully. In this case White needs to play slightly more cautiously. For example, 14 Nd1 Qd8 15 a5 Nc5 (or 15 ... bxa5 16 Qxa5) 16 Qc3 bxa5, as in I.Madl-N.Kokeny, Hungarian League 2017, and now simply 17 Rxa5 should give White an edge in view of the weak dark squares in Black's queenside.

**Remember:** Do not hurry to play a4-a5 if Black is playing prophylactic moves and would be happy to see the b-file open.

**14 a5**



### *Opening lines*

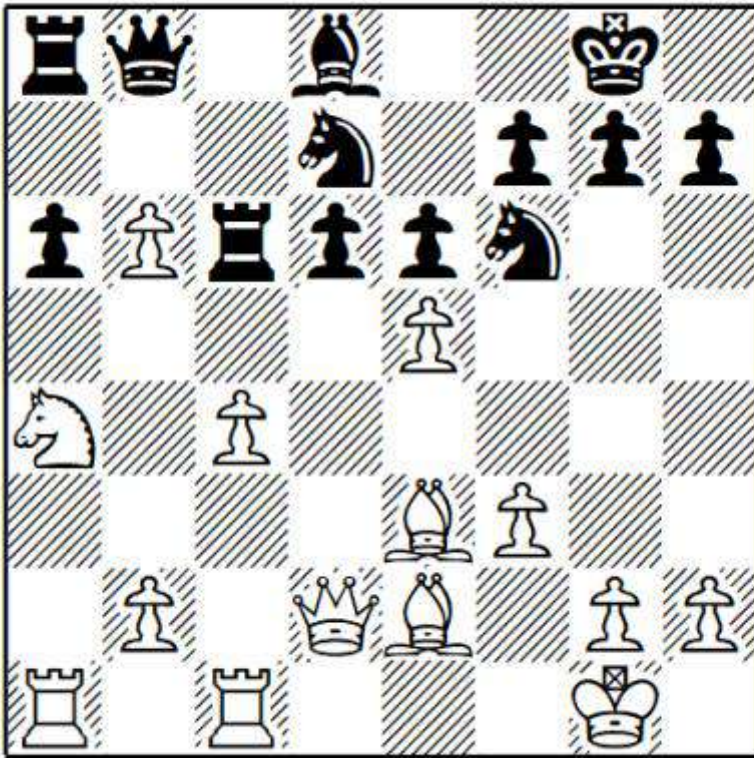
#### **4 ... Qb8**

Here 14 ... bxa5 15 Nb3 Rab8 16 Nxa5 Ba8 is much better for White. The knight on a5 is stable, protecting the c4-pawn, and is attacking important squares in Black's camp.

#### **15 axb6 Bd8 16 Na4 Bc6**

16 ... Nxb6 was not desirable because of 17 Nxe6 Nxa4 18 Nxd8, when White is positionally winning, but may have been the best fighting chance.

#### **17 Nxc6 Rxc6 18 e5!**



### *Distraction!*

A nice distracting move, after which White will be able to secure the b6-pawn.

**18 ... Nxe5**

18 ... dxe5 makes it even easier for us to play 19 c5 with a decisive plus.

**19 b4 d5**

Or similarly 19 ... Ned7 20 c5.

**20 c5 Qb7 21 Nb2 Rcc8 22 Ra4 h5 23 Rca1 h4 24 h3 1-0**

White tidies up before breaking through on the queenside, so Black resigned.

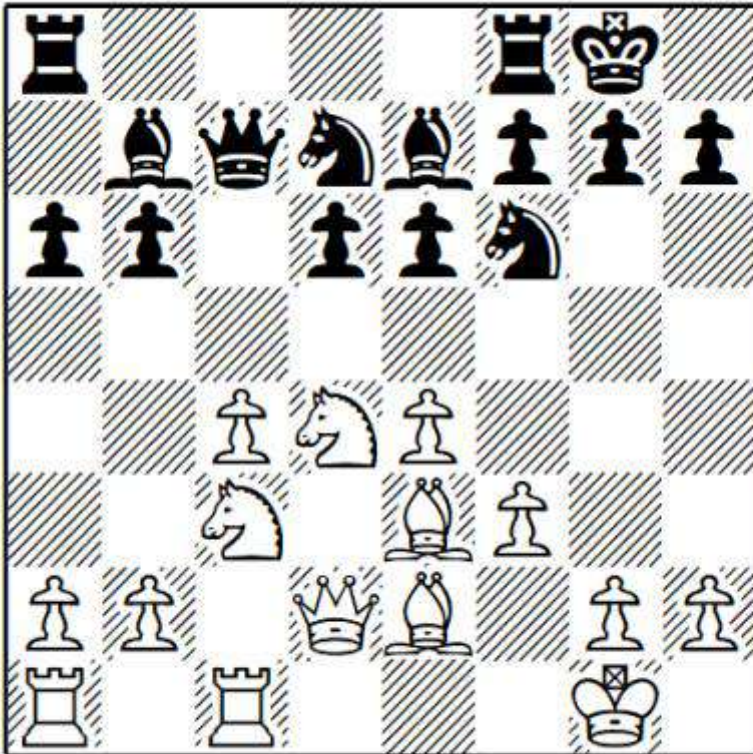
We conclude the chapter with another game implementing the Rfc1 and a4-a5 plan. This one starts with a very different move order, but we soon reach the usual paths.

### *Game 32*

## N. Grandelius-P. Carlsson

Swedish Championship, Sunne 2015

1 Nf3 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 Nc3 b6 4 e4 d6 5 d4 cxd4 6 Nxd4 Bb7 7 f3 e6 8 Be2  
Be7 9 0-0 0-0 10 Be3 a6 11 Qd2 Nbd7 12 Rfc1 Qc7



*Starting position*

We have reached the initial position of our Hedgehog system. In Game 31 White played the immediate 13 a4. Here we see the same plan with a few details changed.

**13 Bf1 Rac8 14 a4**

The insertion of 13 Bf1 Rac8 does not seem to change much, but Black now has an additional way to prevent the Nb3-a5 manoeuvre.

**14 ... Qb8!? 15 a5**

It is almost impossible to bring the knight to a5 here. The direct 15 Nb3 would be answered by 15 ... Nc5 and White must step backwards. The game move does not allow a follow-up with 16 Nb3 either, as we'll see.

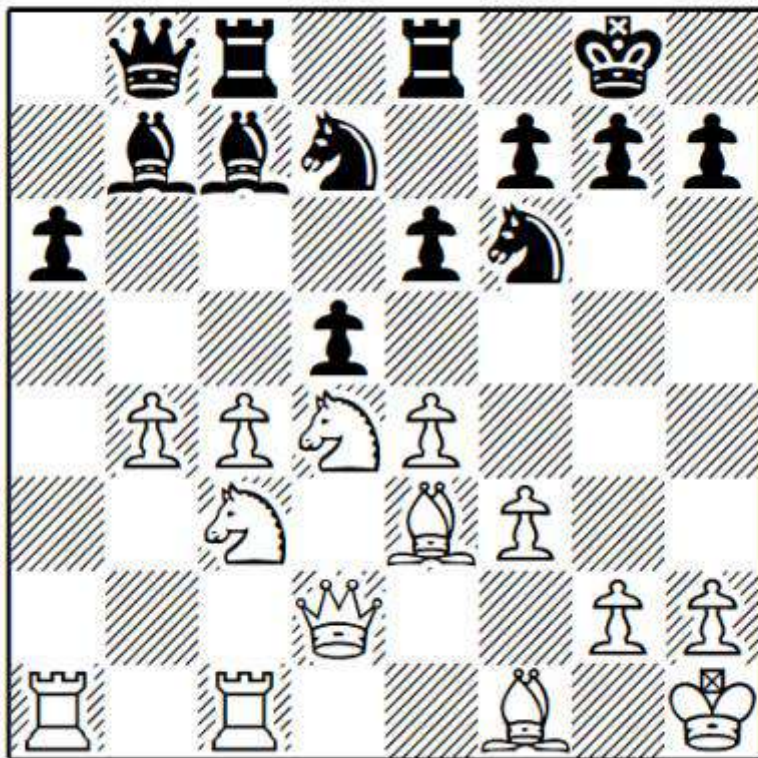
**15 ... bxa5 16 Rxa5**

Now 16 Nb3? runs into 16 ... Bxe4 again, when Black wins a pawn.

**16 ... Bd8?**

But this routine manoeuvre fails to achieve anything special. Instead, Black should play 16 ... Ne5, first targeting the c4-pawn, and then 17 ... Rfd8, preparing the freeing ... d6-d5 break with fully equal chances.

**17 Raa1 Bc7 18 Kh1 Rfe8 19 b4 d5!?**



*Black tries to break out*

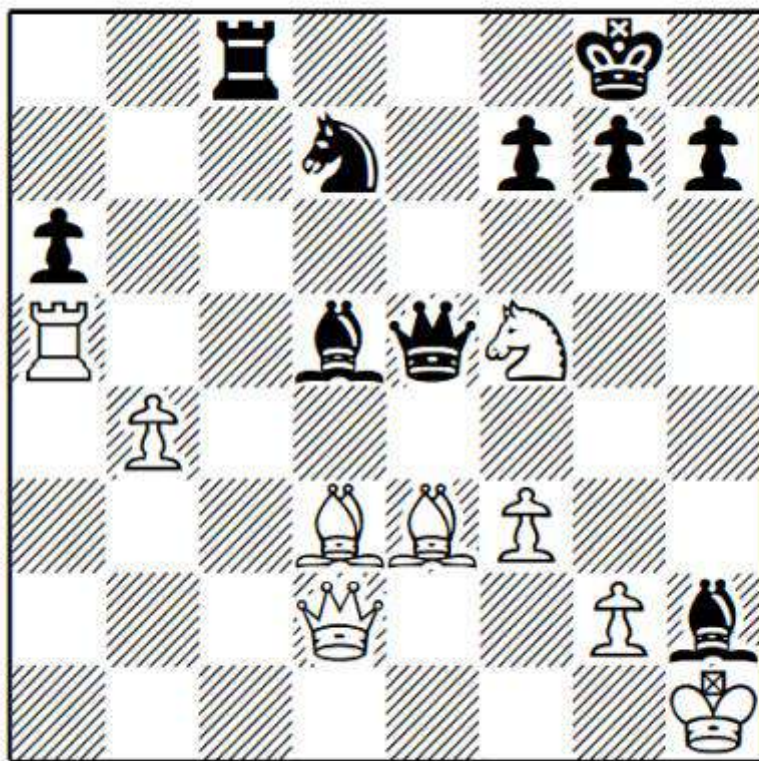
Black makes his breakthrough anyway, but in far less promising circumstances. One important point is that, with the a-file open, White can quickly create threats against the queenside.

**20 cxd5 exd5**

After 20 ... Bxh2 21 dxe6 fxe6 22 Bxa6 Black is too busy on the queenside, so there is no way to create sufficient kingside counterplay; e.g. 22 ... Qg3 23 Bxb7 Qh4 24 Bxc8 and White is winning, since 24 ... Bf4+ 25 Kg1 Qf2+ 26 Kf1 Qh1+ 27 Kf2 Qh4+ 28 Ke2 gets Black nowhere.

**21 Nxd5 Nxd5 22 exd5 Nf6**

22 ... Bxh2 is still no good, because of 23 Nf5! Qe5 24 Bd3 Bxd5 25 Rxc8 Rxc8 26 Ra5 and too many black pieces are either hanging or pinned.



*Hanging pieces*

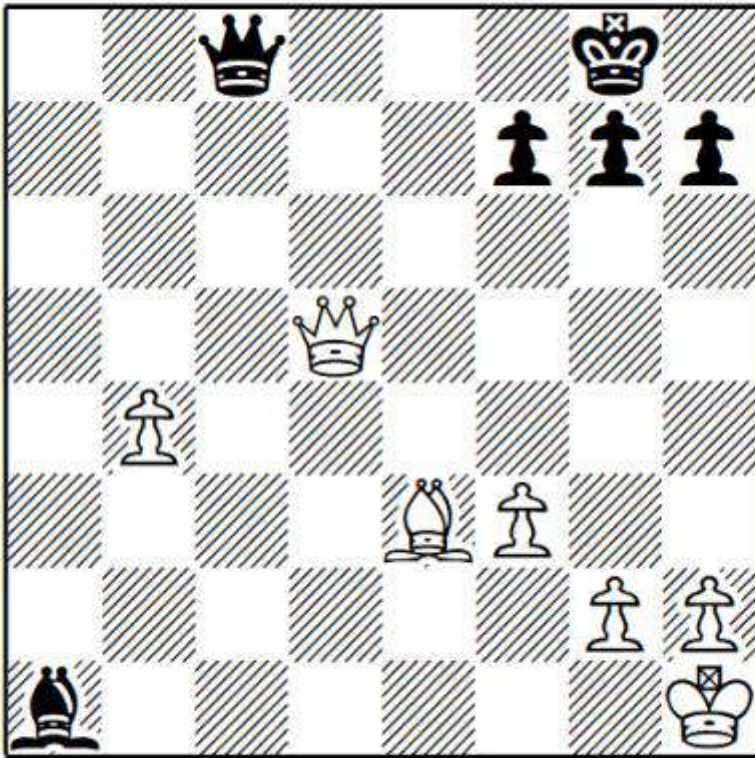
**3 Bxa6?**

White lets his grip slip by grabbing material too soon. 23 b5! axb5 24 Bxb5 Red8 25 Bc6 was correct, threatening Rab1 and wins; e.g. 25 ... Nxd5 26 Rab1 Nxe3 27 Rxb7 Nf5 28 Rxb8 Bxb8 (or 28 ... Rxb8 29 Be4 Rxd4 30 Qc3) 29 Nxf5! Rxd2 30 Ne7+ etc.

**23 ... Nxd5?**

Black returns the favour, allowing White to re-establish his winning position. Instead, 23 ... Bxa6 24 Rxa6 Nxd5 25 Nc6 Qb5 26 Ra3 Bf4 27 Bxf4 Rxc6 would probably have led to a draw.

**24 Nc6 Bxc6 25 Bxc8 Be5 26 Rxc6 Bxa1 27 Qxd5 Rxc8 28 Rxc8+ Qxc8**



*An unstoppable b-pawn*

Despite White being only one pawn up, the ending is an easy win and Grandelius converts it in good style.

**29 b5 h5 30 b6 Qe8 31 Qe4 Qb8 32 Bf4 Qd8**

After 32 ... Qxb6 33 Qa8+ Kh7 34 Qxa1 White wins the bishop and the game.

**33 Qb1 1-0**

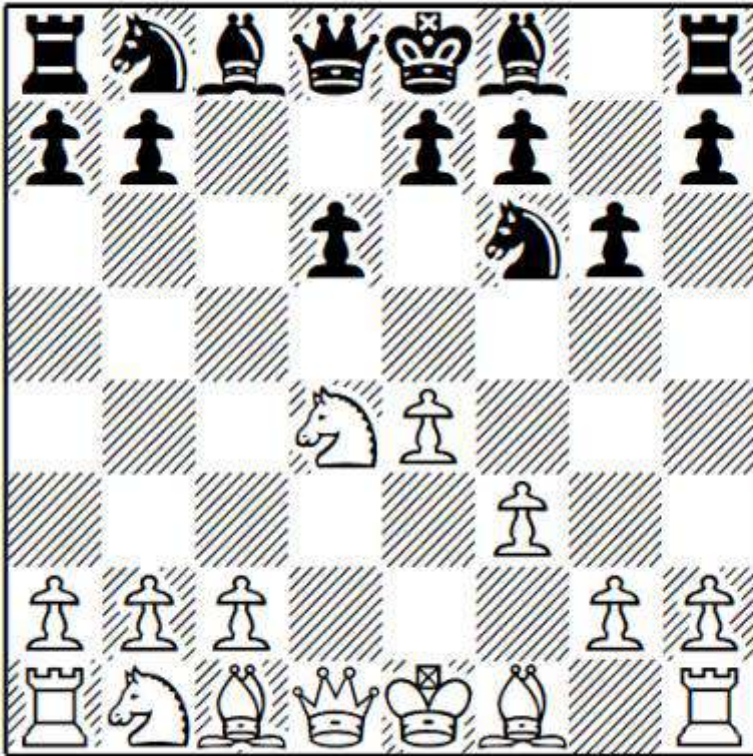
The b-pawn is unstoppable so Black resigned.

# Chapter Five

## Anti-Najdorf: 5 ... g6

### Introduction

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3 g6



### *The Dragon*

Now we come to the Dragon set-ups by Black. Usually everybody who goes for the Dragon with 2 ... d6 wants to avoid the Maróczy Bind; otherwise they could simply adopt an Accelerated Dragon move order. With 5 f3! we force them either to go for one of the specific lines in Chapters One to Four, or, if they stick to their Dragon set-up with 5 ... g6, allow us to play 6 c4 next, setting up a Maróczy pawn centre. Okay, it may not be the most theoretically challenging line of the Maróczy to play with such an

early f2-f3, but I think it is a small achievement that we forced a Dragon player, who usually aims for opposite castling and attacking games, into defending a positional Maróczy structure.

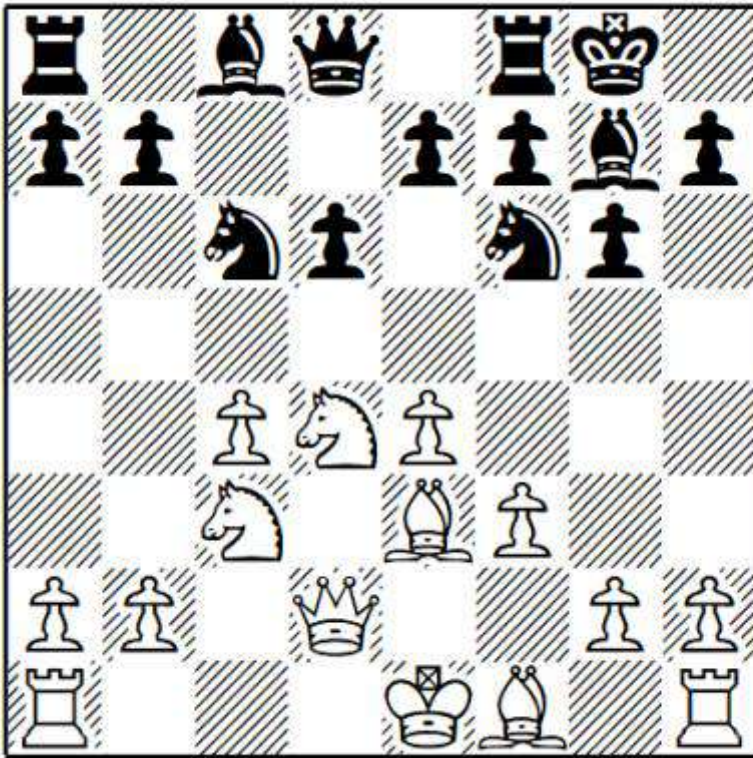
The approach proposed in this chapter will also serve as our repertoire against the Accelerated Dragon, where we also reach the Maróczy.

Summing up, I would say our 5 f3 move has a few advantages here. First, we obtain a Maróczy structure which gives White a pleasant space advantage and objective chances for an advantage. Second, it is very practical to force our opponents to play structures with which they are inexperienced. And third, we have a single repertoire against the Accelerated Dragon and regular Dragon lines, saving a lot of theoretical study time which you can spend on other topics.

Note that the move order will be different if Black starts with 2 ... Nc6 or even 2 ... g6, but the resulting positions are the same. For more details on possible move orders see the subsection Accelerated Dragon.

Let's now start examining our plans in detail. The next few moves are standard.

**6 c4 Bg7 7 Nc3 0-0 8 Be3 Nc6 9 Qd2**



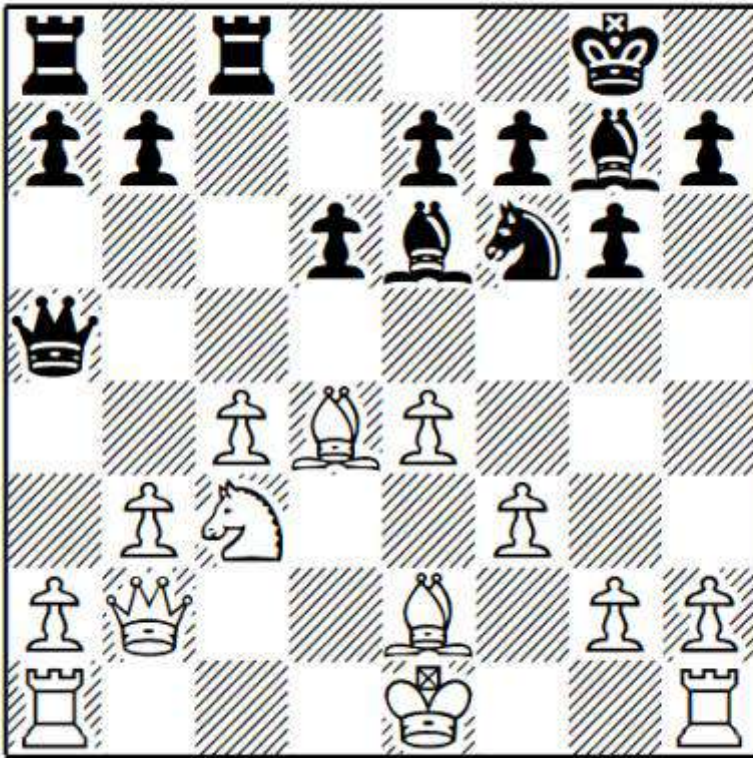
*A standard position*

From this point Black has a few different plans available which we will discuss below.

### **9 ... Bd7**

Black intends an arrangement with ... Bc6 (after ... Nxd4), ... a7-a5, ... Nd7 and so on.

Another option is 9 ... Nxd4 10 Bxd4 Be6!?, when the normal plan is to play ... Qa5 and ... Rc8 (either rook), trying to make the ... b7-b5 break work. I will offer a solution, based on the same idea of Qb2!?, against each black rook move: 11 Be2 (alternatively, 11 Nd5 is an interesting and rarely seen approach; e.g. 11 ... Nxd5 12 Bxg7 Kxg7 13 exd5 Bd7 14 h4, when White went for long castling in Game 33) 11 ... Qa5 (or similarly 11 ... Rc8 12 b3 Qa5 13 0-0 a6 14 Rfd1 Rfe8 15 Qb2!? as in Game 34) 12 b3 Rfc8 13 Qb2!? and White has a slight plus, which we'll examine in Game 35.

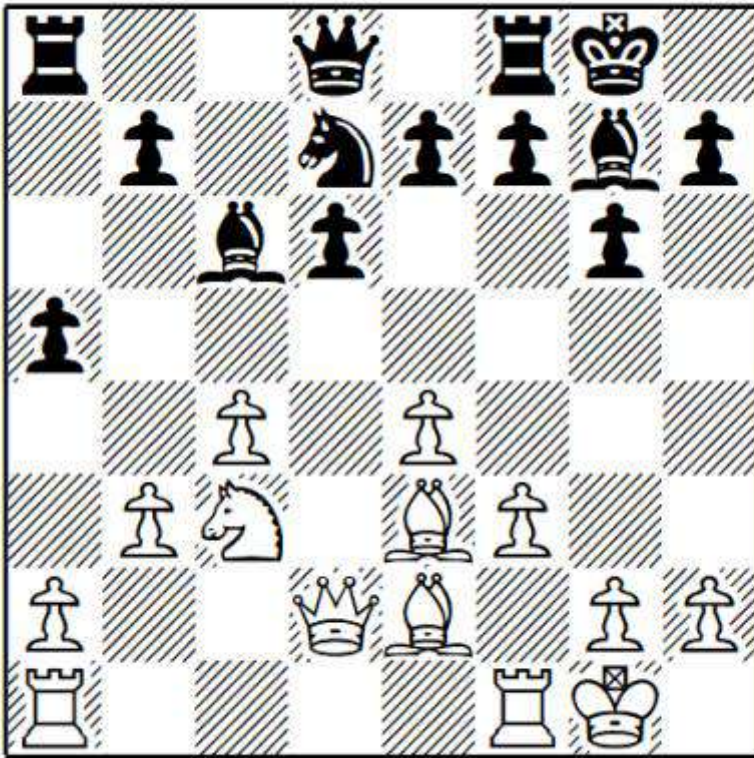


*Creative play by White*

### **10 Be2**

Here 10 Nc2 is an ambitious alternative but is not within the scope of this book.

**10 ... Nxd4 11 Bxd4 a5 12 b3 Bc6 13 0-0 Nd7 14 Be3**



### *Preserving the bishop*

#### **14 ... Nc5 15 Rab1 Be5**

This option is quite popular nowadays. 15 ... Qb6 16 Rfc1 Rfc8 is another solid try, but White can start expanding on the queenside, as in Game 37.

#### **16 Rfd1 e6 17 Bd4 Qf6 18 Qe3**

Here Black has maintained control on the queenside, so in Game 36 White played in the centre, bringing both rooks to the d-file and preparing f3-f4.

### **Accelerated Dragons**

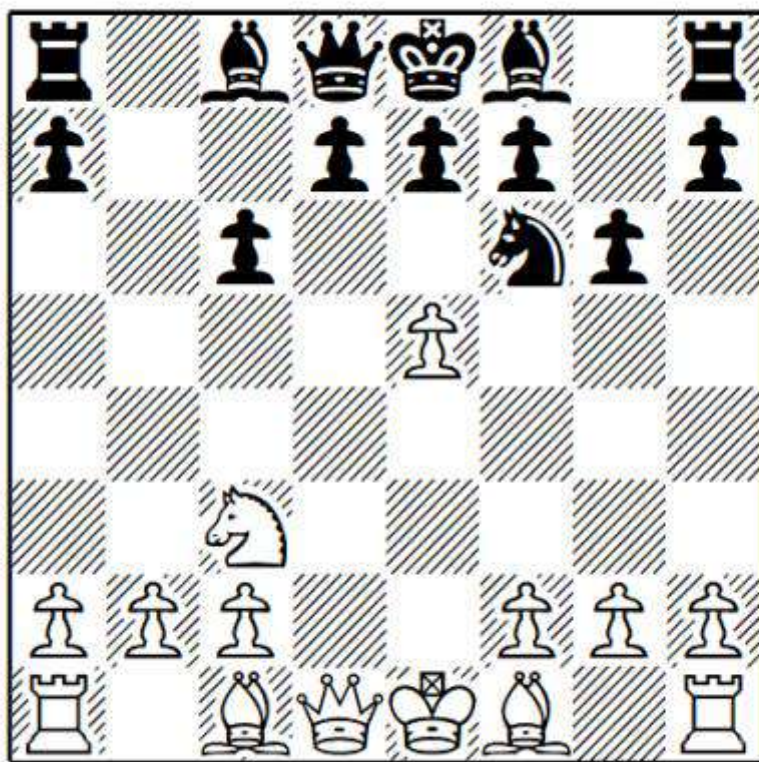
In this section we'll examine other move orders by Black to reach Dragon set-ups, those starting with 2 ... Nc6 and 2 ... g6. Both moves will sometimes require us to be accurate, and in some cases there are some extra options along the way. Let's see what can happen.

#### **1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 g6**

This is the Hyper-Accelerated Dragon. The slightly less accelerated version begins 2 ... Nc6 3 d4 (via this move order, Black also has to reckon with 3 Bb5, but that's not what we intend) 3 ... cxd4 4 Nxd4 and now:

a) 4 ... g6 is the standard route to the Accelerated Dragon, where 5 c4 Bg7 transposes to the main line below.

b) 4 ... Nf6 must be answered by 5 Nc3. (Remember, we cannot play 5 f3 because Black has already developed his knights and can open the centre more quickly.) The main options now are 5 ... e5 and 5 ... d6 which we examine in Chapters Nine and Eleven. On the other hand, we don't have to worry about Black setting up a proper Dragon any longer, because 5 ... g6 allows 6 Nxc6! bxc6 7 e5, harassing the f6-knight.



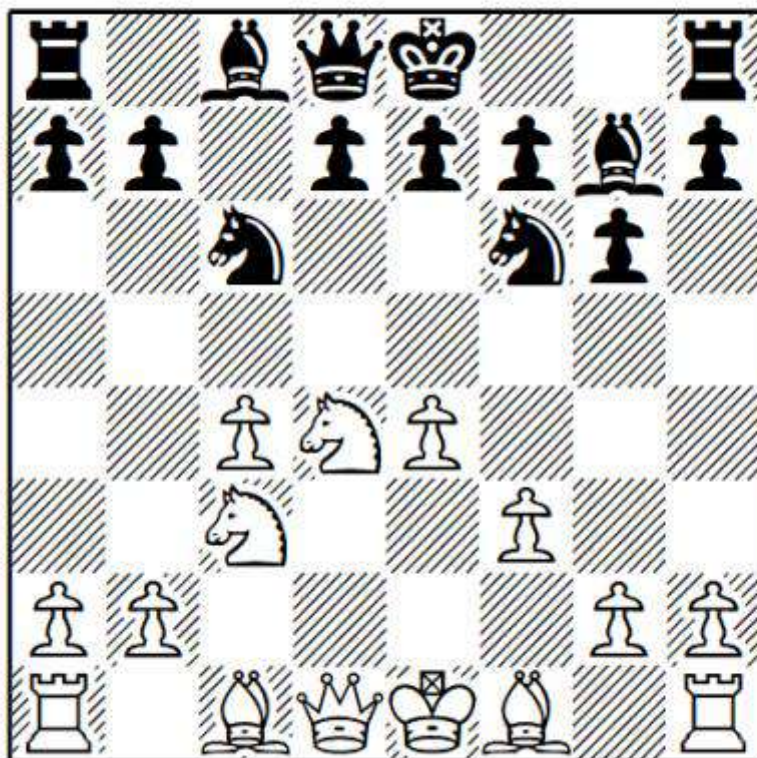
*Forced to waste time*

For example: 7 ... Ng8 (7 ... Nh5 8 Bc4 is good for White) 8 Bc4 d5 (8 ... Qa5 9 0-0 and 8 ... Bg7 9 Qf3 f5 10 Bf4 are good for White too) 9 exd6 Qxd6 10 Qf3 Be6? 11 Bf4 Qd7 12 Rd1 Qc8 13 Nb5 1-0 was a nice miniature in W.So-M.Vachier Lagrave, Chess.com (blitz) 2019.

### 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Bg7

Alternatively:

a) 4 ... Nf6 is quite a tricky move order, especially for us since the main move 5 Nc3 would take us outside of our repertoire. Instead, after 5 f3 Bg7 6 c4 Nc6 we have to be a little careful, since 7 Nc3? is an instructive blunder.



*What did White miss?*

**Question:** Can you find the refutation?

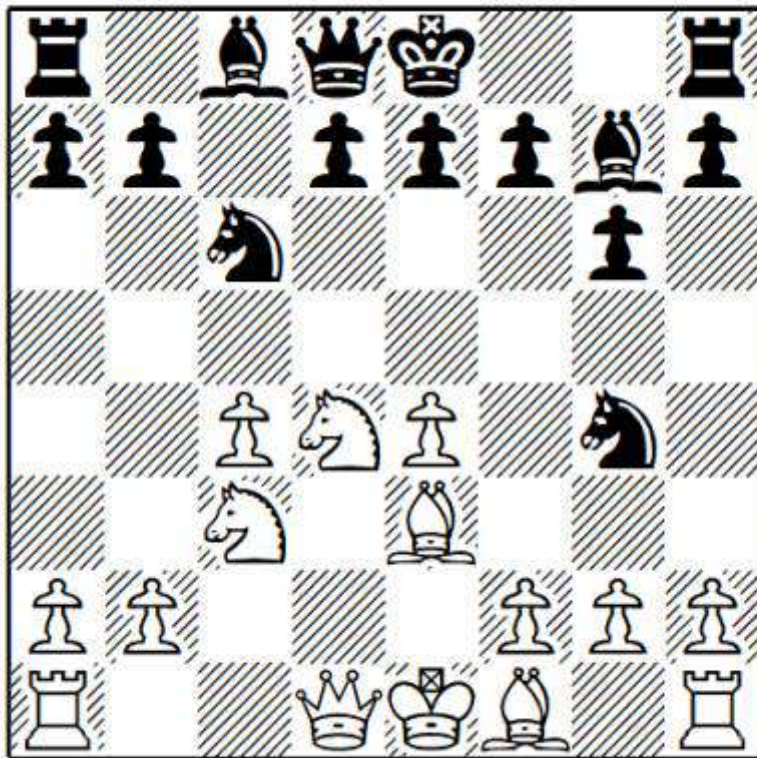
**Answer:** 7 ... Nxe4! 8 Nxc6 Nxc3 9 Nxd8 Nxd1 10 Nxf7 Kxf7 11 Kxd1 d6, when our entire formation has been wrecked and Black is clearly better.

So we must make sure to play 7 Be3, after which Black generally plays 7 ... 0-0 (or 7 ... d6 first) 8 Nc3 d6, when we reach the common paths. The one spoiler is 7 ... Qb6!? 8 Nf5 (the only move) 8 ... Qxb2 9 Nxg7+ Kg8, but Black has not cared to try this very often, probably because it means giving up the Dragon bishop for a knight and White gets decent play for the

pawn; e.g. 10 Nd2 Kxg7 11 c5!? Rd8 12 Nc4 Qc3+ 13 Kf2, threatening to trap the queen with Rc1.

b) 4 ... Nc6 5 c4 Bg7 transposes to the main line. Black can also delay the fianchetto and play 5 ... Nf6 6 Nc3 d6 7 f3 (avoiding 7 Be3? Ng4!; e.g. 8 Nxc6 Nxe3 9 Nxd8 Nxd1 10 Rxd1 Kxd8 11 e5 Be6 with equality) 7 ... Nxd4 (after 7 ... Bg7 8 Be3 we are back in our main line) 8 Qxd4 Bg7, but as there is no dangerous discovered attack threatened we can continue our development 9 Be3 0-0 10 Qd2 with a slight advantage, as in the main lines. The fact that our bishop is on e3 here (rather than d4) does not harm our chances.

**5 c4 Nc6 6 Be3 Nf6 7 Nc3 Ng4!?**



### *Early confrontation*

This is a tricky sideline and it was recently recommended by IM Raja Panjwani in his book on the Hyper-Accelerated Dragon.

Instead, 7 ... 0-0 8 f3 will transpose to our normal Dragon lines. White can also play 8 Be2 first, since f2-f3 will follow anyway once we have

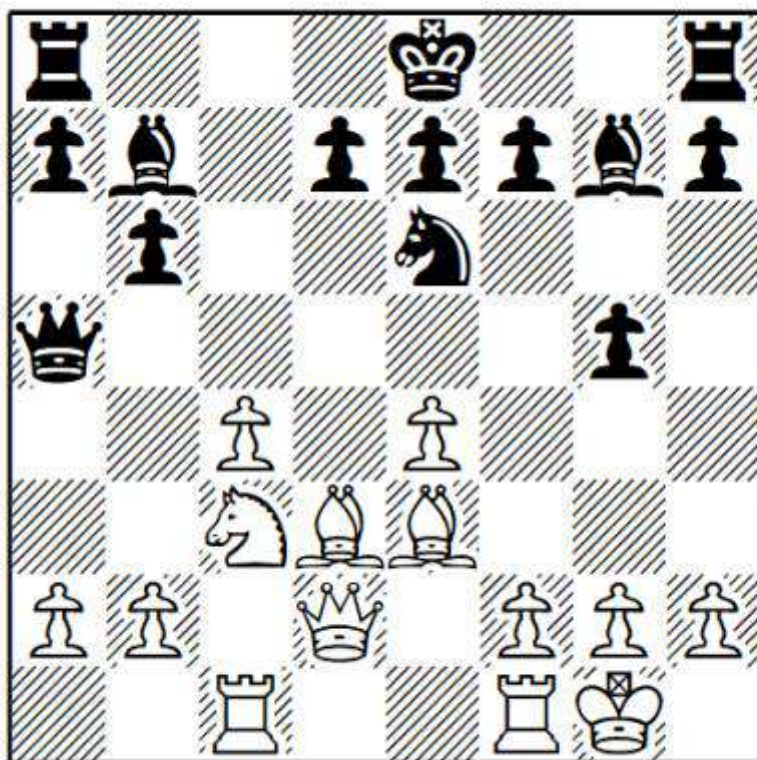
completed development.

### 8 Qxg4 Nxd4 9 Qd1 e5

This is the main recommendation by Panjwani, so I will take it as our main line.

a) 9 ... Nc6 is less individual. After 10 Qd2 d6 11 Be2 0-0 12 0-0 we reach a position very similar to the main lines. Black might claim that having a knight on c6, rather than f6, is in his favour. On the other hand, the fact that White has already developed the f1-bishop and castled seems more significant.

b) 9 ... Ne6 is an independent try to complicate matters, but White can achieve a big advantage with precise play: 10 Rc1 Qa5 11 Qd2 b6 12 Bd3 Bb7 13 0-0 g5! (the main idea behind 9 ... Ne6; Black wants to install a dark-squared blockade on the kingside)



*Interesting but unsound*

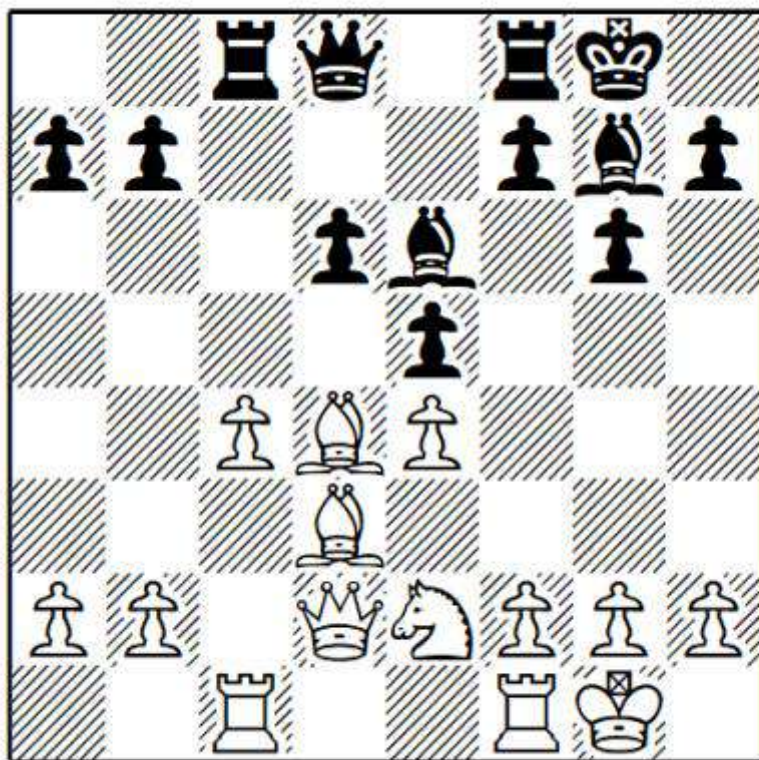
14 a3 h5 (14 ... Qe5 15 b4 is likely to transpose) 15 Rfd1 d6 16 b4! Qe5

(after 16 ... Qxa3 17 Nd5 Qb2 18 Rc2 White has tremendous compensation)  
17 Nd5 h4 18 h3 Rc8 19 Be2 with a huge plus.

### 10 Bd3

Theoretically, 10 Nb5 might be more critical, but I like the text and will suggest two different approaches to the position.

10 ... 0-0 11 0-0 d6 12 Qd2 Be6 13 Bxd4



### *A challenged outpost*

Alternatively, 13 Rac1 Rc8 14 Ne2 is a way to challenge the central knight without allowing any structural concession. The game Geo.Meier-B.Markoja, PRO League, Chess.com (rapid) 2019, continued 14 ... Nc6 15 Rfd1 Qe7 16 b3 Kh8 17 Nc3 f5 18 exf5 gxf5 19 f4 a6 20 Nd5 Qf7 21 Be2 and White had a definite edge.

### 13 ... exd4 14 Ne2

The exchange on d4 followed by 14 Ne2 is not considered the most challenging option, but we get a risk-free game with a clear target. Although Black has compensation with his dark-squared bishop, there is

enough scope to outplay your opponent. We will see how David Navara went on to win from here in Game 38.

## **Illustrative Games**

We will now continue with a few sample games.

First we will see an extraordinarily rare plan in Game 33, where Krasenkow decides to castle queenside as White and launch an attack on the enemy king, surprisingly playing the Maróczy like a Yugoslav Dragon.

We follow this with more traditional fare. In Game 34 White puts a knight on d5 and then recaptures with e5xd5, leading to a classic example of a queenside versus kingside pawn majority. This structure can also arise in other variations, so it is worth having a closer look.

White also inserts an early Qb2, which is repeated in Game 35. This time Black plays ... f7-f6 to close the long diagonal, but this also creates some weak squares which White then tries to exploit.

We continue with an idea which is very fashionable nowadays. In Game 36, Black puts his dark-squared bishop on e5, aiming at the kingside. White is unable to play f3-f4 straight away for tactical reasons but eventually manages to advance the pawn with advantage.

Game 37 features the old plan of ... Qb6, trying to slow down or even prevent queenside expansion with b3-b4. This too proves unsuccessful as White gets to push the b-pawn in the end.

Finally we take a look at an independent line from the Accelerated Dragon, where Black throws in 7 ... Ng4 before White has time for f2-f3. In Game 38 GM David Navara does not choose anything critical, but he convincingly outplays his opponent from a slightly more convenient position.

### *Game 33*

**M.Krasenkow-N.Managadze**

Greek Team Championship 2004

### **1 Nf3**

In this chapter players employ various different routes to the Maróczy system. In fact only one game begins with 1 e4 c5. Nevertheless, we are soon enough back on our well-known paths.

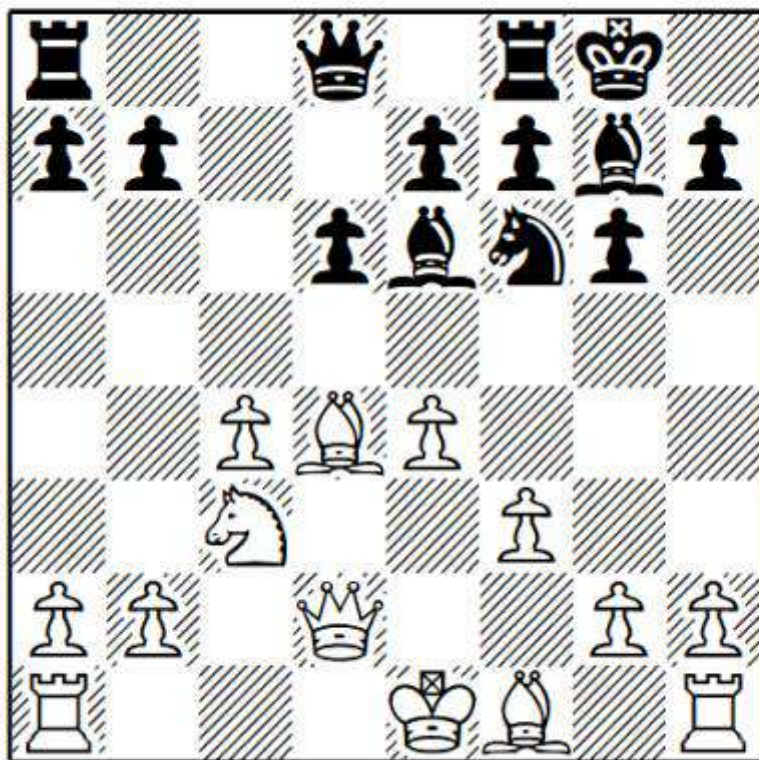
**1 ... c5 2 c4 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 g6 5 e4**

We've now reached a standard Maróczy Bind.

**5 ... Bg7 6 Be3 Nf6 7 Nc3 0-0 8 f3 d6 9 Qd2 Nxd4**

The main alternative, 9 ... Bd7 (which is still possible on the next move), is examined in Games 36 and 37.

**10 Bxd4 Be6**



*Aiming at the queenside*

Black is ready to take the initiative on the queenside with moves like ... Qa5, ... Rc8, ... a7-a6 and ... b7-b5. Krasenkow finds a very original way to pre-empt all those ideas and steer the game in another direction.

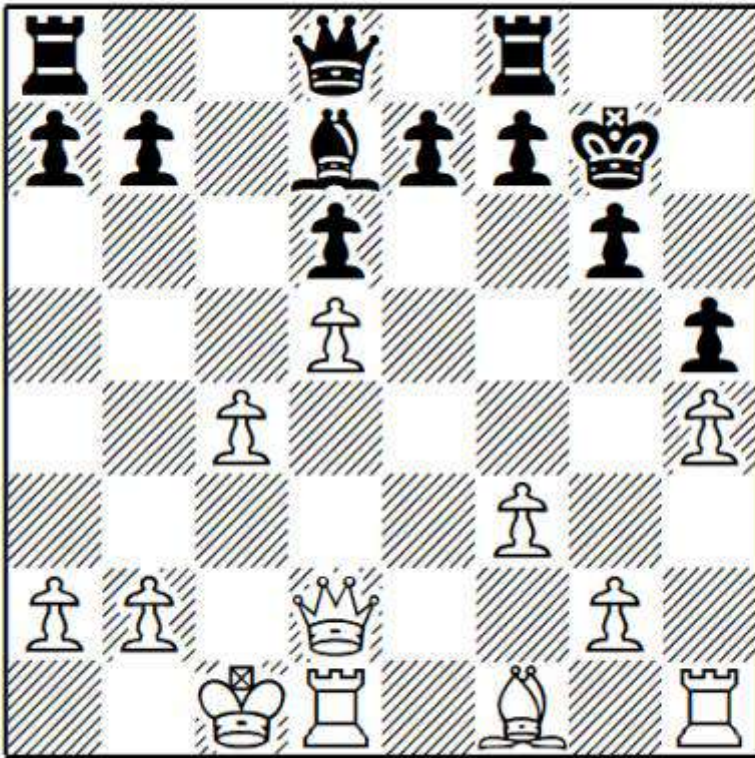
**11 Nd5!? Nxd5**

11 ... Bxd5 12 exd5 Nd7 13 Bxg7 Kxg7 14 0-0-0 is a bit better for White, who can play on the kingside and on the e-file.

**12 Bxg7 Kxg7 13 exd5**

The other capture 13 cxd5 is too symmetrical to get any advantage.

**13 ... Bd7 14 h4 h5 15 0-0-0!?**



### *Queenside castling*

#### **15 ... Qb6?!**

This prevents 16 Qd4 but is too slow, as moves like ... b7-b5 are impossible for the moment, which means Black will lack counterplay.

The immediate 15 ... b5 was interesting, but White clearly stays on top after 16 cxb5, since 16 ... Qb6 17 Qd4+ gives White a favourable endgame and 16 ... Rab8 17 g4 gets White's attack going first.

Probably 15 ... e5 16 dxex6 Bxe6 was best. The weakness on d6 does not matter so much because Black has a lot of dynamic counterplay.

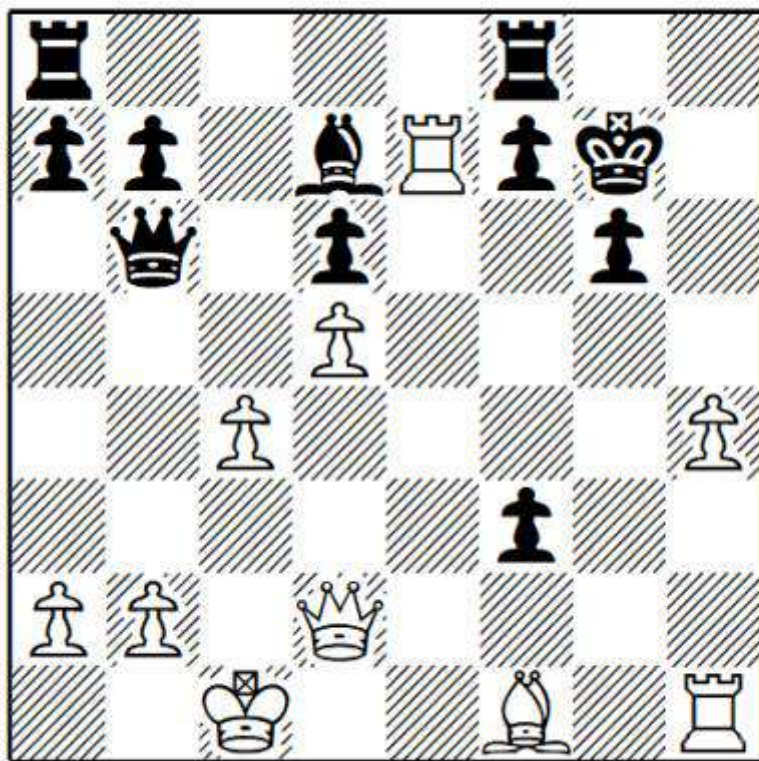
**Question:** White could capture a pawn with 17 Qxd6. How would you evaluate the resulting position and what should Black play?

**Answer:** 17 ... Qa5! is a strong reply and gives Black a slight plus. He is threatening 18 ... Qxa2, while making room for his rooks to activate via the

d-file. For example, 18 a3 Rfd8 19 Qb4 Rxd1+ 20 Kxd1 Rd8+ 21 Kc1 Qc7 with good attacking chances because the white pieces are still at home.

**16 g4 hxg4 17 Re1 Rae8**

Black avoids 17 ... gxf3 18 Rxe7



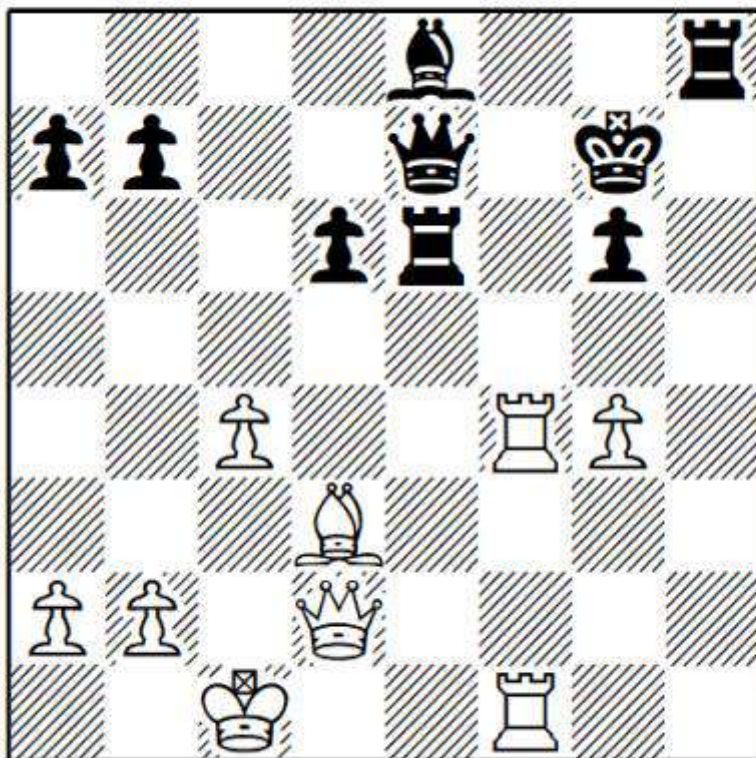
### *Big problems*

because he would then be unable to answer Qc3+ with ... f7-f6, so White's attack is very strong; e.g. 18 ... Bf5 19 Qc3+ Kg8? (the awful-looking 19 ... Kh6 is the only move) 20 h5 and Black has no chance of survival.

**18 h5 Rh8 19 Bd3 Qd4?**

The only way to hold the position together was 19 ... g3!, which was extremely hard to find. Black's idea is 20 ... Qf2 either to exchange queens or create some trouble with the g-pawn. For example: 20 hxg6 (White will have to play this sooner or later in order to open files) 20 ... Qf2! (after 21 Qc3+ f6 22 Rxh8 Kxh8 23 Rh1+ Kg7 the attack is over) 21 gxf7 Qxd2+ 22 Kxd2 Kxf7 23 Rxh8 Rxh8 24 Rg1 Rg8 and Black has made it to an equal endgame.

20 Re4 Qf6 21 fxe4 e5 22 dxe6 Rxe6 23 Rf4 Qe7 24 Rhf1 Be8 25  
 hxg6 fxg6



*White is winning*

White has succeeded in destroying the black king's shelter completely and is not even a pawn down.

**26 Qc3+ Re5 27 c5! d5**

The pin will soon decide the game.

**28 Kb1 Qg5 29 Bf5 Kf6 30 R4f3 Rh7 31 Re1 Rhe7 32 Bd7+ Kg7 33 Rfe3**

Now White wins material and the game is over.

**33 ... Bxd7 34 Rxe5 Rxe5 35 Rxe5 Qxg4 36 Re4+ 1-0**

*Game 34*

**A.Mirzoev-S.Ozdemir**

Konyaalti 2019

## 1 d4

This game begins as a Sämisch King's Indian. 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3 g6 6 c4 Bg7 7 Nc3 0-0 8 Be3 Nc6 9 Qd2 would be our move order to the position at move nine.

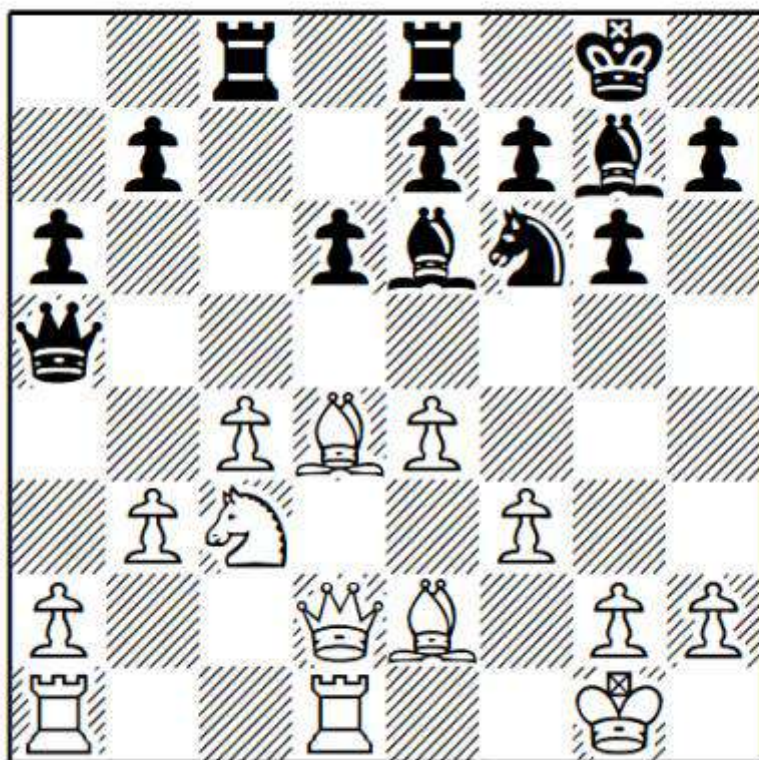
**1 ... Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 f3 0-0 6 Be3 c5 7 Nge2 Nc6 8 Qd2 cxd4 9 Nxd4**

We have now transposed back into our repertoire.

**9 ... Nxd4 10 Bxd4 Be6 11 Be2 a6 12 0-0 Rc8 13 b3 Qa5**

Black is getting ready for ... b7-b5.

**14 Rfd1 Rfe8**



*What now?*

White must now find a plan. Usually White tries to expand on the queenside himself, but this is far from easy.

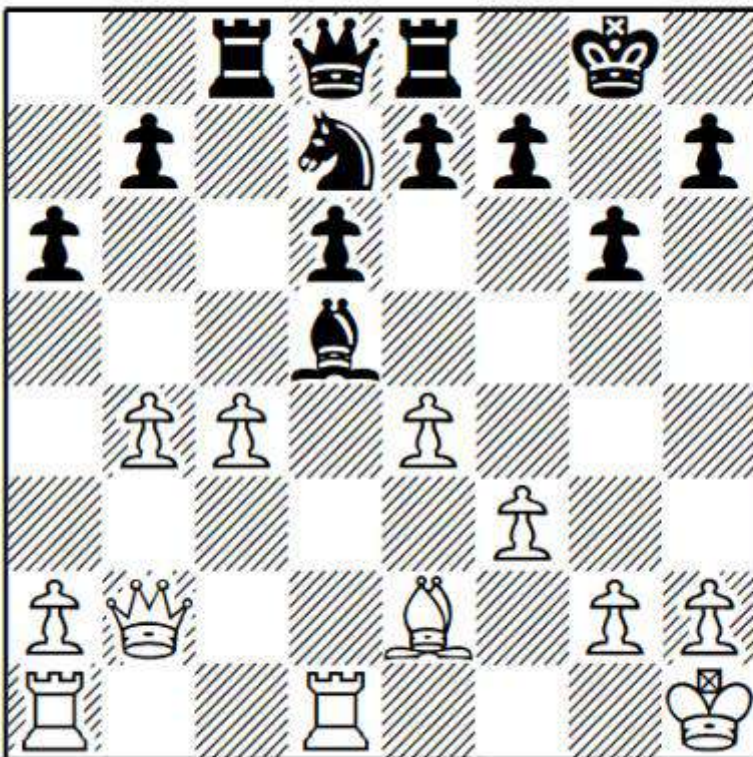
**15 Qb2**

Let's briefly check a few other tries:

a) 15 a3 and 15 Rab1 are similar. As in the game Black can play 15 ... Nd7, when White must exchange dark-squared bishops. However, I prefer 15 Qb2 to either of these moves, as White is then ready for 16 Nd5 without exchanging queens.

b) 15 Rac1 is the only way to keep the dark-squared bishops on the board (i.e. 15 ... Nd7 16 Be3), but this allows 15 ... b5, when 16 cxb5 axb5 17 Bxb5 (not 17 Nxb5?? Qxd2) 17 ... Rxc3 18 Bxe8 Rxc1 19 Qxc1 Nxe8 is okay for Black.

**15 ... Nd7 16 Bxg7 Kxg7 17 Nd5+ Kg8 18 b4 Qd8 19 Kh1 Bxd5**



*Which recapture?*

**Question:** How should White recapture here?

**Answer: 20 exd5!**

Creating a queenside majority which offers good chances to play for an advantage in a complex middlegame. The computer evaluates this as completely equal, but for humans there is enough scope to play. What can

be said about this structure? What are each side's plans? Let's have a quick look from each side:

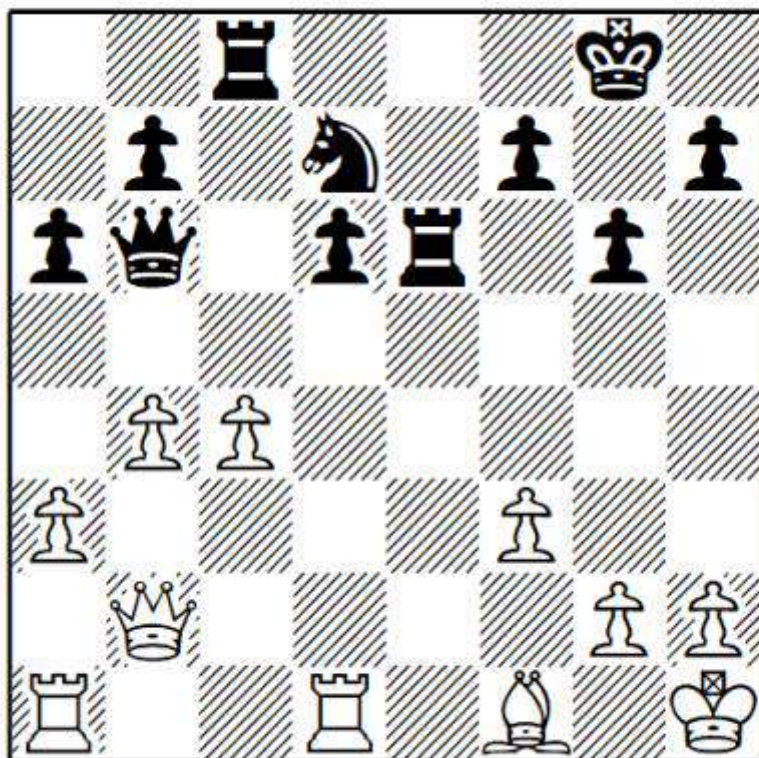
**White** can aim to push c4-c5, gaining more space, and maybe even going further with c5-c6, getting a passed pawn. A second plan is creating pressure on the e-file and going for a kingside attack as the central pawn chain cuts off Black's defences.

**Black** can try to win the c4-pawn but this is really hard, as the game shows. Playing to prevent c4-c5 is only an attempt to keep the position equal and nothing critical for White. Another try is ... e7-e5 but Black is then left with a weakness on d6 and slightly worse.

Note that 20 cxd5? would be wrong, as White has no clear plan and risks ending up with a weak bishop; e.g. 20 ... Qb6 21 Rac1 Qe3 and White must be already careful about keeping the balance.

### 20 ... Qb6 21 Bf1 Rc7

After 21 ... e5 22 dxe6 Rxe6 23 a3 White has a more comfortable position.



## *Weak d6-pawn*

The black d-pawn is a liability, and having pawns on both wings favours the bishop.

**22 Re1 Ne5 23 Qb3 Nd7**

Instead:

a) 23 ... Rec8?! runs into 24 c5! and Black cannot play 24 ... dxc5? because the knight would be lost.

b) 23 ... Qd4 is answered by 24 Rad1 Qf4 25 Re4, chasing the queen away, so the c4-pawn remains safe.

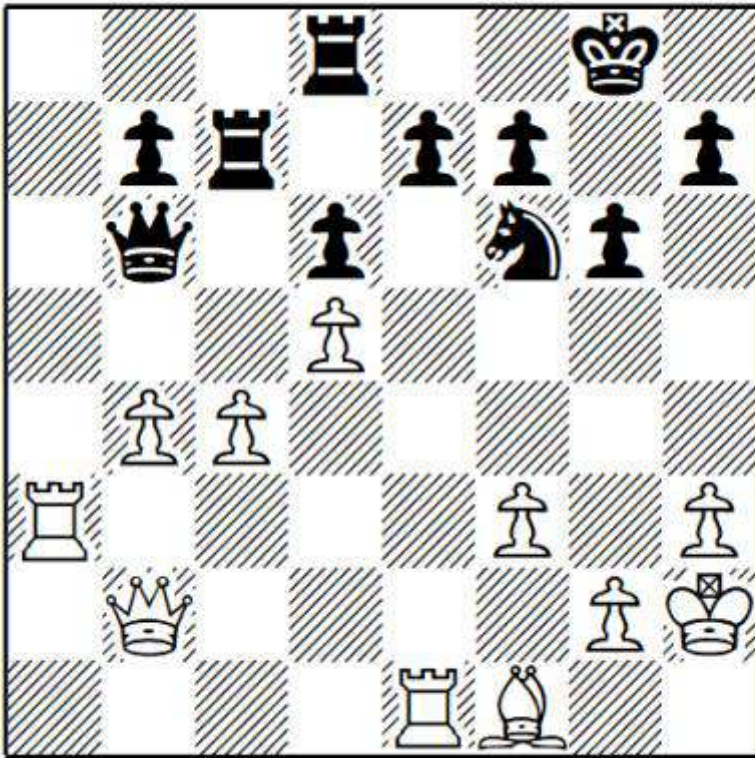
**24 Rad1 Nf6 25 Qb2 a5 26 a3 Nd7**

Black has nothing much to do and from this point on makes a lot of “passing” moves with his knight. From the other side White is happy to make small improvements to his position before deciding upon some concrete action.

**27 Qd2 axb4 28 axb4 Nf6 29 h3 Ra8 30 Ra1 Rac8 31 Rec1 Nd7 32 Ra2 Nf6 33 Ra3 Nd7 34 Ra2 Nf6 35 Kh2 Nd7 36 Re1 Nf6**

Back again, since 36 ... Ne5? 37 c5 loses on the spot.

**37 Qb2 Rd8 38 Ra3**



### *Pressure on Black*

#### **38 ... h5?**

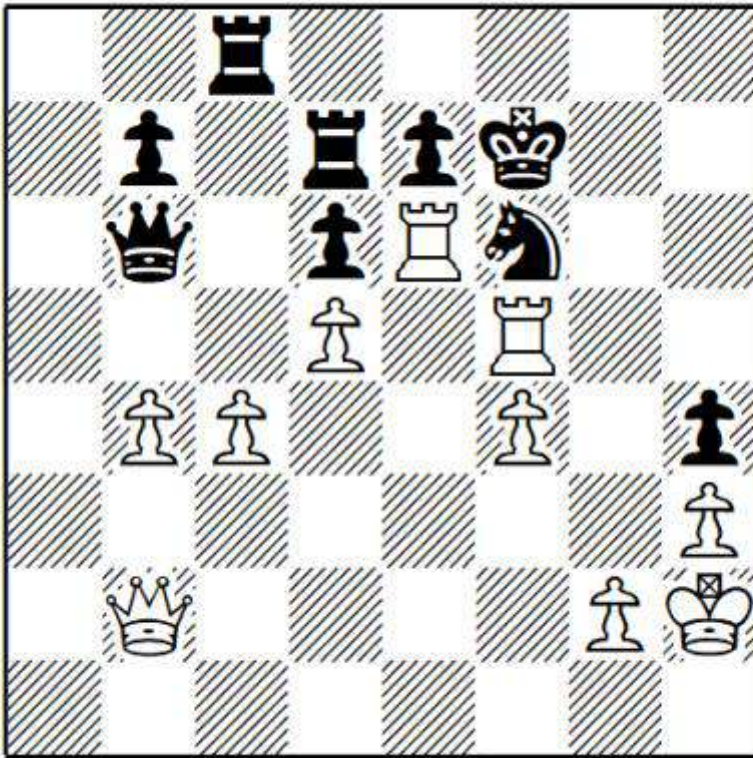
Black suddenly lashes out. It was better to continue the do nothing strategy with, say, 38 ... Rcd7, when White would have to come up with a plan. Previously Black only had to cover the weakness at e7, whereas now the g6-pawn has lost an important defender, which enables White to break the resistance.

**Remember:** When trying to defend a position in the most tenacious way, do not alter the pawns around your king voluntarily, as such moves tend to create new hooks.

#### **39 Rae3**

White's chances have improved substantially and he converts the advantage nicely.

**39 ... Rdd7 40 f4 Kf8 41 Qd2 Kg7 42 Rf3 Nh7 43 Rg3 f5 44 Bd3 h4 45 Qb2+ Nf6 46 Rg5 Kf7 47 Re6 Rc8 48 Bxf5 gxf5 49 Rxf5**



*A decisive attack*

### 9 ... Qd8

The only move, as otherwise one of the white rooks will take on f6 with devastating effect; e.g. 49 ... Rg8 50 Rxf6+ exf6 51 Qxf6 mate. Or if 49 ... Rh8 then 50 Rxe7+ Rxe7 51 Qxf6+ with a mating attack. But now the white queen comes round decisively.

**50 Qe2 Qf8 51 Qh5+ Kg8 52 Rg5+ Qg7 53 Rxc7+ Kxc7 54 Qg5+ Kf7 55 Qf5 Rdc7 56 c5 1-0**

### *Game 35*

**Zhou Jianchao-Lin Chen**

Chinese Team Championship 2006

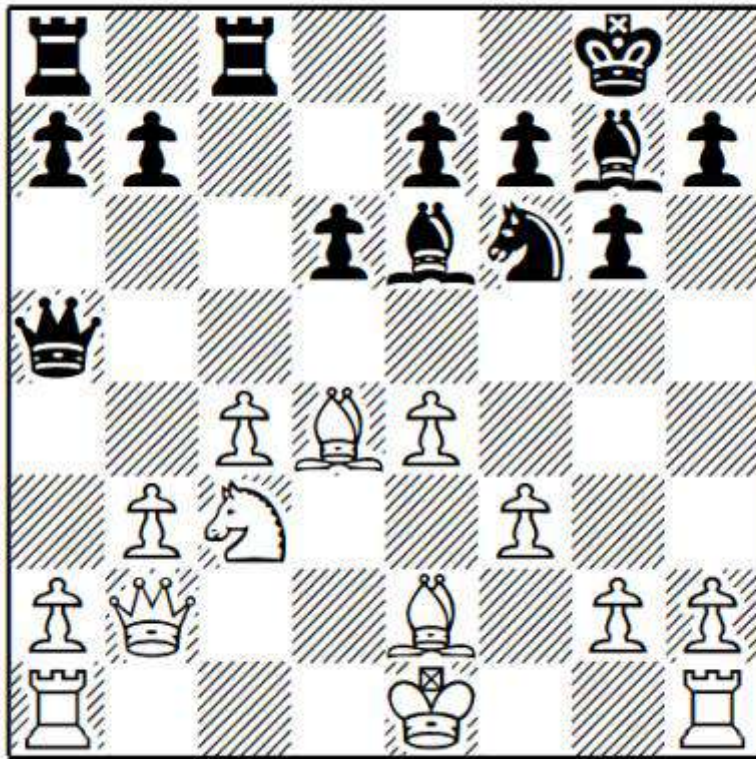
**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 f3**

The Sämisch King's Indian again, but the outcome is the same.

5 ... 0-0 6 Be3 c5 7 Nge2 Nc6 8 Qd2 cxd4 9 Nxd4 Nxd4 10 Bxd4 Be6  
11 Be2 Qa5

Making way for the f8-rook to go to c8.

12 b3 Rfc8 13 Qb2!?



*Remember the Qb2 idea*

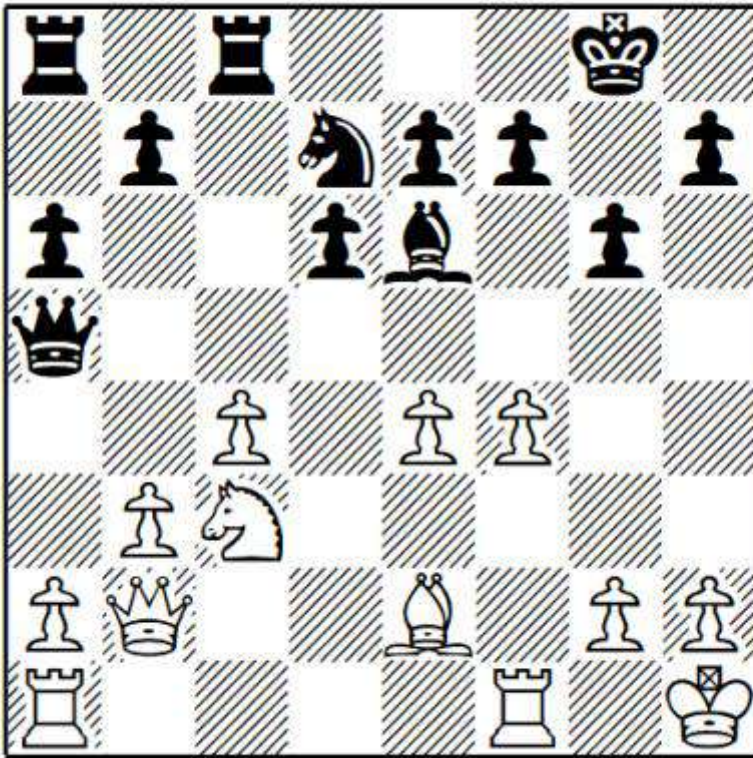
Despite the altered arrangement of Black's rooks, we stick with this rare idea which we saw in the previous game. The queen is useful on b2, preparing b3-b4 as well as creating pressure down the long diagonal.

13 ... Nd7 14 Bxg7 Kxg7 15 0-0 Kg8 16 Kh1!

Sidestepping any inconvenient checks on the a7-g1 diagonal.

16 ... a6 17 f4!

Discouraging ... b7-b5, since 18 f5 would be a good answer.



*What now for Black?*

### 17 ... f6

A concession, but it was hard to find a good alternative:

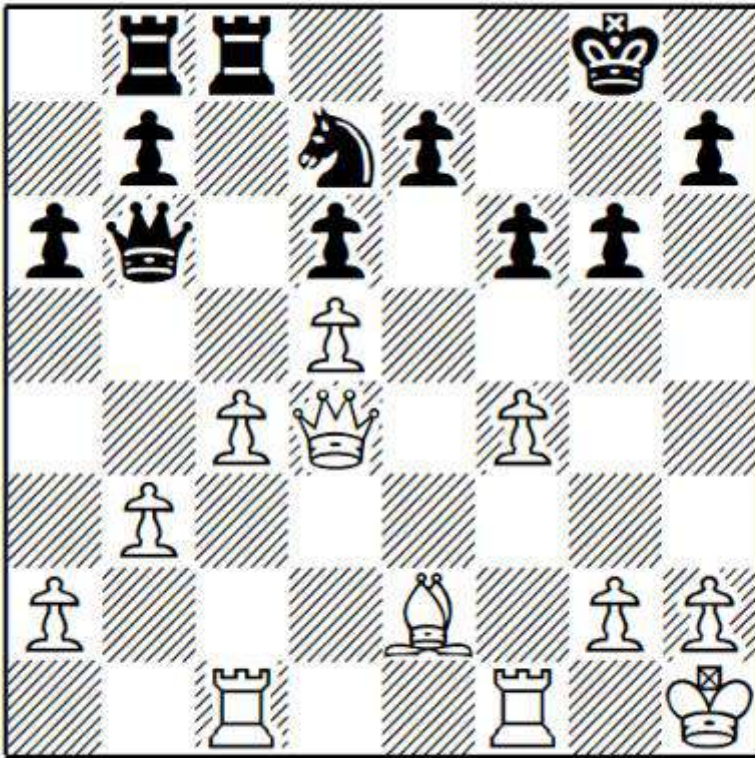
a) 17 ... b5 18 f5 does not, as it appears, win a piece instantly because Black has the resource 18 ... b4!, but the complications still favour White; e.g. 19 fxe6 bxc3 20 exf7+ Kg7 21 Qc2 Rf8 22 Rf3 Rxf7 23 Qxc3+ and White has own a pawn.

b) 17 ... Nf6! would be my preference, though White can play 18 f5 anyway; e.g. 18 ... gxf5 (if 18 ... Bd7 then 19 fxc6 hxg6 20 Rxf6! exf6 21 Nd5 with a huge attack) 19 exf5 Bxf5 20 Rad1 Be6 21 Bf3 and White is better. Nonetheless, the position remains double-edged due to the sacrificed pawn.

### 18 Nd5 Qd8 19 Qd4 Rab8 20 Rac1

Now 20 f5? would be premature due to 20 ... Bxd5 21 exd5 g5 22 a4 Ne5 and the knight will stay there forever, keeping the position balanced.

### 20 ... Bxd5 21 exd5 Qb6



*Exchange queens?*

**Question:** How should White react? Go for the exchange of queens or keep them on the board?

**Answer:** Keep the queens, because the black king will stay in danger.

**22 Qe4!**

The most logical move, keeping an eye on the weak spots e7 and g6.

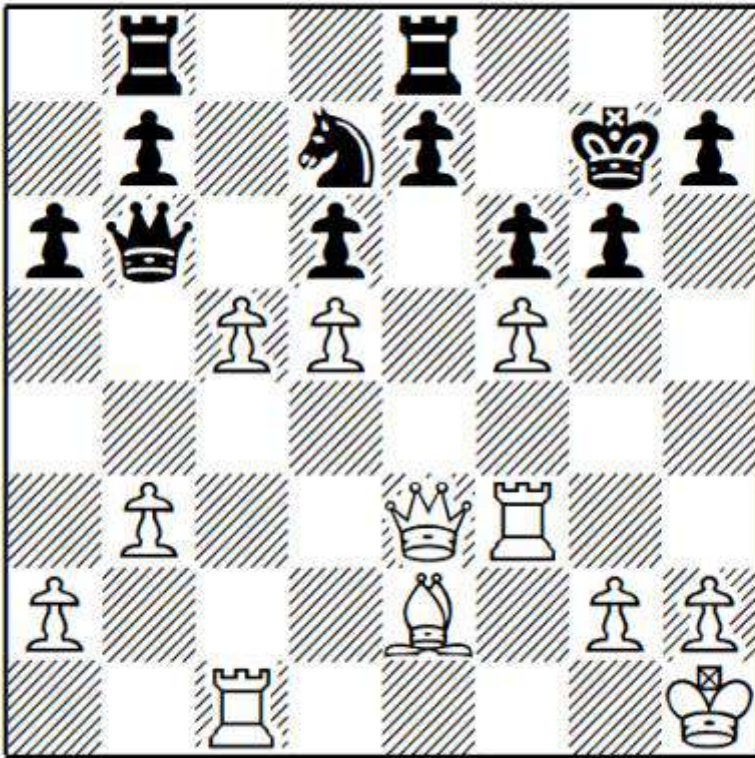
**22 ... Nc5 23 Qe3**

Not 23 Qxe7?? Re8 24 Qxf6 Rxe2 and Black wins the bishop.

**23 ... Re8?! 24 f5**

Now that the knight cannot reach e5 quickly, White seizes the opportunity to play for an attack.

**24 ... Kg7 25 Rf3 Nd7 26 c5!**



### *White attacks*

A strong disruption. Black is busy and no longer threatening to exchange queens, so White has gained time for his attack. Of course 26 Rh3? would be a big mistake in view of 26 ... Qxe3 27 Rxe3 Ne5 and in the ending I already prefer Black.

**26 ... dxc5**

If 26 ... Nxc5? then 27 Rh3 g5 27 Bh5 and Black loses material.

**27 fxg6 c4**

Not yet 27 ... hxg6? due to 28 Rh3 again and White wins since 28 ... Rh8 is impossible.

**28 Qe4 hxg6 29 Rg3 Ne5?**

The only defence was 29 ... f5 30 Qxf5 Qd6! 31 Qg5 (not 31 Bh5?? due to 31 ... Qxg3! and Black wins) 31 ... cxb3 32 axb3, although White remains better as the black king is still in danger.

**30 Bh5 Rh8 31 Rxc6+ Kf8 32 Qxe5! fxe5 33 Rxb6 Rxh5 34 bxc4 e4 35 Re6 b5 36 Rf1+ Kg8 37 cxb5 Rxb5 38 Rxe7 Rf5 39 Kg1 Rfxd5 40**

**Rxe4 Rb2 41 Rg4+ 1-0**

The endgame is a simple win, so Black resigned.

*Game 36*

**A.Neiksans-A.Kveinys**

Latvian Championship, Riga 2017

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 g6**

This time we have an actual Accelerated Dragon and can set up the Maróczy Bind at once.

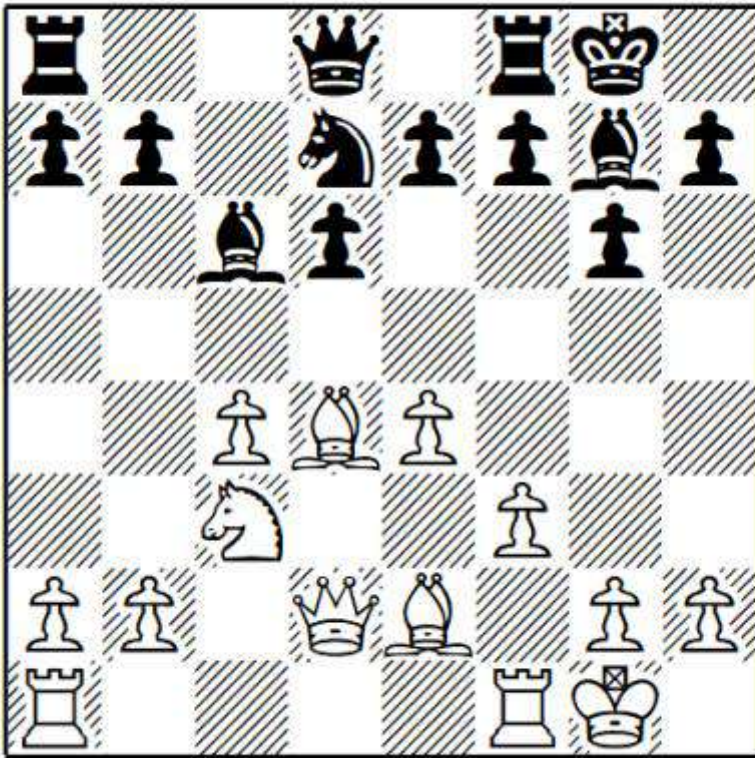
**5 c4 Bg7 6 Be3 Nf6 7 Nc3 d6 8 Be2 0-0 9 0-0 Bd7 10 f3**

We have now reached one of the most frequent positions in the Maróczy. It has been played more than 2,000 times with a score of about 56% for White. In the next game White plays 10 Qd2 first, which merely led to a transposition after 10 ... Nxd4 11 Bxd4 Bc6 12 f3.

**10 ... Nxd4 11 Bxd4 Bc6**

Black can try for ... b7-b5 after 11 ... a6, but White is in time to prevent it: 12 0-0 Qa5 13 Rfd1 Rfc8 (or if 13 ... b5? then 14 Nd5! Qxd2 15 Nxe7+) 14 a3 and Black cannot play 14 ... b5? because 15 b4! just wins the pawn.

**12 Qd2 Nd7**



*Keep the bishop?*

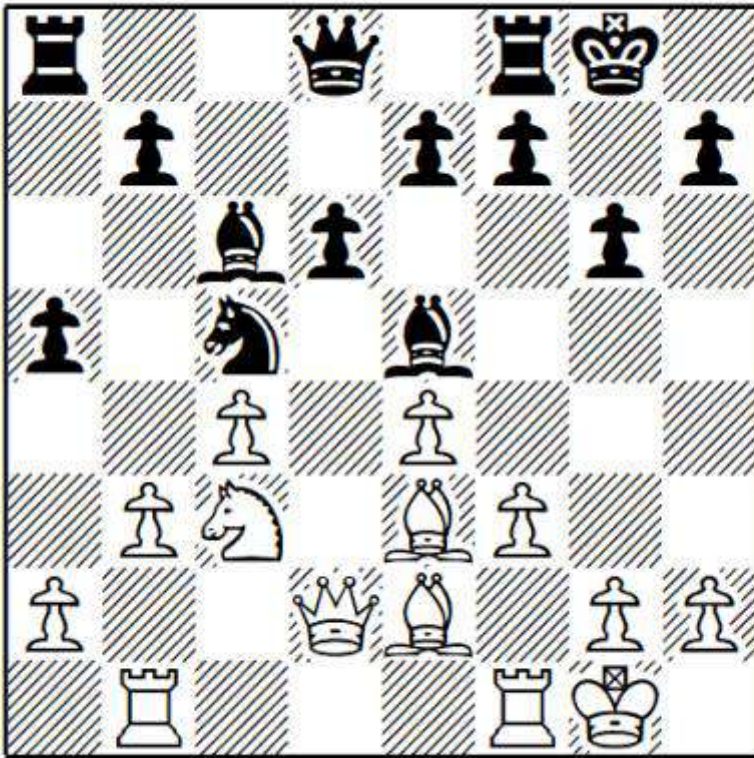
### **13 Be3**

If you want to go for a kingside attack then 13 Bxg7 Kxg7 14 Kh1 a5 15 f4 is another viable option. However, 13 Be3 is positionally sounder, as we should keep our good bishop and thereby lower the risk of ending up with just the bad bishop on e2. From now on Black has several plans, one of the most modern ones being discussed in the current game.

**13 ... a5 14 b3!**

Very typical, otherwise 14 ... a4 and 15 ... Qa5 will follow, when White has a hard job making progress on the queenside.

**14 ... Nc5 15 Rab1 Be5!**



### *How to challenge the bishop?*

This move came into fashion some years ago. It was applied by many grandmasters, including Eduardo Iturrizaga, one of the leading experts on the Accelerated Dragon. The basic idea is that White is unable to drive the bishop away by playing f2-f4 because this would drop the e4-pawn. Meanwhile Black has ideas like ... e7-e6, ... Qh4 and ... f7-f5. White is best prepared if he tries to centralize his forces and prophylactically cover all the upcoming threats on the kingside.

For the alternative 15 ... Qb6 see the next game.

**16 Rfd1!**

Anticipating ... e7-e6, after which the rook belongs on the d-file rather than the c-file.

**16 ... e6 17 Bd4**

Although part of his plan, Black's last move also weakened his dark squares slightly, so White returns his bishop to d4, seeking a trade after all.

**17 ... Qf6**

After 17 ... Qh4 18 Bxe5 dxe5 19 Qd6 Nd7 20 a3 White is better because Black's remaining minor pieces are stuck.

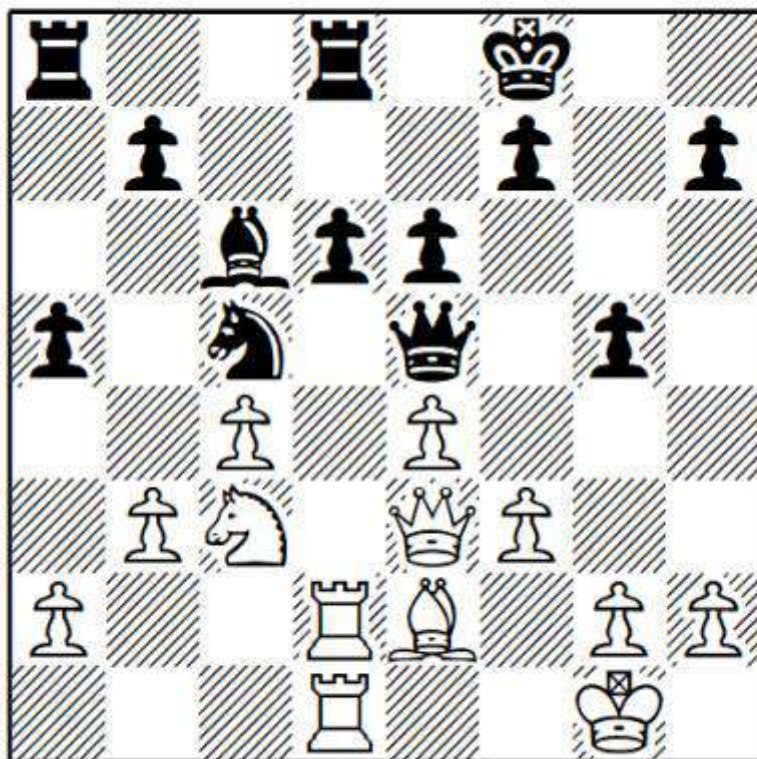
### 18 Qe3 Rfd8

The exchange 18 ... Bxd4 19 Rxd4 gives White a clear target on d6, which makes his position slightly more pleasant.

### 19 Bxe5

Using the moment when Black cannot take back with his d-pawn.

### 19 ... Qxe5 20 Rd2 g5 21 Rbd1 Kf8



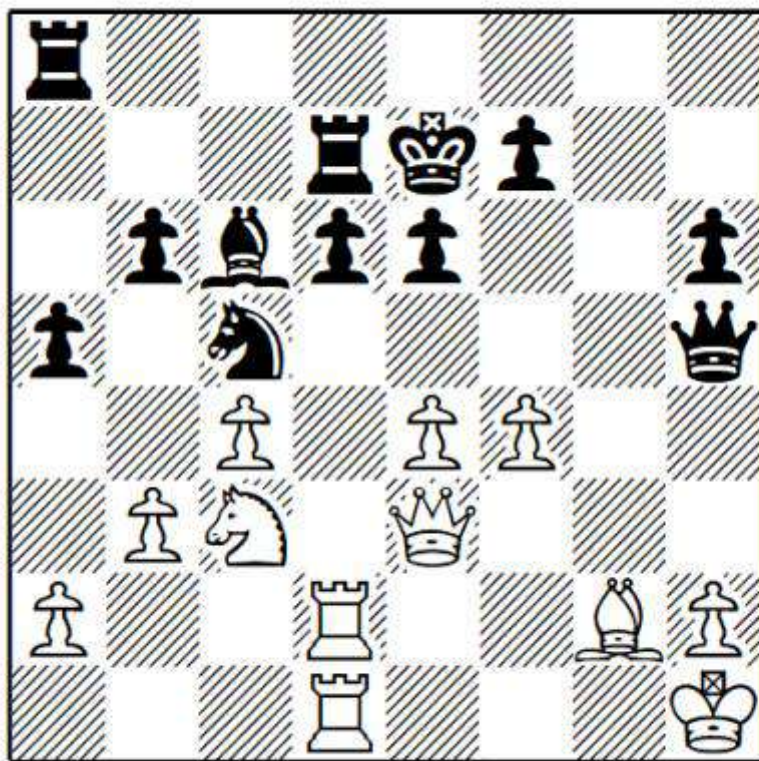
*Can you break the defence?*

**Question:** So far it was obvious how to attack the d6-pawn, but from now it becomes more difficult. Can you find a way to pose new problems for Black?

**Answer:** White should try to open the position with g2-g3 followed by f3-f4, because the black king is weak. The same plan works after 21 ... h6!? 22 g3 Kg7 23 f4, but is even stronger with the king in the centre.

Attacking the d6-pawn directly with 22 Nb5? is not so good, as after 22 ... Bxb5 23 cxb5 Black is very stable on the dark squares and d6 remains well defended.

**22 Bf1 h6 23 g3! Ke7 24 Bg2 b6 25 Kh1 Rd7 26 f4 gxf4 27 gxf4 Qh5**



*Tactics?*

**Question:** Black's king in the centre is vulnerable but everything still seems to

be defended. Can you find a way to destroy the king's shelter?

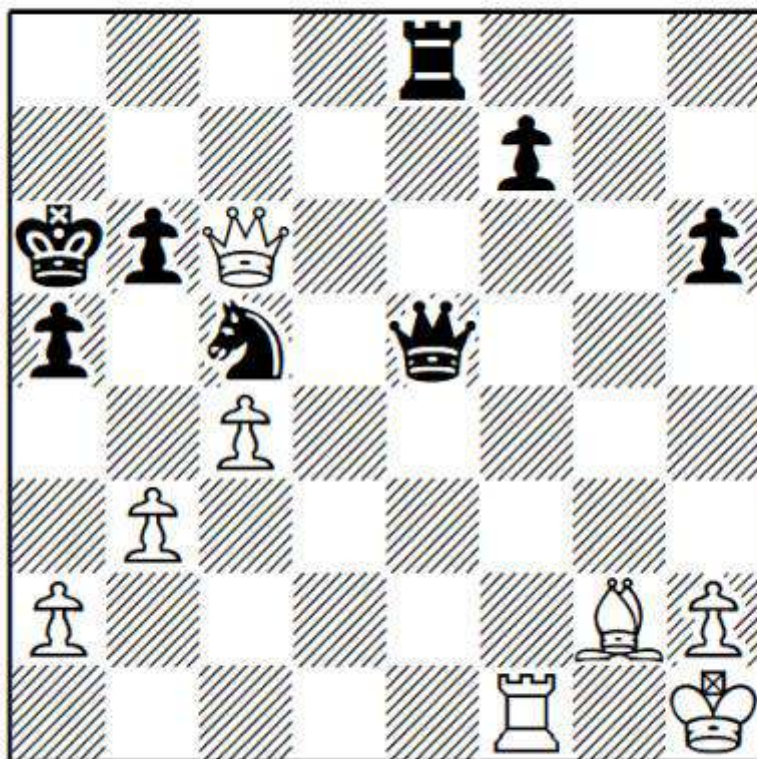
**Answer: 28 Nd5+!**

It turns out that d5 wasn't really covered after all. Black has to take the knight, opening up his own position, as otherwise 29 Nxb6 follows, forking the two rooks.

**28 ... Bxd5**

The only move. After 28 ... exd5? 29 exd5+ Kf8 30 dxc6 White regains the piece immediately and is winning easily.

29 exd5 Rg8 30 dxe6 Nxe6 31 Rf1 Qc5 32 Qe1 Kd8 33 Rd5 Qa3 34 Qd2 Qb4 35 Qb2 Nc5 36 Bh3 Re7 37 Qd4 Kc7 38 Qf6 Rge8 39 Qxd6+ Kb7 40 Bg2 Ka6 41 Re5 Rxe5 42 fxe5 Qc3 43 Qc6 Qxe5



*An easy win?*

**44 Rxf7?!**

White is clearly winning but finds the conversion task rather more difficult than he may have anticipated. Instead, 44 a3 and 45 b4 would have ended the game quickly.

**44 ... Qe1+ 45 Rf1 Qe6 46 Qb5+ Ka7 47 b4 axb4 48 Qxb4 Re7 49 Qa3+ Na6 50 Qc3 Nc5 51 Qf3 Qc8 52 h3 Qe8 53 Qg3 h5 54 Qa3+ Na6 55 Qc3 Nc5 56 Qa3+ Na6 57 Qc1 Nc5 58 Rd1?! h4?**

Missing a chance. After 58 ... Re3! it would be far harder for White to make progress.

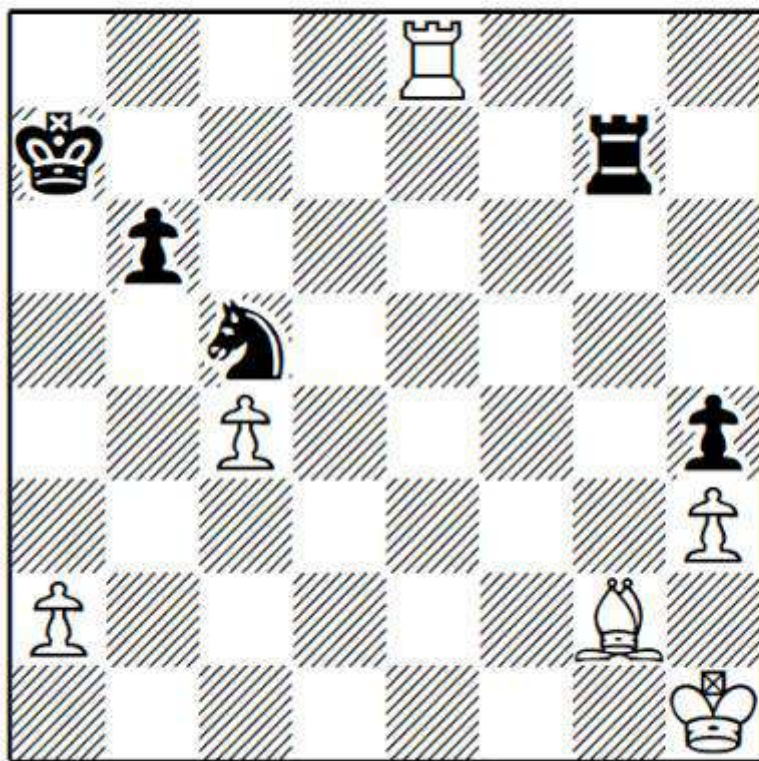
**59 Qa3+ Na6 60 Qc3 Nc5 61 Rf1 Re3 62 Qg7+ Re7 63 Rf8!**

Forcing the queens off, after which everything becomes simple again.

**63 ... Rxc7**

Black has no choice since 63 ... Qd7? 64 Ra8 is mate. But the exchange of the queens doesn't solve his problem.

**64 Rxe8**



*How to defend mate?*

**64 ... b5**

Black is obliged to give up another pawn. 64 ... Ka6 would not help after 65 Bc6 Ka5 66 a3, while 64 ... Nb7 65 Rh8 and 66 Rxh4 is clearly hopeless.

**65 Rc8 Rg5 66 cxb5 Nd3 67 a4 Nf4 68 Rc2 Kb6 69 Rf2 Nh5 70 Rf8 Rc5 71 Rb8+ Kc7 72 Rb7+ Kd6 73 Rh7 Nf4 74 Rxh4 Ke5 75 b6 Rc1+ 76 Kh2 Rc2 77 Rxf4 1-0**

Black resigned in view of 57 ... Kxf4 58 b7 Rb2 59 a5 etc.

*Game 37*

**Bu Xiangzhi-B.Savchenko**

World Rapid Championship, Riyadh 2017

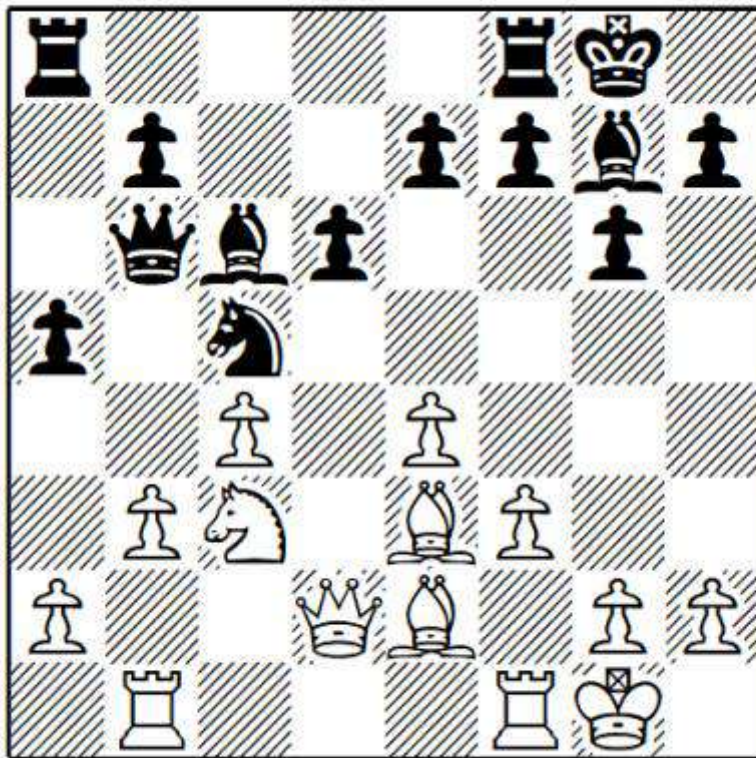
**1 Nf3 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 c5 5 d4 cxd4 6 Nxd4 Nc6**

Just as an English was heading towards a Classical King's Indian, Black decides he'd rather defend a Maróczy Bind, so here we are.

**7 Be3 d6 8 Be2 0-0 9 0-0 Bd7 10 Qd2 Nxd4 11 Bxd4 Bc6 12 f3**

We've finally reached a familiar position from the introductory notes. This was one of the main lines in former years, and it is still played today. There are over 4000 games from here in the databases, with White scoring a very satisfactory 58%.

**12 ... a5 13 b3 Nd7 14 Be3 Nc5 15 Rab1 Qb6**



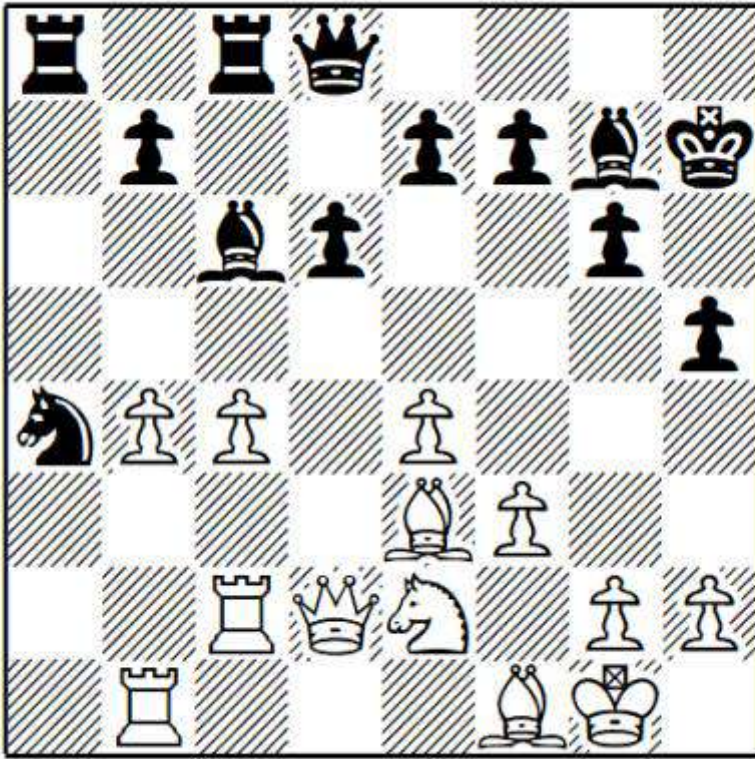
*The old main line*

The old plan. Black is trying to put up resistance on the queenside with ... Rfc8 and maybe ... Qb4 coming next.

**16 Rfc1 Rfc8 17 Bf1**

The most common move is 17 Rc2. However, the prophylactic Bf1, freeing the e2-square for the knight, will often follow anyway before

pushing a2-a3 and b3-b4; e.g. 17 ... Qd8 18 a3 h5 (after 18 ... a4 19 b4 Nb3 20 Qd1 the knight might become a target and it has no way back) 19 Bf1 Kh7 20 b4 axb4 21 axb4 Na4 22 Ne2! is a recurring motif, leaving the black knight on the rim. White is slightly better here.



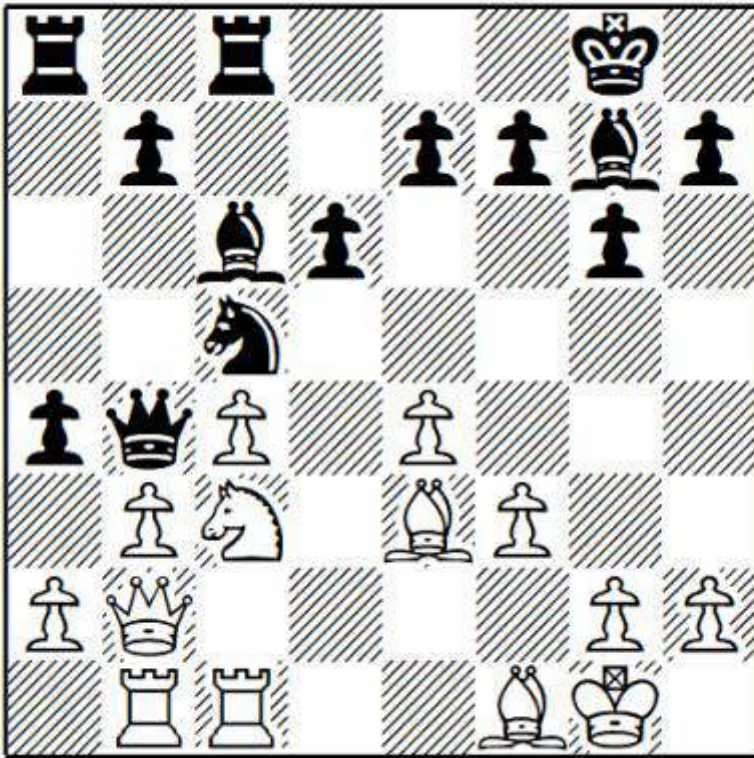
*A strong retreat*

**17 ... Qb4**

Slowing down White's queenside play: a2-a3 is prevented momentarily and White cannot make progress without this move.

**18 Qb2 Qb6**

Here 18 ... a4 might come to mind, but White has a nice resource.



*How to win?*

**Question:** Can you spot how to refute Black's play?

**Answer:** 19 a3! Qxb3 (or 19 ... Qb6 20 b4 and White wins the knight)  
20 Qa1 Bxc3 21 Rxc3 and the black queen is trapped.

**19 Kh1**

A clever way to continue. 19 Qd2 Qb4 is just a repetition, while the immediate 19 a3 runs into 19 ... Bh6!; e.g. 20 Qf2 (not 20 Bxh6?? Nxe4+ 21 Kh1 Nf2+ and White must give his queen to avoid mate) 20 ... Bxe3 21 Qxe3 Nd7, when the exchange of queens led to equality and an eventual draw in E.Hansen-S.De Filomeno, Athens 2012.

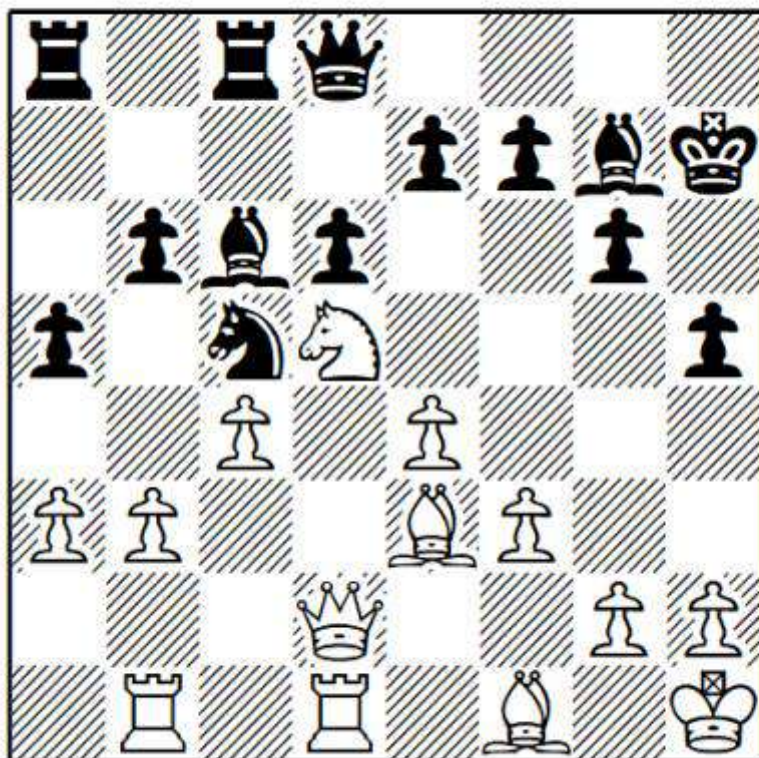
**19 ... h5**

An earlier game went 19 ... Qd8 20 Qd2 e6 21 Bg5 Qf8 22 Rd1 h6 23 Be3 Rd8 24 a3, followed by b3-b4, Wang Hao-Bu Xiangzhi, Chinese Team Championship 2017. Although he later won, Bu cannot have been happy

with how the opening had gone, seeing as he was now ready to take the position on from the other side.

**20 a3 Qd8 21 Rd1 b6 22 Qd2 Kh7 23 Ne2 Ne6 24 Nc3 Nc5 25 Nd5!**

Entering a strong outpost. Black faces the hard decision of expelling the knight at the cost of his pawn structure.



*A strong knight*

**25 ... e6 26 Nf4 Qe8 27 Ne2 Rd8 28 Nd4 Bd7 29 b4**

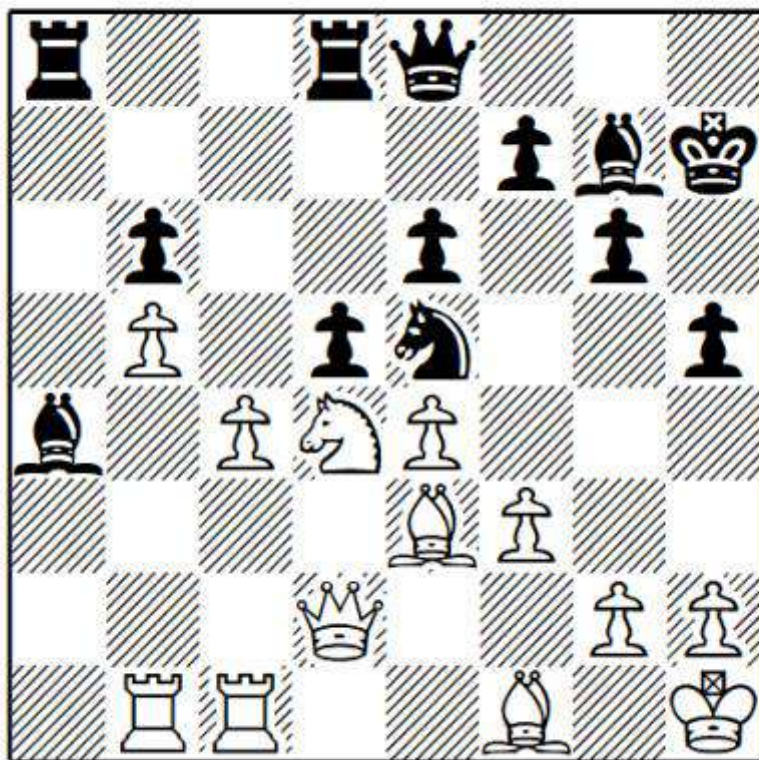
White finally goes for the advance and increases the pressure on the queenside.

**Remember:** Do not hurry to play b3-b4, because Black does not have counterplay. Usually Black's best counterchances arise when White pushes b3-b4 too quickly. So be wise and prepare your pawn push carefully!

**29 ... Ba4 30 Re1 axb4 31 axb4 Nd7 32 Rec1 Ne5 33 b5!?**

Playing against the stranded bishop looks interesting, but Black can escape with good defence. A stronger plan was to create a second weakness on the kingside with 33 Bg5 Rdc8 34 f4 Nd7 35 f5 and White is much better.

**33 ... d5!**



*Central counterplay*

trong defence by Savchenko. Black secures a route back for his bishop and completely equalizes. Other moves are clearly worse, as White can then prevent ... d6-d5 and the bishop will not find a way out soon; e.g. 33 ... Qd7?! 34 f4 Ng4 35 Nc6 Rdc8 36 Nb4 and White is ready to take on d5 without letting the bishop escape.

**34 exd5 exd5 35 c5?!**

It seems probable that the players were getting short of time, since Bu now overplays his hand, and the computer shows the rest of the game to be quite inaccurate. 35 cxd5 Rxd5 was relatively best with a level position.

**35 ... bxc5 36 Rxc5 Nc4 37 Bxc4 dxc4 38 Qf2? Bb3?**

Instead, 38 ... Rac8! 39 Rxc8 Rxc8 secures Black a huge plus; e.g. 40 b6 c3 41 b7 Rb8 42 Bf4 Bxd4 43 Qxd4 c2 44 Rg1 Rxb7 and White has lost his pawn.

**39 Qg1 Ba2?!**

There was no need to move the bishop. 39 ... Qd7 was better, when 40 Nxb3? cxb3 41 Rxb3 loses to 41 ... Ra1 42 Rc1 Rxc1 43 Bxc1 Qd1 44 Rb1 Qxg1+ 45 Kxg1 Rd1+ 46 Kf2 Bh6.

**40 Re1 Qd7 41 Nc6 Rdc8?! 42 Rd1 Qe8 43 Bd4 Bb3 44 Rc1 Bf8?! 45 Re5 Qd7 46 Qe3 Bh6? 47 Qe4!**

White is winning again for the moment. 47 ... Bxc1? is impossible due to 48 Rxh5+ Bh6 49 Rxh6+ Kxh6 50 Qh4 mate.

**47 ... Re8 48 Re1 Rxe5 49 Qxe5?**

Natural but wrong. 49 Nxe5 was correct, when Black cannot take the b-pawn because 49 ... Qxb5? 50 Nxb6! fxb6 51 Qe7+ leads to mate.

**49 ... Ba4 50 h3 Rg8? 51 Qc5 Re8 52 Ra1? Bb3? 53 Ne5 Qf5 54 Ra7? Kg8?**

Both players have committed errors over the past few moves. Here 54 ... c3!, allowing the bishop to defend f7, was Black's last chance to stay in the game.

**55 b6**

Now White wins in a straightforward way. 55 Rxf7 was equally good.

**55 ... Bf4 56 b7 c3 57 Ra8 c2 58 Rxe8+ Kh7 59 b8Q Bd5 60 Rh8+ Kg7 61 Qbf8+ 1-0**

In the final game of this chapter, we'll study the interesting 7 ... Ng4 in the Accelerated Dragon.

*Game 38*

**D.Navara-Y.Kryvoruchko**

Polish Team Championship 2006

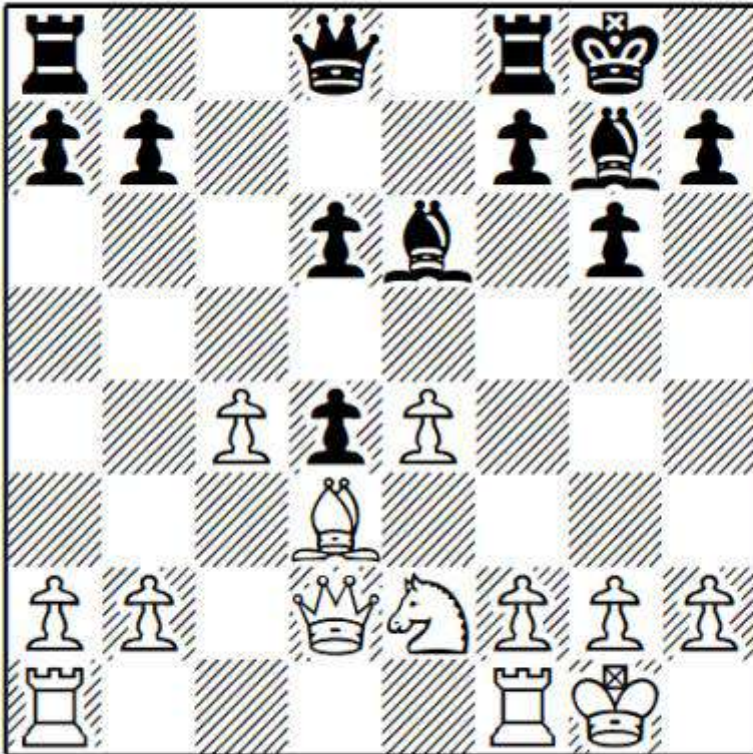
**1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 g6 3 c4 c5 4 Nc3 cxd4 5 Nxd4 Nc6 6 e4 Bg7 7 Be3**

From what can only be called a Queen's Pawn Opening, we've somehow landed up in our King's Pawn repertoire again.

**7 ... Ng4 8 Qxg4 Nxd4 9 Qd1 e5 10 Bd3 0-0 11 0-0 d6 12 Qd2 Be6 13 Bxd4**

So far, we are familiar with everything from the introductory notes. As we saw there, 13 Rac1 Rc8 14 Ne2 is one way to play the position. Instead, Navara decides to double his opponent's pawns and go for a slow positional game.

**13 ... exd4 14 Ne2**



*Simple but interesting*

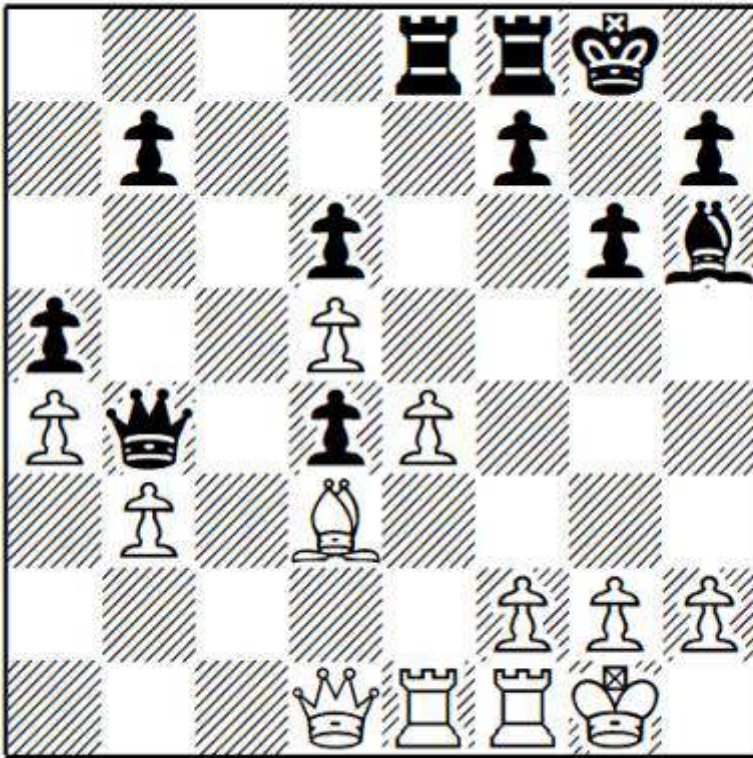
**14 ... Qb6 15 b3 a5 16 a4 Rae8**

Not 16 ... Qxb3? 17 Rfb1 Bh6 18 f4! and White wins.

**17 Qc2 Qb4**

Trying for active play with something like 17 ... f5 18 exf5 Bxf5 19 Nf4 Bxd3 20 Nxd3 would slightly favour White, who now has an excellent knight.

**18 Rae1 Bd7 19 Qd1 Bc6 20 Nf4 Bh6 21 Nd5 Bxd5 22 cxd5**



*Equal but not dead*

here is no doubt that the position is more-or-less equal here, but when you compare the pawns, it is clear that White's kingside pawns are more flexible, which means his game is easier to play.

**22 ... Qd2?!**

I think this is a poor decision. Black's queen was clearly more active than White's, so swapping them off makes little sense. Let's look at some other options here:

a) 22 ... f5? is just bad, as after 23 exf5 Rxe1 24 Rxe1 gxf5 Black has both weakened his king and surrendered the e-file.

b) 22 ... Re7 could be met by 23 g3 Rfe8 24 f4, restricting the black bishop when White can hope for a tiny plus.

c) 22 ... Rc8! 23 Bc4 Bg7 looks best, but I would still take White who will start something with f2-f4 at some point.

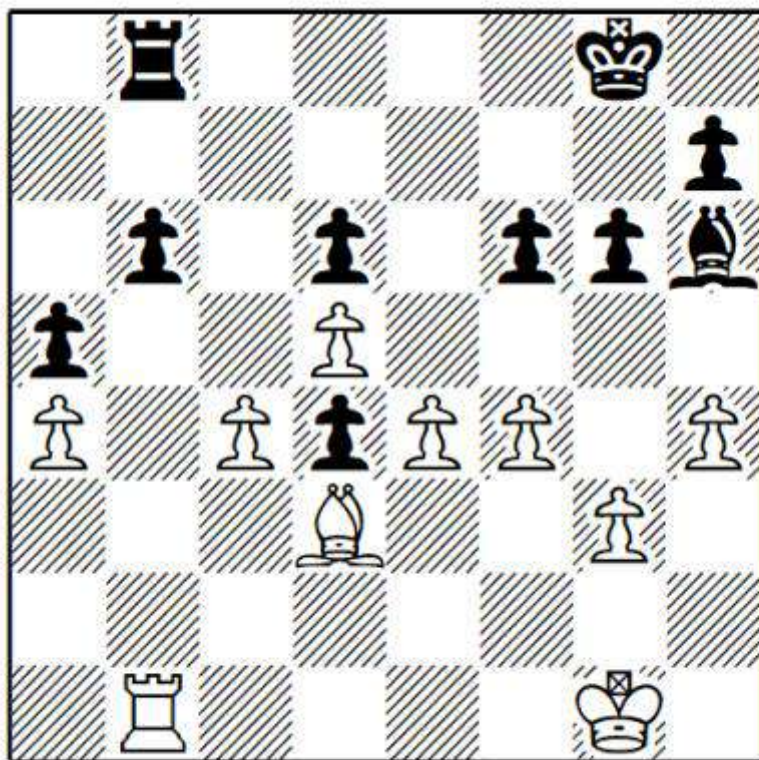
**23 Re2 Qxd1 24 Rxd1 Bg7**

After 24 ... Rc8 25 Bc4 Bg7 White can begin his kingside expansion: 26 f4 Rfe8 27 Rde1 Kf8 28 Kf2 Rc7 29 e5 with a slow but steady initiative.

**25 Rc2 Rc8 26 Rc4 Rxc4 27 bxc4 b6**

Black now has two weaknesses: b6 and d4. White is clearly better and Navara improves his position with great technique.

**28 Rb1 Rb8 29 f4 Bh6 30 g3 f6 31 h4**



### *Increasing pressure*

Gaining more space and preventing any kind of counterplay.

**31 ... Kf7**

31 ... g5 is a radical change of the slow battle, but the outcome favours White: 32 hxg5 fxg5 33 e5 gxf4 34 exd6 fxg3 35 d7 Rd8 (or 35 ... Bf4 36 c5!) 36 Rxb6 and the connected passed c- and d-pawns are too strong.

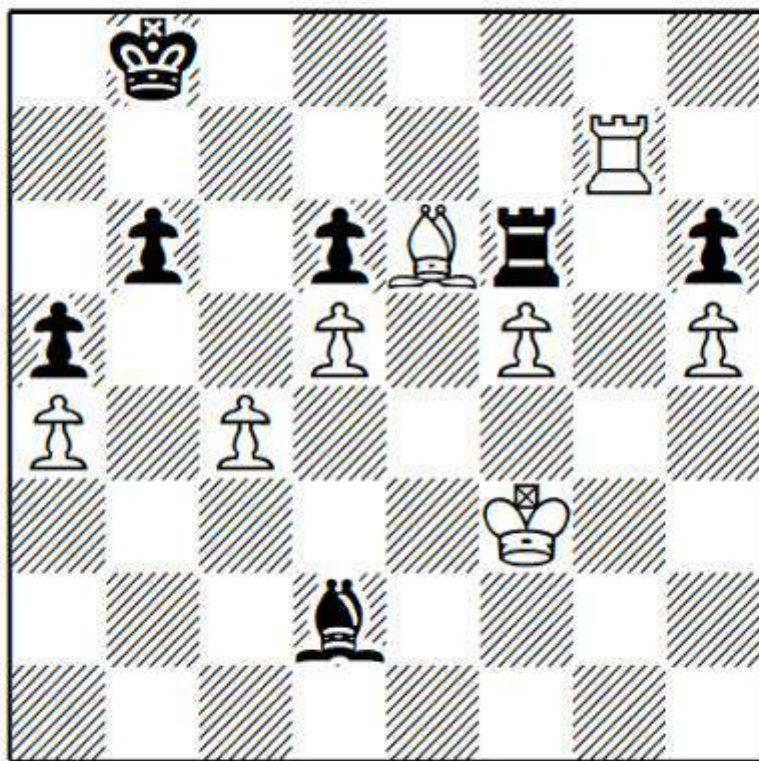
**32 Kf2 Ke7 33 Kf3 Kd7 34 Bf1 Kc7 35 Bh3 Bg7 36 Be6 Rf8 37 h5**

Opening up a second front.

**37 ... Bh6**

If 37 ... g5 then 38 h6! Bh8 (38 ... Bxh6 39 Rh1 Bg7 40 Rxd7 is even worse) 39 Bf5 and White is playing with an extra piece.

**38 Rd1 f5 39 exf5 gxf5 40 Rxd4 Bg7 41 Rd2 h6 42 Rg2 Bc3 43 g4 fxg4+ 44 Rxd4 Bd2 45 Rg7+ Kb8 46 f5 Rf6**



*How to make progress?*

**Question:** White has won a pawn, but Black can still defend on the dark squares.

Can you find new weaknesses or any way to break the defence?

**Answer: 47 Ke4!**

Activate your king and play for a mating attack. The black monarch is in big danger.

**47 ... Bb4 48 Kd3 Ba3**

In the case of 48 ... Bc5 49 Rg6 the h-pawn falls, since Black's bishop can no longer defend the rook, while after 49 ... Rxd4 50 fxg6 the g-pawn would be unstoppable.

**49 c5!**

Clearing a route for the king, as White goes for a mating attack despite the reduced material.

**49 ... Bxc5 50 Rg8+ Kc7 51 Kc4 Be3 52 Kb5 Kb7 53 Rg7+ Kb8 54 Ka6 Rf8 55 Rb7+ Ka8 56 Bd7 1-0**

White threatens Bc6 and Rxb6 mate, or if 56 ... Rf7 then 57 Rc7 Rf8 58 f6 followed by f6-f7 wins.

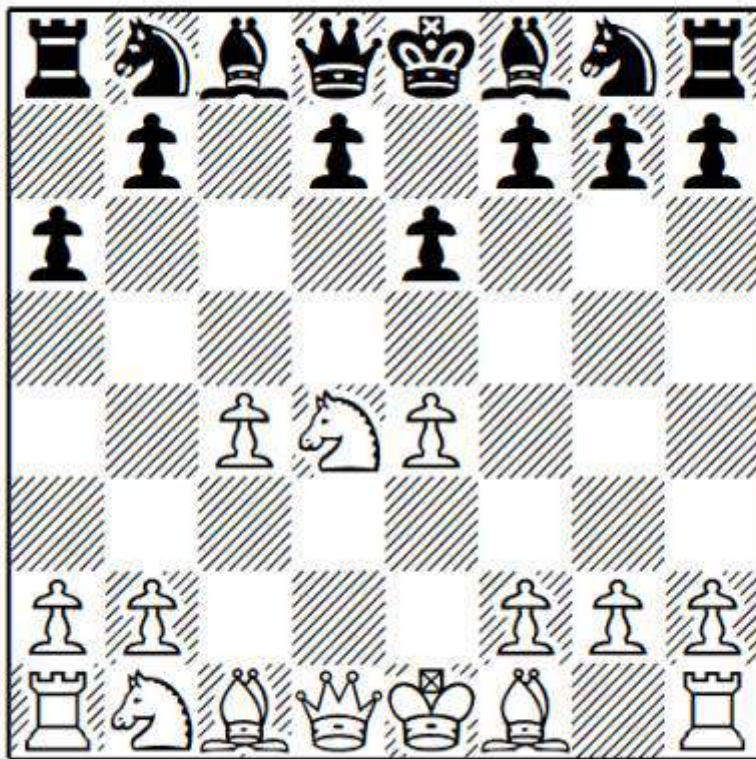
# Chapter Six

## Kan Variation

### Introduction

The Kan (or Paulsen) Sicilian is a quite flexible system. Black puts pawns on e6 and a6 before showing further intentions. White has many options against this, the main ones being 5 Bd3 or 5 Nc3. However, our approach is slightly different, as I again propose to avoid the heavy mainstream theory with 5 c4, conquering the centre with our pawn. But let's check it step-by-step.

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 a6 5 c4**



*Our starting point*

We have reached our initial position and Black must decide how to react.

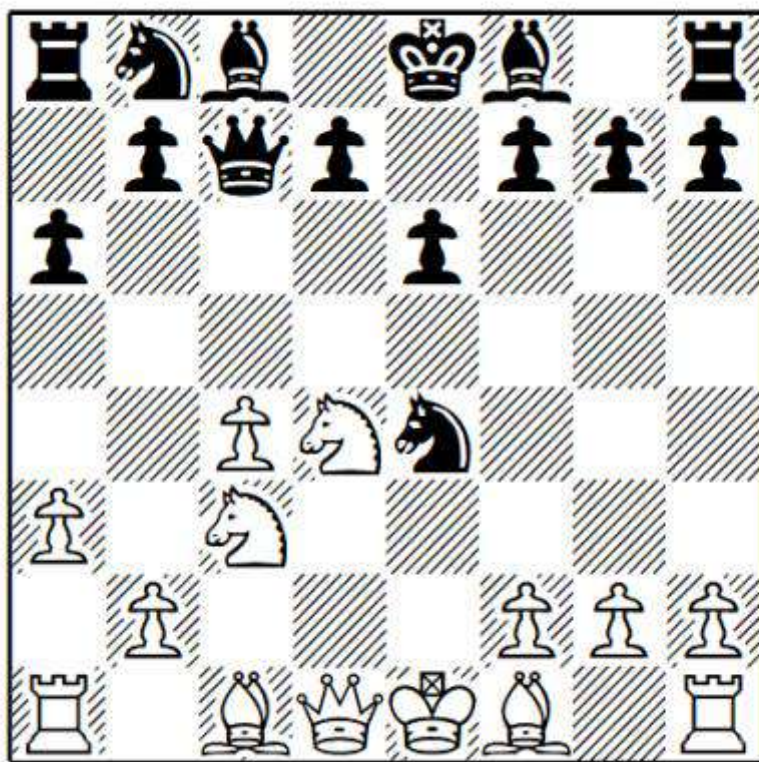
## 5 ... Nf6

By far the main move. Alternatives tend to lead to Hedgehog positions. For 5 ... Qc7 have a look at the notes to 6 ... Qc7.

## 6 Nc3 Bb4

The main alternative 6 ... Qc7, intending ... Bb4 next move, has some tricky ideas in mind. In this case we have the option of preventing ... Bb4 by playing 7 a3, thereby steering the game in the direction of a quiet Hedgehog. For instance, after 7 ... b6 8 Be2 Bb7 9 f3 d6 10 Be3 Be7 11 Rc1 we have a normal Hedgehog set-up which we will examine in Game 40.

There is one wild option by Black we need to be aware of, and that is 7 ... Nxe4!?.



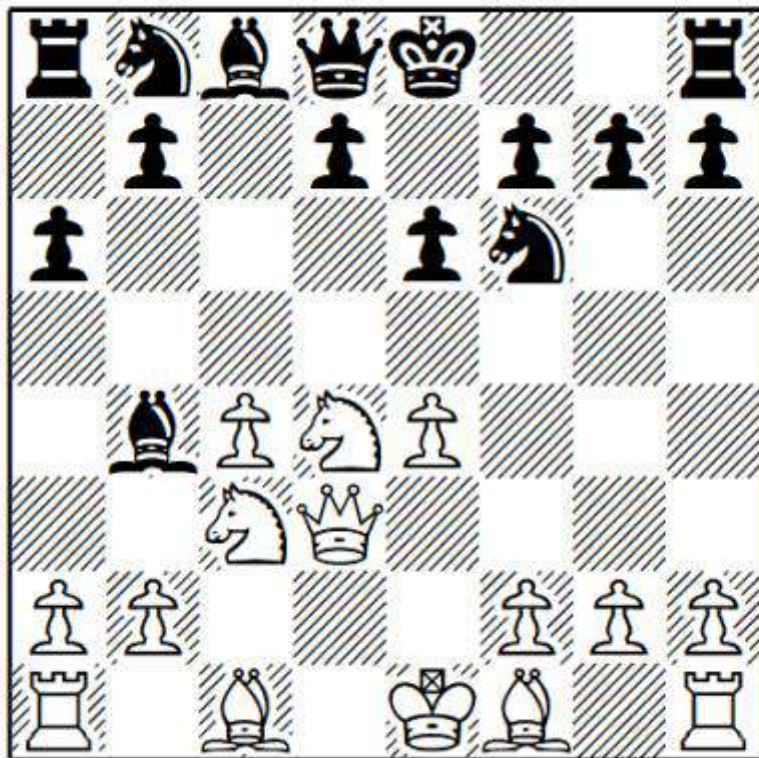
### *Early sac by Black*

Black seizes the chance to grab a pawn with a temporary piece sacrifice. However, there's no reason for us to worry, since we get excellent compensation and great attacking chances. So we can just recapture and go

for quick development with 8 Nxe4 Qe5 9 Bd3 Qxd4 10 Qe2 Nc6 11 Be3 Qe5 12 0-0, for which see Game 39.

### 7 Qd3

The best way to defend the e-pawn. 7 e5? is premature, as after 7 ... Ne4 8 Qg4 Nxc3 Black is already slightly better.



### *Key move by White*

After 7 Qd3 Black has a bunch of possibilities. I'll quickly point out the main characteristics: 7 ... Qc7 is the calmest move, indicating a positional battle. 7 ... Nc6 is of a more concrete nature and White has an active possibility, opening the position. 7 ... d5 leads to a symmetrical position, where White has a development advantage. 7 ... Bxc3 leads to doubled pawns but excellent play for White.

### 7 ... Qc7

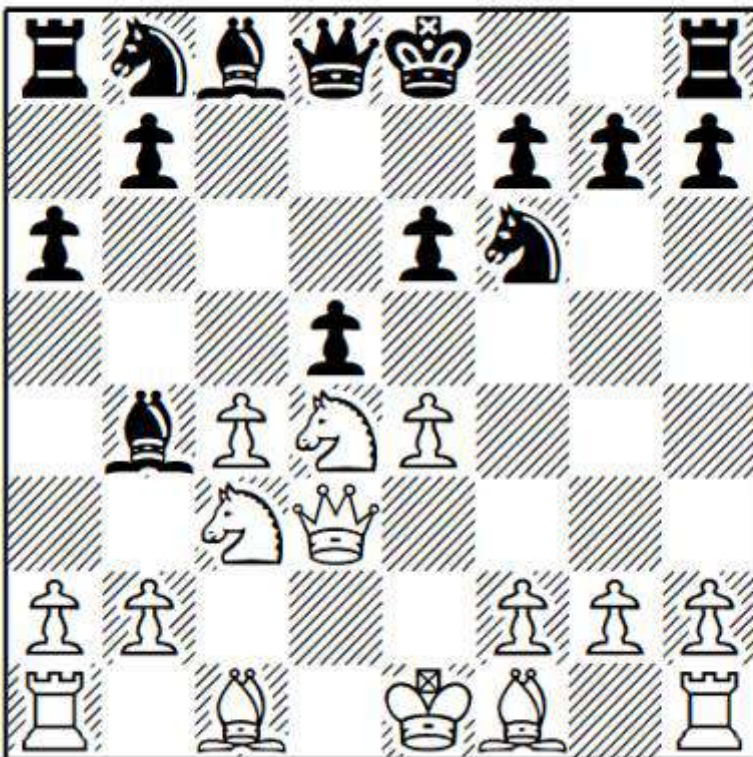
Other options:

a) 7 ... 0-0 is quite rare since White can gain space and an edge by pushing the e-pawn; e.g. 8 e5 Ne8 9 Be2 Qc7 (or 9 ... d6 10 Nc2) 10 Nf3

Nc6 11 Ng5 f5 (or 11 ... g6 12 Qh3 h5 13 g4 with an attack) 12 exf6 Nxf6 13 0-0 with a slight advantage in A.Muzychuk-N.Dzagnidze, Porto Carras 2018.

b) 7 ... Nc6 was seen in the 2014 World Championship match between Carlsen and Anand, which I recommend following. After 8 Nxc6 dxc6 9 Qxd8+ Kxd8 10 e5 Nd7 11 Bf4 Bxc3+ 12 bxc3 White is slightly better (see Game 41).

c) 7 ... d5!? is a frequently played option and we should know how to handle this break.

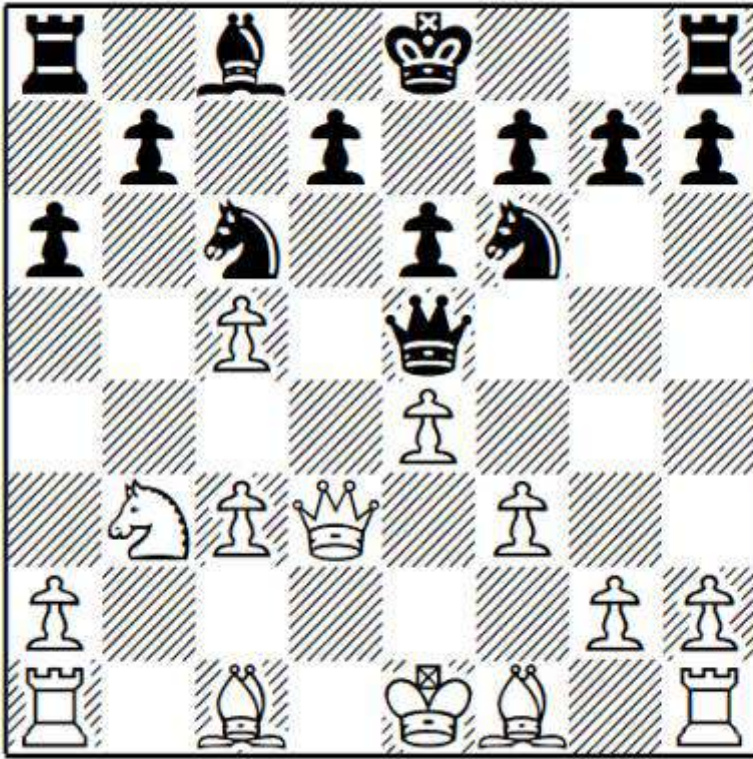


### *Typical equalizing attempt*

Simply 8 exd5 exd5 9 Be2 0-0 10 0-0 is the choice by many top players, hoping to make use of a slight lead in development. We'll look at this more closely in Game 42.

d) 7 ... Bxc3+ 8 bxc3 damages our pawn structure but we get some pluses in return. Our now unchallenged dark-squared bishop can become extremely useful against the complex of weakened squares b6, d6 and e7. In

addition, we have the semi-open b-file and the possibility of paralysing Black's queenside with c4-c5 at some point. For example: 8 ... Qa5 9 f3 Nc6 10 Nb3 Qe5 11 c5!

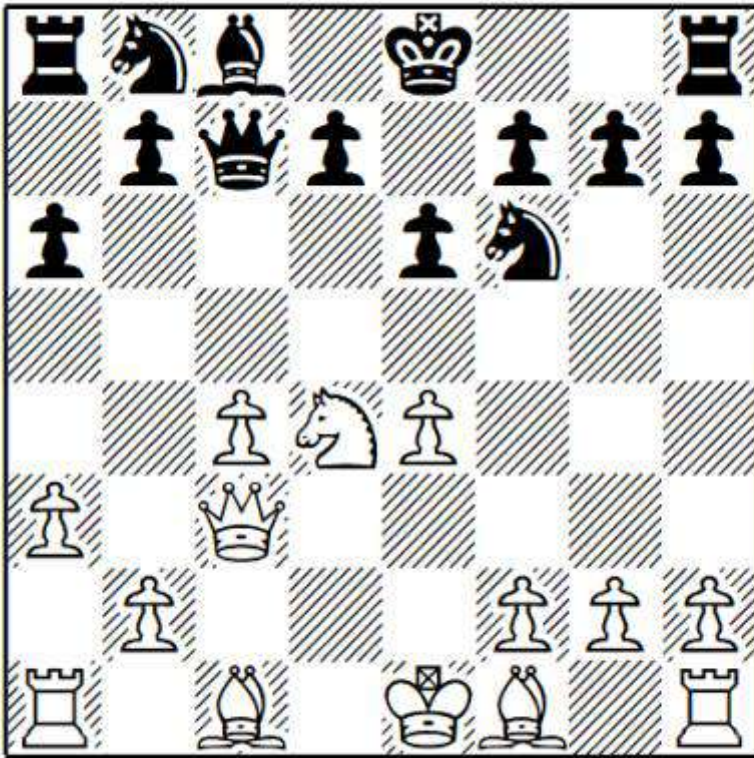


*White is in control*

With this typical pawn advance we restrict Black enormously, so that he can hardly complete development, as we'll see in Game 44.

**8 a3 Bxc3+ 9 Qxc3!**

This time we have gained the pair of bishops without compromising our pawn structure.



*Take the e4-pawn?*

**Question:** Of course the question is: can Black take the e-pawn? What does White have in mind?

**Answer:** No, Black should not go for 9 ... Nxe4, as the complications end up in favour of White.

**9 ... 0-0**

After 9 ... Nxe4? White planned 10 Nb5 axb5 11 Qxg7 Rf8 12 Bh6 Qc5 13 f3!, as we'll see in Game 43. The black queen can come into f2, but it is not mate and she will have to retreat again soon. White is winning directly out of the opening.

Note that 9 ... Qe5 has no point. After 10 f3 0-0 11 Nb5!, for example, the resulting endgame is almost winning for White, who has a solid space advantage, while Black is suffering on the dark squares.

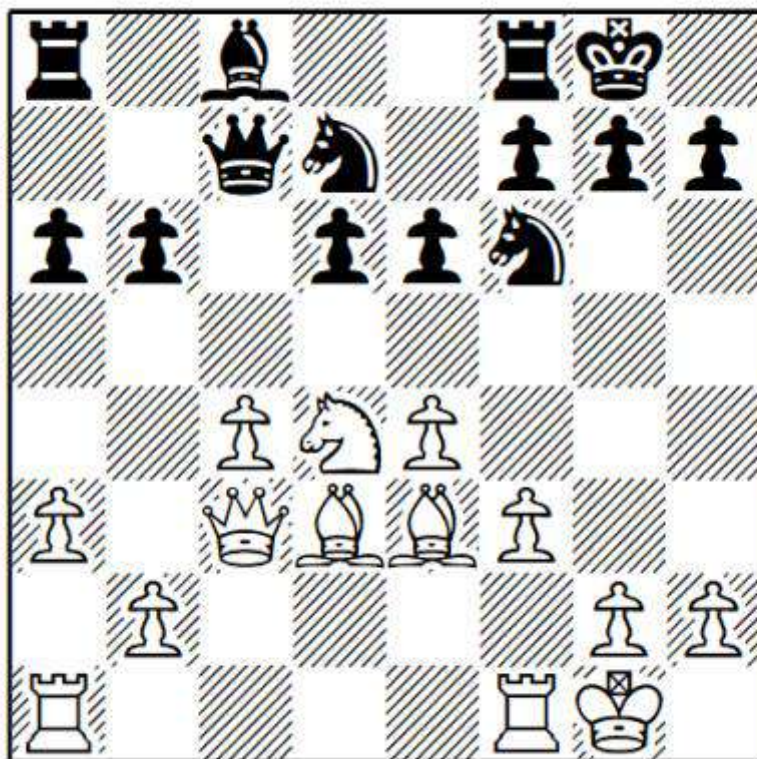
**10 Bd3 d6**

Instead:

a) 10 ... d5 11 exd5 exd5 12 0-0 is similar to the 7 ... d5 variation.

b) 10 ... e5 11 Ne2 is another sensible approach but does not change the overall evaluation that White is slightly better.

**11 0-0 Nbd7 12 f3 b6 13 Be3**



*White is slightly better*

White can look forward to a pleasant middlegame. We'll stop the theoretical discussion here and go on to study a few games implementing our ideas.

### **Illustrative Games**

We start in Game 39 with the early knight sac on e4. Kryvoruchko is well prepared and does not mind being a pawn down. He puts a lot of positional pressure on Black, who has to give the pawn back at some point, when White is clearly better.

Game 40 demonstrates a classical Hedgehog. I especially like Firouzja's 17 Bf4!, taking the steam out of Black's counterchances against our

undefended kingside. Later White pushes his pawns on the queenside and wins a fine positional game.

We continue with the stunning Game 41, featuring an early ... Nc6, after which Carlsen seizes the initiative and goes into a favourable endgame.

Then in Game 42, we encounter an early ... d7-d5 and study a simple and risk-free solution for White, based on rapid development while keeping some tension in the centre.

The last two games will acquaint us with ideas behind an early ... Bb4 and ... Bxc3. In Game 43 Black misses some tactical points with the queen exposed on the c7-square. Finally, in Game 44, Black plays ... Bxc3+ at a moment White is obliged to capture with the pawn. The arising positions are original and it is very instructive how well the dark-squared bishop plus the doubled pawns create problems for Black.

### *Game 39*

**Y.Kryvoruchko-V.Papin**

World Rapid Championship, Berlin 2015

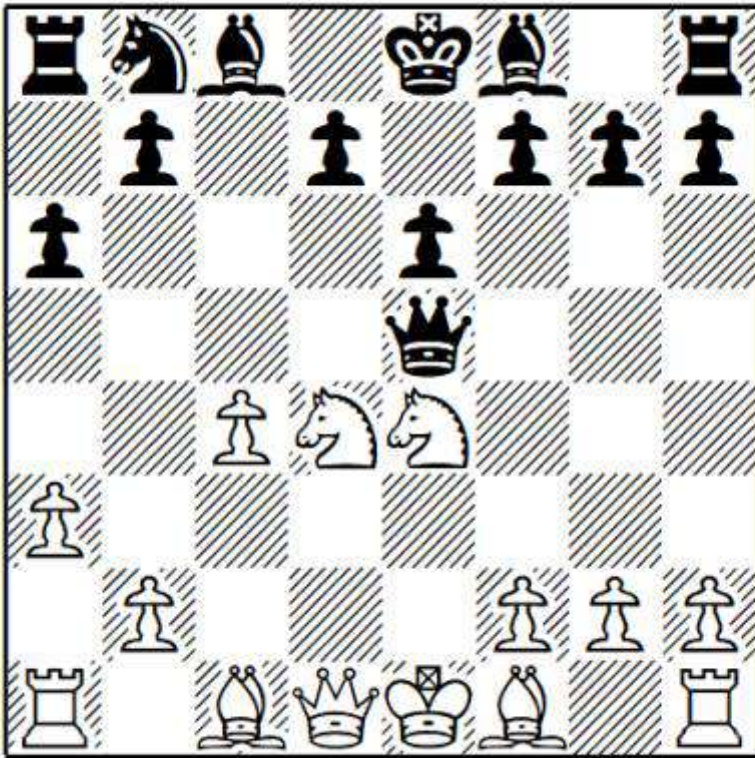
**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 a6 5 c4 Nf6 6 Nc3 Qc7 7 a3 Nxe4!?**

Now that White spent a tempo to prevent ... Bb4, Black goes for an interesting temporary piece sacrifice. However, it is nothing critical and White gets a slightly better position thanks to his quick development.

**8 Nxe4**

White could avoid sacrificing a pawn after 8 Nxe6 dxe6 9 Nxe4 Be7, but Black has an excellent position here.

**8 ... Qe5**

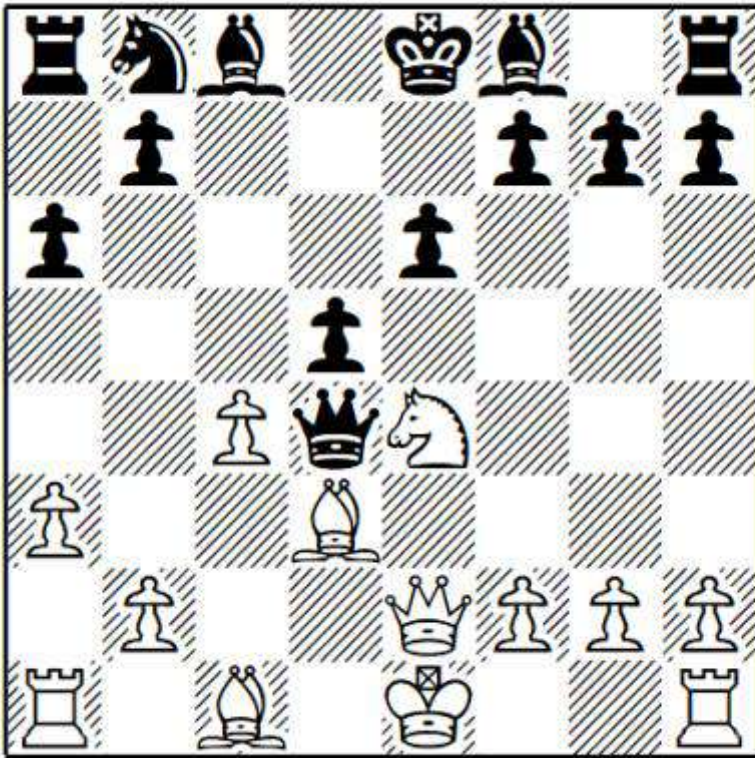


### *Regaining the piece*

Black is guaranteed to get the piece back, as he can follow up with ... d7-d5 if necessary. This is the kind of situation you should solve in preparation rather than over the board, because there are so many possible ways to return the piece. We will focus just on 9 Bd3, followed by 10 Qe2 and 11 Be3, which is very solid and natural but also quite aggressive, as this game will show.

**9 Bd3 Qxd4 10 Qe2 Nc6**

What else? Trying to free the position by means of 10 ... d5? runs into a refutation.

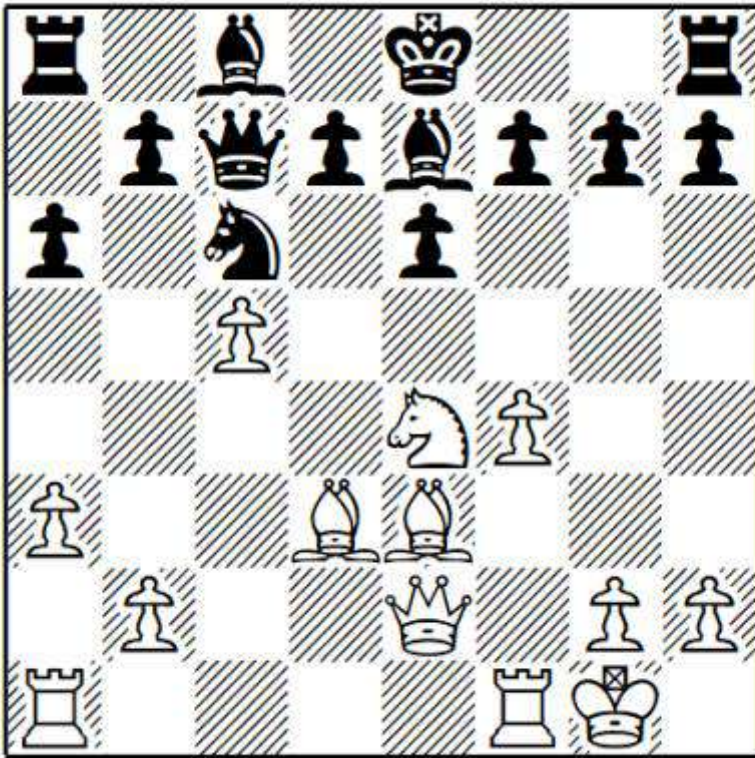


*How to refute 10 ... d5?*

**Question:** Can you see how White wins?

**Answer:** 11 Be3! Qe5 12 f4! Qc7 13 cxd5 both wins the pawn back and opens the position with decisive effect. Black cannot recapture because 13 ... exd5? 14 Bb6! Qxb6 15 Nf6+ Kd8 16 Qe8+ Kc7 17 Nxd5+ wins the queen.

**11 Be3 Qe5 12 0-0 Be7 13 f4 Qc7 14 c5!**



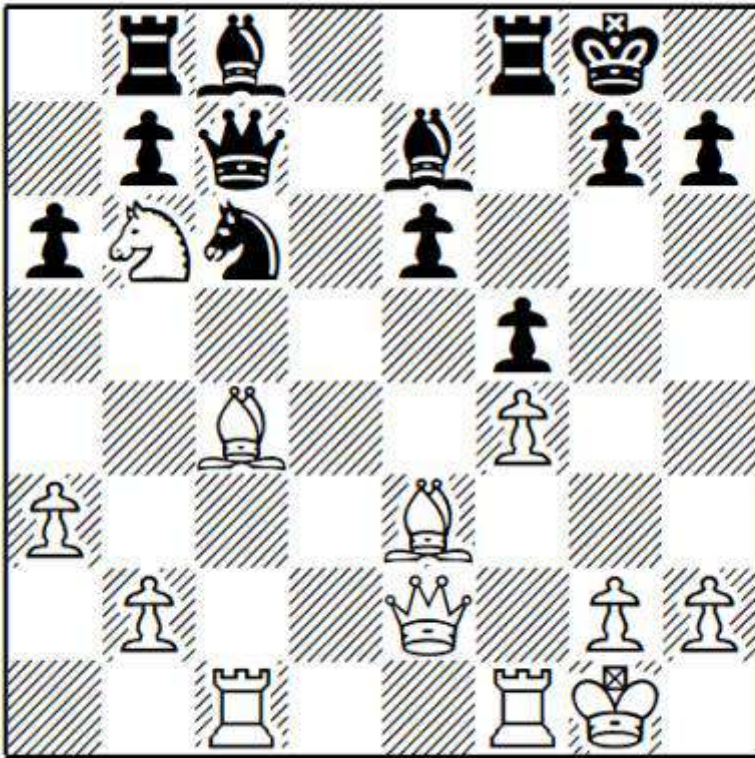
*How to develop?*

A typical manoeuvre by White, offering the type of compensation we can expect in this line. Now Black must make a concession if he wants to bring his pieces out.

**14 ... f5!? 15 Nd2 d5!? 16 cxd6 Bxd6 17 Nc4**

Black has freed himself to a degree, but we can see the side-effects. He is left with a vulnerable e-pawn and White can make use of his active pieces more easily in an opened position. In a practical sense this is very satisfactory for White: he has a clear idea in mind, while Black is just hoping to keep things together. Even after giving up a pawn Black might still be under pressure.

**17 ... Be7 18 Nb6 Rb8 19 Rac1 0-0 20 Bc4**



*Threats become concrete*

## **20 ... Kh8**

Black could only hold onto the pawn with an awkward-looking move like 20 ... Rf6, but White could just increase the pressure with, say, 21 Rfd1 and stands much better, as Black can hardly move.

## **21 Qf2**

21 Nxc8? Rbxc8 22 Bxe6 would be premature as it activates Black's pieces. He will not be able to maintain the extra pawn in any case.

## **21 ... Rd8 22 Rfd1 Bf6 23 Ba2 Bd7 24 b4**

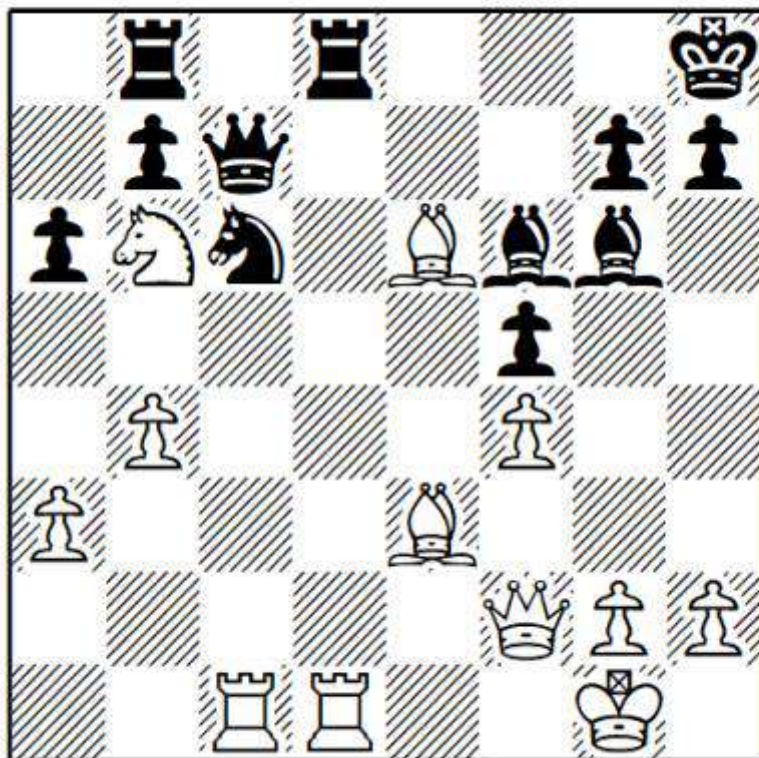
Here 24 Bc5! would have been even stronger, when the threatened 25 Bd6 doesn't just win an exchange but at this point the whole queen. Preventing that with 24 ... Be8 allows 25 Bxe6 Rxd1+ 26 Rxd1 with a big plus for White.

## **24 ... Be8 25 Bxe6**

Everything has gone very well for White. He has regained the pawn and Black is still under positional pressure.

## 25 ... Bg6?

Blundering in a difficult position. Black had to swap rooks.



*How to win?*

**Question:** Can you see a way for White to win material?

**Answer: 26 Nd7!**

The double threat of 27 Nxb8 and 27 Bb6 wins an exchange at least.

**26 ... Re8 27 Bb6 Qc8 28 Nxb8 Rxe6 29 Nxc6 Rxc6 30 Rxc6 Qxc6 31 Qc5**

Now the game is over. There is no counterplay and White converts his advantage with ease.

**31 ... Qe8 32 Qe3 Qa4 33 Rc1 h6 34 Bd4 Bxd4 35 Qxd4 Qxa3 36 Rc7 Bf7 37 h3 Qa2 38 Rxb7 Kh7 39 Kh2 Qe6 40 Qd7 Qe4 41 Qc7!**

Only not 41 Qxf7?? which would give the win away, since after 41 ... Qxf4+ 42 Kg1 Qc1+ 43 Kf2 Qd2+ 44 Kf3 Qd3+ the white king cannot escape the checks.

41 ... h5 42 Ra7 h4 43 Qe5! Qd3 44 Rxf7 1-0

We continue with a game by the rising star Alireza Firouzja, who shows great positional understanding and an exemplary way to fight the Hedgehog, conducting it all at blitz speed.

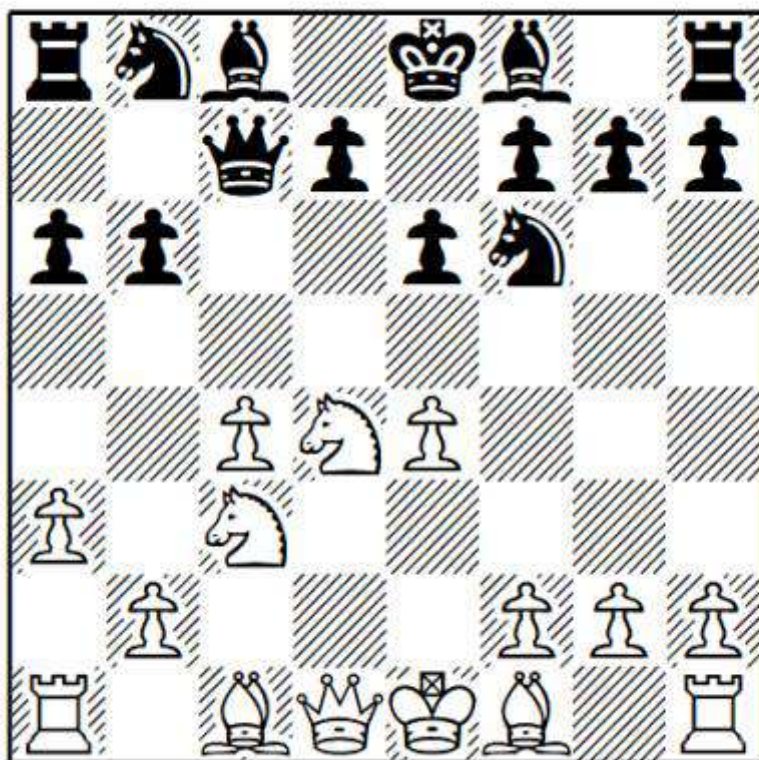
*Game 40*

**A.Firouzja-S.Sevian**

Chess.com (blitz) 2019

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 a6 5 c4 Nf6 6 Nc3 Qc7 7 a3 b6

This time Black declines the complications after 7 ... Nxe4, so we will enter a Hedgehog position.

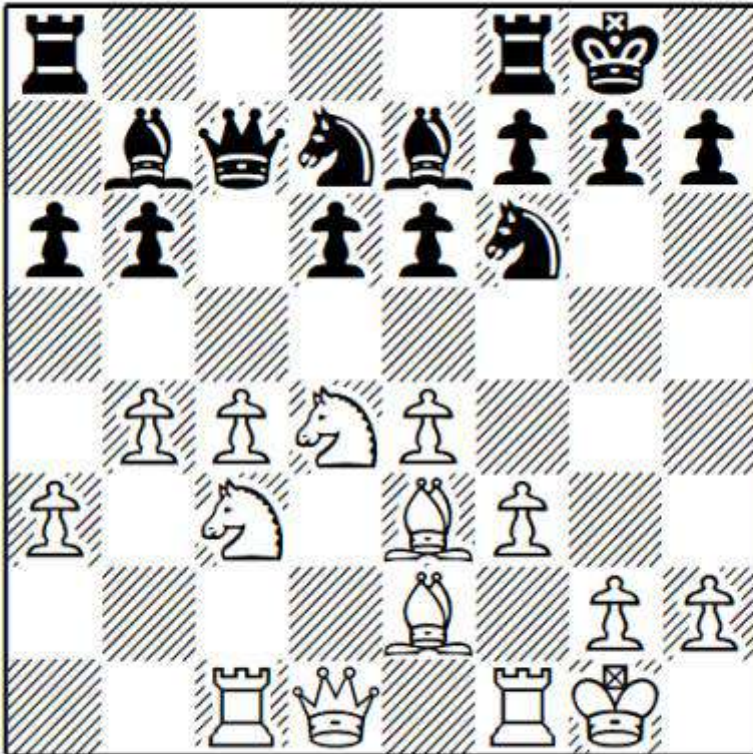


*Hedgehog*

8 Be2 Bb7 9 f3 d6

You might ask whether a direct ... d7-d5 is possible, given that White has wasted time with 7 a3, but after 9 ... d5?! 10 exd5 exd5 11 cxd5 White is clearly better. Black cannot take the pawn because of 11 ... Nxd5? 12 Nxd5 Bxd5 13 Nb5!, when 13 ... Qd7 fails to 14 Qxd5 Qxd5 15 Nc7+ and White wins material.

**10 Be3 Be7 11 Rc1 Nbd7 12 0-0 0-0 13 b4**



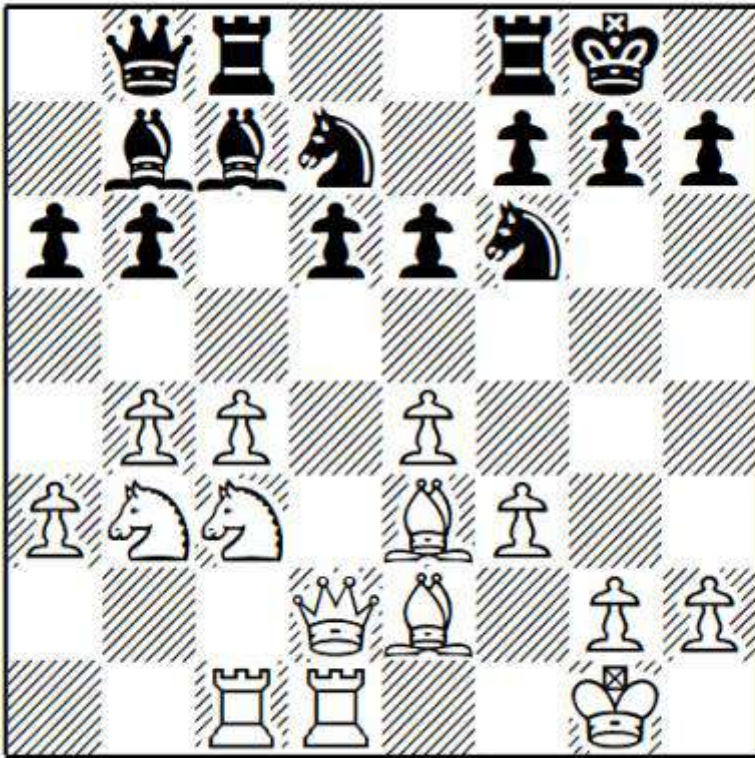
### *A standard Hedgehog*

The usual plan. White should advance his pawns on the queenside and leave his kingside as solid as possible.

**13 ... Rac8 14 Nb3 Qb8 15 Qd2 Bd8**

Here too 15 ... d5?! would be premature, as after 16 cxd5 exd5 17 Bf4 Ne5 18 Nxd5 White remains better.

**16 Rfd1 Bc7**



### *Aiming at h2*

This is a typical manoeuvre in Hedgehog positions, Black is now threatening ... d6-d5, when he also targets the h2-pawn.

**17 Bf4!**

Neutralizing the pressure. It is very important that White does not unnecessarily weaken his kingside by moves such as h2-h3 or g2-g3.

**17 ... Ne8**

This looks a bit passive. Black wants to delay ... Ne5 for a while, but I don't think it's an especially good idea. On the other hand, after the normal 17 ... Ne5 18 Bxe5!? dxe5 19 c5 White is already trying to make use of his additional pawn on the queenside, and he had experience of this position in A.Firouzja-G.Quparadze, World Rapid Championship, Doha 2016.

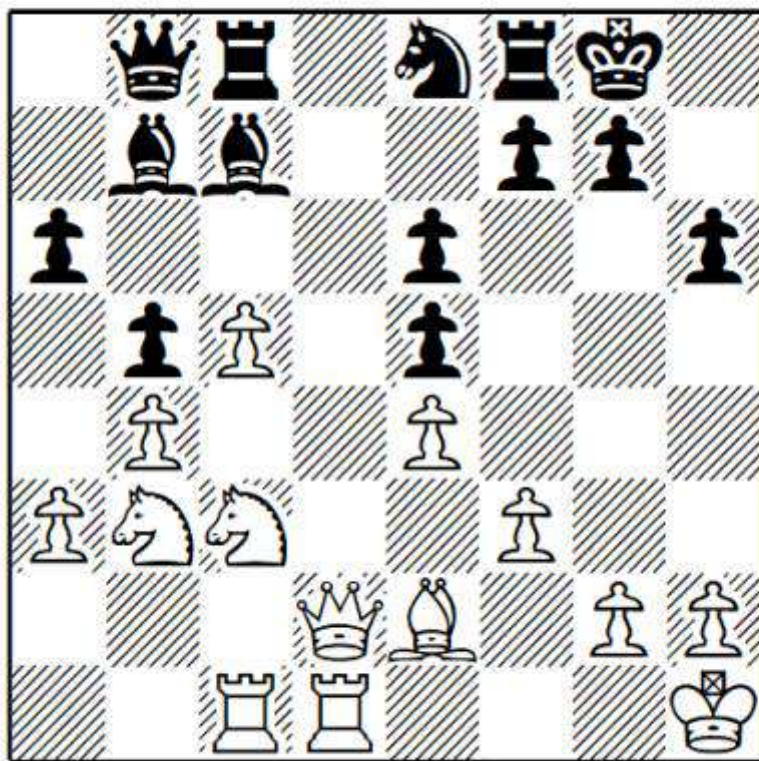
**18 Kh1 h6 19 Bg3!?**

White is waiting for ... Ne5. Black cannot improve his position otherwise, since the bishop on g3 prevents all counterplay.

**19 ... Ne5**

Should Black also wait with 19 ... Kh8, White has enough active plans elsewhere, the easiest being an advance on the queenside with 20 a4 Rd8 21 a5 bxa5 22 Nxa5.

**20 Bxe5 dxe5 21 c5 b5**



*Clear plus on the queenside*

**Remember:** Be careful when you exchange on e5, because the doubled pawns give Black an excellent outpost on d4. However, in this case his pieces are too limited, and it is hard to imagine a piece appearing on d4 at any point soon.

**22 a4 Bc6?**

Black had to take the a-pawn first: 22 ... bxa4 23 Nxa4 Bc6, when he has more counterchances than in the game because the position is a bit more open and dynamic. After the text Black is very passive and left with a big weakness on b5, which White exploits in exemplary style.

**23 axb5 axb5 24 Bd3 f5 25 Qe2 Nf6 26 Bxb5 Ba8 27 Bc4 Rce8**

27 ... Qxb4 loses to 28 Bxe6+ Kh8 29 Bxc8.

**28 b5 fxe4 29 fxe4 Bd8 30 c6 Nh7 31 Nc5 Qa7 32 Nxe6 Rf2 1-0**

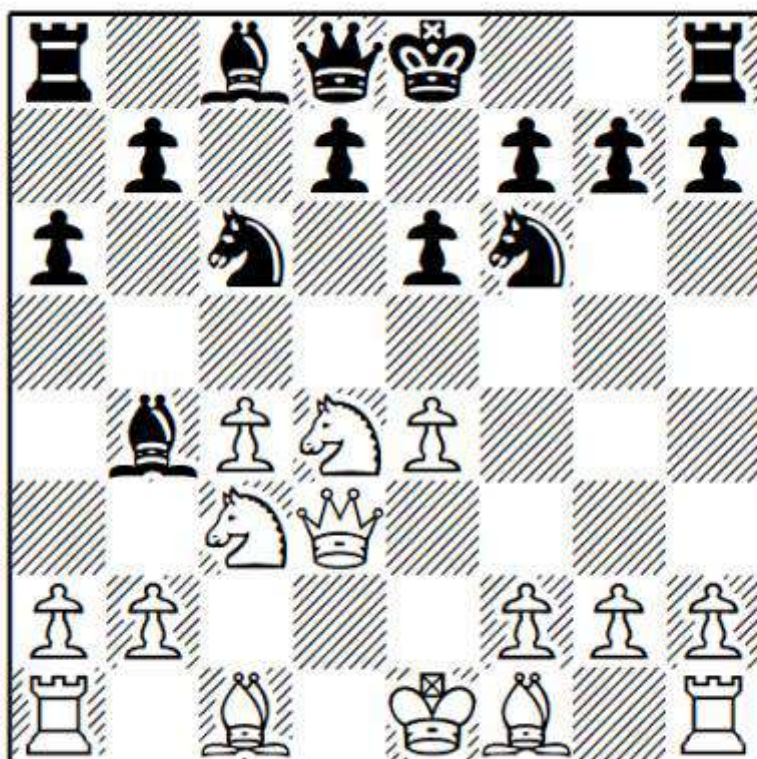
Black either lost on time or resigned in view of 33 Nf4+, when mate is coming soon.

*Game 41*

**Ma.Carlsen-V.Anand**

World Championship (Game 6), Sochi 2014

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 a6 5 c4 Nf6 6 Nc3 Bb4 7 Qd3 Nc6**



*White takes on c6*

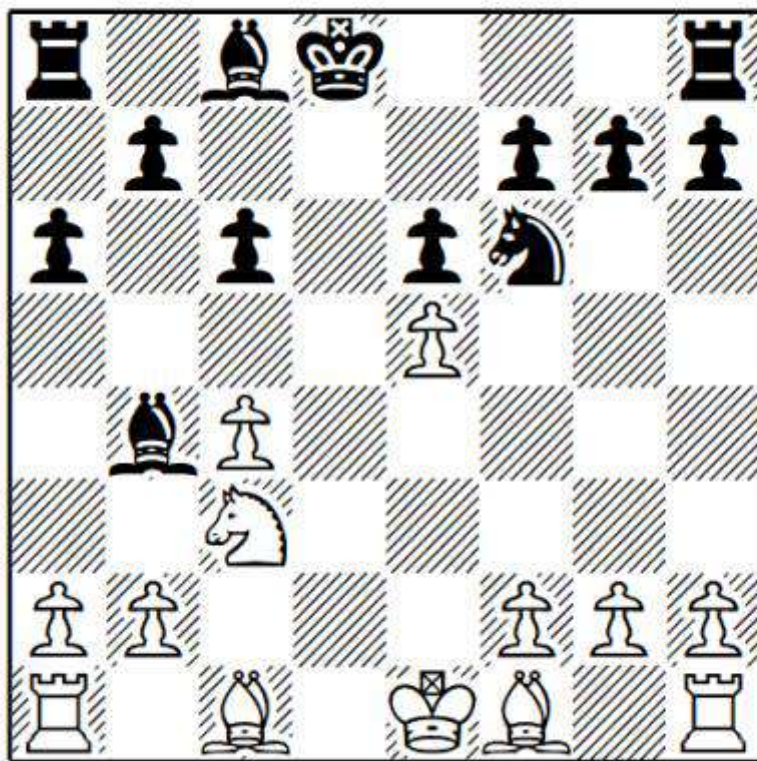
Here we can simply exchange knights because both possible recaptures lead to a convenient position for us.

**8 Nxc6 dxc6**

The alternative 8 ... bxc6?! is quite rare and for good reason. White has a pleasant choice between an immediate 9 e5 or securing the pair of bishops first with 9 a3 Bxc3+ 10 Qxc3, after which 10 ... 0-0 11 e5 leads to our

usual advantage; e.g. 11 ... Ne4 12 Qd4 d5 13 exd6 Nxd6 and White is slightly better.

**9 Qxd8+ Kxd8 10 e5**



*Where to move the knight?*

**Question:** This is a crucial moment for Black. Where should he move the attacked knight?

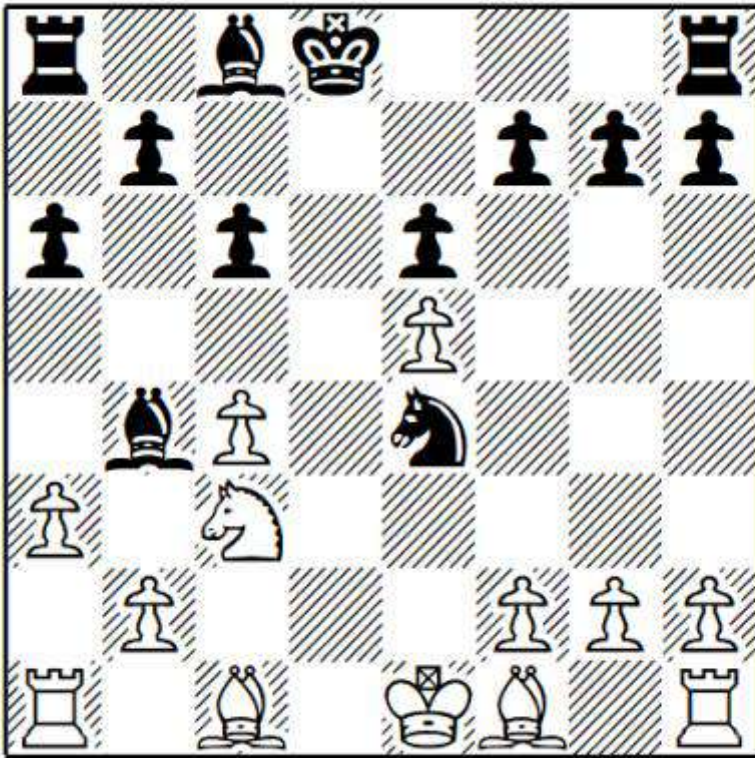
**Answer:** Black should simply go back to d7. The alternatives allow White to continue playing against the knight.

**10 ... Nd7**

Instead:

a) 10 ... Ng4? is not very good. After 11 Bf4 Kc7 12 Be2 Nh6 13 0-0-0 White is much better due to his greater activity and the black knight being out of play.

b) 10 ... Ne4?! looks more ambitious but does not work out well after the strong 11 a3!



*A strong pawn sacrifice*

11 ... Bxc3+ (11 ... Ba5? 12 b4 only makes things worse, since the pawn-grabbing 12 ... Bxb4? loses a piece after 13 axb4 Nxc3 14 Ra3 Ne4 15 f3 etc) 12 bxc3 Nxc3 13 a4 and White's compensation is indisputable, since the knight is in serious trouble and the other black pieces are not even in the game.

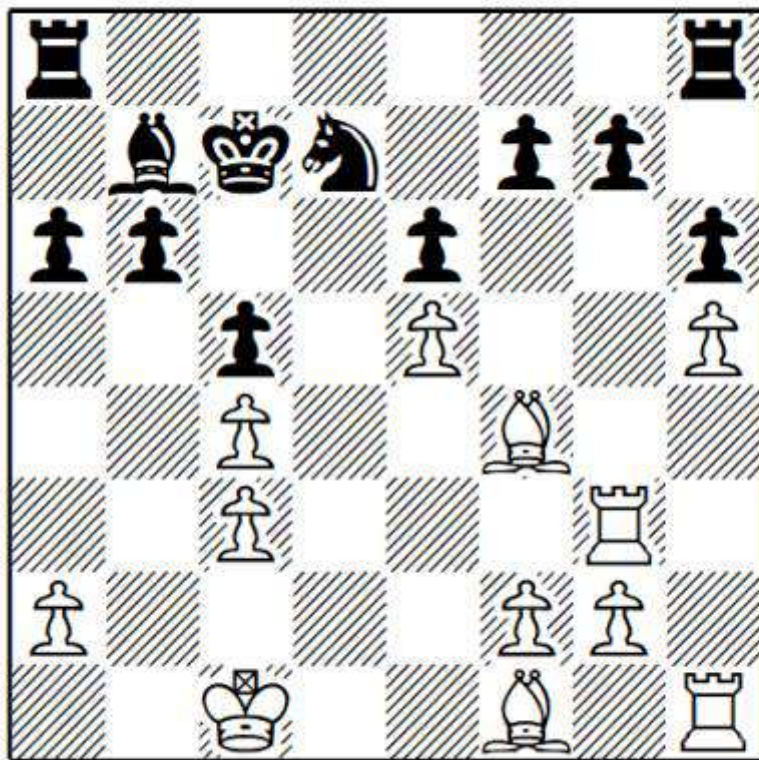
**11 Bf4 Bxc3+ 12 bxc3 Kc7**

The opening stage of the game is almost over and White has to decide what his middlegame plan will be. What do you think is the best plan in this position?

**13 h4!**

This is much better than trying to create pressure on the d-file. For instance, after 13 0-0-0!? c5 14 Be2 Rd8 15 Rd6 Nf8 Black is in time fighting for the open file. Play might continue 16 Rhd1 Rxd6 17 exd6+ Kd7 and I am not convinced that White is better. The d-pawn might eventually turn out to be a weakness.

13 ... b6 14 h5 h6 15 0-0-0 Bb7 16 Rd3 c5 17 Rg3



*Pressure on the kingside*

**17 ... Rag8 18 Bd3**

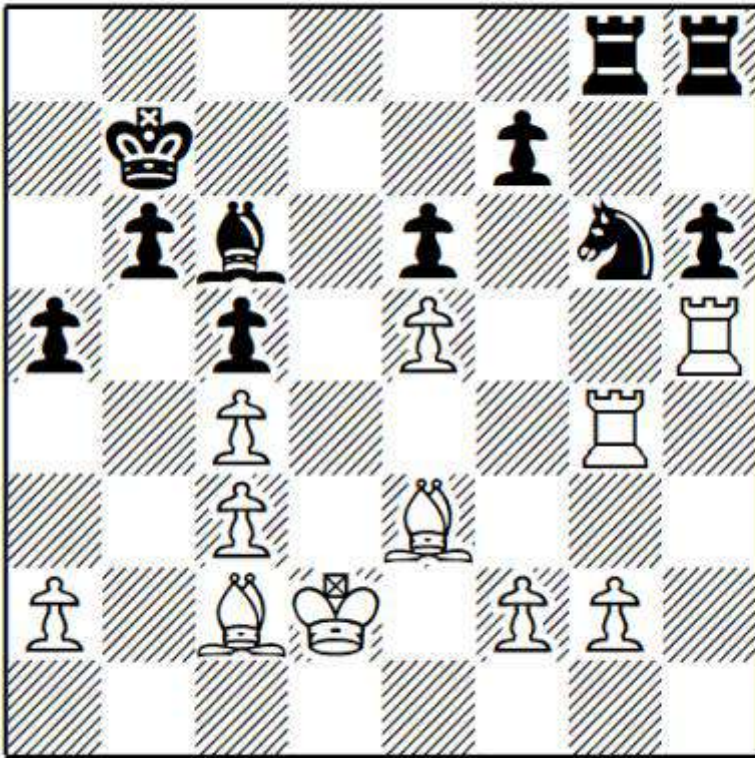
White threatens simply Rh4-g4, winning the g7-pawn, so Black must quickly solve this problem.

**18 ... Nf8 19 Be3 g6 20 hxg6 Nxc6 21 Rh5 Bc6**

Black can still defend everything. If White captures on h6, Black will get the e5-pawn in return.

**22 Bc2 Kb7 23 Rg4 a5 24 Bd1 Rd8 25 Bc2 Rdg8 26 Kd???**

This was one of the biggest blunders in chess world championship's history. Instead, 26 Kd1 would have enabled White to centralize his king safely.



*How to punish White's last move?*

**Question:** Black could now have obtained a huge advantage. Can you spot how?

**Answer:** 26 ... Nxe5! 27 Rxc8 Nxc4+ 28 Kd3 Nb2+ 29 Kd2 Rxc8 and Black has gained two very important pawns.

**26 ... a4??**

The opportunity passed unrecognized, and now White continued playing for a win.

**27 Ke2 a3 28 f3 Rd8 29 Ke1 Rd7 30 Bc1 Ra8 31 Ke2 Ba4 32 Be4+!**

An important intermediate check to lure the black bishop backwards. Now White is winning. The immediate 32 Bxc6?! fxc6 33 Rxc6 Rd1 34 Bxa3 Ra1 does not offer White anything.

**32 ... Bc6?**

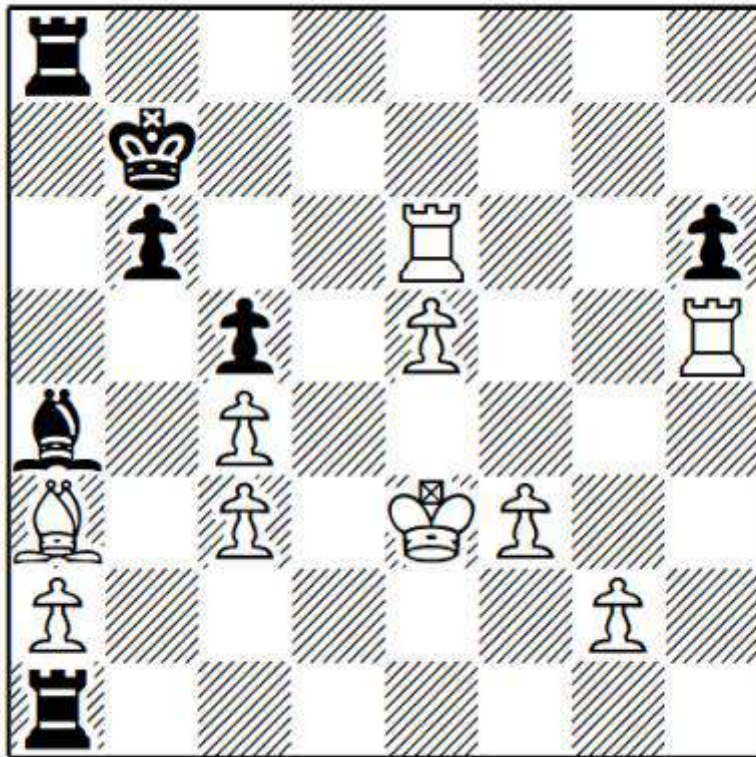
Black obligingly retreats his bishop. His only chance was to give up the exchange with 32 ... Ka7 33 Bxa8 Kxa8, and if 34 Rxh6 Rd1 35 Bxa3 Ra1,

he could still put up a strong fight.

**33 Bxg6 fxg6 34 Rxg6 Ba4**

Seeking similar counterplay, but now it is all too slow.

**35 Rxe6 Rd1 36 Bxa3 Ra1 37 Ke3**



*White is winning*

**37 ... Bc2**

After 37 ... Rxa2 38 Bc1 Rc2 39 Bd2 is the way humans would win. The computer wants to go for 38 Re7+ Ka6 39 Bxc5!? bxc5 40 Rxh6+ Ka5 41 Rc7, when White gets five pawns and an attack for the bishop, but I see no need to give up the piece.

**38 Re7+ Ka6**

Or 38 ... Kc8 39 Rxh6!, threatening mate.

**39 Rxh6 Rxa2 40 Bxc5 1-0**

In conclusion I would say that this variation poses no danger for White and we should be very happy to encounter it. You can follow Carlsen's plan, which is very well suited to create problems for Black, even at the highest

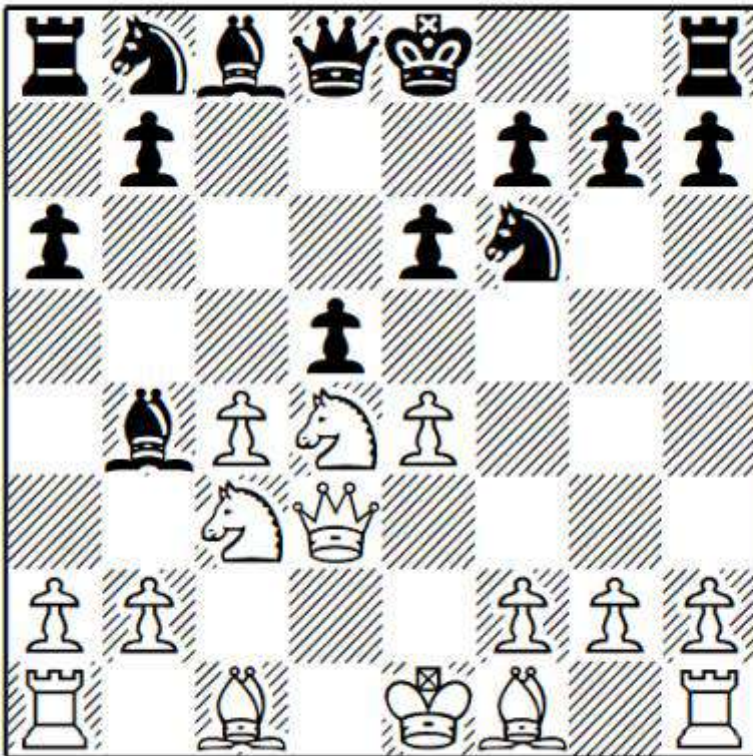
level as the game shows.

*Game 42*

**E.Inarkiev-E.Romanov**

European Championship, Batumi 2018

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 a6 5 c4 Nf6 6 Nc3 Bb4 7 Qd3 d5**



*Central play*

The third most popular move after 7 ... Qc7 and 7 ... Nc6 which we saw before. We are faced with a solid choice, but White can play for two results since the symmetrical situation does not offer Black good winning chances. Statistics show that White scores 65% from here.

**8 exd5 exd5 9 Be2**

White extends his lead in development.

**9 ... 0-0 10 0-0**

Here people have tried 10 ... dxc4 and 10 ... Nc6. Both might come close to equality, but the White side is always easier to play.

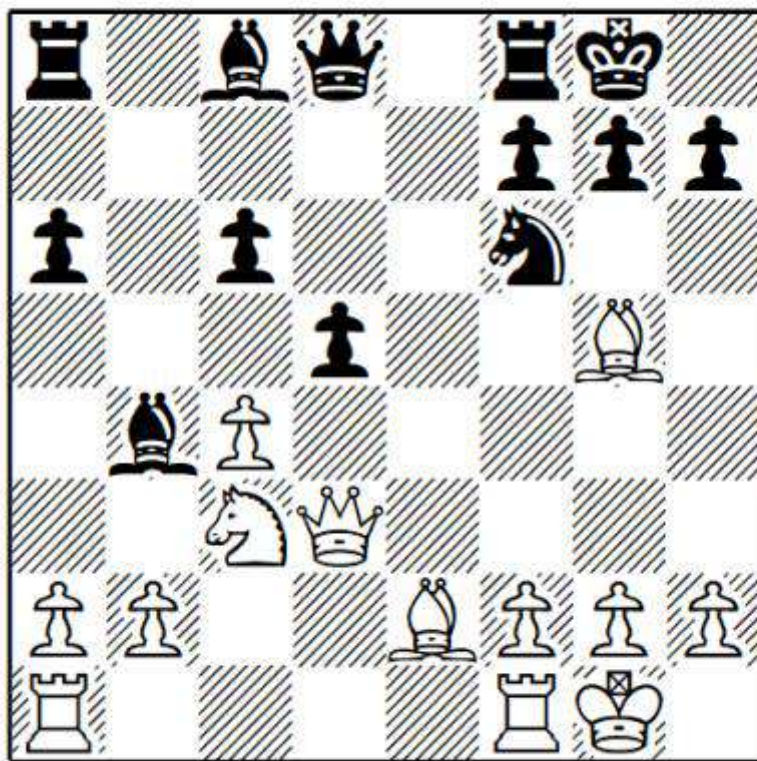
### 10 ... Nc6

Or 10 ... dxc4 11 Qxc4 Bd6 (after 11 ... Bxc3?! 12 Qxc3 White has the lasting plus of the two bishops) 12 Rd1 Qc7 (although engines tend to show equality after 12 ... h6, it is Black who must find some accurate developing moves) 13 Qxc7 Bxc7 14 Bg5 with a slight plus in L.Lenic-G.Izsak, Hungarian League 2018.

### 11 Nxc6

White did not get anything from 11 Nxd5 Nxd5 12 Nxc6 bxc6 13 cxd5 Qxd5 14 Qxd5 (and 14 Be3 is only a microscopic plus if even that) 14 ... cxd5 15 Be3 Be6 16 Bd4 a5 17 Rac1 Rfc8 in K.Goh Wei Ming-M.Ruff, Lienz 2019.

### 11 ... bxc6 12 Bg5!?



*Keeping the tension*

A good try in order not to simplify too much. Instead, 12 cxd5 Nxd5

exchanges too many pieces, or if White wants to keep the knight, Black has sufficient activity; e.g. 13 Ne4 Bf5 14 Qc4 Qb6 with equality.

**12 ... a5**

Another option is 12 ... h6, when 13 Bh4 a5 14 Rfd1 transposes to the game, whereas 13 Bxf6 Qxf6 14 cxd5 Bf5 15 Qc4 Bxc3 16 bxc3 cxd5 leads to equality.

**13 Rfd1 h6 14 Bh4 Re8**

Or 14 ... Ba6 15 Qf3 Bxc3 16 bxc3 Qe7 with a tiny edge in V.Kramnik-L.Van Wely, Dortmund 2005.

**15 Qc2 Bxc3 16 bxc3 Qe7 17 Bf1 dxc4**

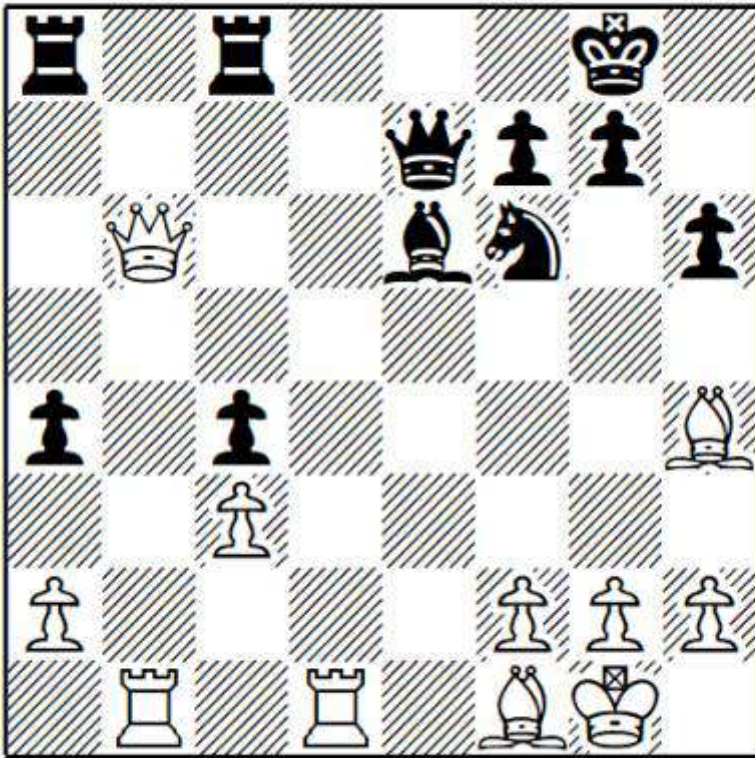
Here 17 ... Ba6 is a good positional idea to exchange one of the bishops, but Black probably abandoned it due to 18 cxd5 Bxf1 19 Kxf1 cxd5 20 Bxf6 Qxf6 21 Rxd5 and White is a pawn up. Some compensation exists but it is unclear if it is enough.

**18 Qa4 Be6**

Breaking the pin with 18 ... g5 weakens too many squares and the king will be in danger in the middlegame.

**19 Qxc6 Rec8 20 Qb6 a4 21 Rab1**

Black is under pressure and his queenside pawns are weaker than White's. Romanov attempts to solve his problems in a radical way but only makes matters worse.



### *Pressure on Black*

**21 ... g5?**

The patient 21 ... a3!? would have offered more resistance; e.g. 22 Qe3 Re8 23 Rd4 Bf5 24 Qxe7 Rxe7 25 Rbd1 g5!? (with the queens gone the weakening of the kingside is not such a big deal) 26 Bg3 Ne4 27 Bxc4 Nxc3 and the position stays level.

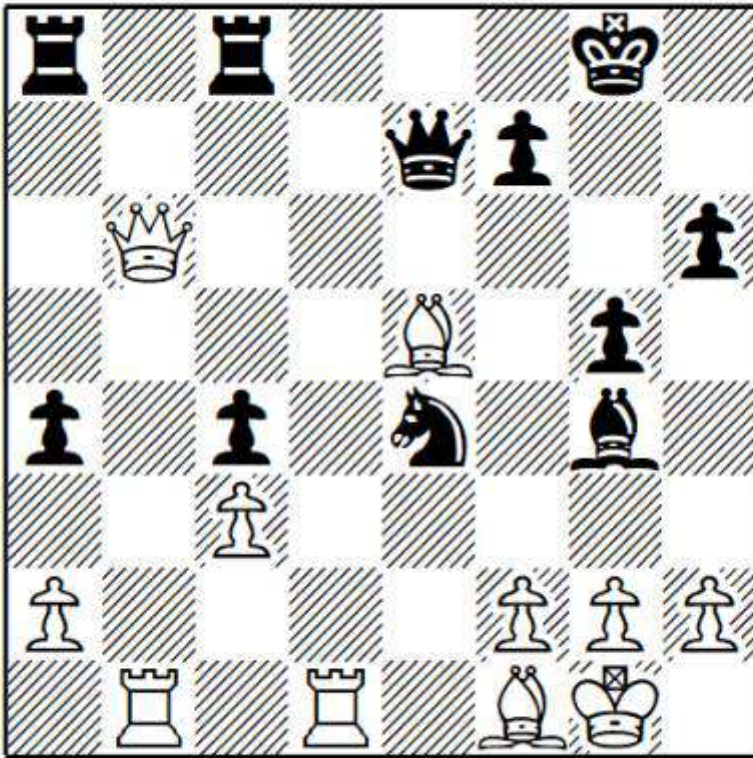
**22 Bg3 Ne4 23 Be5 Bg4?**

23 Qc5 was better, again aiming to get the queens off.

**24 Rd5?!**

Inarkiev does not exploit Black's mistake at once, repeating moves first.

**24 ... Be6 25 Rdd1 Bg4?**



*How to proceed?*

**Question:** Black has attacked the rook on d1 as well as the bishop on e5, but

he probably missed the following strong reply. Can you spot how White seized the initiative?

**Answer: 26 Bd4!**

Ignoring the threat to the rook and planning a counterattack on the enemy king with 27 Qxh6.

**26 ... Be6**

Conceding the previous error instead of letting White show his intentions. The greedy 26 ... Bxd1 grants White good winning chances after 27 Qxh6 f6 28 Qg6+ Kh8 (not 28 ... Kf8? 29 Rxd1, when 30 Re1 wins quickly as Black cannot break the pin on the e-file) 29 Rxd1 Qh7 30 Bxf6+ Nxf6 31 Qxf6+ Qg7 32 Qf3 with two pawns plus a weak enemy king for the exchange.

### **27 Be2 Qa3?**

Sidelining the queen hardly helps Black's cause.

### **28 Bg4! Re8**

Not 28 ... Bxg4? 29 Qxh6 f6 30 Rb7 and the game is already over.

### **29 Re1 Nd6?!**

Now White can finish the game quickly. Returning with 29 ... Qd6 is more resilient, if ultimately hopeless: 30 Rxe4 Qxb6 31 Bxb6 Bxg4 32 Rxg4 Rab8 33 h4 (not 33 Rxc4? Rxb6!, when White loses most of his advantage) 33 ... Re6 34 hxg5 Rbxb6 35 Rxb6 Rxb6 36 gxh6+ Kh7 37 Rxc4 and White has a completely winning rook ending.

**30 Bxe6 Rxe6 31 Rxe6 fxe6 32 Bc5 Qxa2 33 Bxd6 a3 34 Be5 Re8 35 h4 gxh4 36 Qb7 1-0**

We continue with a game by GM Anna Muzychuk, showing how to refute a shaky sideline in an instructive way.

### *Game 43*

### **A.Muzychuk-C.Peptan**

Medias (rapid) 2017

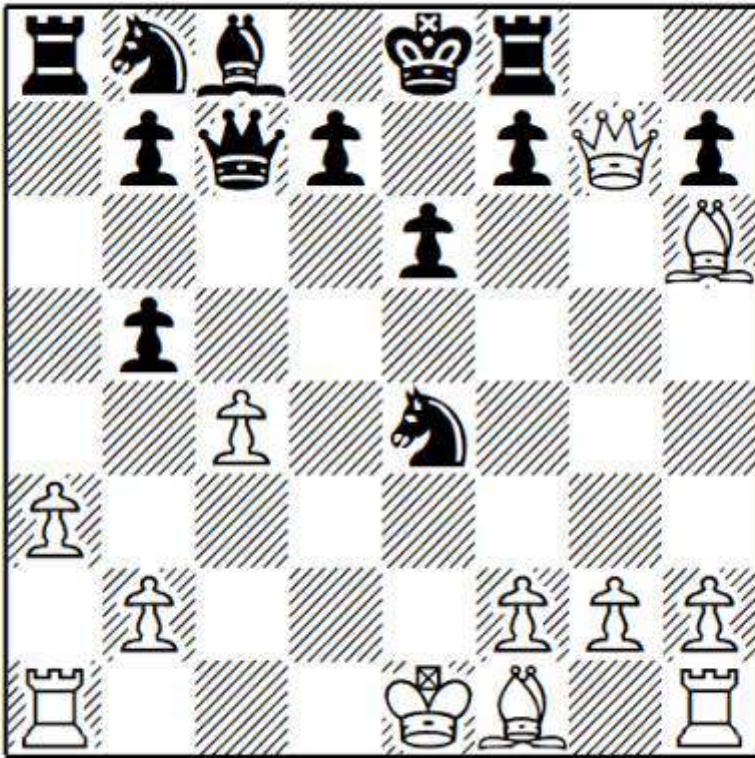
**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 a6 5 c4 Nf6 6 Nc3 Bb4 7 Qd3 Qc7 8 a3!?**

Playing to secure the pair of bishops. And as we'll see, with the black queen sitting on c7, White has no need to compromise her queenside pawn structure.

### **8 ... Bxc3+ 9 Qxc3 Nxe4?**

This meets an unexpected refutation. Black should just have castled; e.g. 9 ... 0-0!? (after 9 ... d5 10 exd5 exd5 11 Qe3+ White is much better) 10 f3 d5 (slow play with ... d7-d6 is another option) 11 exd5 exd5 12 c5 Nc6 13 Be3 Re8 14 0-0-0 with a slight plus for White in T.Kantans-M.Oratovsky, Pontevedra 2015.





### *Mate threatened*

White is threatening mate on f8 and while Black is still material up, she can hardly develop and faces huge problems. Black keeps some chances to swindle in such a messy position, but objectively she is in a horrible situation.

#### **12 ... Qc5**

After 12 ... Qd6 13 cxb5 White is just winning.

#### **13 f3 bxc4**

If 13 ... Nf2 then 14 b4! wins. Black achieves nothing by 13 ... Qf2+? 14 Kd1 either, since the queen must retreat again to defend f8, and White regains the piece with a winning position.

#### **14 Bxc4!?**

Seeing that the knight cannot be saved, White opts to take the c-pawn before Black can defend it. Nonetheless, 14 fxe4 was stronger, and if 14 ... b5 then 15 b4! (not 15 Qxf8+? Qxf8 16 Bxf8 Kxf8, when Black's massive pawn chain makes things unclear) 15 ... Qd6 (or 15 ... cxb3 16 Rc1) 16 e5

Qe7 17 Be2 and White is clearly winning as long as she doesn't exchange on f8 prematurely; e.g. 17 ... Nc6 18 Bg5 f6 19 Bh5+ Kd8 20 Bxf6 Rxf6 21 exf6 etc.

**14 ... Nf6**

Not 14 ... Qxc4?? 15 Qxf8 mate, or 14 ... Ng5 15 Bxg5 Qxc4 16 Rc1! and White wins.

**15 Qxf6 Rg8**

Still not 15 ... Qxc4? 16 Rc1! again.

**16 Bd3 Qe7 17 Bg7!?**

Muzychuk believes in the endgame and she is right: White remains much better. On the other hand, the middlegame is positionally winning too; e.g. 17 Qc3 Nc6 18 0-0.

**17 ... Qxf6 18 Bxf6 Rxd2 19 0-0-0!**

Intending to play for mate on g8.

**19 ... Nc6 20 Rxd1 Rxd1+ 21 Rxd1 Ne7**

If 21 ... d5 22 Bxh7 Ra4 then 23 Rg8+ Kd7 24 Rf8 picks up another pawn. Black cannot create counterplay with 24 ... Rf4? because of 25 Rxf7+ Kd6 26 Be7+ Ke5 27 Bd6+!, winning an exchange.

**22 Bxh7**

Here 22 Rg7! was stronger; for example, 22 ... h5 (if 22 ... d5 23 Rxh7 White will win at least a piece with Bb5+ and Rh8+) 23 Rh7 Ng6 24 Rxh5 Ra4 25 b3 Rf4 26 Bxg6 fxg6 27 Rh8+ Kf7 28 Bc3 is a very aesthetic win.

**22 ... Ra4 23 Bc2 Ra5**

After 23 ... Rf4 24 Bg5 Rxf3 (or 24 ... Rc4 25 h4!) 25 Bxe7 Kxe7 26 Rg8 Black drops the bishop again.

**24 h4 b6 25 f4?**

White makes a more serious misstep, presumably in time trouble. 25 Bg5, followed by pushing the h-pawn, would have won.

**25 ... Rh5 26 Bd1 Rc5+ 27 Kd2 Bb7**

Missing her chance with 27 ... Rf5! 28 Bd4 Rxf4 29 Rg4 Rf1 30 Bxb6, when White is only somewhat better.

**28 Rg5 Rxd5 29 fxg5**

Now the h-pawn is too strong and White won quickly.

**29 ... Be4 30 h5 Nd5 31 h6 Bf5 32 Bc2 Bxc2 33 Kxc2 1-0**

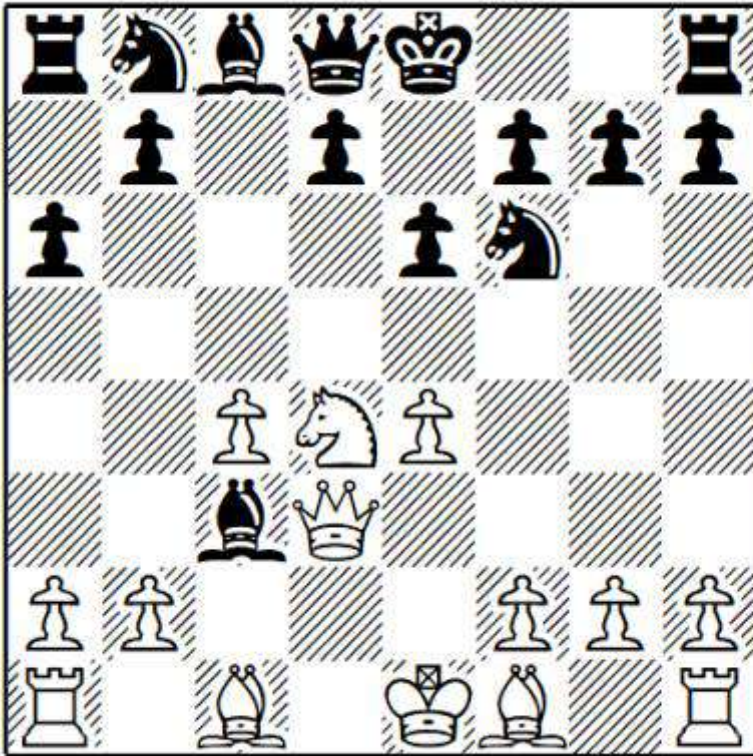
We end the chapter with another example of an early capture on c3. This time White is forced to recapture with the pawn, but other factors in the position far outweigh the damage to his structure.

Game 44

V.Belikov-A.Gorbatov

Alushta 2009

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 a6 5 c4 Nf6 6 Nc3 Bb4 7 Qd3 Bxc3+?



*How to recapture?*

This is a very rare option and after this game we will understand why. At first sight it seems that Black is creating a weakness he might play against later. But looking deeper, the dark-squared pressure is really missing, while the doubled pawns prohibit Black from completing his development.

**8 bxc3!**

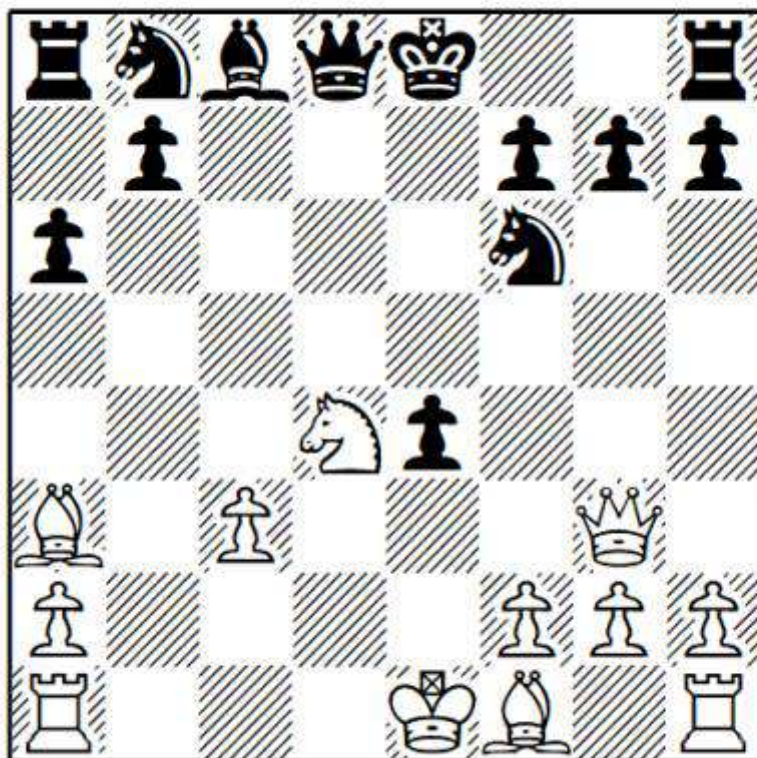
Not 8 Qxc3? Nxe4! and Black is fine. With no queen on c7, the d4-knight does not have any special discovered attack (like Nb5 in the previous game). White may not be worse given some dark-squared counterplay, but he is not better either.

## 8 ... Qa5

Threatening ... Nxe4 and preventing Ba3 for the moment.

In the case of 8 ... d6 White can activate his bishop straight away, and after 9 Ba3 0-0 10 Nb3 Black has immediate problems with the d6-pawn.

The attempt to free Black's position with 8 ... d5 fails because the dark squares are too vulnerable. After 9 cxd5 exd5 10 Ba3 dxe4 11 Qg3 White already has a decisive advantage.



*Too many threats*

## 9 f3 Nc6 10 Nb3

Even simple development with 10 Be2 leaves White clearly better. If Black tries 10 ... Nxd4 11 Qxd4 e5?, hoping for something like 12 Qd3 0-0 13 Be3 d6 14 0-0 Be6 with counterplay against the doubled pawns, instead 12 Qd6! gives White a virtually decisive attack; e.g. 12 ... Qxc3+ 13 Kf2 Qxa1 14 Be3! (but not 14 Ba3?? Qd4+ and Black wins) 14 ... Qxa2 15 Bc5 Kd8 16 Qe7+ Kc7 17 Qxe5+ Kd8 18 Bb6 mate.

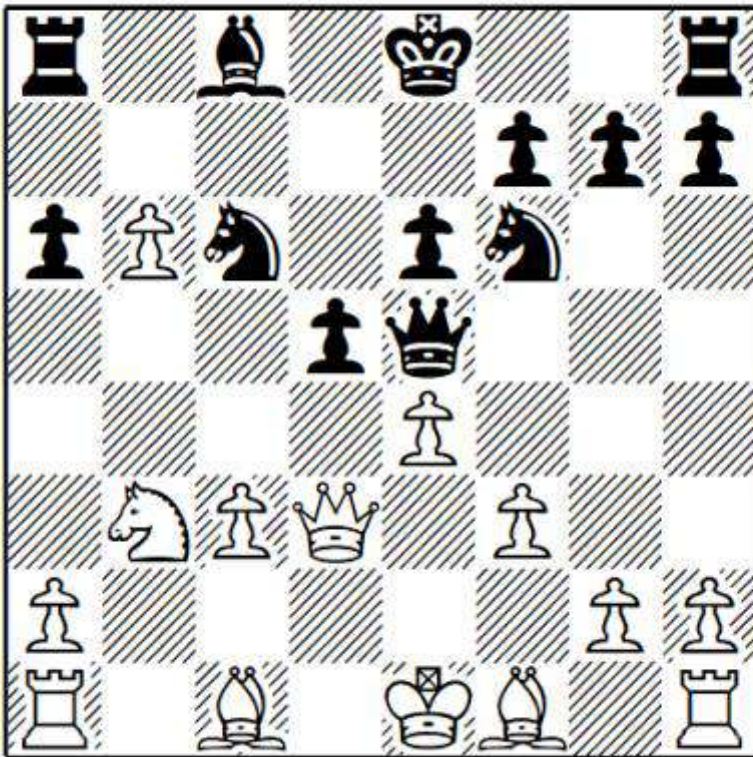
**10 ... Qe5 11 c5!**

The same motif as in the first game in this chapter. White has the queenside completely tied up.

**11 ... b5!?**

A very direct attempt to seek counterplay which, unfortunately for Black, is unsound. Nonetheless, we should take it seriously because it is at least more challenging than all the passive set-ups. For example, after 11 ... 0-0 12 Be2 a5 13 Ba3 a4 14 Nd4 White is positionally winning with no concrete calculation required.

**12 cxb6 d5**



### *Central counterplay*

Although what Black is doing looks reasonable, there is no reason to be worried. In return for the slight pressure in the centre we have a strong extra pawn on b6 which can become the match-winner.

**13 Be2 0-0 14 0-0 Rd8**

The endgame after 14 ... dxe4 15 fxe4 Qxe4 16 Qxe4 Nxe4 17 Bf3 f5 18 Be3 is easily winning for White.

**15 Qe3 dxe4 16 fxe4 Rb8 17 Nc5 Nb4 18 Qf2 Qxc3 19 Bf4 e5 20  
Rac1 Nc2 21 Bg5 Rd4 22 Nb3 Qb2 23 Bd1 1-0**

White had many ways to finish the game, but the chosen path is without any risk and wins a decisive amount of material.

# Chapter Seven

## Taimanov Variation

### Introduction

We continue with the variation which is most related to the Sicilian Kan, the so-called Sicilian Taimanov. It is a bit more active and dynamic than the Kan because Black delays ... a7-a6 in order to gain time and put pressure on the centre immediately, .

In this chapter you will find a very original approach starting with 5 Nb5, making use of the fact that 4 ... a6 has not yet been played. Of course 5 Nb5 has been well known for a couple of decades and is still used by a few strong grandmasters nowadays. Nonetheless, the line I'm proposing (7 N5c3!?) remains almost a secret weapon and is not frequently encountered in tournament practice. The reason for this might be that the opening theory just does not cover this specific sideline in very much detail.

So why should it be worth it, studying this chapter and employing this rare opening? First, it is easy to learn because it is based on some simple concepts; second, it is objectively completely sound; and third, the surprise factor is on our side.

Our initial position arises after the following moves:

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4**

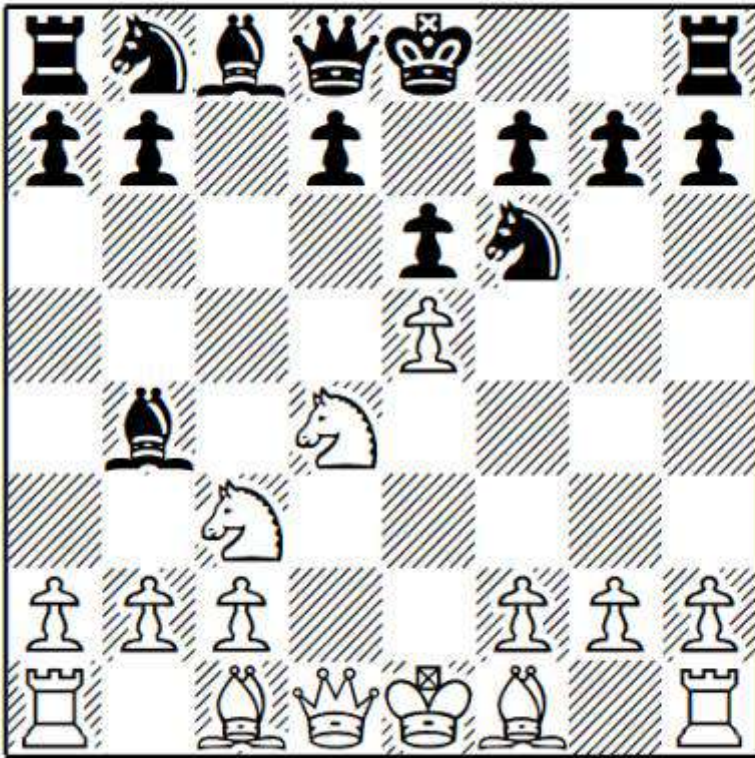
Now 4 ... Nc6 is the distinctive Taimanov move, which we'll get on to shortly. Before that I want to discuss a couple of minor systems with 4 ... Nf6 5 Nc3.

The main continuation then is 5 ... d6 (the Scheveningen Variation), which is the subject of Chapter Ten. However, Black can also play 5 ... Bb4 (the Pin Variation) and 5 ... Nc6 (the Sicilian Four Knights). Those are the two options we'll look at first.

### Pin Variation

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 Bb4**

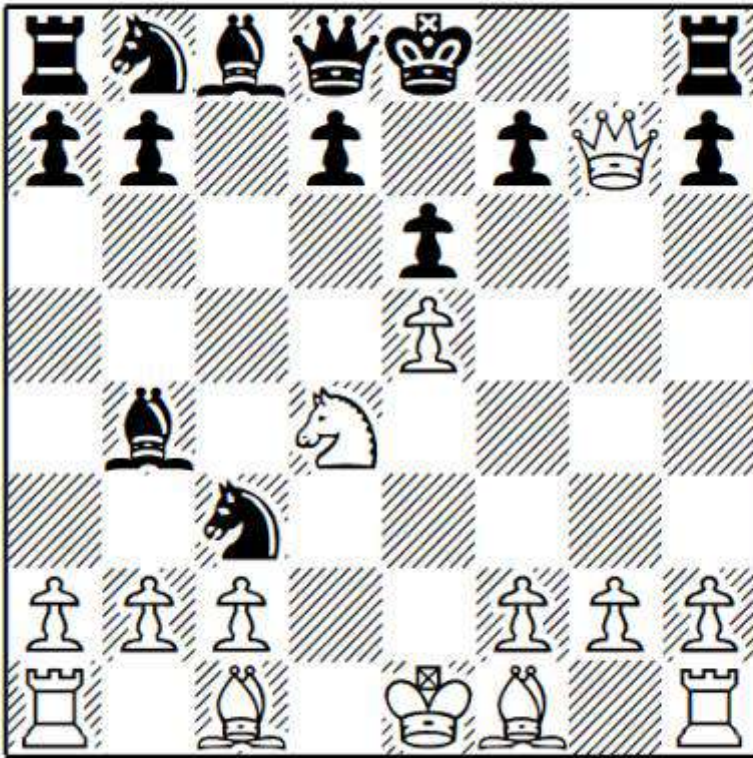
The so-called Pin Variation is not completely sound since White gets a huge plus, but some preparation is required to avoid any pitfalls. The critical response is 6 e5!,



### *The Pin Variation*

when Black has three options: the aggressive 6 ... Ne4?!, the safer 6 ... Nd5, and the tricky but losing 6 ... Qc7?.

a) 6 ... Ne4?! allows White to seize the initiative with 7 Qg4! Nxc3 (forced) 8 Qxg7!

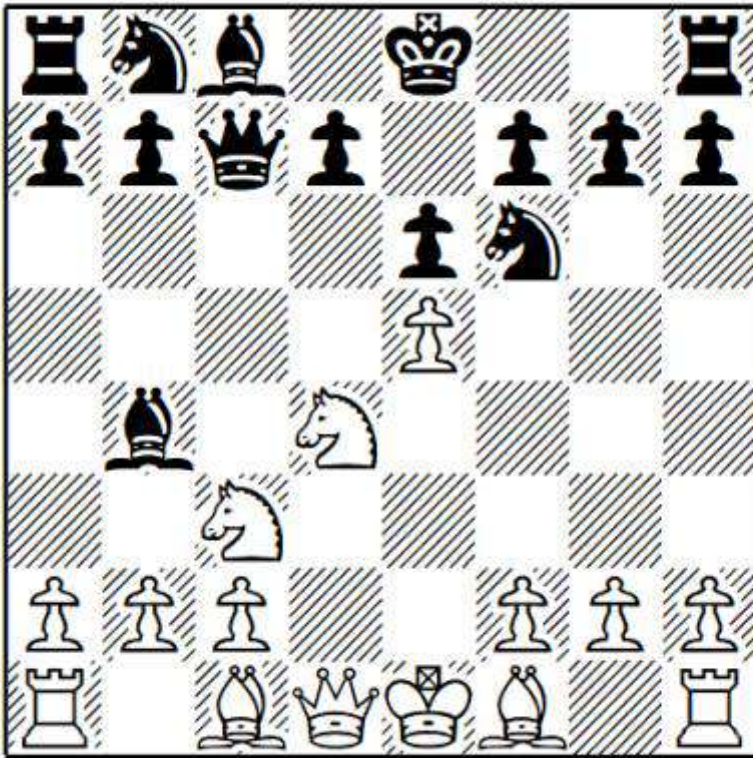


*White is winning*

8 ... Rf8 9 a3 Nb5+ (if 9 ... Qa5 10 axb4 Qxa1 11 Nb3 Qb1 12 bxc3 Qxc2 13 Bh6 Qxc3+ 14 Nd2 Qxb4 15 Be2 Nc6 16 0-0 b6 17 Ne4!, White is clearly winning) 10 axb4 Nxd4 11 Bg5 Qb6 12 Bd3, when Black is in trouble and lost after five more moves in M.Jevtic-V.Prokopisin, Hungarian League 1995. 12 ... Nf5 13 Bxf5 exf5 14 0-0-0 Qg6 15 e6 d6 16 Rxd6 f6 17 Rd8+ 1-0.

b) 6 ... Nd5 is the most solid option, but White can secure a clear advantage with normal moves. For example: 7 Bd2 (since Black cannot take on d2 here) 7 ... Nxc3 (or 7 ... Bxc3 8 bxc3 Qc7 9 f4, and if 9 ... Nxc3? 10 Qf3 Nd5 11 Nb5, White brings the knight to d6 with complete domination) 8 bxc3 Be7 9 Qg4 0-0 10 Bh6 g6 11 h4 and White has a huge plus, as we'll see in Game 45.

c) So far, I have only encountered 6 ... Qc7? in blitz games, but it is good to remember the refutation.



*White to play and win*

**Question:** Can you spot White's winning continuation?

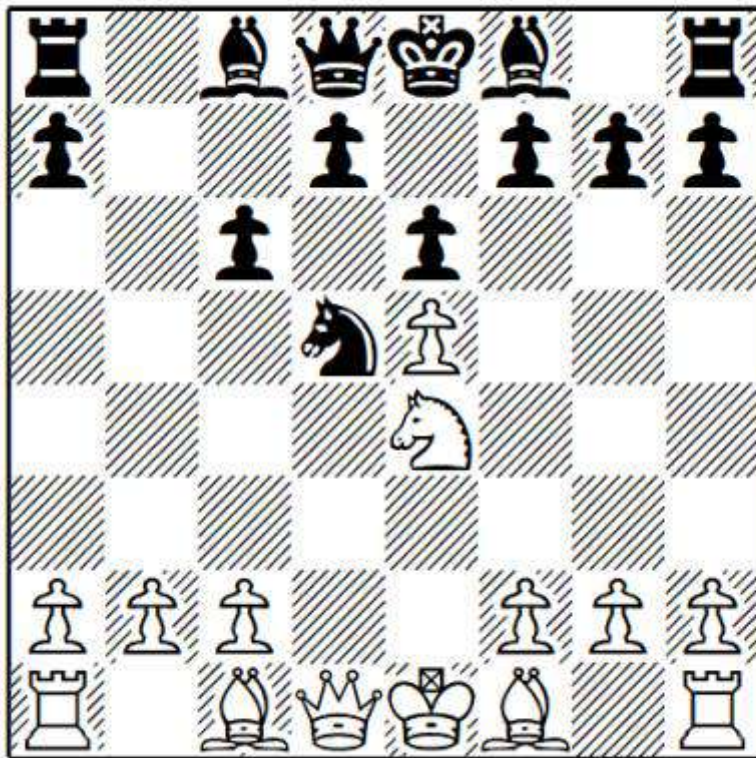
**Answer:** 7 exf6! Bxc3+ 8 bxc3 Qxc3+ 9 Qd2 Qxa1 10 fxg7 Rg8 11 c3! and White threatens to trap the queen. Black can avoid this with 11 ... Qb1 but loses anyway after 12 Bd3 Qb6 13 Qg5, as White will soon win a rook.

### **Sicilian Four Knights**

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 Nc6**

The Sicilian Four Knights is a rather more significant sideline. It is used very often as a transpositional route into the Sveshnikov after 6 Ndb5 d6 (6 ... Bb4 is an independent alternative) 7 Bf4 e5 8 Bg5, while avoiding lines like 2 ... Nc6 3 Bb5. From our perspective this move order has the consequence of taking us out of our repertoire, since White is already committed to Bg5 and thus our 7 Nd5 from Chapter Nine is no longer possible.

Instead, we will focus on 6 Nxc6 bxc6 (6 ... dxc6?! is a rare and poor alternative, since 7 Qxd8+ Kxd8 8 Bf4 Bb4 9 0-0-0+ Ke7 10 f3 promises White a slight edge without any risk, due to his space advantage and lead in development) 7 e5, which is a very sharp line to force matters, steering the game towards a fascinatingly complex battle: 7 ... Nd5 (the awkward-looking 7 ... Ng8?! has only been tried a few times and results have proven White's superiority; e.g. 8 Bd3 d5 9 exd6 Bxd6 10 Qf3 and White is better developed as well as holding the superior structure) 8 Ne4 (the only way to fight for an advantage; 8 Nxd5 cxd5 9 Bd3 is too simple and gives Black no problems at all – in fact I prefer Black, whose central pawn mass has more potential than White's b- and c-pawns)



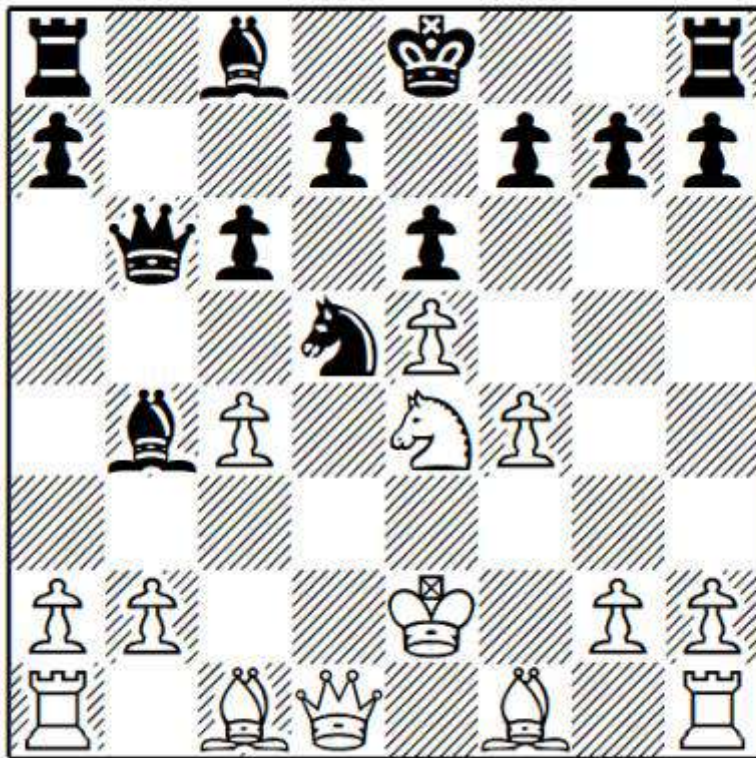
### *Concrete central play*

Now Black has a few options, which we will investigate further:

a) 8 ... f5?! is premature in view of 9 exf6 Nxf6 10 Nd6+ Bxd6 11 Qxd6, when White has a comfortable position with the pair of bishops.

b) 8 ... Qa5+ is an attempt to disturb White's coordination, so we need to be a bit careful: 9 c3 (the main idea is 9 Bd2 Qc7 10 f4 Qb6, hitting the now unprotected b2-pawn; although this is definitely playable for White, I recommend 9 c3 as a simpler solution) 9 ... Qc7 (both 9 ... f5 10 exf6 Nxf6 11 Nxf6+ gxf6 12 Bf4 and 9 ... Ba6 10 Be2 Bxe2 11 Qxe2 f5 12 exf6 Nxf6 13 Nxf6+ gxf6 14 0-0 offer a slight plus due to White's superior structure) 10 f4 Qb6 11 c4 and we transposed into line 'c' below.

c) 8 ... Qc7 is the main move, hitting the e5-pawn immediately. Play continues 9 f4 Qb6 10 c4 Bb4+ (10 ... Ne3 is not as challenging: 11 Qd3 Bb4+ 12 Bd2 0-0 13 Rc1 Nxf1 14 Rxf1 is slightly better for White; the knight is extremely strong and Black must be careful not to get serious dark-squared problems) 11 Ke2!.



*A surprising idea*

The only good move but, as we'll soon see, the king is safe here and Black needs time to reshuffle his minor pieces. (Note that 11 Bd2? is a big blunder due to 11 ... Qe3+ 12 Qe2 Bxd2+ 13 Nxd2 Qxe2+ 14 Bxe2 Nxf4 and Black

wins at least one pawn). We will now have a look at a few possible continuations:

c1) 11 ... Ne7?? is just a blunder, as 12 a3 wins on the spot.

c2) 11 ... Ba6 is more viable, but White keeps a huge plus if he remembers the next move.

**Question:** Can you guess how White should proceed?

**Answer:** 12 Kf3! (unpinning the c4-pawn and renewing the threat to the knight) 12 ... f5 13 exf6 Nxf6 14 c5 Qa5 (or 14 ... Bxc5 15 Nxc5 Bxf1 16 Na4!) 15 Nd6+ Kf8 16 Be3 and Black is in deep trouble.

c3) 11 ... f5 is the best response. The position is already quite crooked and unique. Concrete play is more important than any general consideration here. We'll examine two different approaches by White in the illustrative games section: keeping the centre closed with 12 Nf2 (Game 46), or opening the position with 12 exf6 (Game 47).

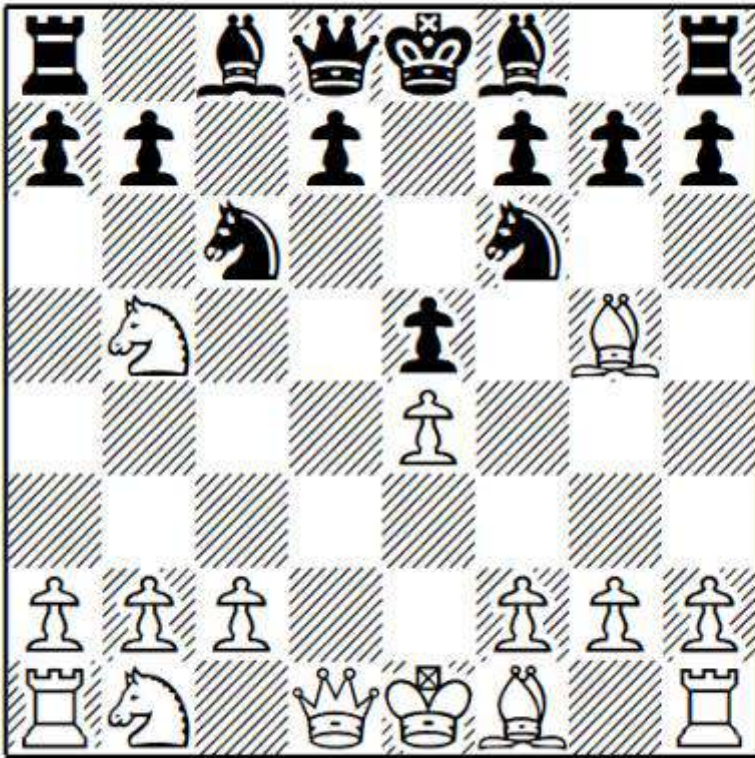
## **Taimanov Sicilian**

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nc6**

Here I'm proposing we exploit Black's omission of 4 ... a6 with:

**5 Nb5 d6**

Another option is 5 ... Nf6!?, asking us a tricky question about the e4-pawn. The most natural and usual reply is 6 N1c3, but this would take us outside of our repertoire again after 6 ... d6 7 Bf4 e5 8 Bg5. Instead, I will suggest the more original variation 6 Bf4! e5 (the only sensible move, as well as the only one which has played in practice) 7 Bg5.

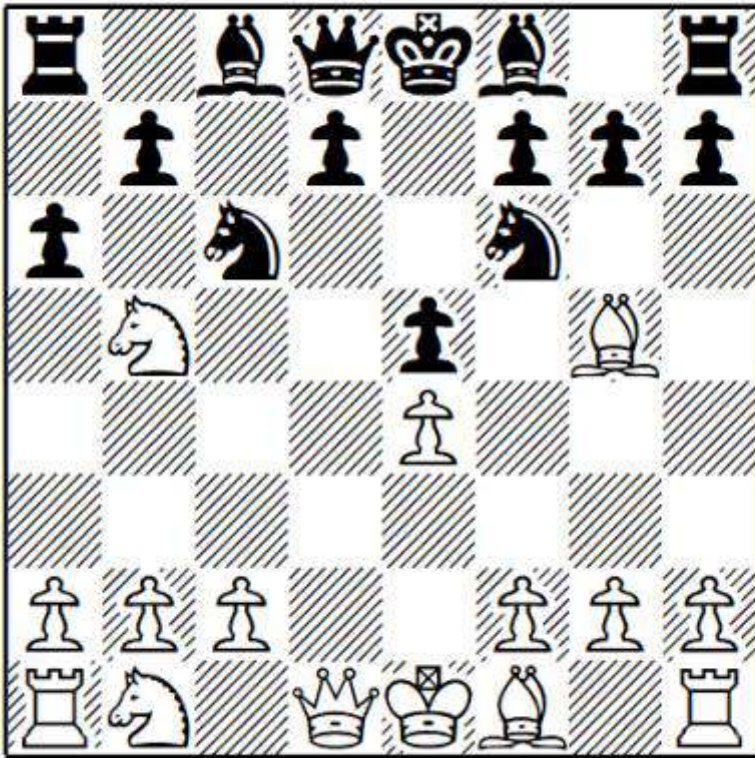


### *Not a Sveshnikov*

Although this *looks* like a Sveshnikov, the fact that N1c3 and ... d7-d6 have not yet been included allows White to take the play along independent lines. Black has three major options which we will check in detail:

a) 7 ... d6 8 Nd2!? is a nice way to avoid Sveshnikov positions. For example, 8 ... a6 9 Nc3 Be7 (note that 9 ... b5 can be met by 10 a4! with a plus for White, thanks to the knight being on d2 rather than a3) 10 Nc4 0-0 11 Bxf6 Bxf6 12 Qxd6 Be6 13 0-0-0 Qxd6 14 Nxd6 and White was much better in P.Popovic-G.Todorovic, Yugoslav Team Championship 2000.

b) 7 ... a6?! has been played a few times but it's not a good move.



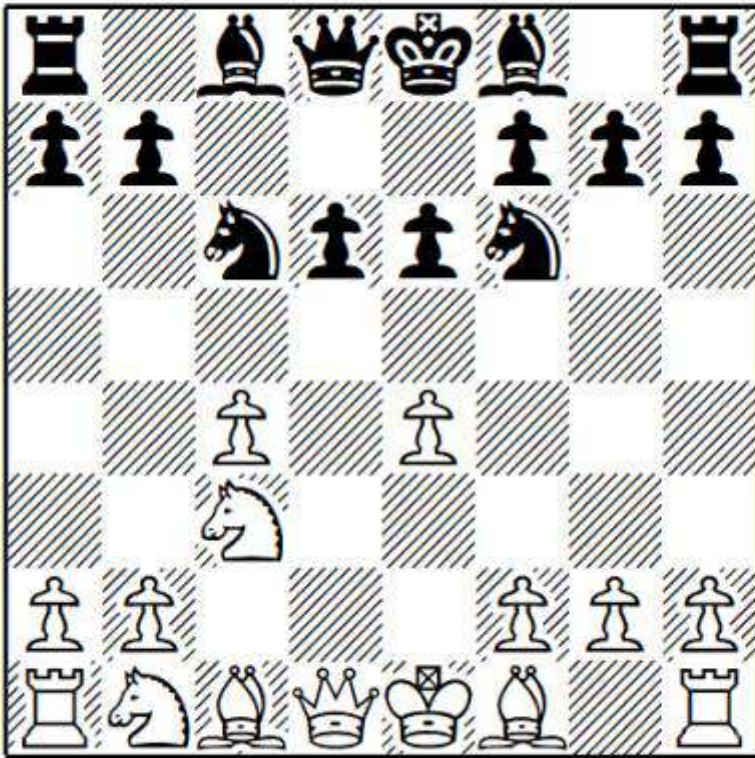
### *Attacking the knight*

**Question:** Can you spot how White can exploit it?

**Answer:** 8 Bxf6! (simply 8 N5c3 grants White a slight plus as well, but the text move is stronger; not 8 Nd6+? Bxd6 9 Qxd6 Nxe4!, when the pin has transformed into a discovered attack and Black is fine) 8 ... gxf6 9 Nd6+ Bxd6 10 Qxd6 with a clear plus to White.

c) 7 ... Bc5 (the most active and critical response) 8 N1c3 d6 9 Bxf6! (but not 9 Nd5? Nxe4!, since 10 Bxd8? Bxf2+ 11 Ke2 Bg4+ wins for Black) 9 ... Qxf6 10 Nc7+ Kd8 11 f3! Rb8 12 Qd2 and White is slightly better thanks to the stranded king in the centre. We'll examine this variation further in Game 48.

**6 c4 Nf6 7 N5c3!?**



*After 7 N5c3!?*

This is our move, which is played over six times less frequently than 7 N1c3. We will not cover 7 N1c3 here, I will just quickly point out its drawbacks and why it is interesting to go for 7 N5c3 instead.

1. 7 N1c3 means we have to retreat the b5-knight to a3 after Black plays 7 ... a6. In comparison we rather have it on c3.

2. There are no early ... d6-d5 breaks after 7 N5c3 (such as with 7 N1c3 a6 8 Na3 d5!?).

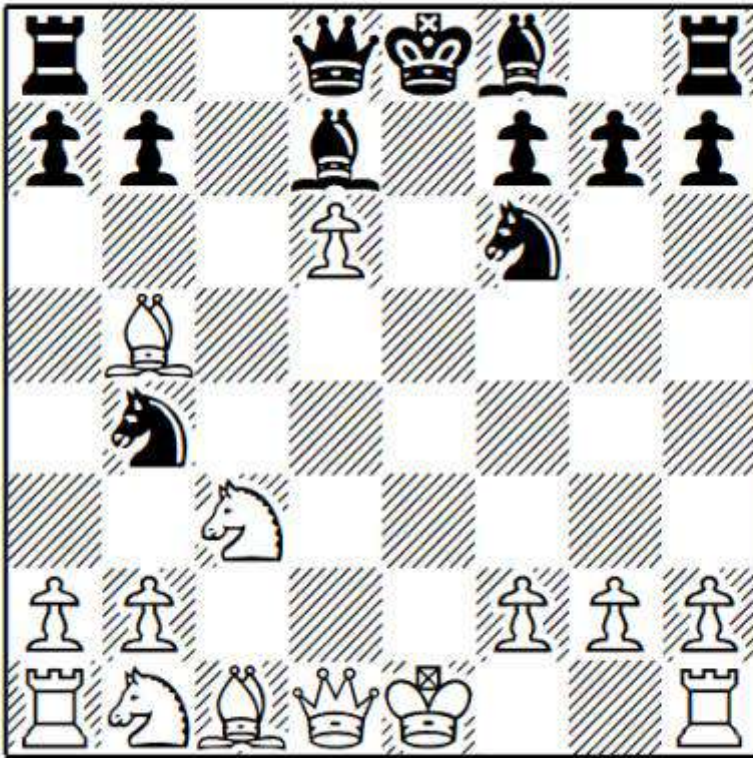
3. We can protect the c4-pawn easily with Nd2 at any point.

**7 ... Be7**

**Question:** Couldn't Black already play 7 ... d5, exploiting White's slow play?

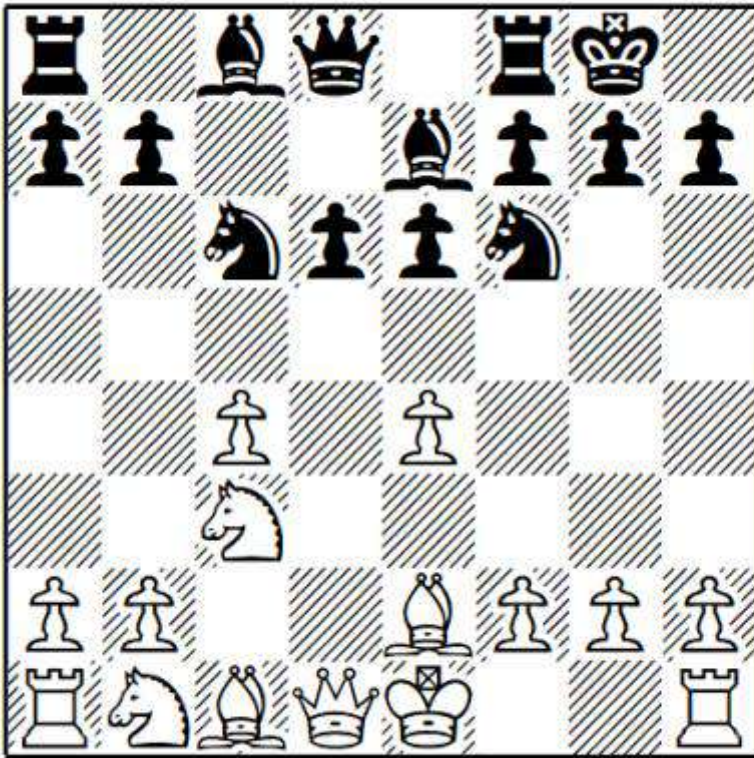
**Answer:** No, 7 ... d5? does not work. After 8 exd5 exd5 9 cxd5 Nb4 Black will not be able to regain the pawn because White has 10 Bb5+ Bd7

11 d6!, when Black is completely busted.



*Lost after 11 moves*

**8 Be2 0-0**



### *A non-theoretical variation*

Here the theoretical knowledge of variations is not really necessary; it is more important to know some basic concepts and be aware of the dangers and chances lying in the position.

Our normal plan is to finish development. This is usually done by 0-0, Bf4, Rfe1, Bf1 and Nbd2. The placement of the rook on e1 and the bishop on f4 is extremely effective against Black's threat of ... d6-d5!?, which is a typical Sicilian or Hedgehog pattern. With our set-up we almost universally have the strong response c4xd5 ... e6xd5, e4-e5 (this advance is well protected by rook and bishop), which leaves Black with a weak d5-pawn and gives us a kingside majority. You often see in practice that Black wants to equalize with ... d6-d5 at any cost, but it will almost never work.

Meanwhile, we can slowly improve our position by Rc1, as well as expanding on the queenside with a2-a3 and b2-b4, before we finally breaking through with, for example, c4-c5 at some point.

Concluding, I estimate the positions as being very easy to handle and, due to the space advantage, also slightly better for White, at least in a practical sense.

**9 0-0 b6**

9 ... Bd7? would be illogical since the bishop is more active on the long diagonal.

**10 Bf4 Bb7 11 Re1**

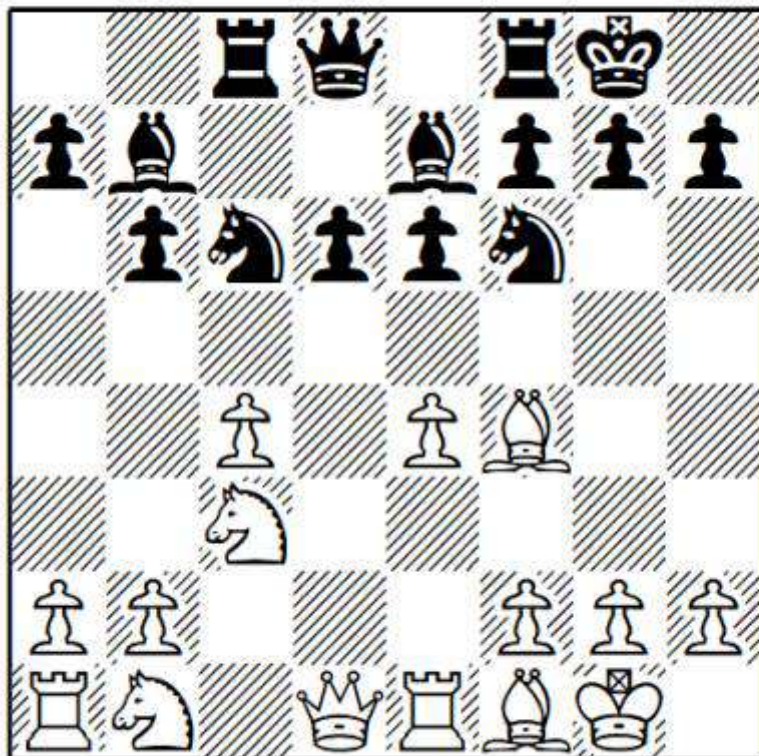
**Remember:** One key concept of this opening is: prophylaxis first. We must always be ready to have a good response to ... d6-d5, and White's last move, 11 Re1, is useful for that.

Returning to attack the d-pawn with Nb5 is not yet an idea, because the e4-pawn would drop.

**11 ... Rc8**

In the case of 11 ... d5 we answer 12 cxd5 exd5 13 e5 as usual. The well-supported e5-pawn grants White a big plus.

**12 Bf1**



## *Our basic starting position*

This is our basic starting position and there are not many deviations until move 12. That's good news as we only have to remember one straight line instead of many branches to reach this point.

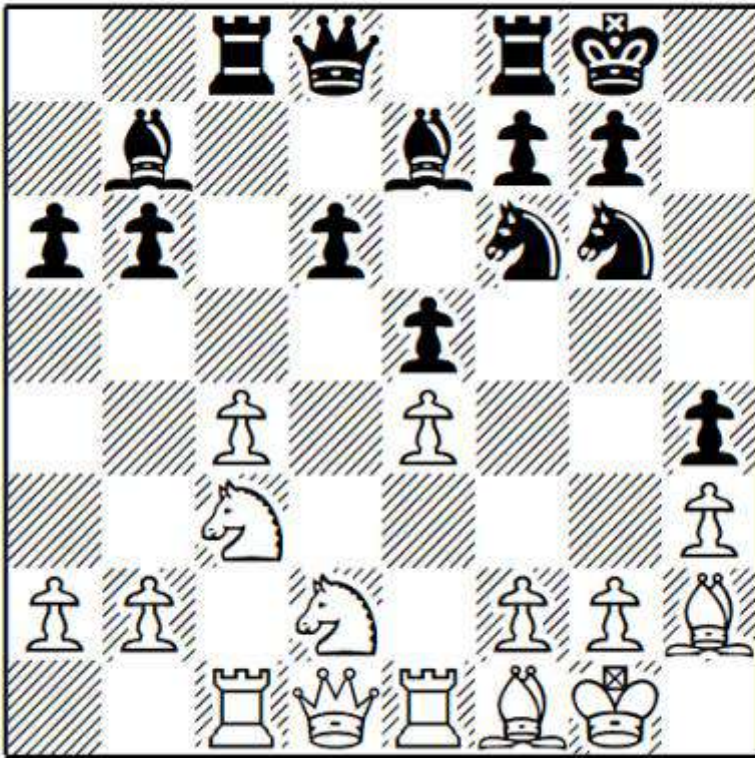
From here, I would like to discuss a set of different plans by Black and show how to meet each of them. This is not a move by move analysis because there is not one single move order implementing each plan. Instead, the play is rather flexible and it is important to understand the idea of any set-up. So let me give you an overview what Black could try:

1. Black tries to make the typical Sicilian breakthrough ... d6-d5!/? work.
2. Black plays ... Nd7 and ... g7-g5, which is in my opinion the best and most ambitious option.
3. Black plays ... e6-e5 at some point to create an outpost on d4 or f4.
4. Black tries to exchange dark-squared bishops.
5. Black just manoeuvres around slowly without doing anything concrete, basically just waiting.

Note that 12 Nd2?!, as given by Pavlidis in his latest book on the Taimanov, is a bit less accurate, since Black has the extra options of ... Nd4 or ... Nd7. (The d2-knight blocks the queen, so that the squares d4 and d6 are no longer attacked.)

**12 ... a6 13 Nd2 Nd7**

Continuations like 13 ... Ne5 14 Rc1 Ng6 15 Bg3 h5 16 h3 h4 17 Bh2 e5 (implementing plan 3) will be discussed in Game 50.



*White is better*

Playing the position like a standard Hedgehog with 13 ... Qc7 14 Rc1 Qb8 is normally doomed to fail. Black is trying to shuffle around and finally make ... d6-d5 work (plan 1), but White is well prepared to respond with c4xd5 and e4-e5. For further analysis of this plan, please consult Game 49.

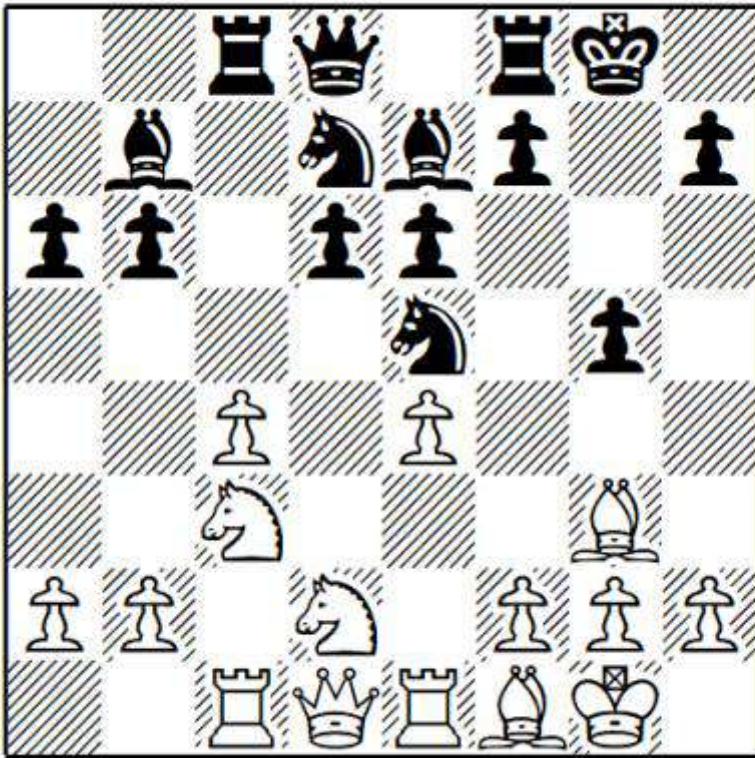
On the other hand, should Black continue to wait (plan 5), you can strengthen your position by slowly increasing your space advantage; e.g. 15 a3 Rfe8 16 Bg3 Nd7 17 b4 with a plus for White.

**14 Rc1 Nce5**

Preparing either plan 2 or plan 4.

**15 Bg3!? Bh4**

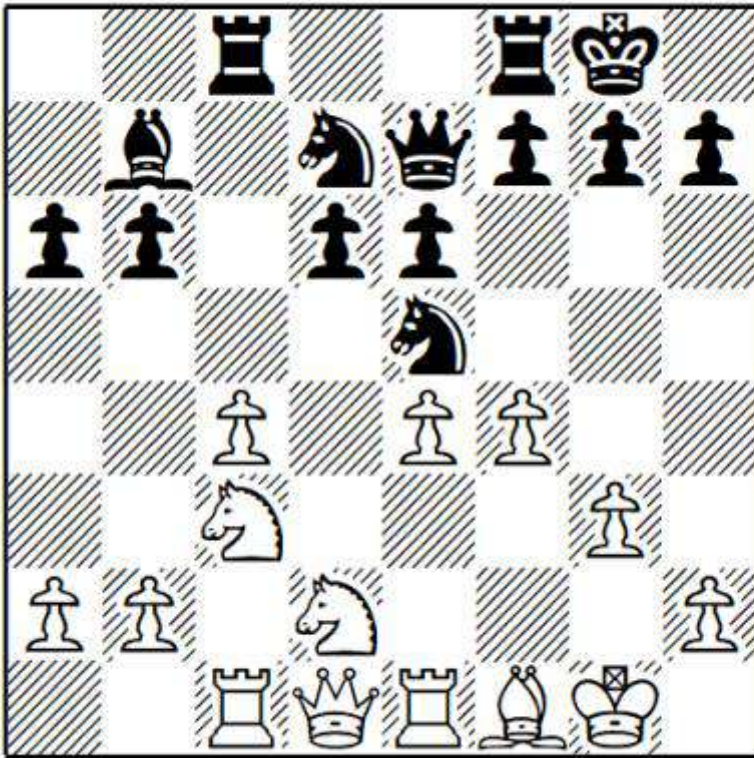
In case of 15 ... g5



*Black is ambitious*

White can go for 16 h3 Kh8 17 b4!?, initiating counterplay on the queenside. We'll see similar style play in Games 51 and 52.

**16 Bxh4 Qxh4 17 g3 Qe7 18 f4**



*White stands better*

White has a comfortable position despite the exchange of bishops.

We stop the theoretical discussion here, but you will find more details in the following collection of games.

### **Illustrative Games**

In the first four games we study some sidelines: two by Black and one by White.

We start with the Pin Variation. In Game 45, White is almost winning out of the opening after the clever 11 h4!, but things become messy afterwards and a long fight arises on the board.

In the next three games, our choices are governed by the need to avoid being move ordered into a main line Bg5 Sveshnikov. Against the Four Knights, we therefore reject 6 Ndb5 in favour of 6 Nxc6 bxc6 7 e5, which leads to sharp play, In the main line we have the option of either closing or opening the position, as we'll see in Games 46 and 47 respectively.

The similarly tricky 5 ... Nf6 in the Taimanov is the subject of Game 48. Here two very strong computers are conducting each side and the game ends in a draw, but I would prefer White's position in a human contest.

Then we look at proper Taimanov games with 5 Nb5 d6 6 c4 Nf6 7 N5c3!?. First, in Game 49, we see Black trying to make the typical breakthrough ... d7-d5 work and the positions open up in favour of White.

In Game 50 Black opts for a more stodgy approach, keeping the centre closed with ... e7-e5. This gives White all the time to organize his pieces effectively and soon afterwards he gets a winning position.

Finally, in the last two examples, we see a very aggressive plan by Black, starting a offensive with ... g7-g5. White will play on the queenside, while Black aims for a kingside attack, pushing pawns forward in a double-edged way.

We'll start with a sample game featuring the risky Pin Variation.

#### *Game 45*

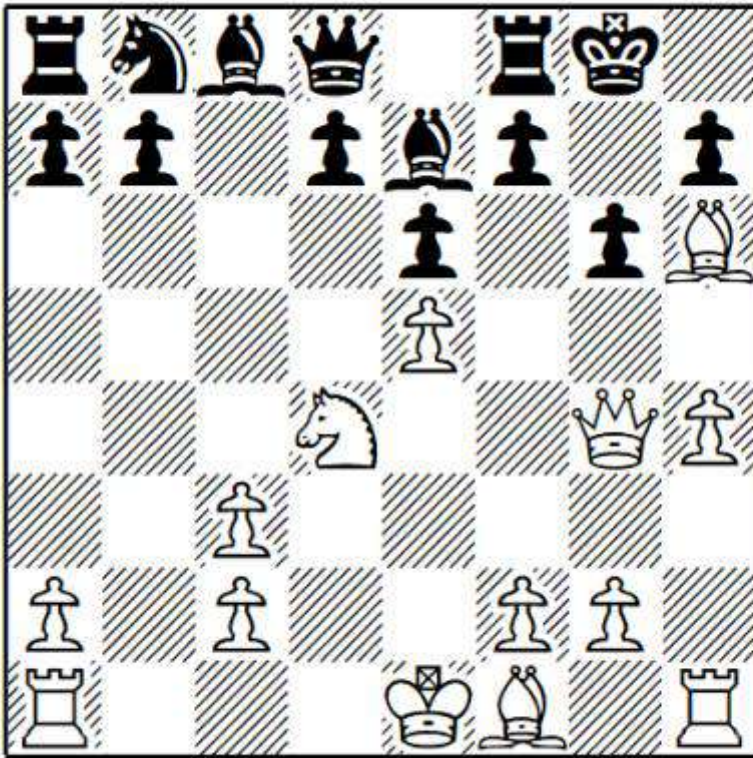
**P.Czarnota-S.Sulskis**

European Championship, Warsaw 2005

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 Bb4 6 e5 Nd5 7 Bd2 Nxc3**

Instead, 7 ... Bxc3 8 bxc3 0-0 (remember, 8 ... Qc7 9 f4 Nxc3? is a mistake because of 10 Qf3 Nd5 11 Nb5 and wins) 9 Bd3 d6 10 exd6 Qxd6 11 0-0 was seen in A.Firouzja-Ba.Jobava, World Blitz Championship, St. Petersburg 2018. The position is not entirely clear, but White's activity looks appealing to me.

**8 bxc3 Be7 9 Qg4 0-0 10 Bh6 g6 11 h4!**

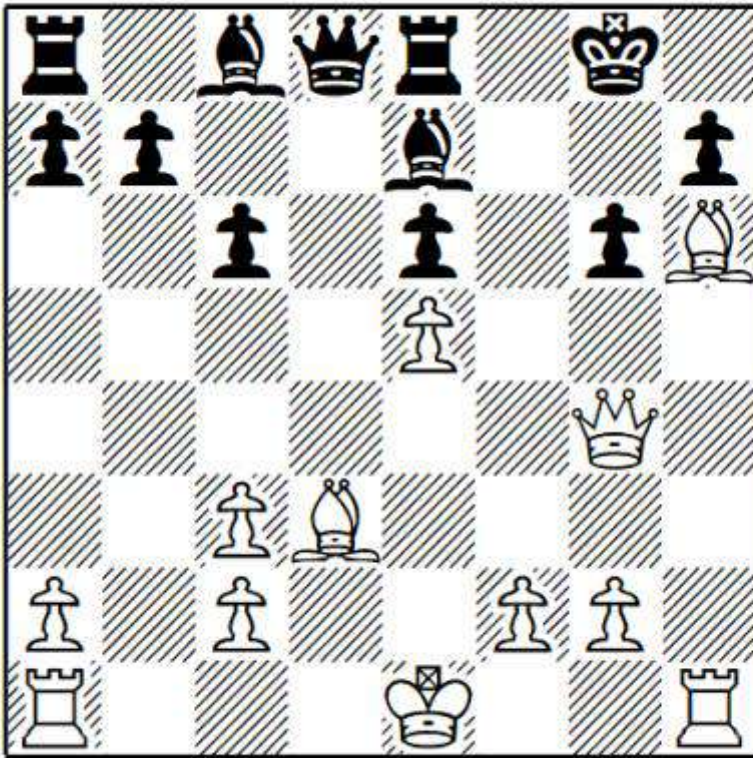


*Increasing the pressure*

Delaying Bxf8 and going for an attack. The alternative is simply to take the rook: 11 Bxf8 Bxf8 12 Qg3 Qa5 13 Bc4 with a slight plus for White in Z.Almasi-A.Fedorov, Polanica Zdroj 2000.

**11 ... Qa5**

11 ... Re8? is impossible due to 12 h5 Nc6 13 hxg6 fxg6 14 Nxc6 dxc6 15 Bd3 and there is no defence against 16 Bxg6! next.



*A crushing attack*

**12 Qg3! d6**

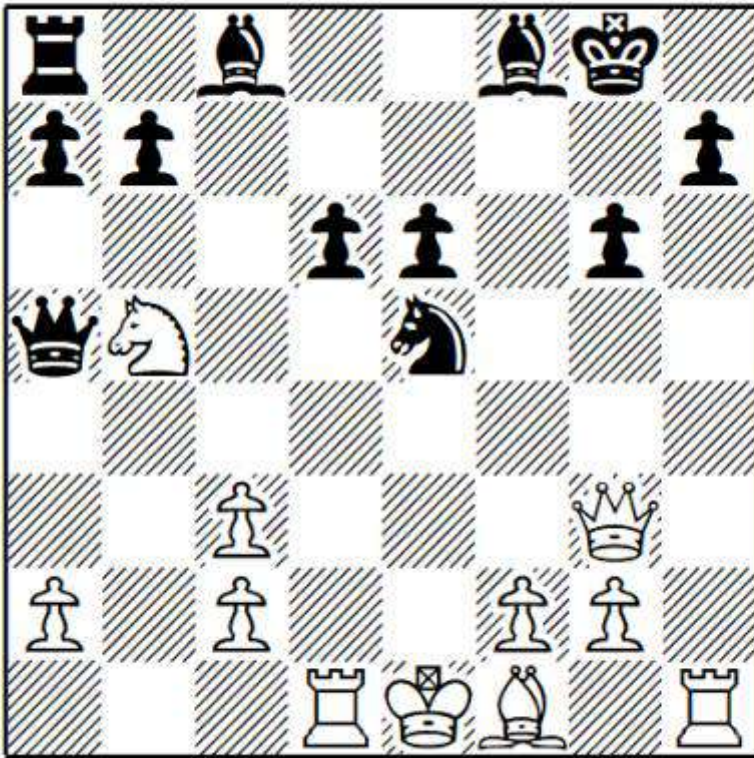
12 ... Re8? 13 h5! is still a decisive attack.

**13 Nb5 Nd7 14 h5**

This looks a good moment for 14 Bxf8! Bxf8 15 Nxd6 and White should consolidate; e.g. 15 ... Bg7 16 Nc4 Qc5 17 f4 b5 18 Nd2 Bb7 19 Rb1.

**14 ... Nxe5 15 f4**

Here too 15 hxg6 fxg6 16 Bxf8 Bxf8 17 Rd1 is clearer.



*White should win*

When you compare this position with the outcome after an immediate 11 Bxf8, it is obvious that 11 h4! has only helped White. Note that Black had no real chance to remove his rook from f8 because of the rapid kingside attack.

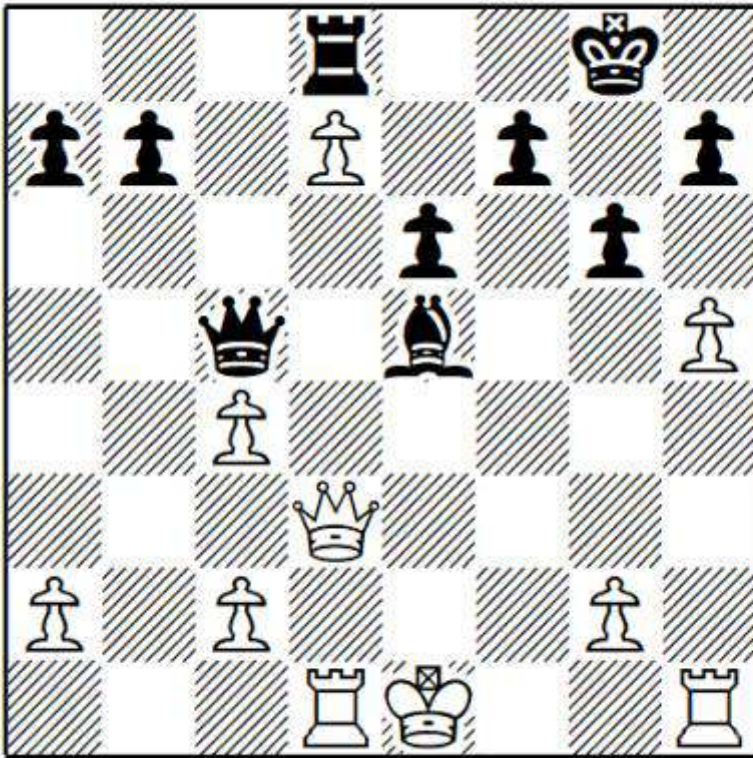
**Remember:** Waiting with Bxf8 can prove to be very effective.

**15 ... Bd7 16 fxe5 Bxb5 17 Bxb5 Qxb5 18 Bxf8 Bxf8 19 exd6 Rd8 20 Rd1 Bg7**

White is clearly better thanks to his material plus, but converting this will be harder than in the variations above.

**21 Qd3 Qc5 22 c4 Rd7?!**

Instead, 22 ... Be5! would have offered Black great counterchances, despite allowing White to try and save the d-pawn with 23 d7.

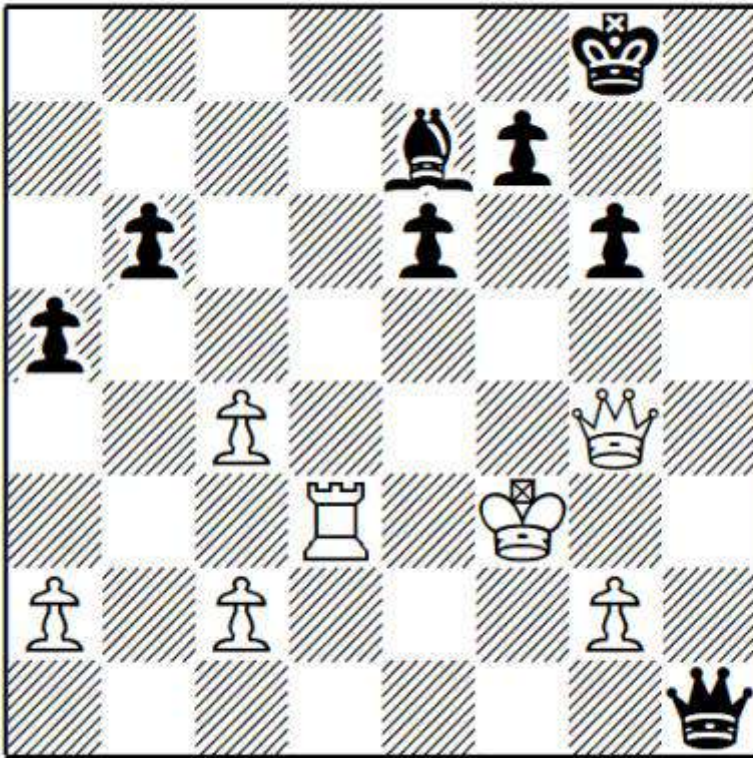


*How to proceed?*

**Question:** Can you see what Black has in mind?

**Answer:** 23 ... Rxd7! and White is caught in a perpetual after 24 Qxd7 (24 Qb3 is also fine for Black, who has the safer king and one pawn already for the exchange) 24 ... Qe3+ 25 Kf1 Qf4+ 26 Ke2 Qe4+ 27 Kf2 Qf4+ etc.

**23 hxc6 hxc6 24 Qe4 Rxd6 25 Rxd6 Qxd6 26 Rh3 b6 27 Rd3 Qc5 28 Ke2 Bf6 29 Rd7 a5 30 Rd3 Be7 31 Qd4 Qg5 32 Kf3 Qh5+ 33 Qg4 Qh1**



*White can play on and on*

Objectively the worst is over for Black, but he will still have to defend for a long time. From the other side, White managed to exchange queens and eventually win the endgame.

**34 Kg3 Bf6 35 Qe4 Qh5 36 Kf2 Be7 37 Kg3 Qg5+ 38 Kh2 Qc1 39 Rd7 Qh6+ 40 Kg3 Qg5+ 41 Kf3 Bc5 42 Qf4 Qh5+ 43 Kg3 Qf5 44 Qxf5 gxf5 45 Kf4 Kg7 46 Ke5 Bg1 47 Rd3 Bh2+ 48 g3 Kg6??**

Black finally blunders. 48 ... Bg1 was essential to prevent White's next move.

**49 c5! bxc5 50 Kf4 Bg1 51 Ra3 Bd4 52 Rxa5 e5+ 53 Kf3 e4+ 54 Kg2 f4 55 gxf4 Kf5 56 Ra7 f6 57 a4 Kxf4 58 a5 Ke3 59 a6 c4 60 Rd7 Bb6 61 Kf1 f5 62 Ke1 f4 63 a7 Bxa7 64 Rxa7 Kd4 65 Kd2 e3+ 66 Ke2 Kc3 67 Rc7 Kd4 68 Rf7 1-0**

Next we'll look at a couple of games with the Sicilian Four Knights.

*Game 46*

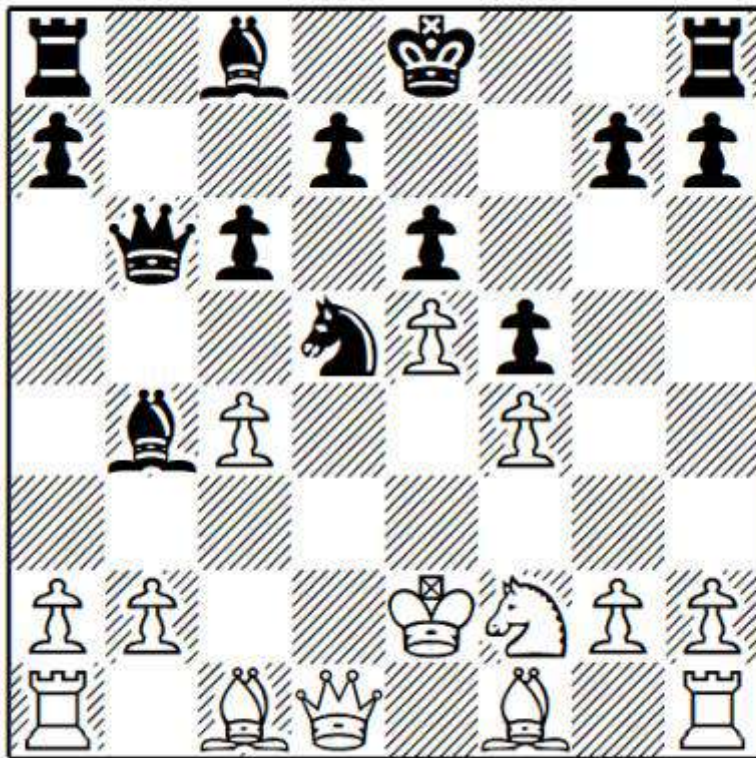
**D.Navara-D.Vocaturro**

Prague (rapid) 2019

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 Nc6 6 Nxc6 bxc6 7 e5 Nd5 8 Ne4 Qc7 9 f4 Qb6 10 c4 Bb4+ 11 Ke2 f5**

So far, we have been following the moves from the theoretical introduction. White now has two ways of playing the position. In the current game we will see him keeping the centre closed, aiming for a solid strategic set-up.

**12 Nf2**



*Closed centre*

The alternative is to open the position with 12 exf6 Nxf6. We will look at this in the next game.

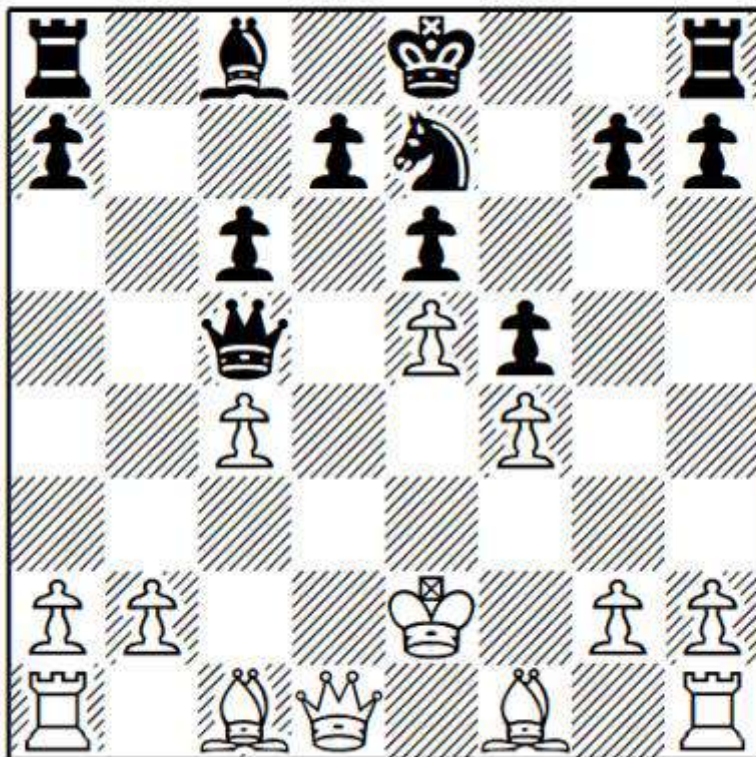
**12 ... Ne7?!**

Black already goes wrong. Rather than retreat the knight straightaway, it was better to insert 12 ... Ba6 13 Kf3 before 13 ... Ne7 in order to prevent the strong Nd3 manoeuvre. Now 14 Nd3? obviously fails to 14 ... Bxc4, while 14 Be3 Bc5 15 Bxc5 Qxc5 16 Qd6! offers White only a slight advantage.

### 13 Nd3

Chasing the bishop with 13 a3? does not work because 13 ... Bc5 14 Nd3 Bd4 sees it find an active and stable place, when Black is even better.

### 13 ... Bc5 14 Nxc5 Qxc5



*Big plus for White*

Let's briefly sum up the outcome of the opening. White has managed to exchange his knight for Black's dark-squared bishop, which is extremely helpful since d6 and c5 are incredibly weak now. Meanwhile, the white king is in no real danger: the centre is closed and he is ready to go to f2 after the preparatory Be3. White is much better.

### 15 b3 Qb6 16 Qd6

Another possibility was 16 Be3 c5 17 Kf2 with the idea of winning the c5-pawn; e.g. 17 ... a5 18 Qd6! Qxd6 19 exd6 Ng6 20 h4 h5 21 Kg3 etc. Navara perhaps rejected this on account of 17 ... Bb7 18 b4 (intending 18 ... Qxb4? 19 Rb1!) 18 ... Rc8, when 19 Bxc5? runs into 19 ... Rxc5! 20 bxc5 Qxc5+ 21 Ke1 Qe3+, though something like 19 h4 still looks very good for White.

**16 ... c5 17 Ba3 Ng6 18 Bxc5 Nxf4+ 19 Ke3!**

The exchange of queens is forced, so White can confidently keep the king in the centre of the board.

**19 ... Qxd6 20 Bxd6 Ng6 21 b4!**

Simple and strong. White starts pushing his queenside pawn majority.

**21 ... Bb7 22 h4 Kf7 23 h5?!**

I'm not sure this help White at all. Simply 23 b5 looks better, continuing forward with the pawns; whereas now Black can gain a little counterplay on the other flank.

**23 ... Ne7 24 b5 g5! 25 hxg6+ hxg6 26 Rxh8 Rxh8**

**27 Rd1 Nc8 28 Bc5 Ke8 29 a4 Rh4 30 a5!?**

White has many ways to keep the advantage, but ignoring the threat of 30 ... Re4+ and creating his own threats seems most convincing.

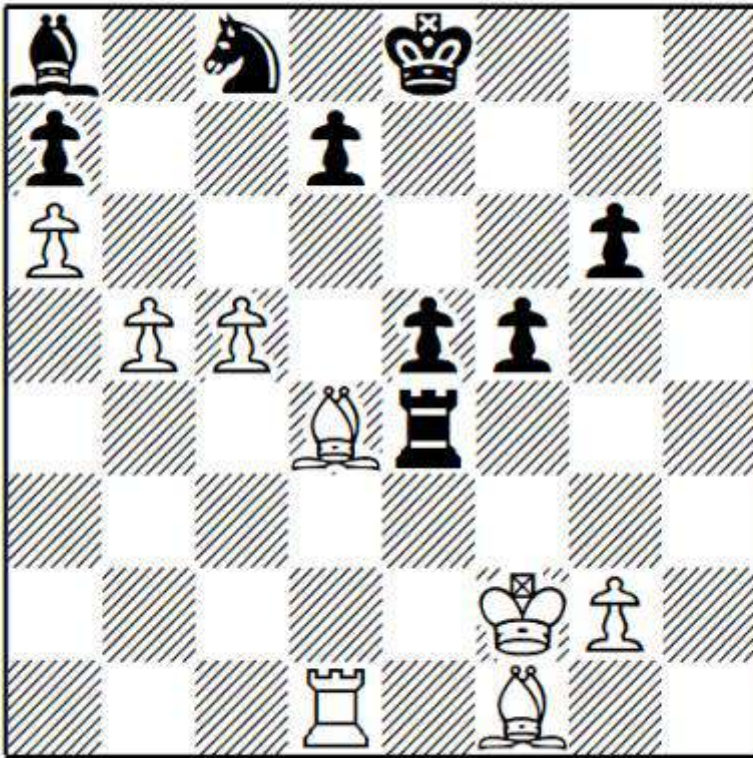
**30 ... Re4+?**

Grabbing the e5-pawn virtually concedes the game. He had to try and halt the white pawns with 30 ... a6!?, when 31 b6? Ne7 sets up a light-squared blockade. White would probably play 31 Rd4, but there remains some work to be done.

**31 Kf2 Rxe5 32 Bd4 Re4 33 a6!**

Now the pawns are rolling down the board.

**33 ... Ba8 34 c5 e5**



*White to play and win*

**Question:** Things are becoming concrete now. Can you find a win for White?

**Answer: 35 b6!**

The advanced pawns will decide the game; Black has no time to capture the bishop.

The alternative 35 Be3?! f4 36 Bd2 Ra4 is still good for White but nowhere near as clear as the text.

**35 ... axb6 36 cxb6 Nxb6**

After 36 ... exd4 37 b7 the game is over.

**37 Bxb6 Rb4 38 Bc7 1-0**

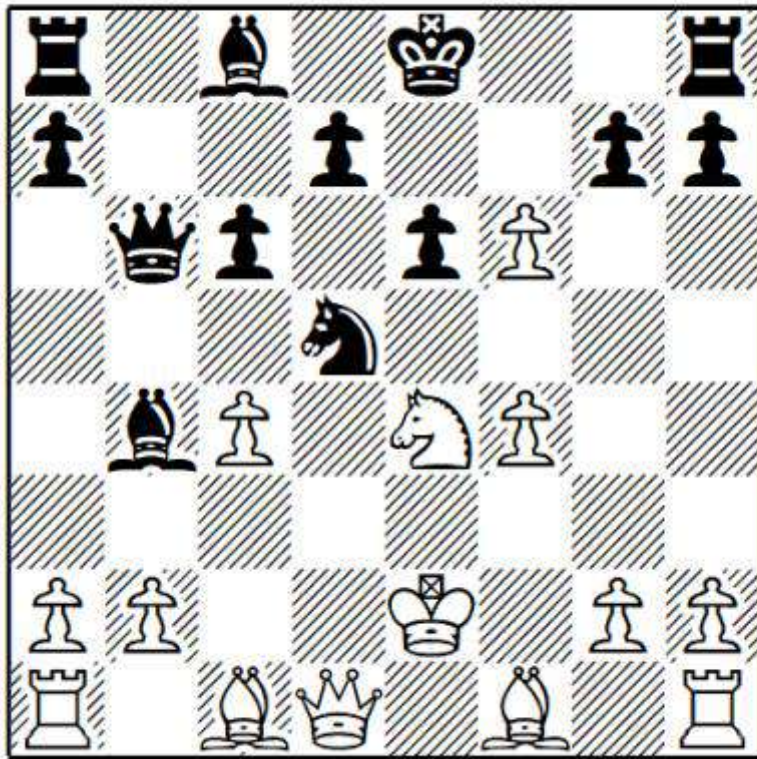
The passed pawn on the a-file will soon cost Black another piece.

*Game 47*

**A.Volokitin-P.Eljanov**

Ukrainian Championship, Lutsk 2019

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 Nc6 6 Nxc6 bxc6 7 e5 Nd5  
8 Ne4 Qc7 9 f4 Qb6 10 c4 Bb4+ 11 Ke2 f5 12 exf6



### *Open centre*

Now we see White's other strong option: opening the position and immediately grabbing the pair of bishops.

**12 ... Nxf6 13 Be3 Qd8**

If 13 ... Qc7, to prevent 14 Nd6+, White can switch plans and go for 14 Nxf6+ gxf6 15 Kf2 with harmonious play, while Black has problems finding a safe spot for his king.

**14 Nd6+ Bxd6**

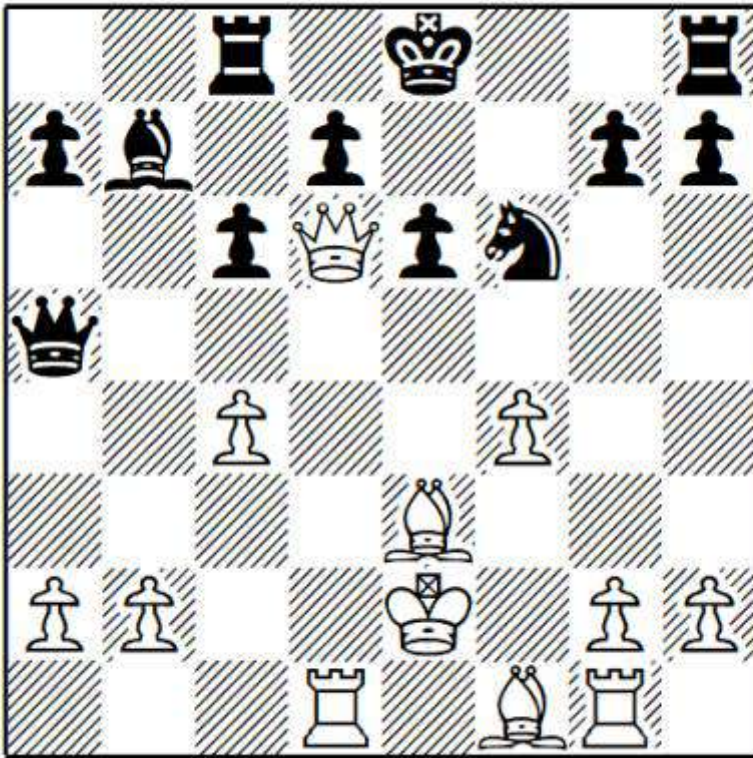
If 14 ... Ke7 15 c5, White secures the strong knight with a big plus.

**15 Qxd6 Bb7**

Again 15 ... Ba6 16 Kf3! is very good for White.

**16 Rd1 Rc8 17 Rg1 c5**

One might wonder whether Black can punish 16 Rd1 (which left the a2-pawn unprotected) with 17 ... Qa5.



*Attacking a2*

**Question:** What do you think?

**Answer:** No, Black should not go after this pawn. 17 ... Qa5 is actually a big mistake because the absence of the queen allows White to counterattack with 18 Bc5 and Black has nothing better than to return to queen to d8, when White has made two moves for free.

**18 g4**

Of course not 18 Bxc5?? due to 18 ... Ne4.

**18 ... Qc7 19 g5 Ne4 20 Qe5 d6!**

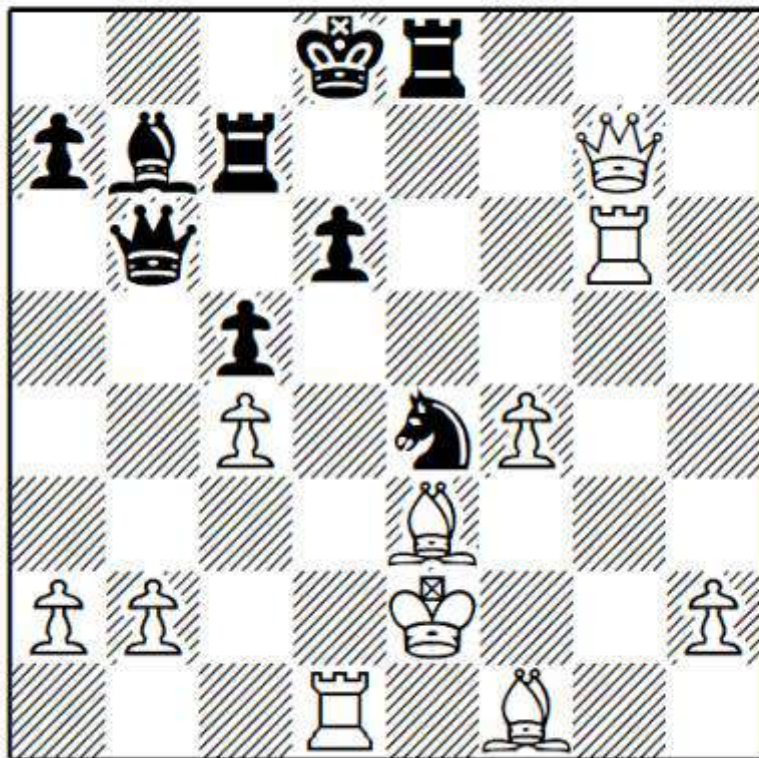
Black sacrifices a pawn to open the e-file. Instead, 20 ... Qxe5 21 fxe5 Rf8 22 Bh3 is good for White, since the knight is stuck in the centre.

**21 Qxe6+ Kd8 22 g6 Re8 23 gxh7!**

A nice reaction. White gives up his queen, seeing that he will immediately get a new one.

**23 ... Rxe6 24 h8Q+ Re8 25 Qxg7 Qb6 26 Rg6 Rc7!**

After this move White appears to be in trouble, since his queen has no squares on the long diagonal to defend b2.



*Is White in trouble?*

**Question:** How does White save himself?

**Answer:** With an exchange sacrifice.

**27 Rgxd6+! Nxd6 28 Qf6+ Kc8**

The king can't defend the knight since 28 ... Kd7?? 29 Bh3+ leads to mate quickly.

**29 Rxd6 Qb4?!**

Black best chance was 29 ... Rc6 30 Rxc6+ Bxc6 31 Kf2 Bb7, when he has everything covered. White can swap off into an endgame where he has three pawns for the exchange, but winning it would no be easy.

### 30 Bh3+ Kb8 31 Be6?

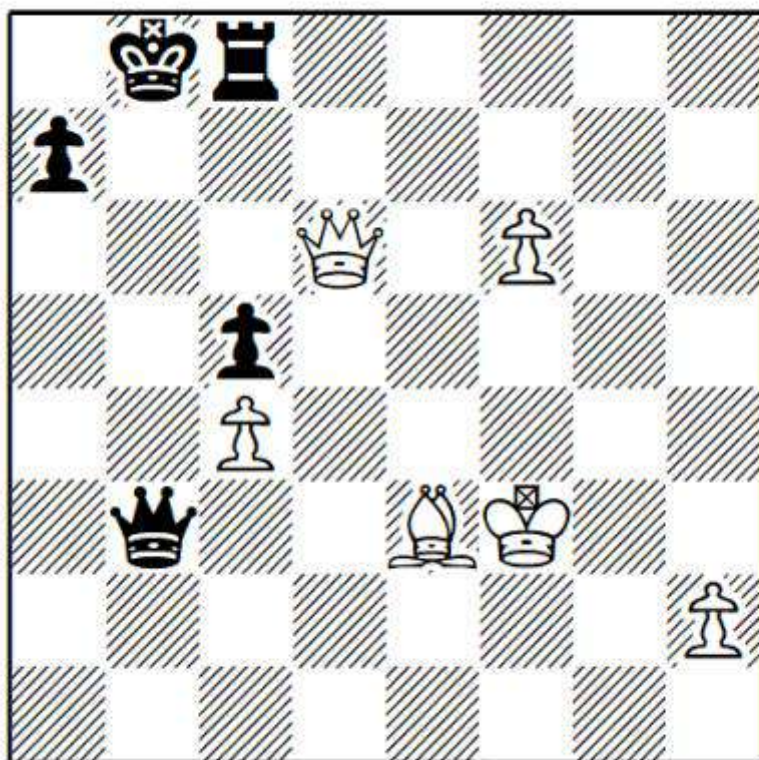
A mistake in turn. 31 Rd8+ Rxd8 32 Qxd8+ Bc8 33 b3 gives White excellent chances.

### 31 ... Bc8 32 b3 Qa3

The computer indicates 32 ... Qb7! as correct, and if 33 Bd5 then 33 ... Qb4! again. The point of luring the bishop off the e-file is that 34 ... Rce7 is now a very strong threat, while if 34 f5 then 34 ... Rxe3+! 35 Kxe3 Qe1 leads to perpetual check.

### 33 f5 Qxa2+ 34 Rd2 Qb1 35 Rd8 Qc2+ 36 Kf3 Rxd8 37 Qxd8 Qxb3 38 f6 Rc6 39 Bxc8 Rxc8 40 Qd5?

The wrong square. 40 Qd6+! would have quickly decided the game;

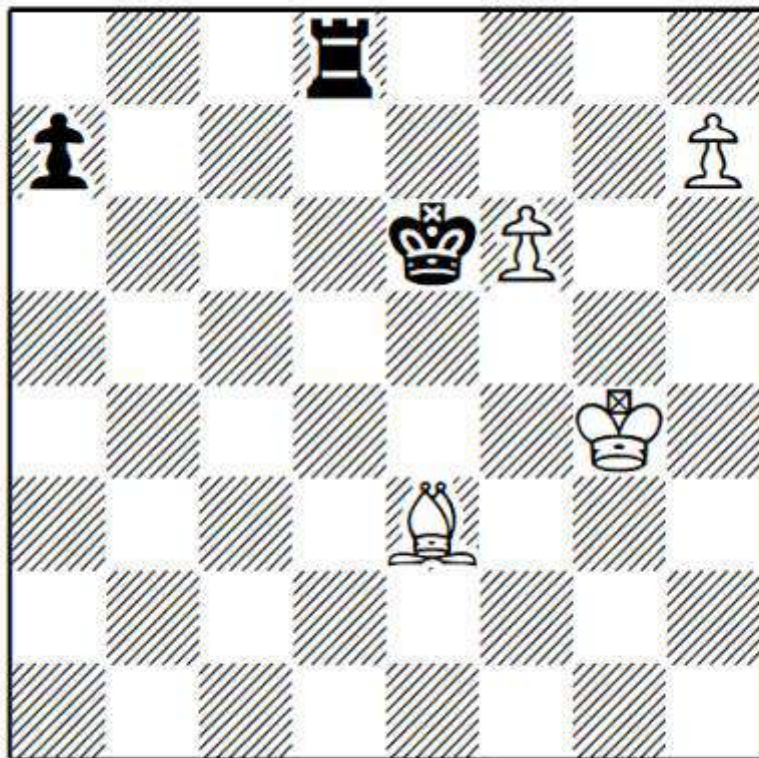


*The correct square*

e.g. 40 ... Kb7 (or 40 ... Ka8 41 Qd5+ Qb7 42 Bh6 Rc7 43 Kf4 a5 44 Kf5 a4 45 Bf4 Rh7 46 Kg6 etc) 41 Qd7+ Rc7 (41 ... Kb8 42 f7, threatening 43 Qxc8+, is also lethal.) 42 Qd5+ Kb6 43 f7 and White wins.

**40 ... Re8 41 Qd6+ Kc8 42 Qxc5+ Kd8 43 Qd4+ Kc8 44 h4 Qb7+ 45 Qd5 Qxd5+ 46 cxd5 Rf8?**

Too passive. Activating the king with 46 ... Kd7 would have secured the draw; e.g. 47 h5 (or 47 Bxa7 Re5) 47 ... Re5 48 h6 Rxd5 49 Kg4 Ke6 50 h7 Rg8.



*No chance to win left*

**47 Bd4 Kd7 48 Kf4 Ke8**

Now Black is unable to return with his king; e.g. 48 ... Kd6 49 Kf5 Kxd5 50 Bxa7 Kd6 51 Be3 Kd7 52 Bg5 Rf7 53 Bh6! Rf7 (or 53 ... Rg8 54 Ke6) 54 Kg6, followed by Bg7, h4-h5-h6-h7 and wins.

**49 Ke5 Kf7 50 d6 Re8+ 51 Kd5 Rd8 52 h5 a5 53 h6 a4 54 h7 a3 55 Kc6 Rc8+ 56 Kb7 Rh8 57 d7 1-0**

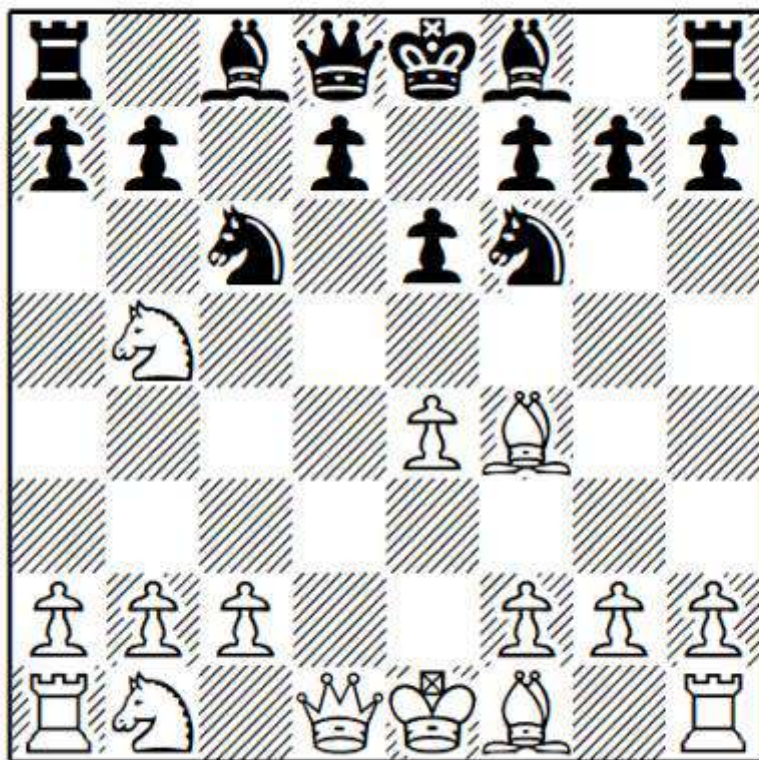
Having discussed those two sidelines for Black, we'll move on to the Taimanov. We start with a game between two computers in another rare but sharp sideline, this time for White.

Game 48

**Komodo-Stockfish**

10th Top Chess Engine Championship 2017

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nc6 5 Nb5 Nf6 6 Bf4!**



*A tricky sideline*

Our special weapon to avoid certain lines of the Sicilian Four Knights or the Sicilian Sveshnikov.

**6 ... e5**

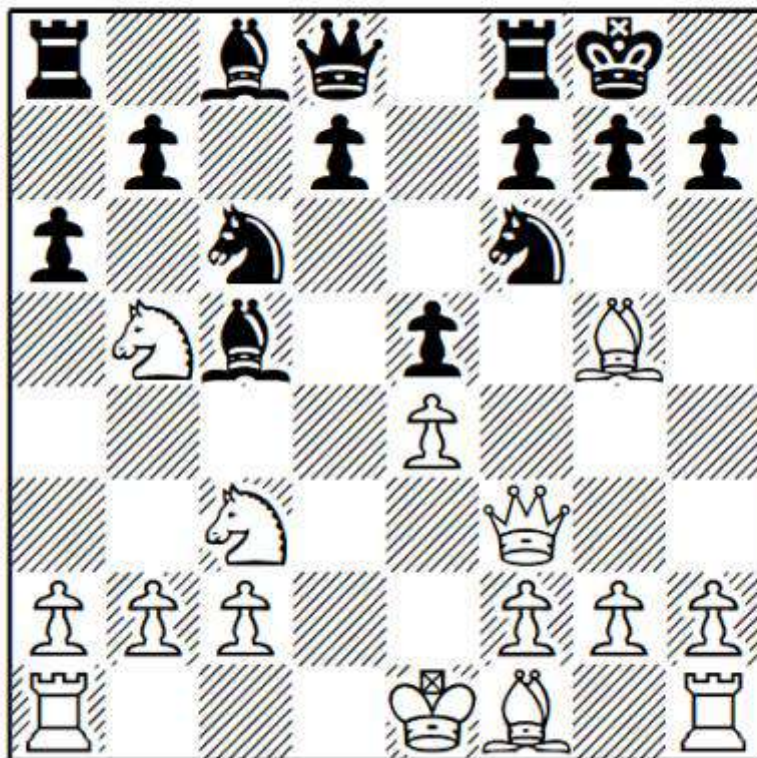
The only real alternative is 6 ... d6, but after the simple 7 Nxd6+ Bxd6 8 Qxd6 Qxd6 9 Bxd6 Nxe4 10 Ba3! White has a clear plus.

**7 Bg5 Bc5**

The critical move. For 7 ... d6 and 7 ... a6 please check the comments in the theoretical section.

**8 N1c3 d6**

8 ... 0-0 looks interesting, sidestepping all possible checks on d6, and if 9 Qf3 then 9 ... a6 seems troublesome, but White has a nice resource.



*Trouble for White?*

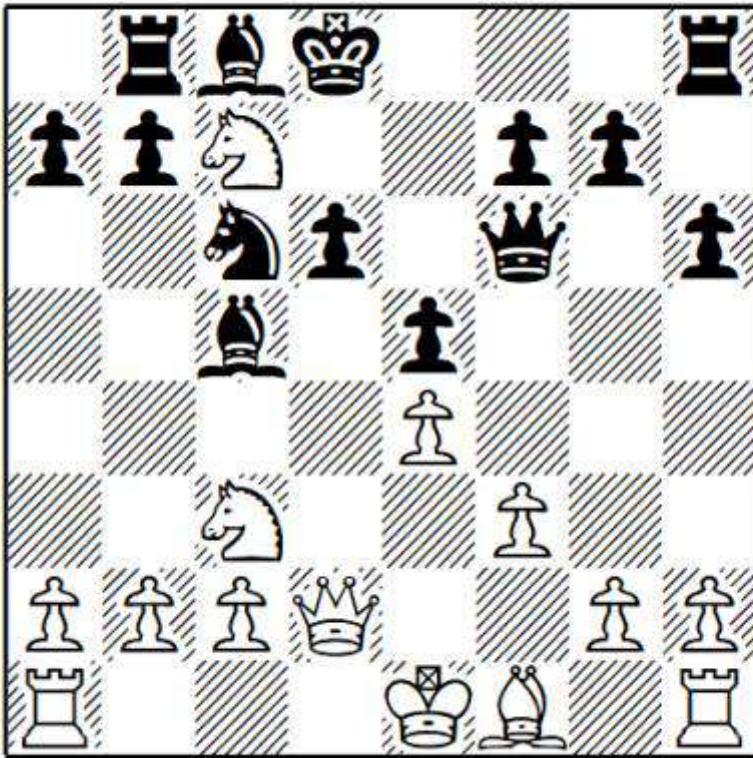
**Question:** Can you find out which one?

**Answer:** 10 Nd5! is very strong. Rather than reacting on the queenside (after 10 Na3? Nd4 Black is better), White starts a mating attack; e.g. 10 ... axb5 (or 10 ... Be7 11 Nxe7+ Qxe7 12 Bxf6 Qxf6 13 Qxf6 gxf6 14 Nc7 and White is clearly on top) 11 Nxf6+ gxf6 12 Bxf6 Qa5+ 13 c3 Rd8 14 Be2 d5 15 0-0 with a crushing attack.

**9 Bxf6 Qxf6 10 Nc7+ Kd8 11 f3 Rb8**

The knight is untouchable as 11 ... Kxc7? runs into 12 Nd5+.

**12 Qd2 h6**



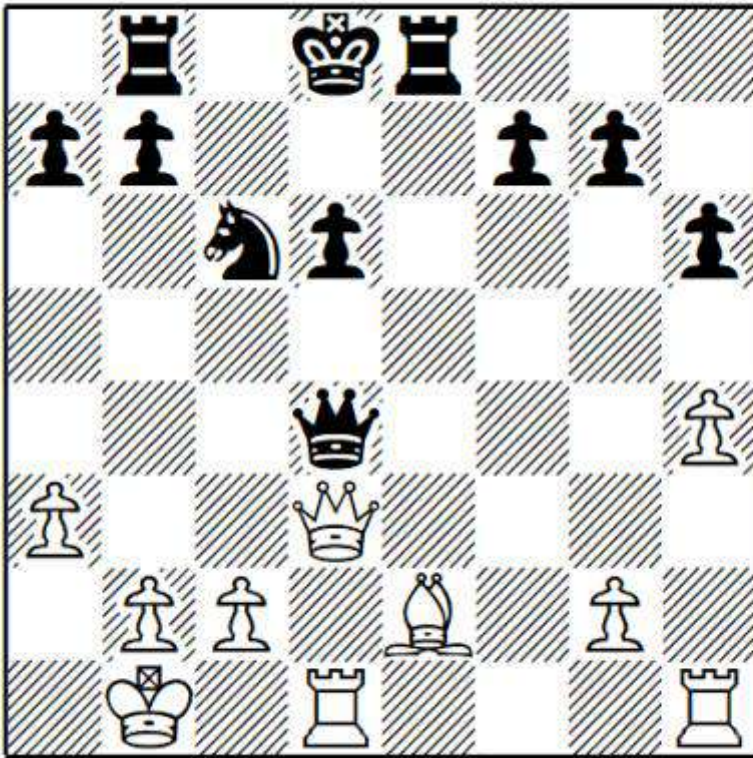
### *King in the centre*

Although this engine match ends in a draw, I consider the position to be excellent for White in human chess. Black has a much more uncommon game with the misplaced king and consequently a much higher risk of misplaying the position.

**13 N7d5 Qg5 14 f4 exf4 15 0-0-0 Bg4 16 h4 Qe5 17 Be2 Be6 18 Kb1**

Here 18 Nxf4 Qd4 19 Nd3 was a tempting alternative, restoring the material balance while keeping the queens on the board, which means Black has not overcome all the problems yet.

**18 ... Re8 19 a3 Bxd5 20 Nxd5 Be3 21 Nxe3 fxe3 22 Qxe3 Qxe4 23 Qg3 Qe5 24 Qd3 Qd4**



*Trying to swap queens*

Black tries to exchange queens at all cost because its king is in danger. I have no doubt that this grants White enough compensation for the missing pawn.

**25 Qxd4**

*Komodo* obliges because it doesn't see anything better; for example 25 Qb3 Qe3 26 Qd5 Qe5 keeps up the pursuit.

**25 ... Nxd4 26 Bh5 Nf5 27 Bxf7 Re5**

I think that White still has easier play with the bishop and superior structure, but *Stockfish* shows that it is not enough to win against accurate defence.

**28 Bg6 Ke7 29 Bxf5 Rxf5 30 Rd3 Rbf8 31 Rhd1 Rf1 32 Rxd6 R8f2 33 Rd7+ Ke6 34 g3 Rf3 35 R7d6+ Ke7 36 Rd7+ Ke6 37 R7d6+ Ke7 38 Rd7+ Ke6 ½-½**

*Game 49*

**J.Hacker-M.Weishäutel**  
Magdeburg 2018

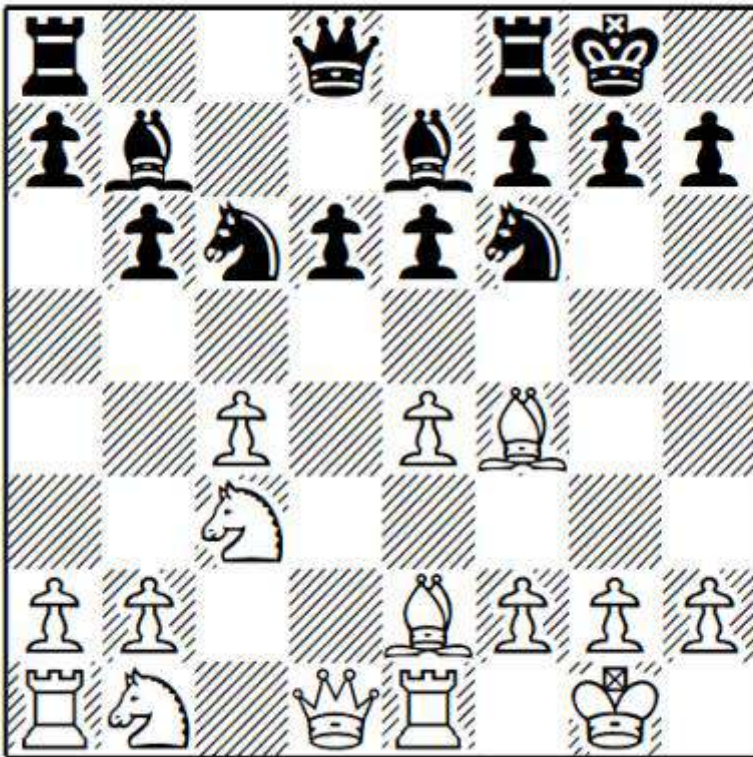
**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nc6 5 Nb5 d6 6 c4 Nf6**

This move is superior to 6 ... a6, because ... Nf6 must be played anyway, while Black can usually save the time of playing ... a7-a6 until later.

**7 N5c3**

Our characteristic move in this variation.

**7 ... Be7 8 Be2 0-0 9 0-0 b6 10 Bf4 Bb7 11 Re1**



*The starting position*

Our starting position. We have successfully prevented the ... d6-d5 break and will continue with a combination of prophylactic moves (such as Bf1, Bg3, and sometimes even f2-f4) and gaining space on the queenside (e.g. Rc1, a2-a3, b2-b4, Na4). After that we have chances to break through with a well-timed c4-c5! or, as in this game, if Black commits to ... d6-d5 we have our typical reaction, c4xd5 ... exd5, followed by e4-e5!.

## 11 ... Rc8 12 Nd2

As mentioned in the theoretical part, I think that my move here is a slight inaccuracy because it allows Black to play 12 ... Nd4. I would now go for 12 Bf1 first and only after 12 ... Ne5 continue with 13 Nd2, when we are still in time to defend the c4-pawn.

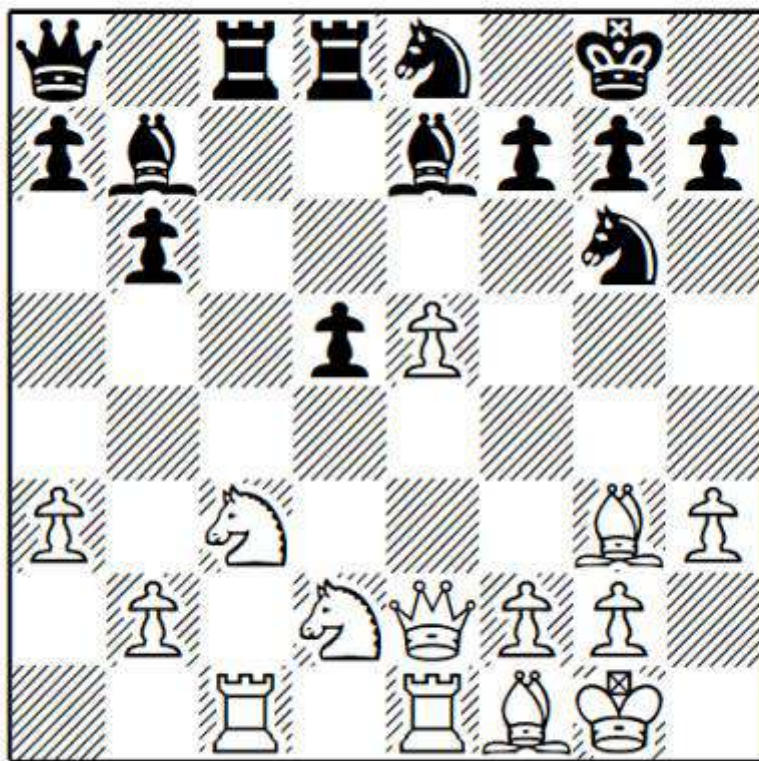
Another advantage of 12 Bf1 is that Black is unable to play ... Nd7, intending ... g7-g5, straight away because the d6-pawn would drop.

## 12 ... Qc7 13 Bf1 Rfd8 14 Rc1 Qb8

Black reorganizes his forces in Hedgehog style, looking to push ... d6-d5 at a good moment. Unfortunately, there may not be any good moments.

## 15 Bg3 Ne5 16 h3 Qa8 17 Qe2 Ng6 18 f4?!

Reaching the same position again I would probably go for the thematic advance on the queenside with 18 a3!?. Then 18 ... d5?! would be a mistake because of 19 cxd5 exd5 20 e5 Ne8 and White has a very pleasant position.



*White is clearly better*

Once again, this example shows the easy handling of the ... d6-d5 break.

Black could play any slow move instead, but there are no real improvements to his position that would be dangerous for White.

Alternatively, 18 Rcd1 Nd7 19 a3 Bf6 20 Qe3 is slow but not bad for White either.

### **18 ... d5!?**

This is basically a move every Hedgehog player wants to execute at some point. Usually it never works against our special set-up because we have the simple c4xd5 and e4-e5! (as in the diagram above), giving us a dangerous pawn mass on the kingside while Black has an isolated pawn.

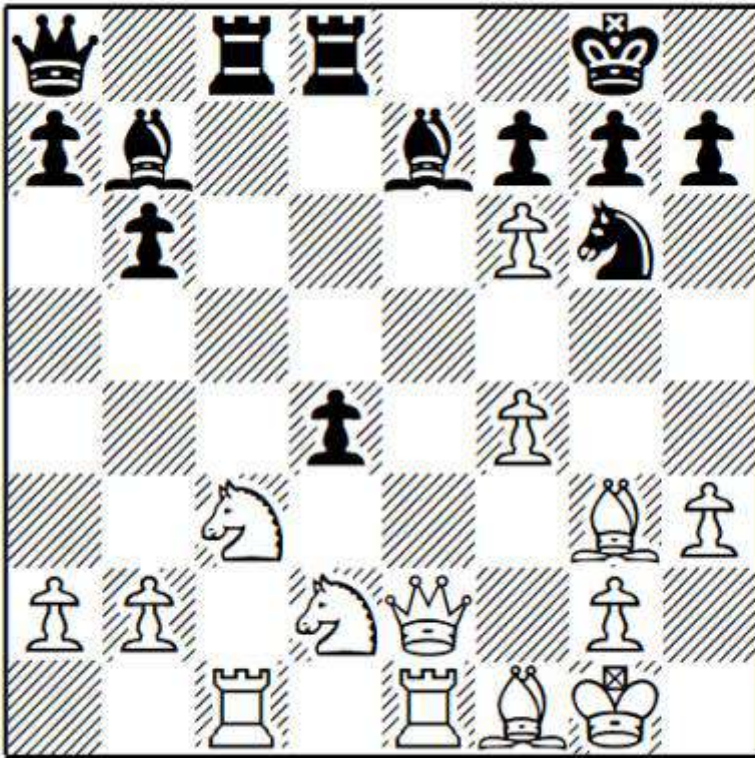
Of course, sometimes we find exceptions to this rule. In this exact case, things are more tactical, so general positional considerations do not matter.

Nevertheless, 18 ... Nd7 would be stronger. Black takes the steam out of e4-e5 and tries to exchange some pieces and punish White for his early f2-f4; for example, 19 a3 Bh4 20 Bxh4 Nxb4 21 Qf2 Ng6 and White keeps only a slight edge.

### **19 cxd5 exd5 20 e5 d4!?**

Exploiting one such exception.

### **21 exf6**



*How to save the piece?*

**Question:** What did Black have in mind in order to avoid losing a piece instantly?

**Answer: 21 ... Bc5!**

Safeguarding the bishop as well as threatening the white queen! Instead, 21 ... dxc3? loses immediately to 22 fxe7 Rxd2 23 Qxd2 cxd2 24 Rxc8+ Qxc8+ 25 e8Q+ etc.

**22 Kh2**

22 Nce4?? would blunder the queen to 22 ... d3+.

**22 ... dxc3 23 Rxc3**

23 bxc3 is too calm, and 23 ... Bd6! equalizes straight away.

**23 ... Bb4?**

A logical-looking move, but White is ready for it. 23 ... Bd6? also finds White well prepared with his rook on the third rank: 24 f5! Bxg3+ (or 24 ...

Rxc3 25 Bxd6 Rxd6 26 bxc3) 25 Rxc3! and White has a decisive advantage.

Black should have played 23 ... Re8, when 24 Qd1 Rxe1 25 Qxe1 Re8 26 Qc1 Bd4 enables him to re-establish the material balance with equality.

**24 f5!**

24 Rxc8? Qxc8 25 Rd1 Qd7 would turn the tables.

**24 ... Bxc3**

After 24 ... Nf8 25 Qg4 g6 26 Qxb4 White wins at least a piece.

**25 bxc3**

Or 25 fxg6 Bxf6 26 gxf7+, and if 26 ... Kxf7? then 27 Qe6+ Kf8 28 Bc4 Rxc4 29 Bd6+ wins.

**25 ... gxf6?!**

Not 25 ... Nf8? 26 Qg4 g6 27 Qg5 Nd7 28 Be5 Rc6 29 Ne4 with 30 Qh6 next, Black will be mated soon.

The best try was 25 ... Re8 again, though after 26 Qg4 Rxe1 27 fxg6 hxg6 28 Bxe1 gxf6 29 Qd4 White has a huge plus with two pieces for a rook, and the black queen out of the game on a8.

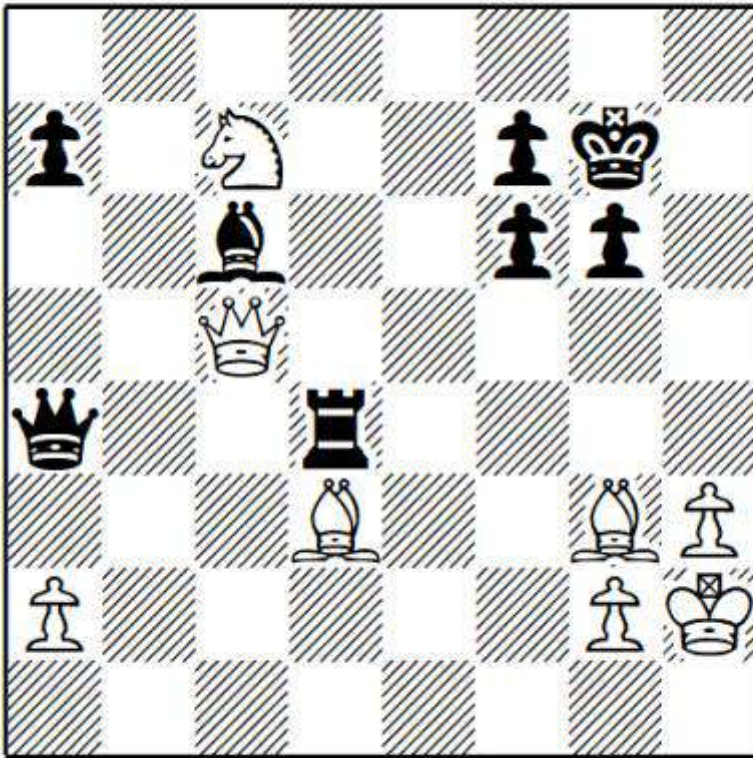
**26 fxg6 hxg6 27 c4?**

Here 27 Qf2 would have been much stronger, making use of Black's temporarily misplaced pieces; for example, 27 ... Kg7 (or 27 ... Rxc3 28 Qxf6 Rxc3 29 Re7! will leave Black a piece down) 28 Nb3 Rxc3 29 Re7 Re8 (or 29 ... Bd5 30 Nd4 and the knight joins the attack) 30 Bh4 g5 31 Bxg5! and White wins.

**27 ... Re8 28 Qf2 Rxe1 29 Qxe1 Re8 30 Qf2 Qd8 31 c5 bxc5 32 Nb3 Kg7 33 Nxc5 Bc6 34 Na6 Qa5 35 Qc5 Qa4?**

If Black swaps queens, he doesn't stand so badly.

**36 Nc7 Re4 37 Bd3 Rd4**



*White to play and win*

**Question:** How would you continue here?

**Answer:** It is time for the decisive tactics.

**38 Ne6+!**

Alternatives do not achieve much.

**38 ... fxe6 39 Qe7+ Kh6**

Probably the toughest defence.

a) 39 ... Kh8? 40 Bxg6 mates in two moves.

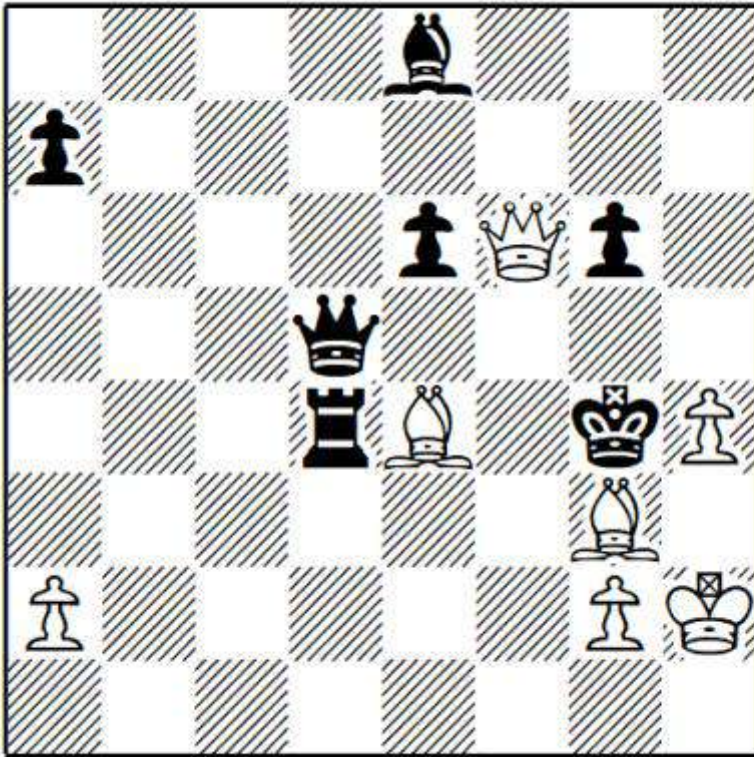
b) 39 ... Kg8 40 Qxe6+ Kg7 41 Qe7+ Kg8 42 Bxg6 Rd7 43 Qxf6! wins, since Be5 is a great threat which will decide the game.

**40 Qxf6 Be8!?**

Black hangs onto his extra material so White must continue in an energetic way. Whereas after 40 ... Rxd3 41 Bf4+ Black must give up his queen to avoid mate, and 41 Qh8+! as in the next note is even more decisive.

### 41 Bc2! Qxc2

If 41 ... Qd7 then 42 Qh8+ Kg5 43 h4+ Kg4 44 Qf6 Qd5 45 Be4!! is another aesthetic finish.



*A nice finish*

Black is mated after each recapture.

**42 Qh8+ Kg5 43 h4+ Kf5 44 Qe5+ 1-0**

It's mate next move.

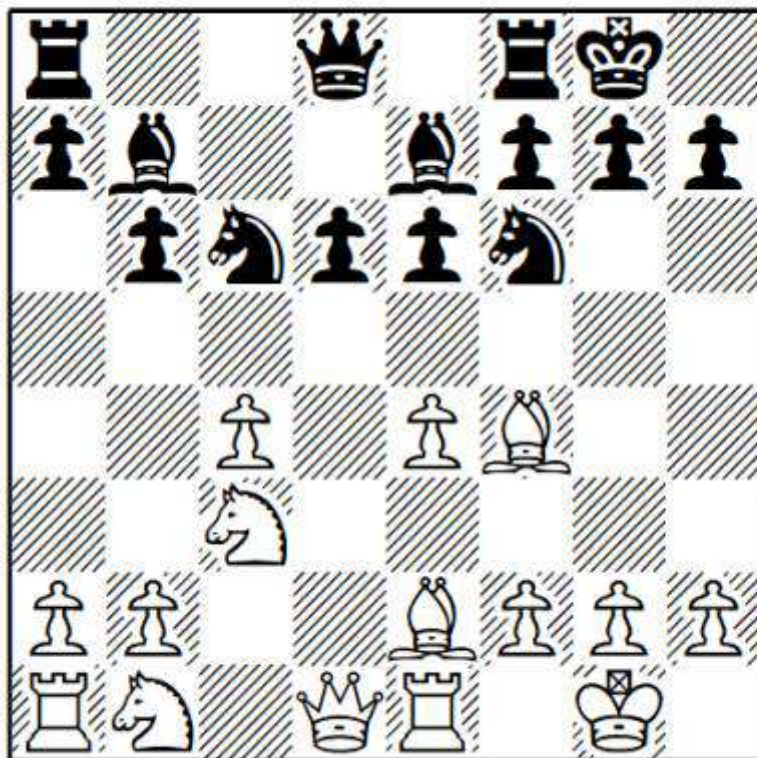
In the next game we will see Black playing ... e6-e5 early in the middlegame. After that, White usually has a big advantage. He can use the d5-outpost and does not need to worry about the ... d6-d5 break anymore.

*Game 50*

**J.Hacker-M.Klekowski**

German League 2019

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 e6 5 Nb5 d6 6 c4 Nf6 7 N5c3 Be7 8 Be2 0-0 9 0-0 b6 10 Bf4 Bb7 11 Re1



*White prevents ... d6-d5*

**Remember:** This is a key development. By putting the rook on e1 and the bishop on f4 White is perfectly prepared for ... d6-d5, which can then be answered by c4xd5 and a well-supported e4-e5, gaining a strong kingside majority.

**11 ... Ne5 12 Bf1**

Note that 12 Bxe5?! dxe5 is not a wise decision unless we really get something concrete out of our queenside majority; e.g. a protected passed pawn, gain of material, etc. If not, the superior central and dark square control grants Black a slightly better position.

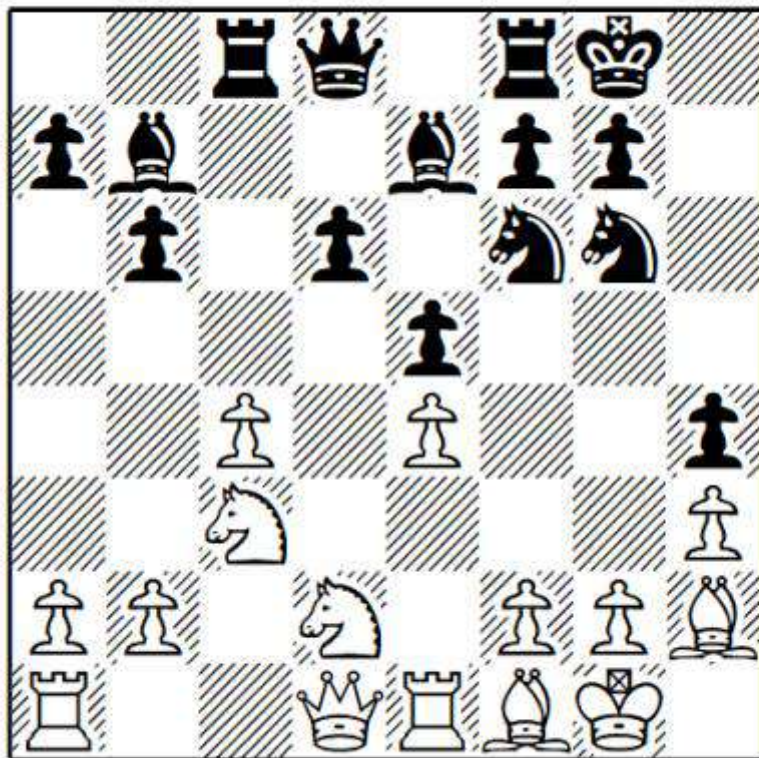
**12 ... Rc8 13 Nd2 Ng6**

The plan with ... Ng6 is pretty slow and I think Black has better options here. For example:

a) 13 ... a6 14 Rc1 Nfd7 15 Bg3 Bh4! is a nice idea, getting rid of Black's passive bishop as in R.Jumabayev-B.Adhiban, Asian Cup, Hamedan 2018. White responded as indicated in the introductory notes, but later lost control of the position and then the game as well.

b) 13 ... Nfd7 14 Bg3 g5! is an aggressive choice. We will examine this idea, from various positions, in the next two games.

**14 Bg3 h5 15 h3 h4 16 Bh2 e5?!**



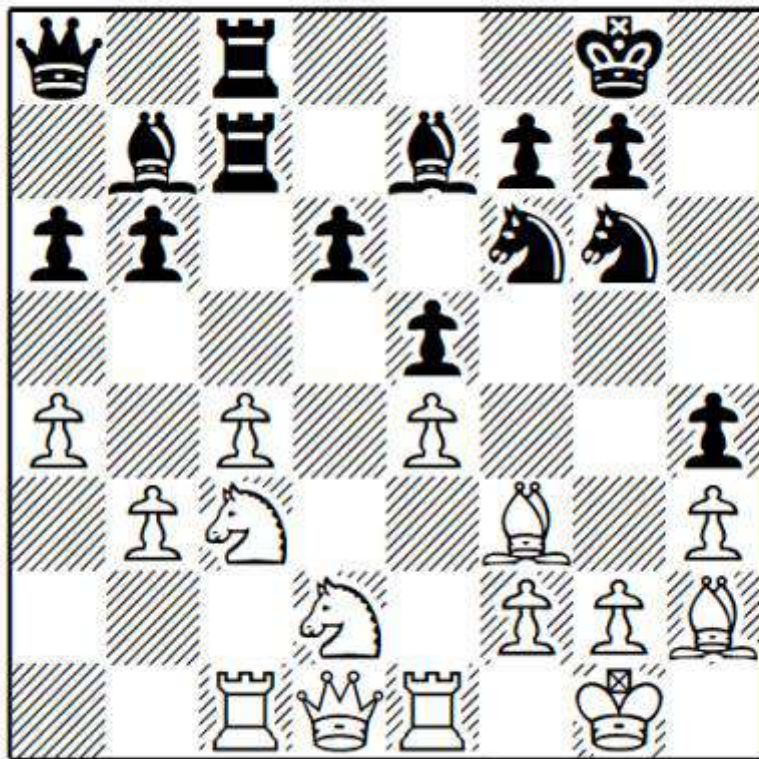
### *Big advantage*

This is a very committal move and it grants White a big advantage in general. Of course, it shuts in the bishop on h2, but White gets a lot of pluses in return. There are no further central breakthroughs to worry about; White is always ready for a knight jump to d5, and he can expand on the queenside without danger. Meanwhile it is not obvious what Black's active plan will be.

Black was not forced to fix the centre and could instead have opted for 16 ... a6 17 Rc1 Nd7 18 a3 Bg5!?, implementing the plan of activating the

dark-squared bishop again. Note that the d6-pawn cannot be captured because of 19 Bxd6? Nde5! 20 Bxf8 Bxd2 and Black would even be better.

**17 Be2 a6 18 Rc1 Rc7 19 Bf3 Qa8 20 a4 Rfc8 21 b3**



*No counterplay*

Now Black has almost no chance to make the ... b6-b5 break, whereas White will be ready to open the position on the kingside.

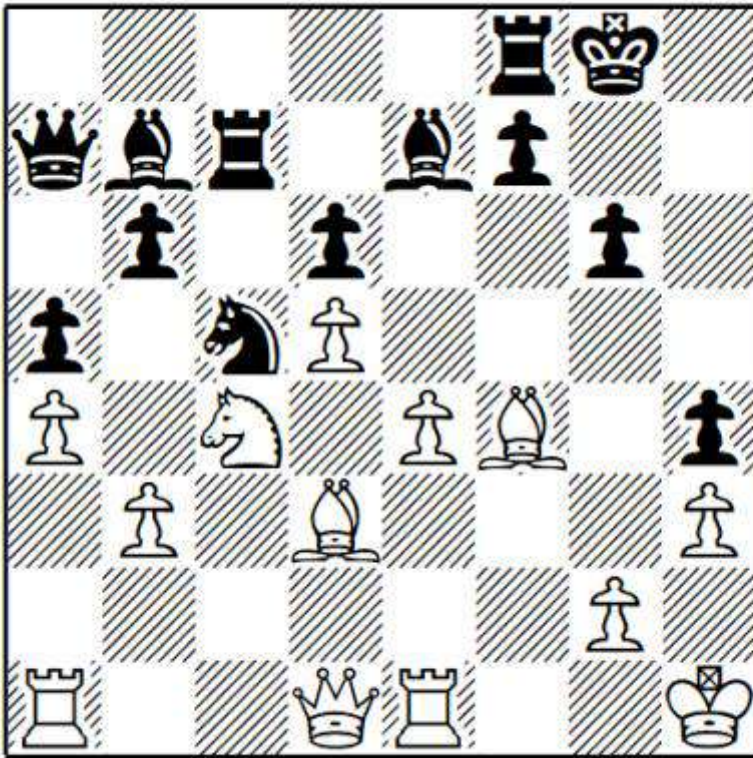
**21 ... Nf8 22 Be2 Ne6 23 Bd3**

Correcting the earlier misplacement of the bishop.

**23 ... g6 24 Ra1**

Preparing 25 Nd5. The immediate 24 Nd5? would run into 24 ... Nxd5 25 exd5 Bxd5, losing a pawn because the c1-rook is unprotected.

**24 ... Rf8 25 Nd5 Nxd5 26 cxd5 Nc5 27 Nc4 Qa7 28 Kh1 a5 29 f4 exf4 30 Bxf4**



*A big advantage*

White has a big advantage. Black's pieces are passive on the queenside, while White is ready to open the game on the other wing.

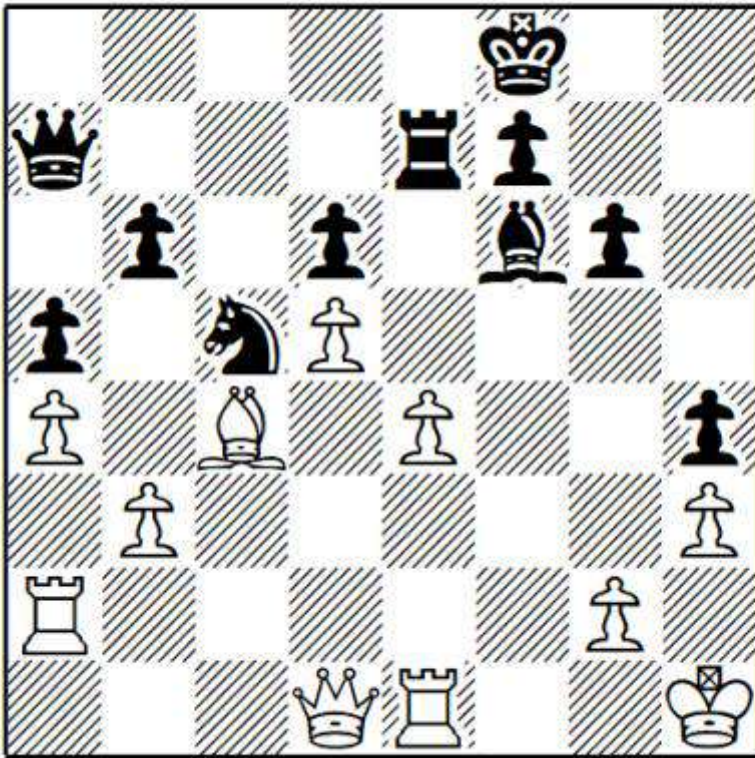
**30 ... Ba6 31 Bf1**

The direct 31 e5! was stronger; e.g. 31 ... dxe5 32 Bxe5 Rd7 33 Bc2 Rfd8 34 Qg4 with decisive threats.

**31 ... Bxc4 32 Bxc4 Rd7 33 Bh6?**

White was too greedy grabbing the exchange, since Black gets good dark-squared compensation afterwards. Instead, 33 e5 dxe5 34 Bxe5 still offered good chances to win the game.

**33 ... Bf6 34 Bxf8 Kxf8 35 Ra2 Re7**



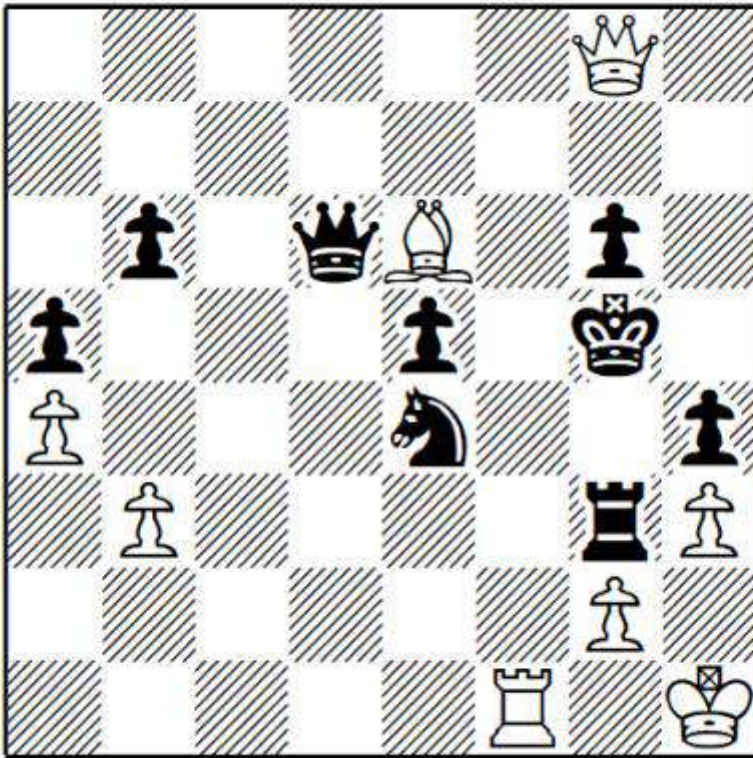
*Compensation for Black*

**36 Qf3 Kg7 37 Qf4?**

Better was 37 Rf2 Be5, when at least the black rook cannot come forward. In the game Black was able to activate his forces and even win in the end after a few more bad moves by White.

**37 ... Re5 38 Rae2 Qe7 39 Qf3 Rg5 40 Qe3 Rg3 41 Qf2 Bc3 42 e5 Bxe1 43 Rxe1 dxe5 44 d6 Qxd6 45 Qxf7+ Kh6 46 Rf1 Kg5 47 Qg8 Ne4 48 Be6**

For a short moment I was optimistic due to the threat of 49 Rf5+, but Black had something else in mind.



*What did White miss?*

**Question:** Can you spot Black's winning idea?

**Answer: 48 ... Rxh3+!**

After this precise sacrifice Black wins in all variations. The alternatives let White escape with a draw.

**49 gxh3**

After 49 Bxh3 Ng3+ 50 Kg1 (otherwise the rook drops) 50 ... Qd4+ 51 Rf2 Qd1+ White is quickly mated.

**49 ... Ng3+ 50 Kg2 Qd2+ 51 Rf2 Qd1**

A silent but strong move, threatening mate on h1. White is dead lost here.

**52 Rf8 Qh1+ 53 Kf2 Qf1+ 54 Ke3 0-1**

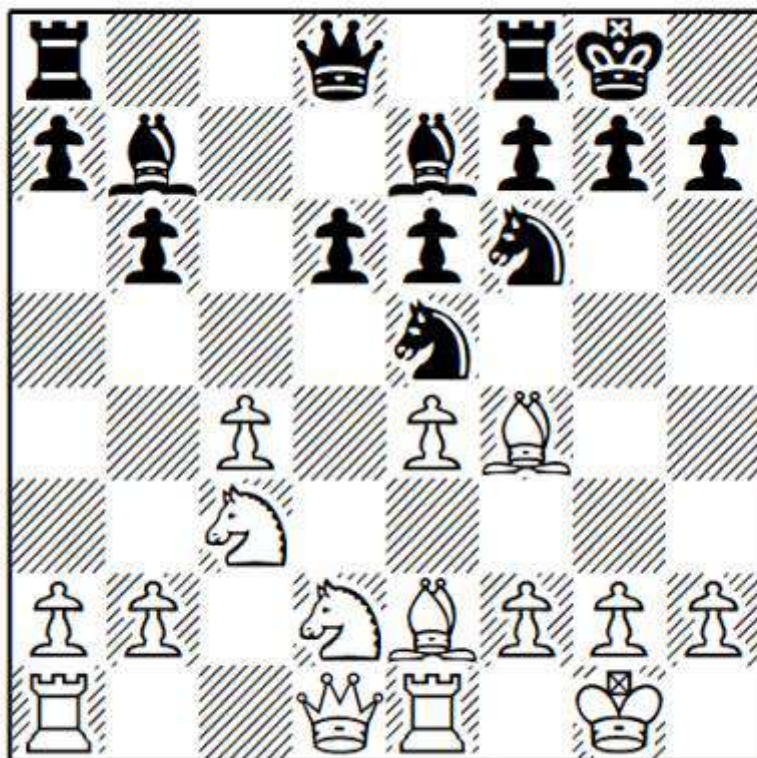
White resigned before 54 ... Qe2 mate.

*Game 51*

## K.Spraggett-O.Korneev

Salou 2006

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nc6 5 Nb5 d6 6 c4 Nf6 7 N5c3 Be7 8 Be2 0-0 9 0-0 b6 10 Bf4 Bb7 11 Re1 Ne5 12 Nd2



### *Early middlegame*

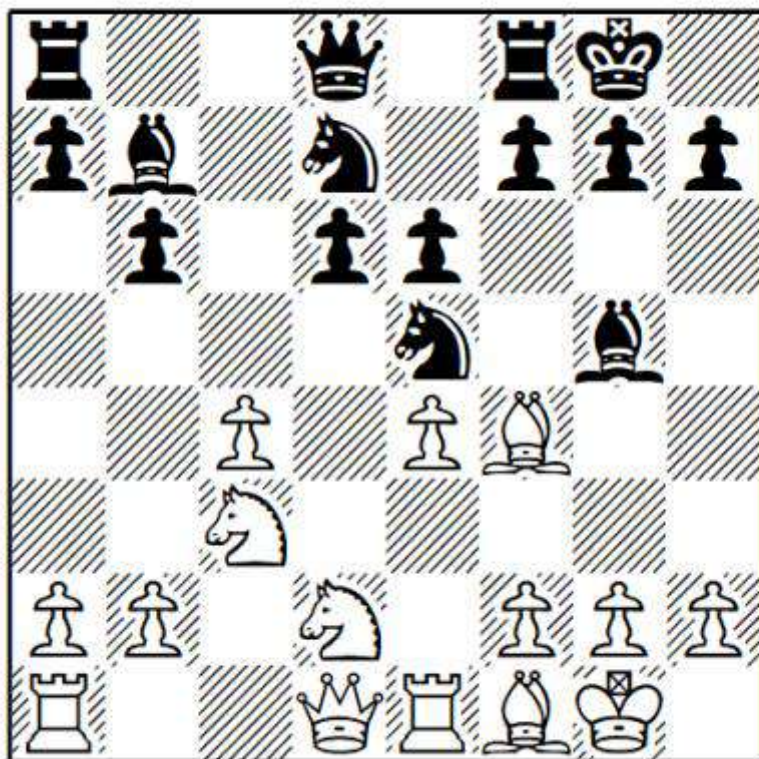
So far everything is quite familiar to us, but now we will get to know an interesting plan for Black: pushing on the kingside with ... g7-g5. It is, in my opinion, one of the most challenging variations and, because the game usually becomes double-edged, Black can ambitiously play for a win as well. However, White has a solid position and Black's idea involves some risks too, as ... g7-g5 irrevocably weakens the king.

Meanwhile, White's plan is to expand quickly on the queenside, pressurize the queenside pawns; in particular, b6 can be targeted by Na4, Qd4 and Be3. Another option is to open the position in the centre with a well-timed c4-c5.

## 12 ... a6

The position has a very slow and quiet character, so Black can take the time to prevent any kind of Nb5 ideas.

He might also play ... Nfd7 and ... g7-g5 at once, though no one seems ever to have done so, perhaps regarding it as overly committal. Alternatively, 12 ... Nfd7 13 Bf1 Bg5!?, exchanging the dark-squared bishops, is a reasonable plan for Black and was once employed by Kasparov.



### *A typical plan*

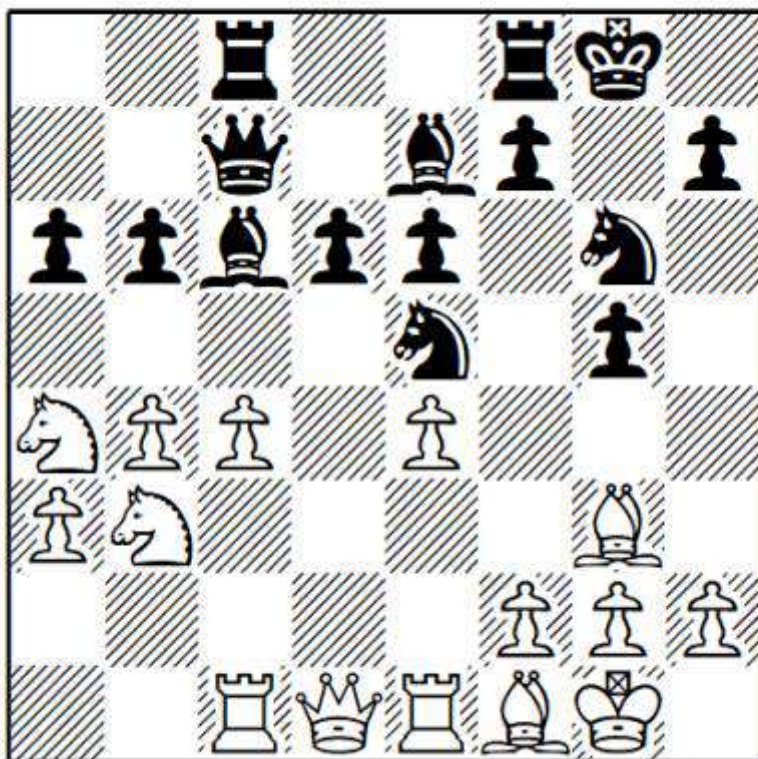
After 14 Bxg5 Qxg5 15 Nf3 Qf6 16 Nxe5 Nxe5 17 Qd2 g5 White has a bit more space, but Black's active pieces made up for this in L.Ljubojevic-G.Kasparov, Tilburg 1981.

### **13 Rc1 Qc7 14 Bg3 g5**

In this game Black uses this move primarily in order to control the kingside dark squares rather than as part of an attacking plan. We'll see a more aggressive interpretation in the next game.

**15 b4 Nfd7 16 Bf1 Rac8 17 a3 Ng6 18 Na4 Nde5 19 Nb3 g4**  
19 ... Bc6 is often an annoying move in such positions.

The knights on a4 and b3 are ideal placed to support the c4-c5 break, so Black wants to disrupt this. Rather than retreat again, White has a very direct, albeit committal, response in 20 b5!?. For example: 20 ... Bb7 (or 20 ... Bd7 21 Qd4 Rb8 22 Nc3 a5 23 Be2 Rfc8 24 Na4 with a complex position) 21 Qd4 Nd7 22 Qe3!?, when c4-c5 becomes a real threat which Black should do something about.



*20 b5 or retreat the knight?*

**20 Qd4 Bg5 21 Rc3 Bf6 22 Qe3 Nd7 23 Rcc1 e5**

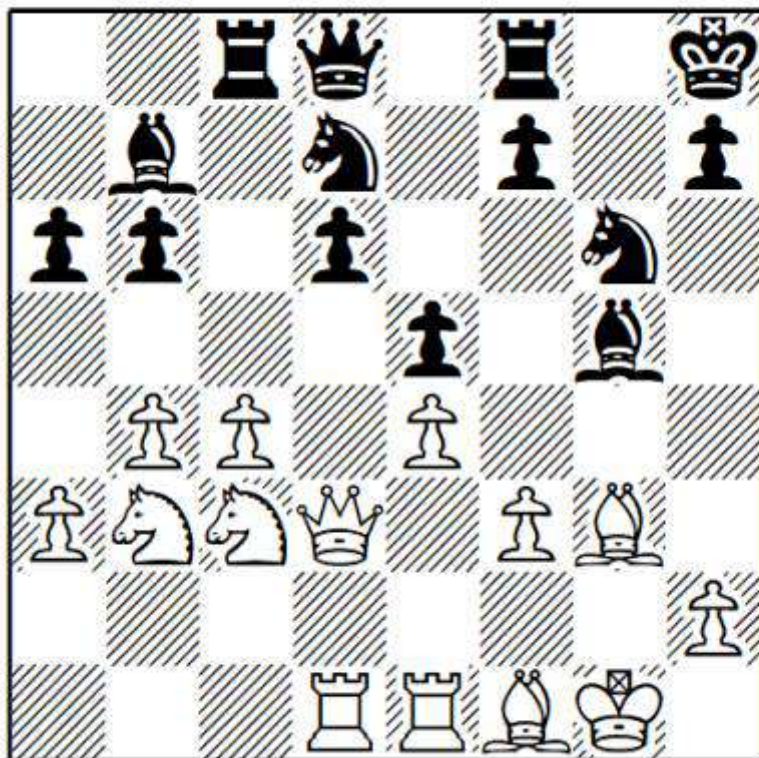
White was threatening c4-c5 again, so Black feels obliged to block the g3-bishop with the e-pawn, despite weakening the d5-square.

**24 f3?!**

There was no need for this just yet. Simply 24 Nc3 and 25 Rcd1 would consolidate White's positional advantage. Whereas now Black is able to

organize counterplay.

24 ... gxf3 25 gxf3 Kh8 26 Nc3 Qd8 27 Rcd1 Bg5 28 Qd3



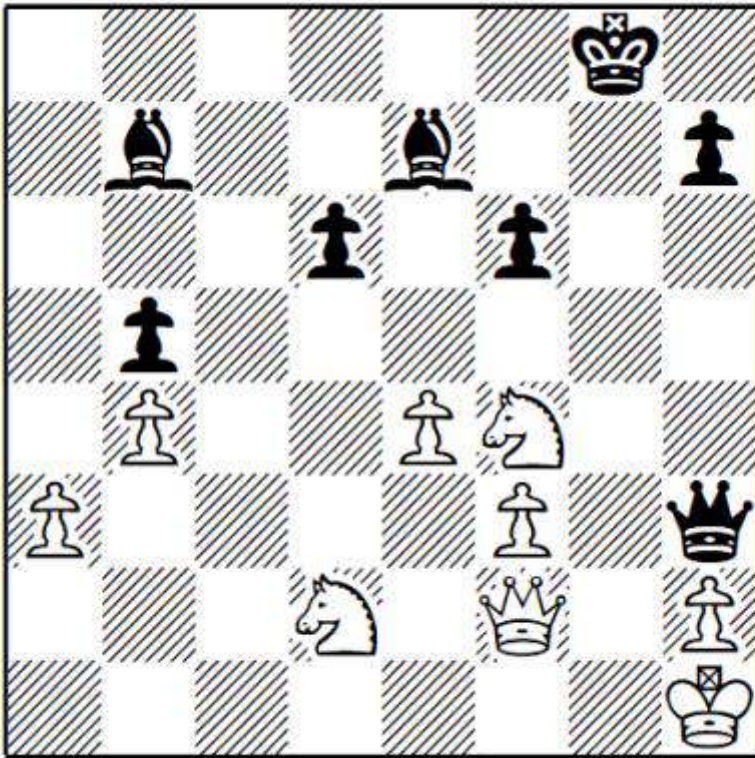
*What about the d6-pawn?*

**28 ... Be7?**

After this passive defence White soon manages to re-establish control.

Black could have sacrificed his d-pawn with 28 ... Bf4, intending 29 Qxd6 Qg5 with a strong initiative. White seems to have nothing better than 30 Qxd7 Bxg3 31 hxg3 Qxg3+ 32 Bg2 Nf4 33 Qg4 Rg8 34 Qxg3 Rxg3 35 Rd2 Rcg8 36 Kf2 Rxg2+ 37 Ke3, when material is equal again and the game would likely be drawn.

29 Bh3 Nf4 30 Bxf4 exf4 31 Bxd7 Qxd7 32 Qd4+ f6 33 Kh1 Qh3 34 Nd2 Rg8 35 Rg1 Rg3 36 Qf2 Rcg8 37 Ne2 Rxg1+ 38 Rxg1 b5 39 cxb5 axb5 40 Rxg8+ Kxg8 41 Nxf4



### *Strong knights*

The position has clarified. A pawn up, with excellent outposts for his knights, White is clearly better and should win. The rest of the game just looks like a desperate time scramble.

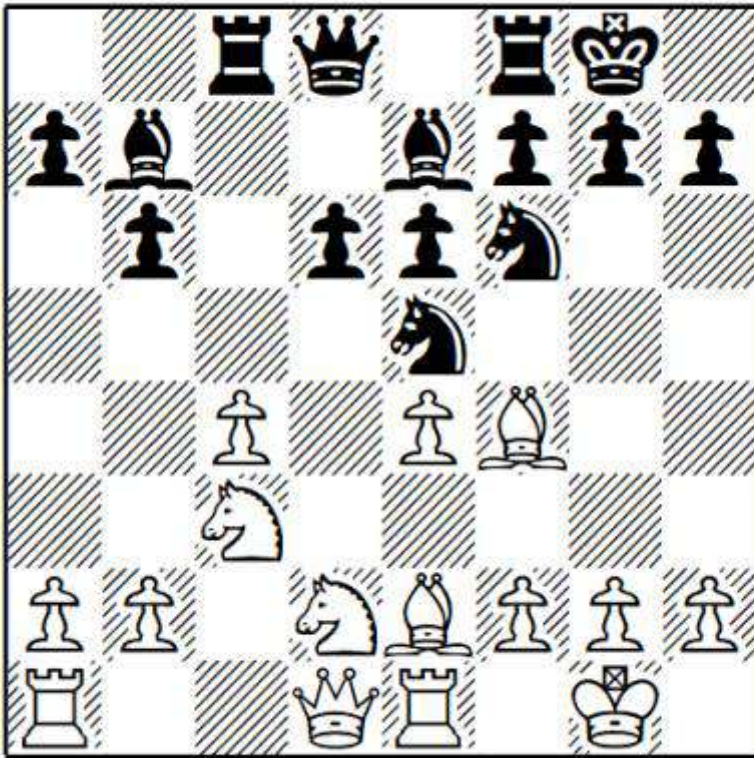
**41 ... Qh6 42 Qg3+ Kf7 43 Qg4 Bc8 44 Qxc8 Qxf4 45 Qc3 Bd8 46 Nf1 Bb6 47 Ng3 Qe5 48 Qc6 Qd4 49 Qd7+ Kf8 50 Kg2 h5 51 Kh3 Qf2 1-0**

### *Game 52*

**R.Castellanos Rodriguez-S.Halkias**

European Rapid Championship, Tallinn 2016

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nc6 5 Nb5 d6 6 c4 Nf6 7 N5c3 Be7 8 Be2 0-0 9 0-0 b6 10 Re1 Bb7 11 Bf4 Ne5 12 Nd2 Rc8**



*A standard position*

This time Black first sets up in the style of Game 49 with ... Rc8 and ... Qc7-b8, waiting to see what White will do, and only then committing himself to a plan. He opts for the typical ... Nfd7 and ... g7-g5 which is, in my opinion, the most ambitious plan at Black's disposal.

**13 Rc1**

White can also play 13 Bf1, and if 13 ... Nfd7 then 14 Bg3, which is definitely the most aggressive move as it prevents 14 ... Bg5 and also prepares f2-f4. Black should probably go for 14 ... g5 (if 14 ... Bh4 15 f4 Bxg3 16 hxg3 Ng6 then 17 Nb5 picks up a pawn), but after 15 Qh5 the white queen is a bit annoying in Black's camp.

**13 ... Qc7**

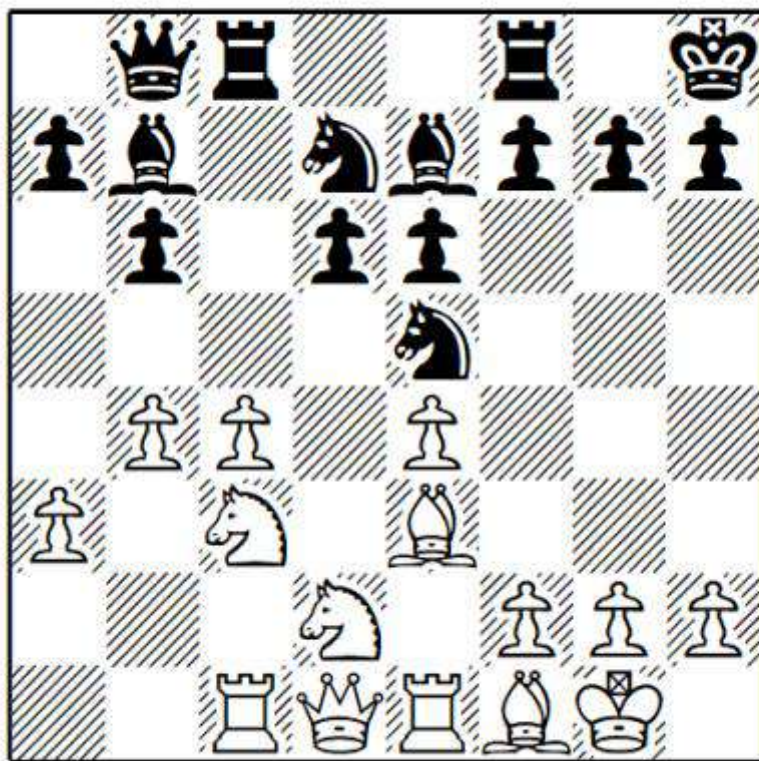
If 13 ... Nfd7 White can go for 14 Bg3 again, or else 14 Be3!? with similar ideas to 17 Be3 below.

**14 a3 Qb8 15 b4 Nfd7 16 Bf1 Kh8**

Black shows his intentions for ... g7-g5 and ... Rg8, though I doubt that the queen belongs on b8 in such a scenario.

**17 Bg3**

Another option is 17 Be3!?, anticipating ... g7-g5.



*Strong prophylaxis*

White's play is principled and strong. He is playing in the centre as a reaction to the play on the wing. After 17 ... g5 18 Nf3 (challenging the central pieces!) 18 ... g4 (18 ... Nxf3+ 19 Qxf3 f5 20 Qh3! leaves Black with a lot of weak squares) 19 Nxe5 Nxe5 20 Nb5 White is better. He can provoke weaknesses on the queenside or play open it with a3-a4-a5.

**17 ... g5 18 Na4?!**

The knight embarks on an unusual tour, which works out quite well when Black fails to react vigorously enough.

**18 ... Bc6**

Black could have punished White's knight on the rim by attacking straight away: 18 ... f5! 19 exf5 exf5 20 f3!? (20 f4?! gxf4 21 Bxf4 Rg8

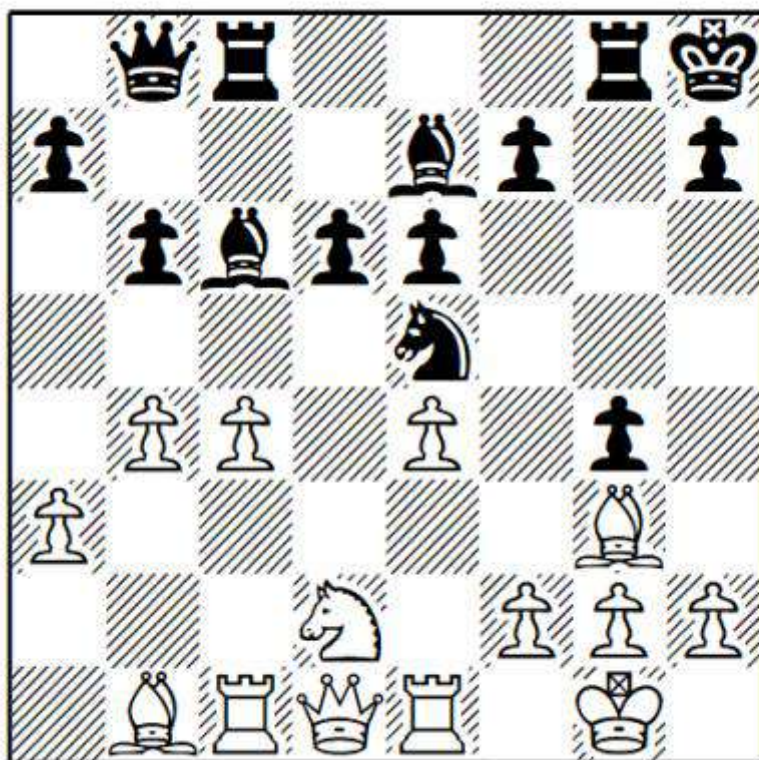
looks very good for Black) 20 ... f4 21 Bf2 g4 22 fxg4 f3, when Black has a dangerous initiative; e.g. 23 g3 (not 23 gxf3? Bxf3 and White is in trouble) 23 ... Rf7 (threatening ... Nxg4) 24 h3 h5 25 gxh5 Rg8 with strong pressure for the pawns.

### 19 Nb2

If 19 Nc3!? Black could repeat with 19 ... Bb7 or look for something better. However, it's too late for 19 ... f5?!, as after 20 exf5 exf5 21 f3 f4 22 Bf2 g4 23 fxg4 f3 24 Nde4 White is in full control. The centralized knight makes a huge difference in assessing the position.

### 19 ... Rg8 20 Nd3 Nxd3 21 Bxd3 Ne5 22 Bf1

Alternatively, 22 Bb1!? keeps the bishop in a more active place. For Black 22 ... g4, intending a pawn storm on the kingside with ... h7-h5-h4, is an interesting plan.



*How to prevent the expansion*

**Question:** How would you react?

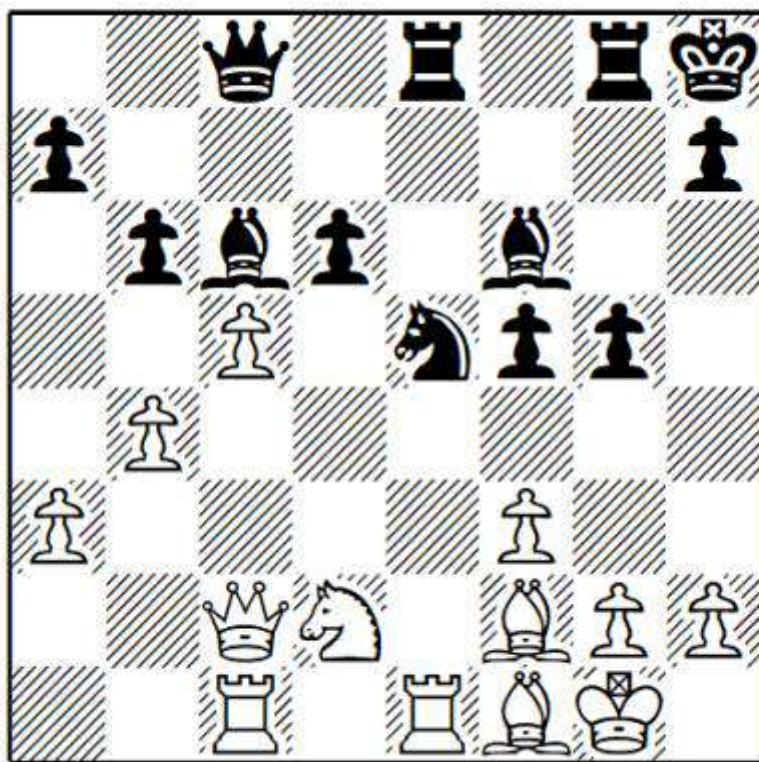
**Answer:** With 23 Nf1 h5 24 Ne3!. This is not the only way, but White employs his knight while prohibiting further kingside advances. For example: 24 ... Rg6 25 c5 bxc5 26 bxc5 dxc5 27 Nf5 Bf8 28 Qd2 and Black's weaknesses give White good counterplay.

**22 ... f5 23 exf5 exf5 24 f3 Bf6 25 Bf2 Rce8 26 Qc2 Qc8 27 Bd3 Bd7 28 Bf1**

The immediate 28 c5 leads to equality after 28 ... Nxd3 29 Qxd3 dxc5 30 bxc5 Rxe1+ 31 Rxe1 bxc5 32 Nc4.

**28 ... Bc6 29 a4**

Now was the moment for 29 c5!.



*A typical breakthrough*

very strong common pattern! Play might continue 29 ... dxc5 30 bxc5 b5, when White has managed to open the position and Black will soon wish that his kingside pawns were not so far advanced.

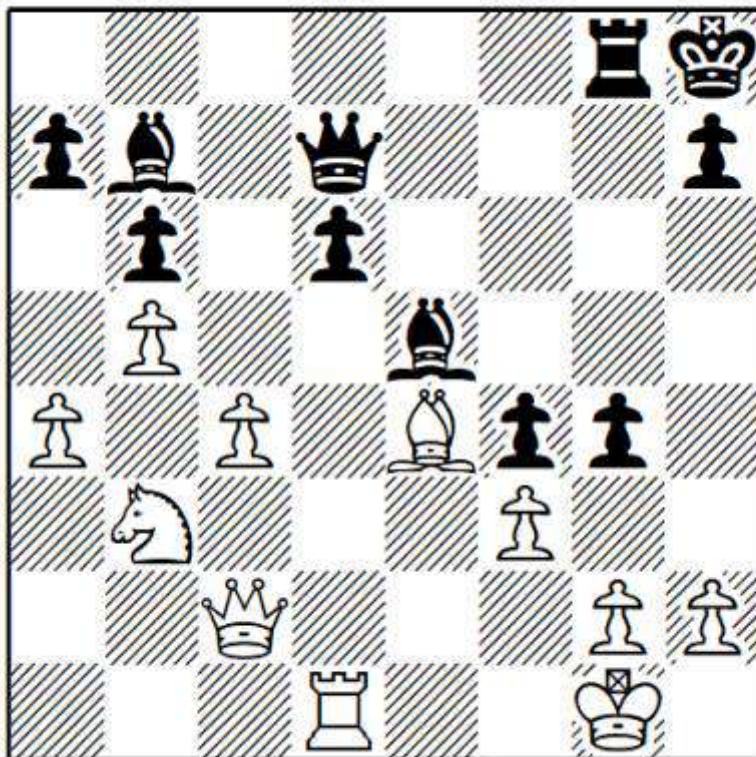
**Remember:** In the ... g7-g5 system it is always important to keep your opponent busy on the queenside or in the centre. If you succeed, Black will

not be able to create threats on the kingside and will end up with a weak king.

Now it appears that time pressure played a part once more. Black came out on top as his moves proved easier to find.

**29 ... Qd7 30 b5 Bb7 31 Bd3 Bc8 32 Nb3 f4 33 Bd4 g4 34 Bxe5 Rxe5 35 Rxe5 Bxe5 36 Be4 Bb7 37 Rd1??**

Almost anything was better than this. For instance: 37 Nd2, bringing one more defender towards the kingside; or 37 Kh1, shifting the king off the g-file; or just 37 fxg4 with a level position.



*How does Black win?*

**Question:** Can you see how Black can win the game?

**Answer: 37 ... gxf3!**

By simply capturing the pawn. White can't take back because of the x-ray attack by Black's b7-bishop.

**38 Rd2 fxg2**

Here 38 ... Bxe4! 39 Qxe4 Qh3 is quickly decisive.

**39 Rxc2 f3 40 Rxc8+ Kxc8 41 Bxb7 Qxb7 42 Qf5?**

The final mistake. White could fight on with 42 Qf2, though Black is winning anyway.

**42 ... Qg7+ 0-1**

Mate follows via ... Qg2+ and ... Qe2.

# Chapter Eight

## Kalashnikov Variation

### Introduction

In this chapter we will discuss the Kalashnikov Variation, an ambitious opening which is encountered regularly in games at all levels.

The history of the variation goes back to the 19th century, but back then Black often went for the Löwenthal with 5 ... a6, allowing 6 Nd6+. Only in the 1980s did chess players begin to opt for 5 ... d6 regularly, and the variation gained a lot of popularity.

The line I recommend against it is built around 7 N5c3!?, which is a relatively unexplored but nonetheless good move. We usually start as follows:

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 e5**

Black takes action in the centre immediately, and if White wants to fight for an advantage the next move is forced.

**5 Nb5**

Alternatives do not offer White anything.

**5 ... d6**

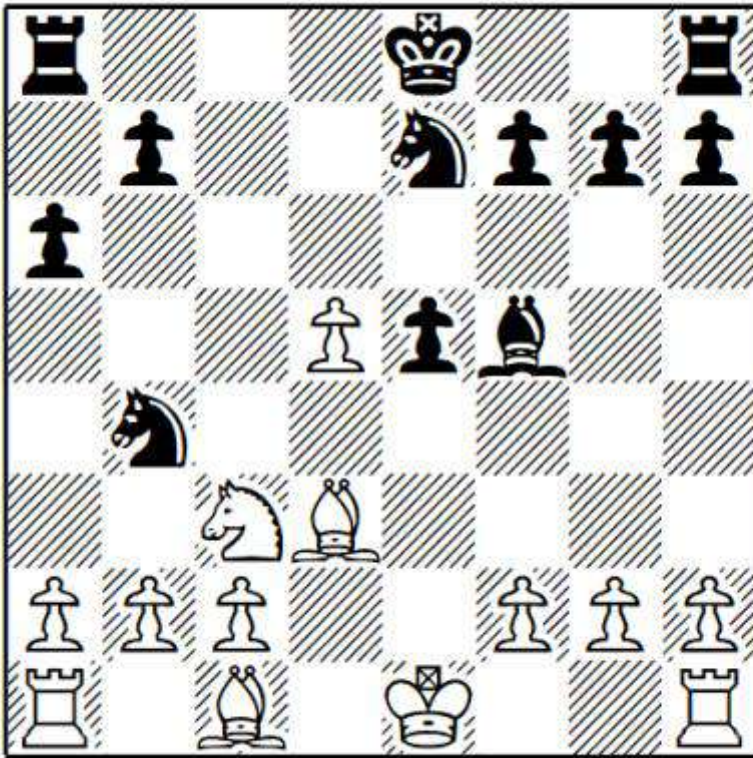
The characteristic move for the Kalashnikov. Instead:

a) 5 ... Nf6 6 N1c3 d6 transposes to the closely related Sveshnikov Variation, which we will analyse in Chapter Nine. White also has the option of 6 Bg5!?, going into a Taimanov sideline from Chapter Seven (Game 48).

b) 5 ... h6 is very rare. White gets a comfortable position and there are no pitfalls along the way; for example, 6 N1c3 Nf6 7 Nd6+ Bxd6 8 Qxd6 Qe7 9 Qxe7+ Kxe7 10 Be3 d6 11 0-0-0 a6 12 f3.

c) 5 ... a6, the so-called Löwenthal Variation, is another possibility for Black here. It is rarely seen nowadays but remains an interesting opening, so let's have a look how we should handle it. After 6 Nd6+ Bxd6 7 Qxd6, Black has two different approaches:

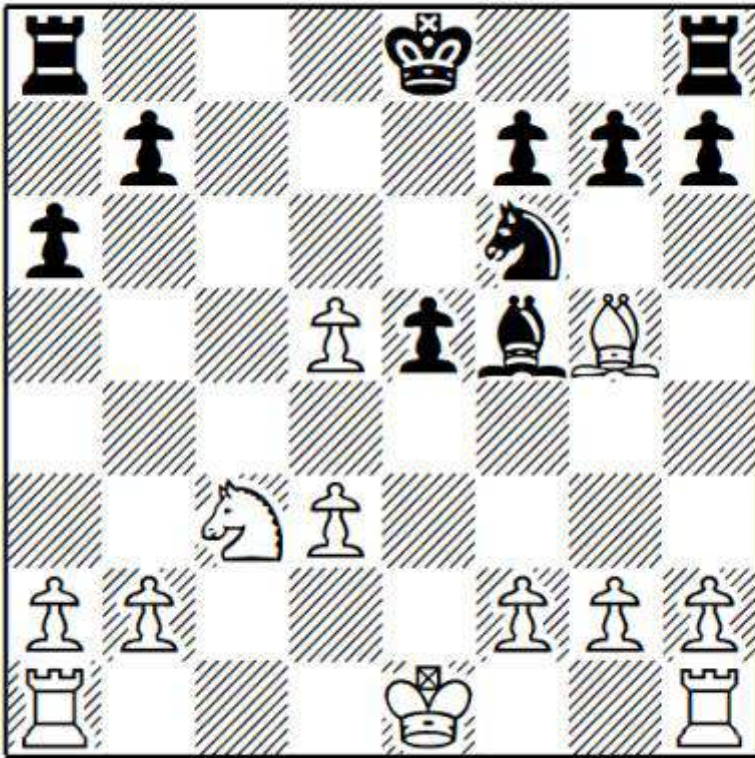
a) 7 ... Qe7!? and now 8 Qxe7+?! Ngxe7 9 Nc3 d5 10 exd5 Nb4 11 Bd3 Bf5! is completely fine for Black.



*No advantage*

Instead, we should retreat with 8 Qd1. The black queen on e7 does not bother us since it cannot go to g6 so easily. For more details see Game 54.

b) 7 ... Qf6 is best answered by 8 Qxf6 (after 8 Qd1 Qg6! it is not easy for White to complete development) 8 ... Nxf6 9 Nc3 d5 (9 ... Nb4 10 Bd3 d5 11 exd5 transposes; the quieter 10 ... h6!? will be examined in Game 53) 10 exd5 Nb4 11 Bd3 (note that with Black's knight on f6 the immediate 11 ... Bf5 is not possible here) 11 ... Nxd3+ (or 11 ... Nfxd5 12 Nxd5 Nxd5 13 Bd2 and White is slightly better thanks to the bishops) 12 cxd3 Bf5 13 0-0 with a plus for White.

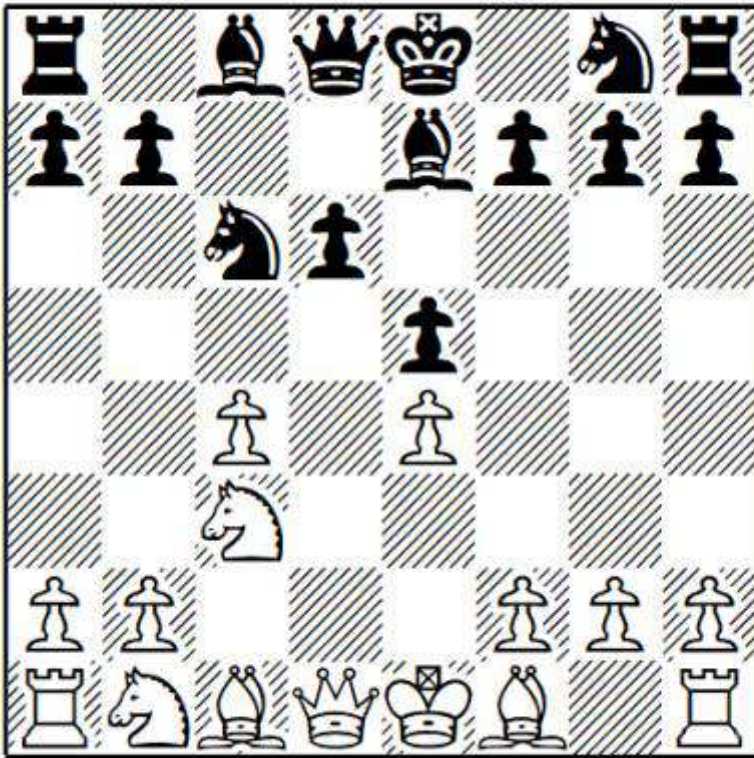


*White stands better*

**6 c4**

The other main choice is 6 N1c3, but since it leads to completely different set-ups it will not be covered in this book.

**6 ... Be7 7 N5c3!?**



### *Our starting position*

First, I want to give a short introduction why this variation is consistent with the other variations recommended in this book and why it is a sensible opening to play. After this we will talk about the advantages and drawbacks it involves.

The first important point to note is that 7 N5c3 has not been played so often; compared to the main move (7 N1c3) it occurs in just one out of 40 games. Besides being a sideline, it is solid, ambitious and positionally sound.

Furthermore, it is easy to learn and thus fits into the set of healthy, easy to understand sidelines which this book wants to show. The whole opening is more about general understanding of the structure than concrete knowledge (of course, some lines always need to be remembered).

Other things to note are that White does not need to place a knight on the edge of the board; it is also less easy for Black to achieve the exchange of dark-squared bishops via ... Bg5 than in the 7 N1c3 variation. In

conclusion, I would say that you can play this system confidently once you are familiar with all the important ideas, and this kind of knowledge will not become outdated in several years when the opening theory develops further.

Other the other hand, when we have a critical look at the variation proposed here, the main question one might ask is whether it is really better to have knight on d2 than on a3. From a3 it can regroup to c2 and later to d5. Also, Black spends a tempo on ... a7-a6 to drive the b5-knight back, which is not necessary after 7 N5c3.

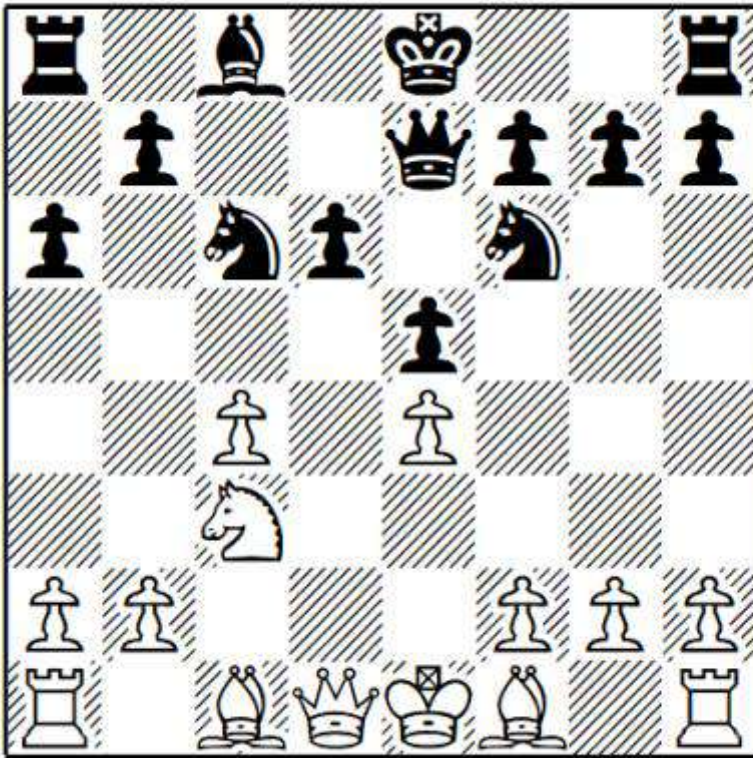
That is of course all true, and it is therefore hard to say which move is objectively stronger. However, there is no clear drawback to Nd2, and we have lots of fresh ideas in mind. In my opinion, that is enough to make this our main weapon against the Kalashnikov.

### **7 ... Nf6**

This is already a big branching point of our variation and Black's last move steers the game into a certain direction. That's why we should have detailed look at all the alternatives at this point before we go on with the main line.

a) 7 ... Bg5? is just a mistake. After 8 Bxg5 Qxg5 9 Nb5! White wins a pawn without allowing counterplay and is much better. Not 9 Qxd6? Qc1+ and Black is fine.

b) 7 ... a6 is a creative continuation, aiming for ... Bg5. Here I suggest the easy approach of playing with the pair of bishops. After 8 Nd5 White scores about 75% in practice. For example, the game might continue with 8 ... Nf6 9 Nxe7 Qxe7 10 Nc3 and White is better.



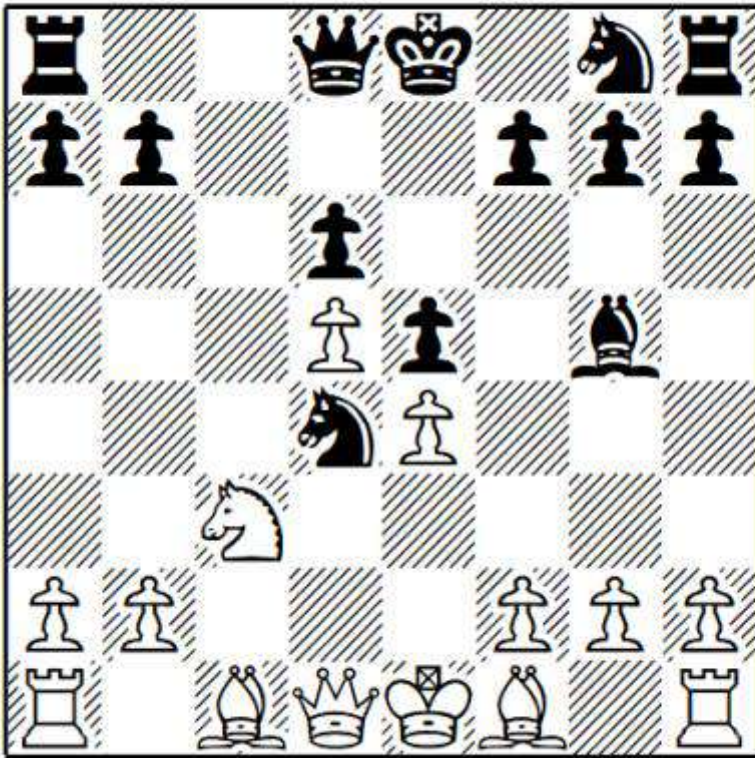
*White has a lasting plus*

We have a space advantage, and our dark-squared bishop is worth a lot. For more details on this have a look at Game 55.

c) 7 ... Be6!? is interesting as it keeps the option of playing ... Bg5, but we can continue with 8 Nd5 again, preventing that idea for the moment. Then:

c1) 8 ... Nf6 does not create any trouble. After 9 Nbc3 we have employed our knights perfectly. In contrast to the main line with 7 N1c3, neither knight is placed on the rim.

c2) 8 ... Bxd5 9 cxd5 Nd4 10 Nc3 Bg5 is critical, as it looks as if Black will achieve his dream position after the exchange of dark-squared bishops. But White has something prepared.



*How to react?*

**Question:** If White simply exchanges the dark-squared bishop, he will be left

with a poor light-squared bishop versus a strong black knight on d4.

Can

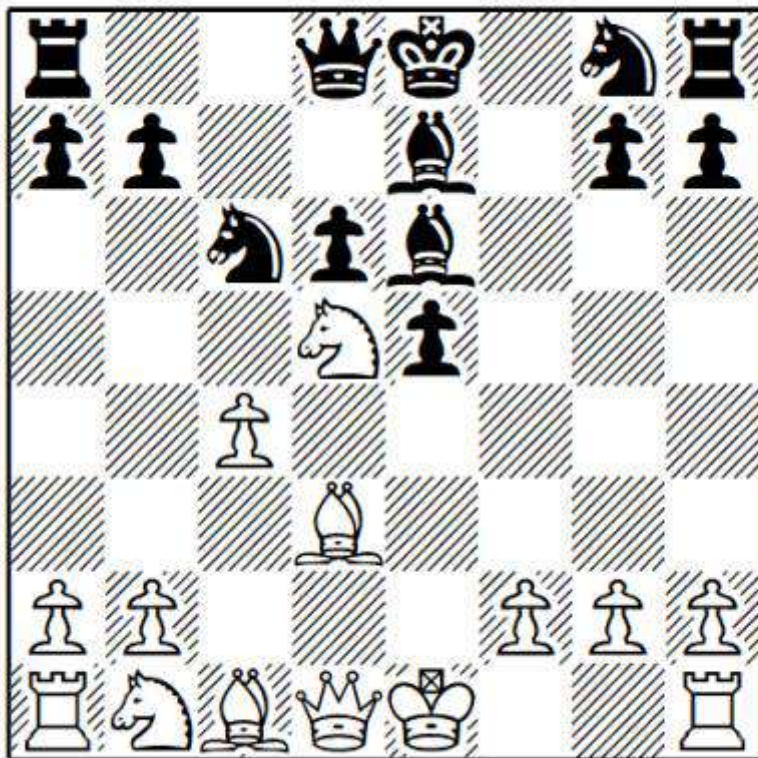
you find a way to avoid such scenario?

**Answer:** 11 Be3! is quite a fine idea and perhaps hard to find in view of the potential doubled pawns. However, the tactics forbid this (11 ... Bxe3? 12 fxe3 wins the knight), so White threatens to take twice on d4 and Black will not have full compensation. This is even stronger than 11 f4, when Black has to retreat.

d) 7 ... f5 is a reasonable-looking and aggressive approach, but I think the evaluation can make us very happy. We get a theoretical advantage after this move, and practical results support it, as White scores more than 70%

after 8 exf5 Bxf5 9 Bd3 Be6 (9 ... Bxd3 10 Qxd3 just leaves Black with weak light squares) 10 Nd5!.

This is a key move. Black can never really capture because he would suffer on the light squares afterwards. So play continues 10 ... Nf6 11 Nbc3 0-0 12 0-0 and here I would conclude that White is better. It is hard to suggest a plan for Black.

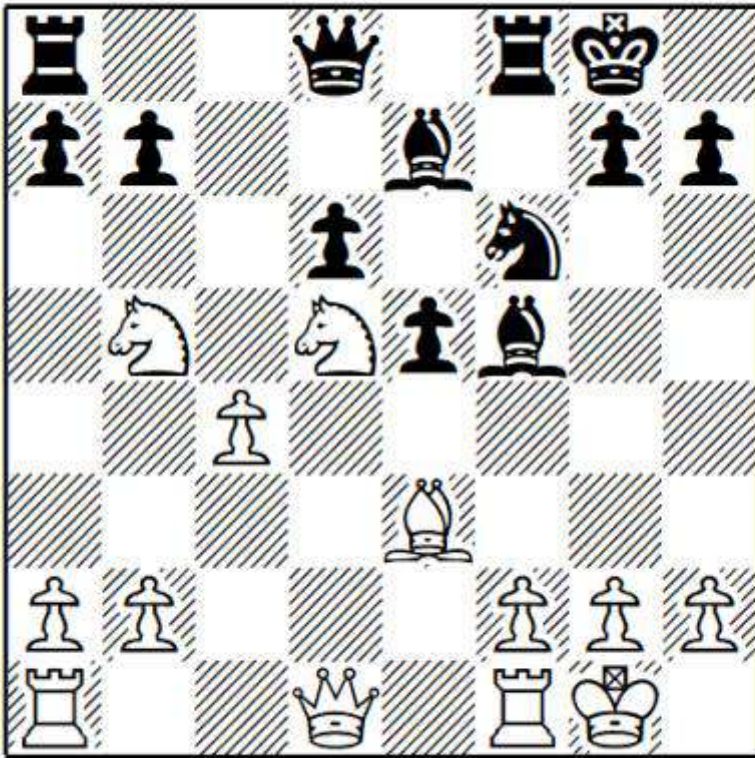


### *A strong knight*

d1) 12 ... Bxd5 13 cxd5 clarifies the situation in the centre, but after 13 ... Nb8 14 Bf5 Kh8 15 Be3 Nbd7 16 Rc1 White has excellent squares for all his pieces, while Black is extremely passive.

d1) 12 ... Nd4 has been the most frequent move. Here I suggest the following antidote: 13 Be3 Nf5 (13 ... Nxd5 14 Nxd5 Bxd5 15 cxd5 is good for White who has superior control of the light squares; while for 13 ... g6 see Game 56) 14 Bxf5! (keeping the dark-squared bishop and exchanging

Black's knight for our other bishop is a very interesting plan!) 14 ... Bxf5 15 Nb5!.



### *Pressure on Black*

Objectively speaking, this is horrible for Black. White wins a pawn and has the advantage in all variations, as we'll see in Game 57.

#### **8 Bd3**

With this move we stay loyal to our initial idea of playing without Na3. Switching to a sort of main line with 8 Na3 is not bad either. Yes, Black has saved a tempo on ... a7-a6, but the f6-knight blocks his two main ideas of ... Bg5 and ... f7-f5, which means we have more control over the position.

#### **8 ... 0-0**

8 ... Bg4 9 f3 Be6 10 Nd5 leads to the normal kind of space advantage, and the provoked f2-f3 does not create serious weaknesses in our position.

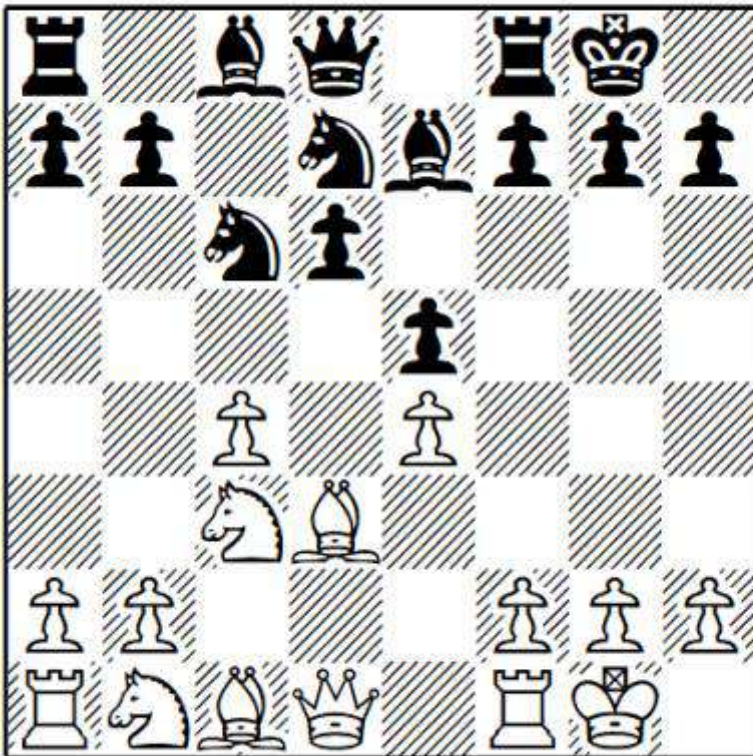
#### **9 0-0**

White can now continue with h2-h3, Be3 and Nd2, enjoying the usual space advantage, if Black is not doing anything special. Black could try to

make ... f7-f5 or ... b7-b5 work, but these normally gives us clear targets or squares. For instance, after ... f7-f5 we have excellent control over the central squares e4 and d5 and can play against the weak pawns on d6 or e5.

More details on concrete plans in the middlegames can be found in the games section. Here we will only have a look at the most challenging plan by Black: exchanging dark-squared bishops.

**9 ... Nd7!?**



*Dark square strategy*

Black wants to exchange his dark-squared bishop via g5 after which he can more easily install a knight on d4. If this is achieved, White risks being left with just the bad bishop on d3, so I suggest keeping our dark-squared bishop on the board.

**10 b3!?**

White has more often opted for 10 Nd5, but that allows the exchange of dark-squared bishops.

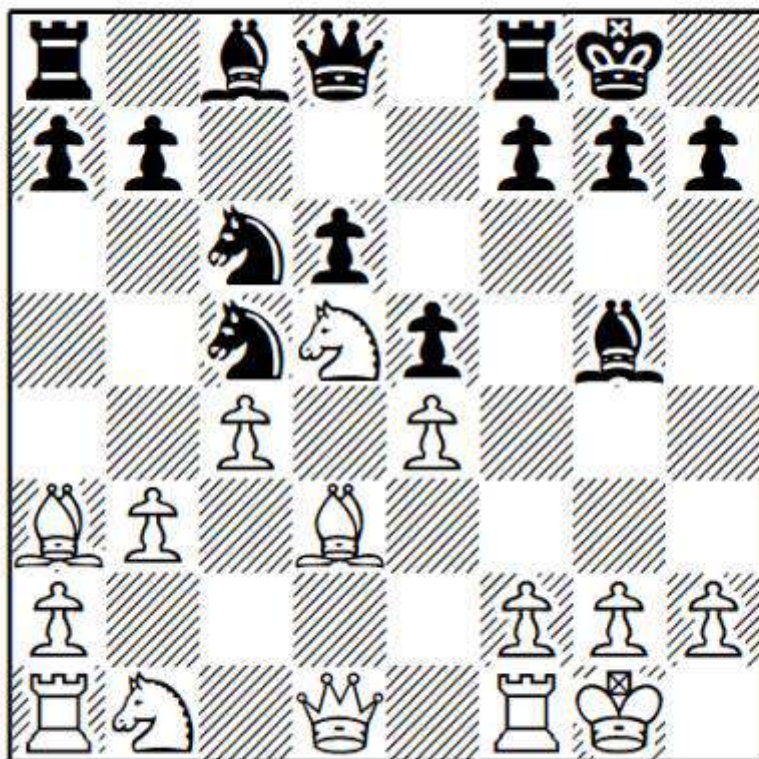
**10 ... Bg5**

Black can play 10 ... Nc5 first, but then 11 Nd5 Bg5 (after 11 ... f5!? 12 exf5 Nxd3 13 Qxd3 Bxf5 14 Qd1 White has a long-term edge in view of the d5-outpost and weak d6-pawn, for which Black's activity doesn't seem to fully compensate) 12 Ba3 transposes to the main line, while in Game 58 White tried 12 Bb2.

### 11 Ba3

Avoiding the exchange of bishops and eyeing the d6-pawn.

11 ... Nc5 12 Nd5



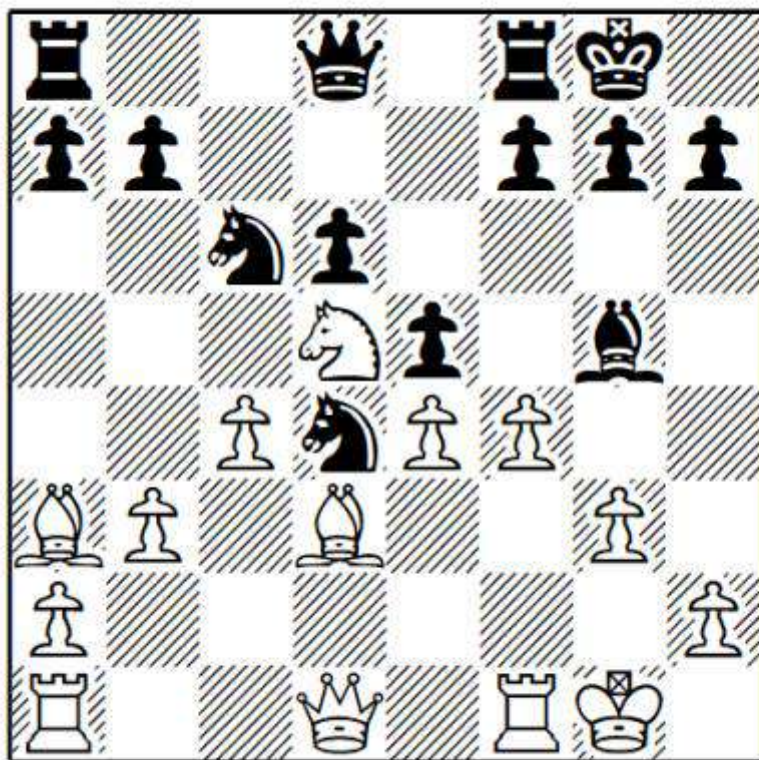
From now on anything might happen and it is not necessary to remember things exactly move by move. Nevertheless, I think it can be quite useful to examine a few possible continuations:

a) 12 ... f5?! is a mistake. White obtains a big advantage after 13 Bxc5 dxc5 14 exf5 Bxf5 15 Bxf5 Rxf5 16 Qg4 Nd4 17 Nbc3 due to the superiority on the light squares.

b) 12 ... Ne6 is a bit slow and thus also very promising for White. For example: 13 Nbc3 Ned4 14 Nb5! Nxb5 15 cxb5 Nd4 16 f4!? exf4 17 Bc4 (making use the d4-knight which is very loose in the centre) 17 ... Bf6 (17

... Ne6 18 Bxd6! is the tactical point) 18 Nxf6+ Qxf6 19 Qd2 with a decisive positional advantage.

c) 12 ... Be6 13 Nbc3 Bxd5 (or 13 ... Nd4 14 Bb1, intending f2-f4) 14 Nxd5 Ne6 15 g3 Ned4 16 f4 and the knights will become unstable in the centre.



### *Opening the position*

d) 12 ... Kh8 13 Nbc3 Bh6 (if 13 ... g6 at once, White could try to exploit the weakening of the long diagonal with Bb2 and ideas like f2-f4) 14 Re1 (White can perhaps improve here) 14 ... g6 15 Bf1 f5 led to double-edged play in Game 59, where we'll also look at other ways of meeting Black's plan of ... g7-g6 and ... f7-f5.

We stop the theoretical discussion at this point and move on to the games, where we will see how things work out in practice.

### **Illustrative Games**

We will start with a couple of games featuring the now rather more rare

Löwenthal Variation. In Game 53, after 7 ... Qf6, Nisipeanu slowly increases the pressure and his space advantage before finally winning some material. In Game 54, Black goes for the other option, 7 ... Qe7, so we'll discuss the differences and look at a strong set-up for White.

Then we switch our focus to the Kalashnikov, including three games by the Russian grandmaster Evgeny Alekseev, who has employed the 7 N5c3 system regularly against strong opposition.

In Game 55, encountering an early ... a7-a6, Alekseev shows in good style how to get something concrete, i.e. the pair of bishops, and how to convert it.

In the next two games, Black tries the more aggressive 7 ... f5, but with 7 N5c3 played White gets a great game since both knights can fight for the d5-square. Black was unable to solve his problems with either 13 ... g6 (Game 56) or 13 ... Nf5 (Game 57).

The final two games show the typical idea of developing the c1-bishop to either b2 or a3, avoiding Black's desired exchange with ... Bg5. Game 58 soon changes its positional character and we see a great attacking game which White won convincingly. In Game 59 we see Alekseev lose control of with an untimely Ne4, but he eventually wins anyway when Black goes wrong in turn.

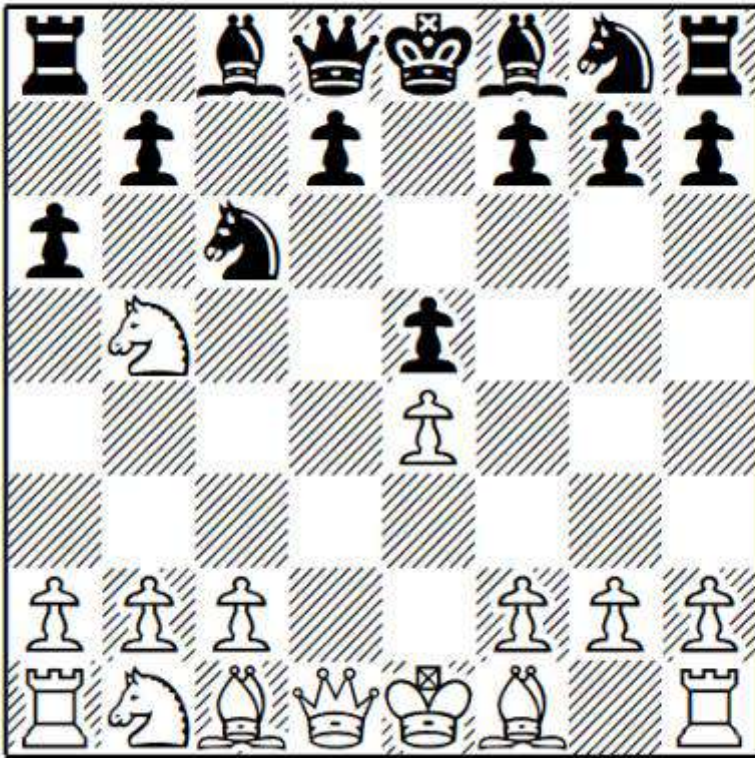
Enough of explanatory words; let's begin the games.

### *Game 53*

**L.D.Nisipeanu-Ju.Polgar**

World Cup, Khanty-Mansiysk 2009

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 e5 5 Nb5 a6**



*Allowing Nd6+*

The Löwenthal Variation is on the board. For the Kalashnikov 5 ... d6 see Games 55-59.

**6 Nd6+ Bxd6 7 Qxd6 Qf6**

**Remember:** If Black develops the queen to f6 we should swap it off, as otherwise Black can play 8 ... Qg6, preventing our development on the kingside.

The main alternative, 7 ... Qe7, is the subject of the next game.

**8 Qxf6 Nxf6 9 Nc3 Nb4**

9 ... d5 was the sharp line in the pre-computer era, but now there is a straightforward solution: 10 exd5 Nb4 11 Bd3 Nxd3+ 12 cxd3 Bf5 13 0-0 and White is better.

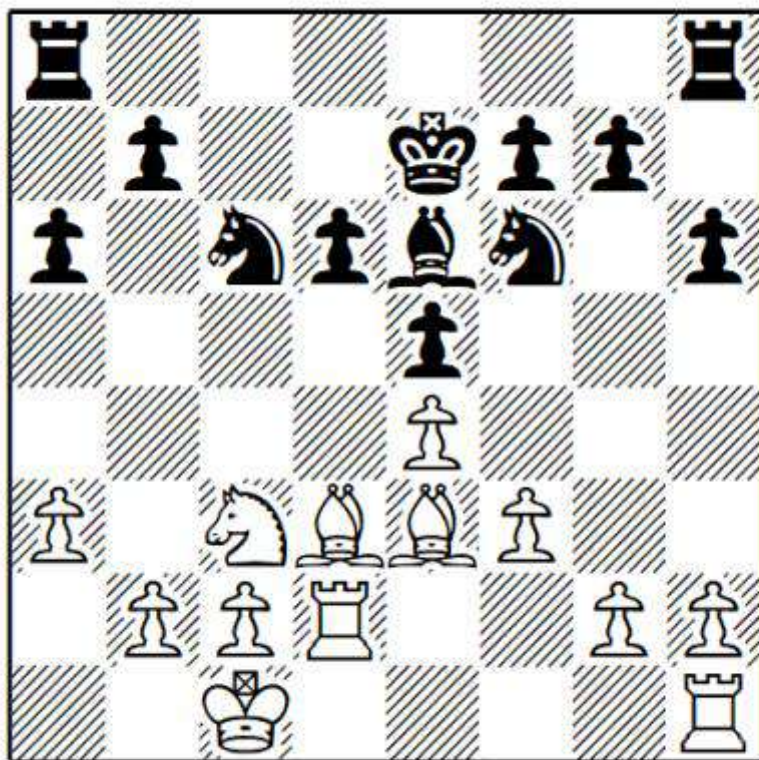
**10 Bd3 h6!?**

The modern approach; Black accepts that White has the bishop pair and simply limits the dark-squared bishop by taking away its best square. 10 ...

d5 11 exd5 is the same as 9 ... d5 above.

**11 Be3 d6 12 0-0-0 Be6 13 a3 Nxd3+**

Retreating with 13 ... Nc6 seems interesting seeing as the white bishop has no job on d3. In this case we have the simple and effective plan of doubling rooks and then retreating the bishop out of the way with 14 f3 Ke7 15 Rd2!



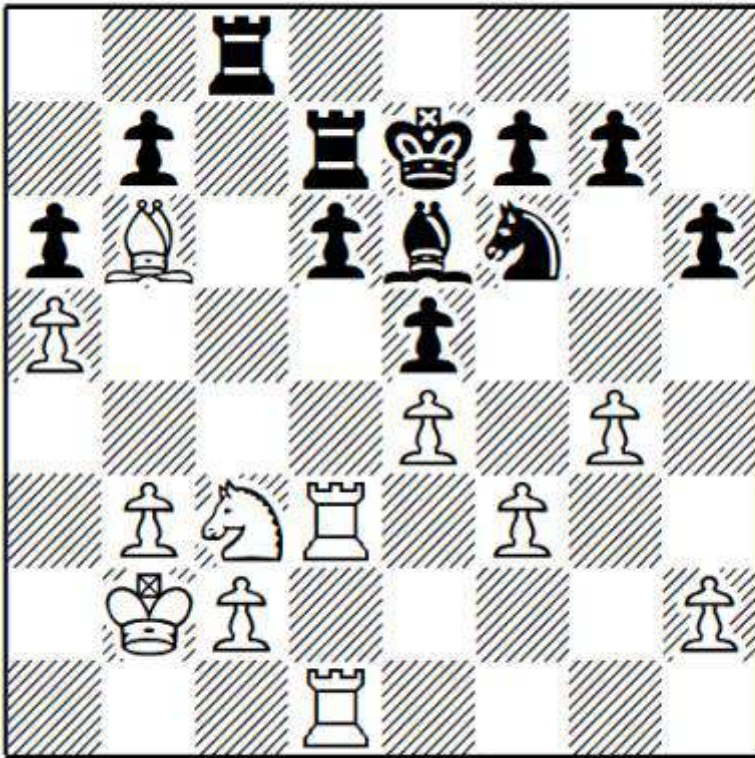
*White improves slowly*

15 ... Rhc8 16 Rhd1 b5 17 Bf1 Ne8 18 b3. Of course White cannot increase the pressure on the d6-pawn any more, but we can slowly improve with Kb2 and Nd5 before finally opening the queenside for the bishops; e.g. 18 ... Rc7 19 Kb2 Rac8 20 Nd5+ Bxd5 21 exd5 Nd4 22 c4 bxc4 23 Bxd4 exd4 24 Bxc4 with a big plus.

**14 Rxd3 Ke7 15 Rhd1 Rhd8 16 Bb6 Rd7 17 f3**

Black is now completely stuck.

**17 ... Rc8 18 a4 Rc6 19 a5 Bc4 20 Re3 Ne8 21 b3 Be6 22 g4 Rc8 23 Kb2 Nf6 24 Red3**

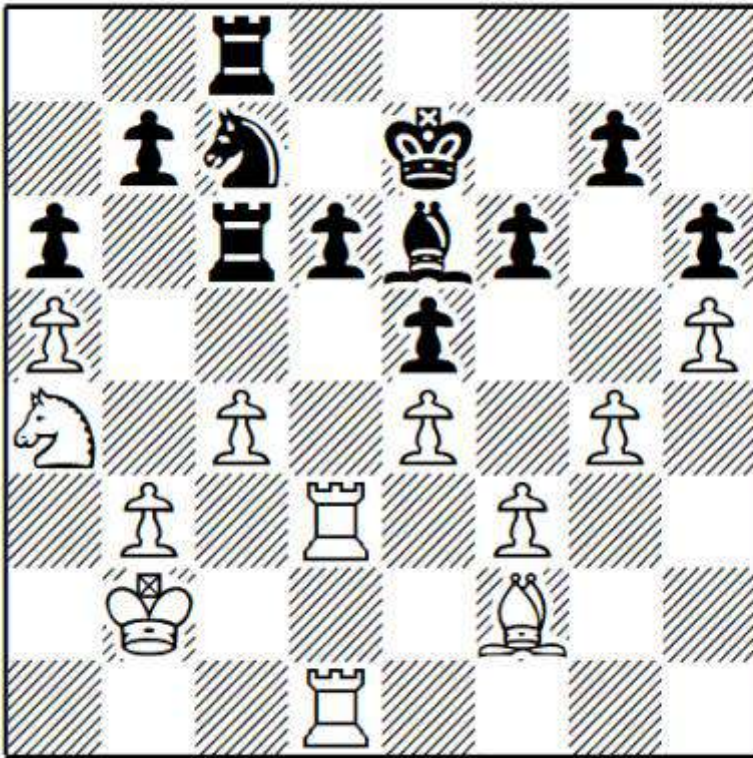


*Black lacks space*

From this point White's play is just incredible to watch: slowly expanding further on both wings before thinking about the final push.

**24 ... Ne8 25 h4 f6 26 h5 Nc7 27 R1d2 Na8 28 Na4 Rc6 29 Bf2 Rdc7 30 c4 Rc8 31 Rd1 Nc7**

This loses material but it was already hard to suggest an improvement. If Black simply passes White can break through with something like 31 ... Bf7 32 Ba7 Be6 33 Nc3 Bf7 34 Na2, planning Nb4 with crushing effect; e.g. 34 ... Rd8 35 c5 Ke6 36 Nb4 Rcc8 37 cxd6 and wins.



*How to win?*

**Question:** Can you discover how White continued?

**Answer:** 32 Nb6! Rb8 33 Nd5+ Kf7

Taking the knight would cost Black at least a piece. But now White wins the exchange anyway and the game is over.

34 Nb4 Ne8 35 Nxc6 bxc6 36 Kc3 Ke7 37 b4 Rc8 38 Bb6 Ra8 39 c5 d5 40 exd5 Bxd5 41 Rxd5!

The simplest way to win.

41 ... cxd5 42 Rxd5 Ke6 43 Kc4 Rc8 44 Rd1 f5 45 gxf5+ Kxf5 46 b5 1-0

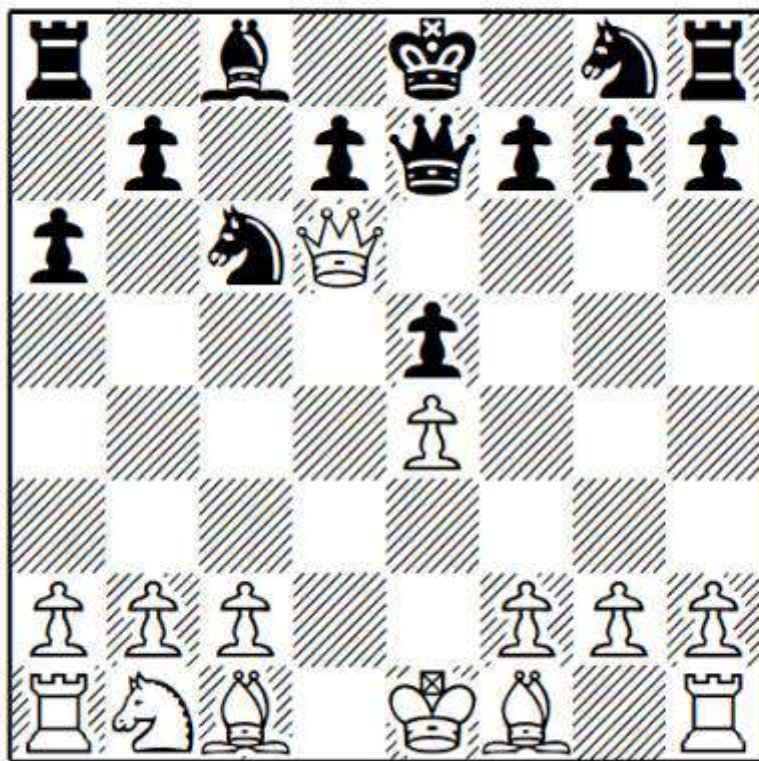
*Game 54*

**Yu Yangyi-Li Chao**

Ningbo (rapid) 2018

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 e5 5 Nb5 a6 6 Nd6+ Bxd6 7 Qxd6 Qe7

Black challenges our queen from a different square.



*Exchange queens or not?*

**8 Qd1!**

**Remember:** We should retreat the queen here because 8 Qxe7+ Ngxe7 9 Nc3 Nb4 10 Bd3 d5 11 exd5 Bf5 is fine for Black.

Note that Black has no problems after 8 Qc7 d5! 9 Qxe7+ Ngxe7 either.

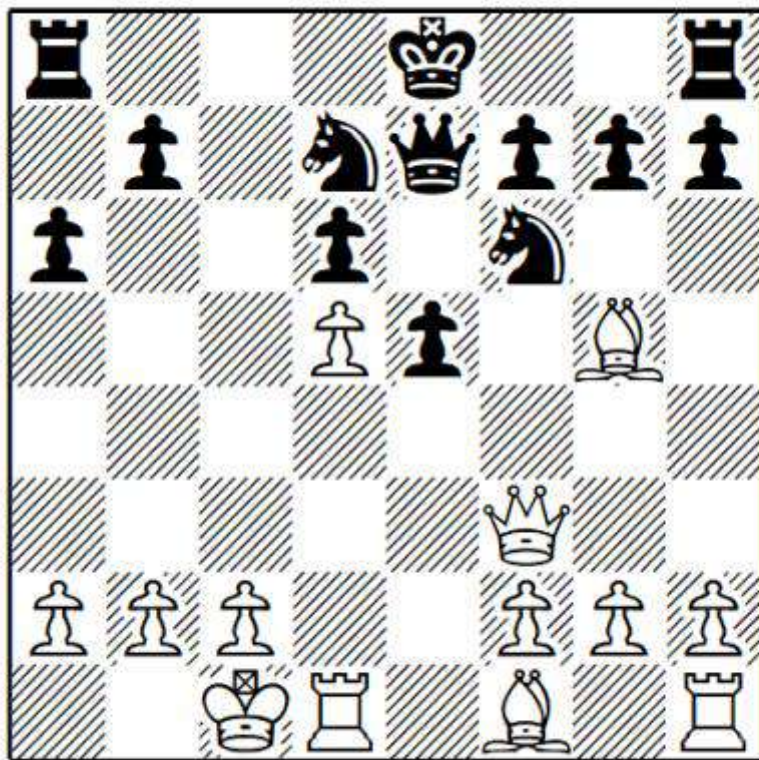
**8 ... Nf6 9 Nc3 d6**

Preventing Bg5 with 9 ... h6 is a bit slow. White can just develop normally; e.g. 10 Be3 d6 11 Qd2 Be6 12 0-0-0 and is already building strong pressure against d6.

**10 Bg5 Be6 11 Nd5 Bxd5 12 exd5 Nb8 13 Qf3**

White has several decent alternatives, such as 13 c4 or 13 Be2, with a plus thanks to his two bishops and queenside majority.

13 ... Nbd7 14 0-0-0!



*An interesting plan*

Instead of pushing his queenside majority White intends to play on the kingside with g2-g4, while the king will be perfectly safe on the other flank.

**14 ... h6 15 Be3 h5**

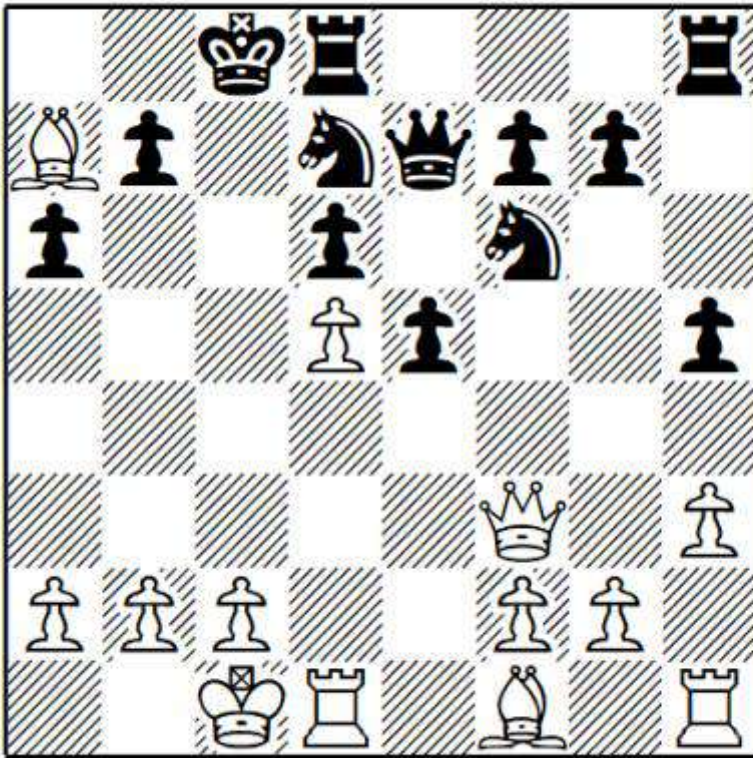
Black prevents g2-g4 with ideas himself of ... Ng4 and ... Qf6.

Instead, 15 ... 0-0?! shows the great attacking potential of opposite castling: 16 g4! e4 17 Qg3 Ne5 18 g5 hxg5 19 Bxg5 and White was clearly better in O.Zambrana-P.Dukaczewski, Tromsø Olympiad 2014.

**16 h3**

Preventing ... Ng4 and preparing to push g2-g4 again, after a further Be2 if necessary. So Black decides to seek safety on the queenside, but White is quite ready to switch focus to that flank.

**16 ... 0-0-0 17 Ba7!**



*An annoying bishop*

This might look strange at first sight but White has concrete attacking ideas in mind. the immediate threat is 18 Qc3+ Nc5 19 b4 Nfe4 20 Qe3, winning a piece. Meanwhile the bishop hinders Black from consolidating with ... Kb8.

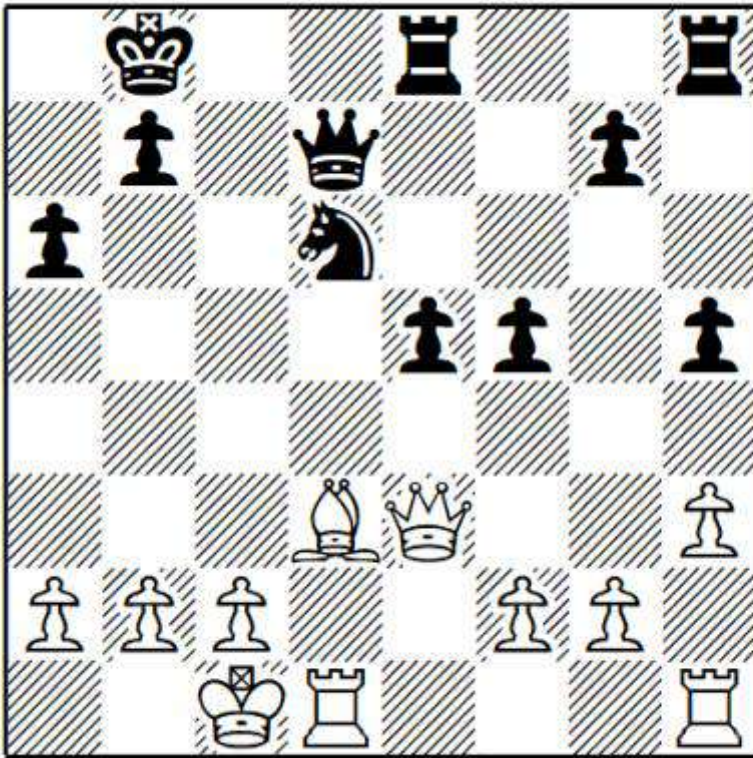
**17 ... Nc5 18 Bb6 Rde8**

18 ... Rd7 would prevent the follow up in the game, but White keeps a big plus with 19 Qa3! Kb8 20 b4 Nce4 21 c4, as Black is completely tied up.

**19 Bxc5 dxc5 20 d6 Qd7 21 Qe3 Kb8**

If Black defends the c-pawn with 21 ... Qc6, White returns his attentions to the kingside: 22 Bc4 Rhf8 23 g4 hxg4 24 hxg4 with huge pressure. Black can't take the g-pawn because of 24 ... Nxg4? 25 d7+ and White wins.

**22 Qxc5 Ne4 23 Qe3 f5 24 Bd3 Nxd6**



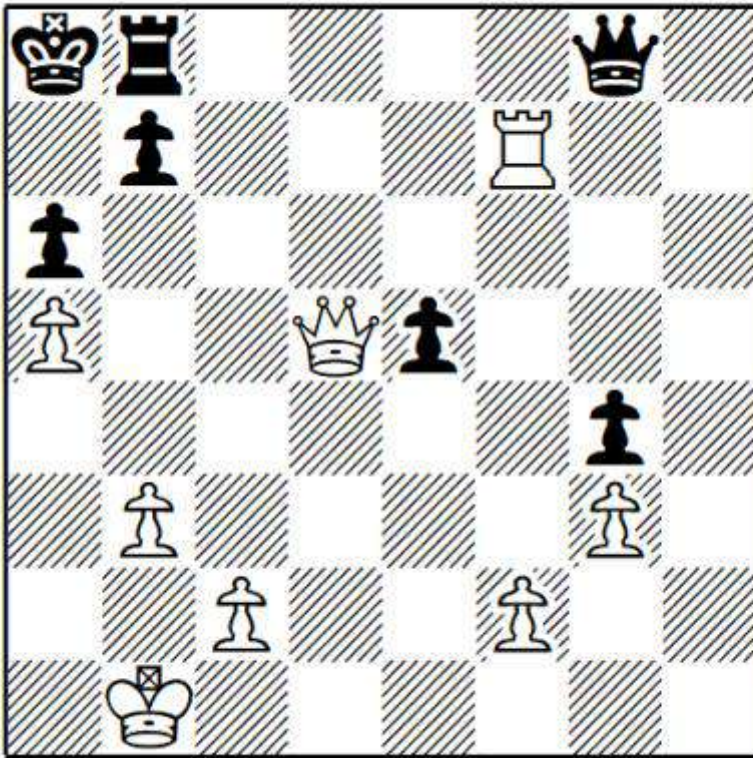
*Equal material?*

**Question:** No, White has not just blundered his extra pawn. What did he have in mind?

**Answer: 25 Bxf5! Qxf5 26 Rxd6**

White has the pawn back again and is now a healthy pawn up, while Black still has weaknesses in his position.

**26 ... Rhf8 27 Rd2 g5 28 Rhd1 g4 29 hxg4 hxg4 30 Kb1 Rc8 31 Re1 Rcd8 32 Ree2 Ka8 33 a3 Rxd2 34 Rxd2 Qe6 35 Qc5 Rh8 36 b3 Qf6 37 Rd6 Qf5 38 Qd5 Ka7 39 Rd7 Rb8 40 Rf7 Qh5 41 g3 Ka8 42 a4 Qg6 43 a5! Qg8**



*White is winning*

White has increased his activity and control a lot. Now with Black's defence hanging by a thread, probably the easiest way to win is by zugzwang, aiming to pick off the kingside pawns; e.g. 44 Kb2 and what can Black do?

Yu's plan of pushing the queenside pawns opens his king up to potential counterplay, and the computer says Black could have drawn on more than one occasion. Such endings are easy for a computer, very difficult for humans. In the end Yu wins anyway.

44 c4 Qg6+ 45 Kb2 e4 46 Ka3 Qh6 47 Rf4 Re8 48 Rxe4 Qf8+ 49 Ka4 Rd8 50 Qg5 Rd1 51 Qe7 Qxf2 52 Re2 Qf5 53 Kb4 Rd3 54 Rh2 Ka7 55 Rh7 Qc8 56 Qf6 Rf3 57 Qd4+ Ka8 58 Rd7 Qf8+ 59 Ka4 Qe8 60 Ka3 Rf8 61 Qd5 Qb8 62 Rd6 Ka7 63 Rd7 Ka8 64 c5 Rc8 65 Rd6 Ka7 66 Qd4 Qc7 67 Kb4 Ka8 68 Qd5 Ka7 69 Rd7 Qb8 70 c6 Rc7 71 Qd4+ Ka8 72 Rd8 Rc8 73 Rxc8 Qxc8 74 Qd7 Qf8+ 75 Ka4 bxc6 76 Qxc6+ Kb8 77 Qb6+ Kc8 78 Qxa6+ Kd7 79 Qb7+ Ke6 80 Qe4+ 1-0

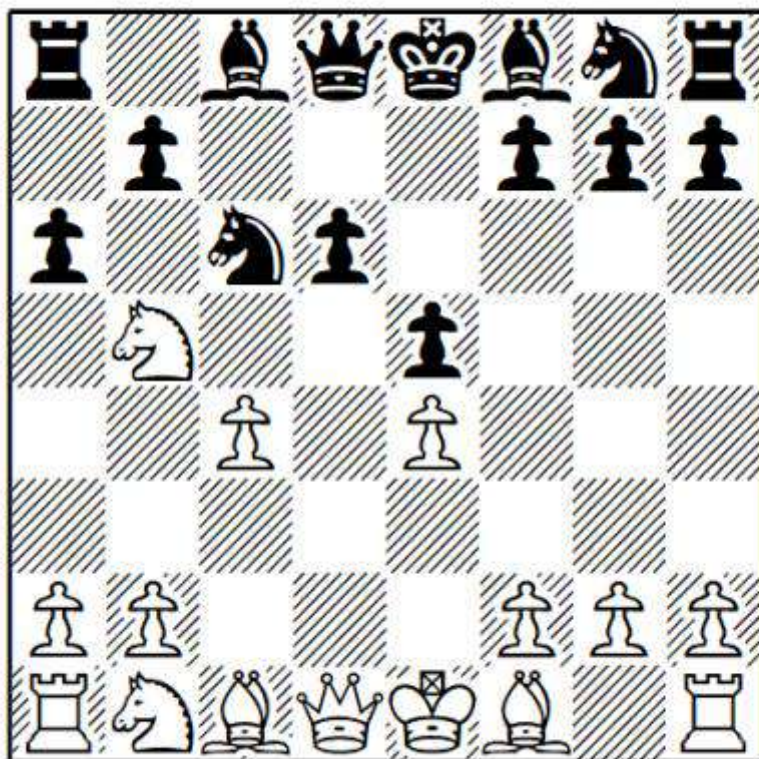
After that excursion into the Löwenthal Variation, we now move on to the Kalashnikov with 5 ... d6.

*Game 55*

**E.Alekseev-E.Bayramov**

Nakhchivan 2016

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 e5 5 Nb5 d6 6 c4 a6**



*A rare move order*

Usually I would call this mistake, as Black should wait for N1c3 before attacking the b5-knight, in order to force it back to the a3-square. But since we're intending to play N5c3 anyway, it hardly makes a difference.

If we consider our standard move order 6 ... Be7 7 N5c3, then ... a7-a6 looks like a waste of time. Nevertheless, it does have a point in that Black

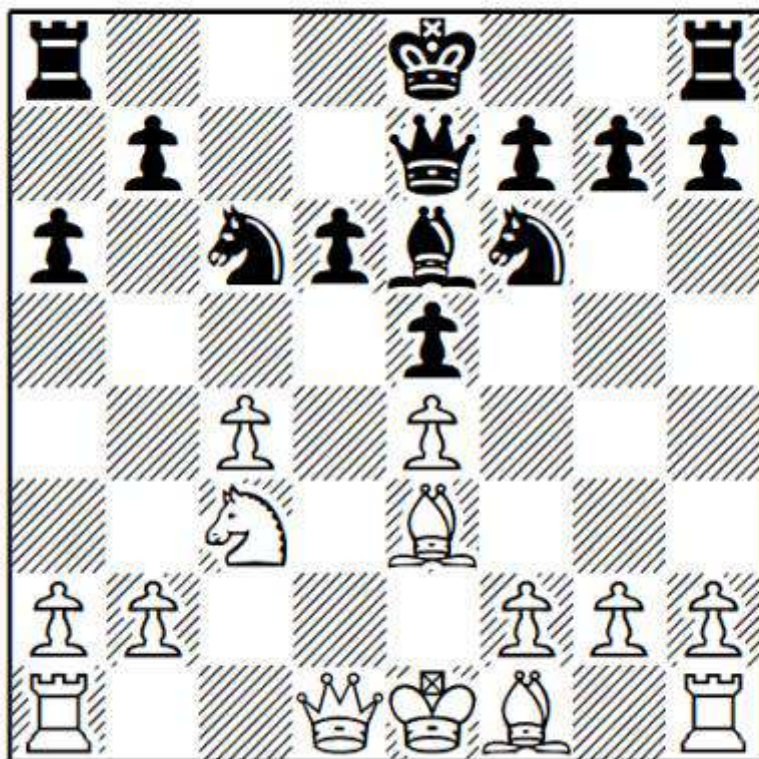
prepares the typical ... Bg5. At the moment 7 ... Bg5? would run 8 Bxg5 Qxg5 9 Nb5 and White wins.

**7 N5c3 Be7 8 Nd5!**

Preventing Black's plan and securing the pair of bishops.

The careless 8 Be2 allows 8 ... Bg5 and Black succeeds with his little strategic goal. After 9 Bxg5 Qxg5 Black is fine, since 10 Qxd6? fails to 10 ... Qxg2 11 Rf1 Qg6 with a huge plus.

**8 ... Nf6 9 Nxe7 Qxe7 10 Nc3 Be6 11 Be3**



*White has an edge*

White is slightly better; he will play Nd5 at some point with advantage.

**11 ... 0-0**

If 11 ... Ng4 then 12 Bb6 and the bishop is safe.

**12 Be2 Rac8 13 0-0 Na5 14 b3**

Another option was 14 Nd5 Bxd5 15 cxd5 Nc4 (15 ... Nxe4? 16 Qa4! is the tactical justification) 16 Bxc4 Rxc4 17 f3 and White is better due to his good bishop plus space advantage.

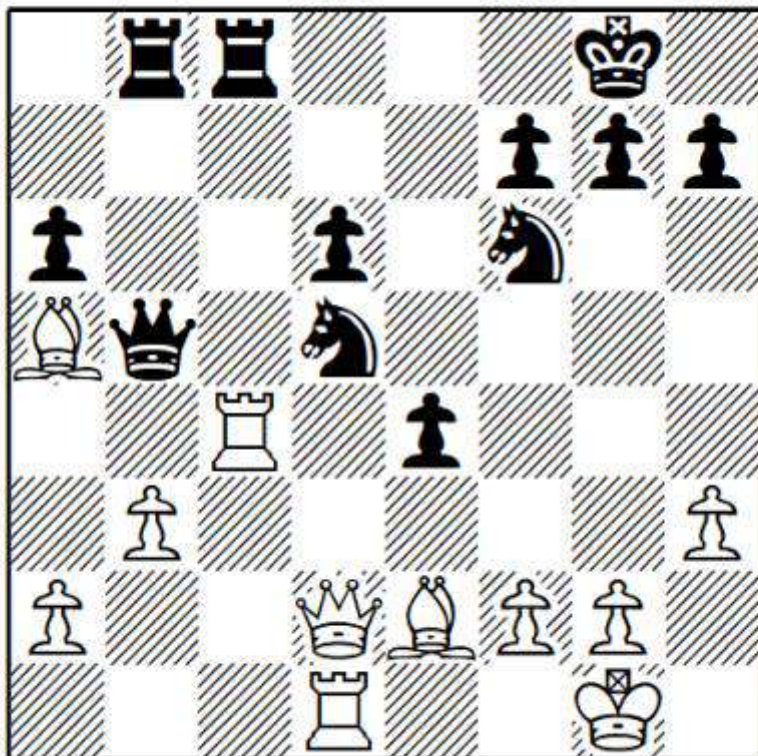
**14 ... b5 15 Bb6 Nb7 16 Nd5!**

Resolving the pin and creating a queenside pawn majority.

**16 ... Bxd5 17 exd5 bxc4 18 Bxc4 Nc5 19 Rc1 Qb7 20 Ba5 Ncd7 21 Qd2 Rb8 22 Rfd1 Nb6 23 Be2 Nbx5 24 Bf3 Rfc8 25 Rc4 Qb5 26 h3**

Not yet 26 Bxd5 Nxd5 27 Qxd5?? because of 27 ... Qxd5 28 Rxd5 Rxc4 and Black wins thanks to White's vulnerable back rank.

**26 ... e4 27 Be2**



*Black is uncoordinated*

Black still has an extra pawn but it is very unstable. White will soon win it back and get a fantastic position with his two bishops.

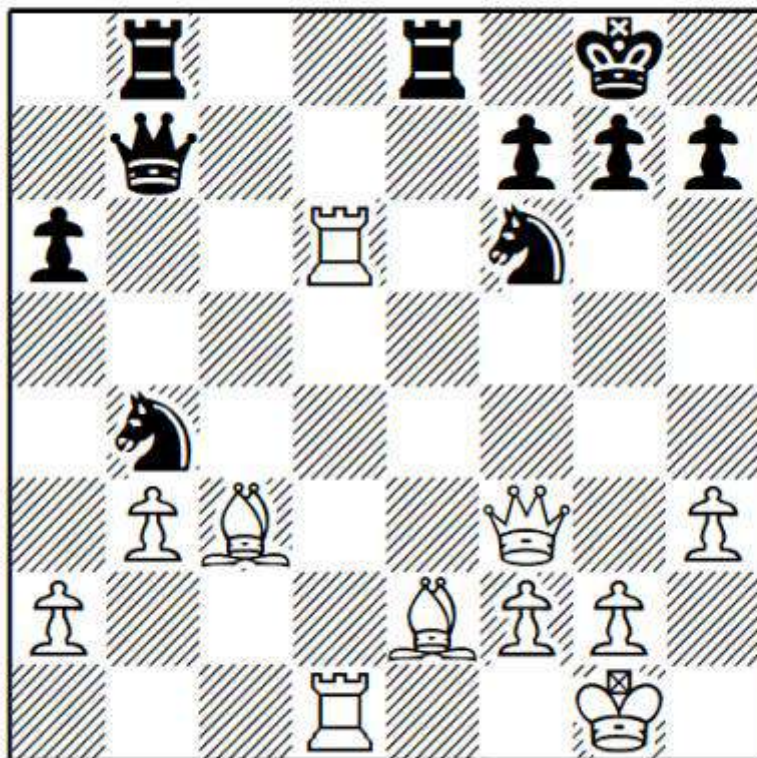
**27 ... Qb7 28 Rd4 Ne7**

Black might try to disrupt things with 28 ... e3 29 fxe3 Qe7, but after 29 fxe3 Qe7 30 Bf3 Qxe3+ 31 Kh1! Qxd2 (31 ... Rb5 32 b4 doesn't help) 32 Bxd2 White still dominates the game completely.

**29 Rxd6 Nc6 30 Bc3 e3**

This does nothing now since White can take with the queen.

31 Qxe3 Re8 32 Qf3 Nb4



*How to win?*

**Question:** How can White finish the game quickly?

**Answer #1: 33 Rxf6!**

Winning a piece, since 33 ... gxf6 34 Qxf6 leads to mate in a few moves, while 33 ... Qxf3 34 Rxf3 Rxe2 fails to 35 Bxb4 and the bishop is untouchable.

**Answer #2:** 33 Qg3 is also quickly decisive; e.g. 33 ... Rxe2 34 Bxf6 g6 35 Qf4 and White will checkmate soon.

White was of course winning in any case, but these are the most direct finishes.

**33 ... Nxa2!?**

Black has one last try, attacking the bishop on c3.

**34 Bc4!**

White doesn't fall for it. Moving the dark-squared bishop anywhere would allow 34 ... Qxf3 35 Rxf3 Rxe2, when Black is back in the game.

**34 ... Nxc3 35 Rxf7 Ne2+ 36 Qxe2 1-0**

After 36 ... Rxe2 37 Rxb7+ Kf8 38 Rxb8+ Ke7 39 Bxe2 Black has nothing left.

*Game 56*

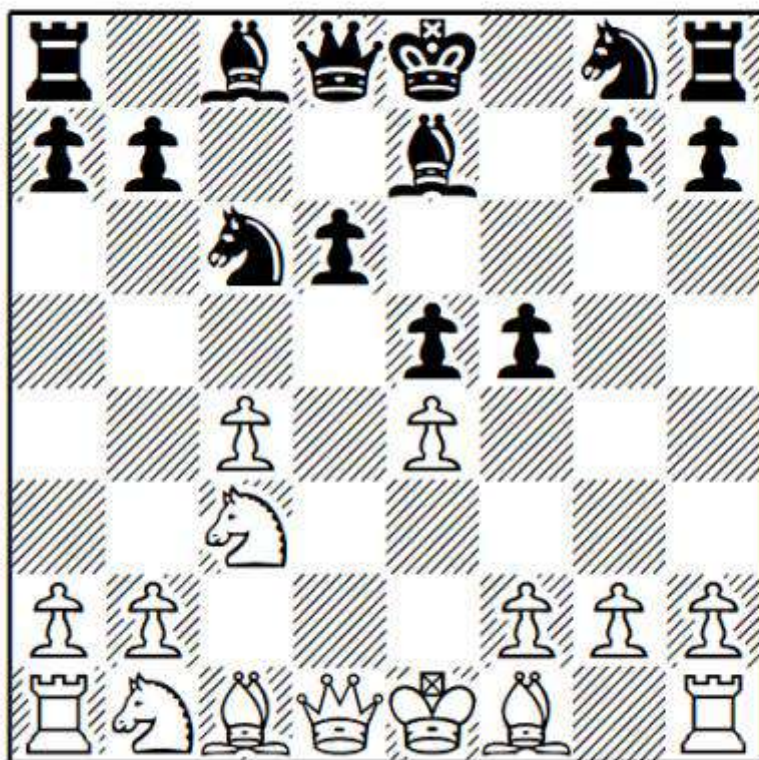
**E.Alekseev-K.Klugin**

St. Petersburg (rapid) 2017

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 e5 5 Nb5 d6 6 c4 Be7 7 N5c3**

Our main move again, avoiding a placement of the knight on the rim.

**7 ... f5**



*Direct play by Black*

With this move Black immediately shows his intention to play an active game, rather than just sitting there to see what White does. I think it is

important to know the best reaction to this. Don't worry; it is easy to remember.

1. Take on f5! If we allow ... f5-f4, Black obtains the potential to launch an attack on the kingside due to his space advantage there.

2. Develop your bishop to d3! In this structure we would be happy to see an exchange of light-squared bishops, because then the holes on d5 and e4 would be harder to cover for Black.

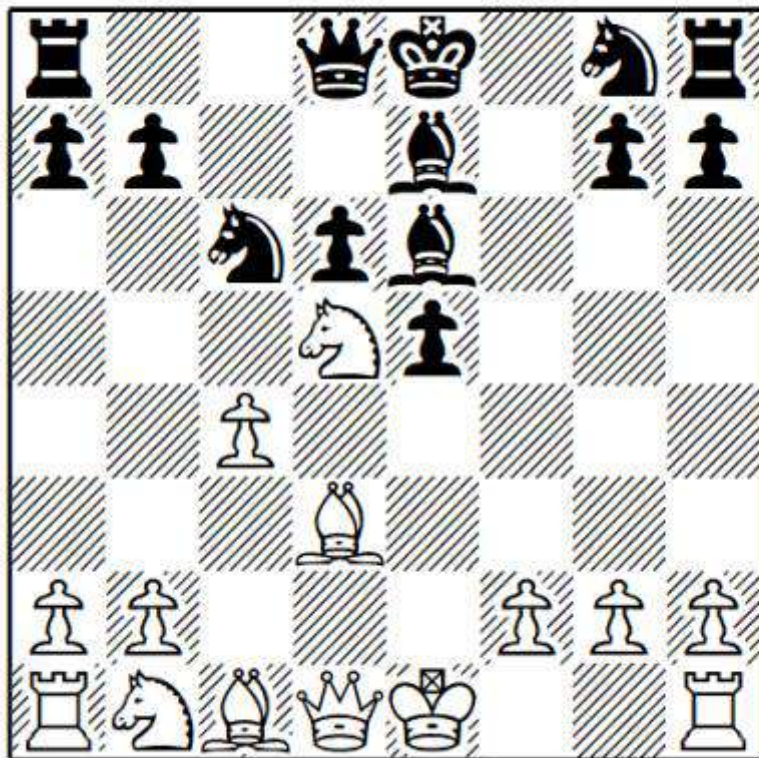
3. Bring your knight to the d5-square as soon as possible and support it with N1c3.

With those three rules of thumb in mind, you already have a plan of how to handle the opening and I think it is even possible to play the next few moves without further knowledge.

**8 exf5 Bxf5 9 Bd3 Be6**

The bishop is more-or-less forced to retreat. 9 ... Bxd3? 10 Qxd3 would be White's dream as Black will miss the defender of the light squares in the centre.

**10 Nd5**



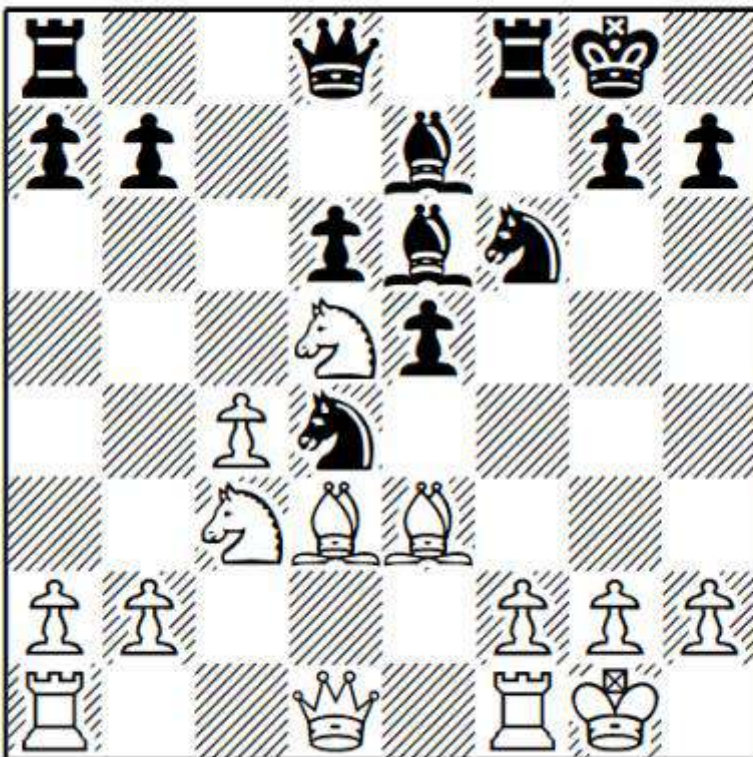
### *A key move*

Securing a stable advantage! If White delays this move Black will quickly fight for the d5-square with ... Nf6.

**10 ... Nf6 11 Nbc3 Nd4**

Black can also castle first: 11 ... 0-0, when 12 0-0 Nd4 13 Be3 transposes below. We'll look at this move order a bit more in the notes to the next game.

**12 Be3 0-0 13 0-0**



### *What is White's threat?*

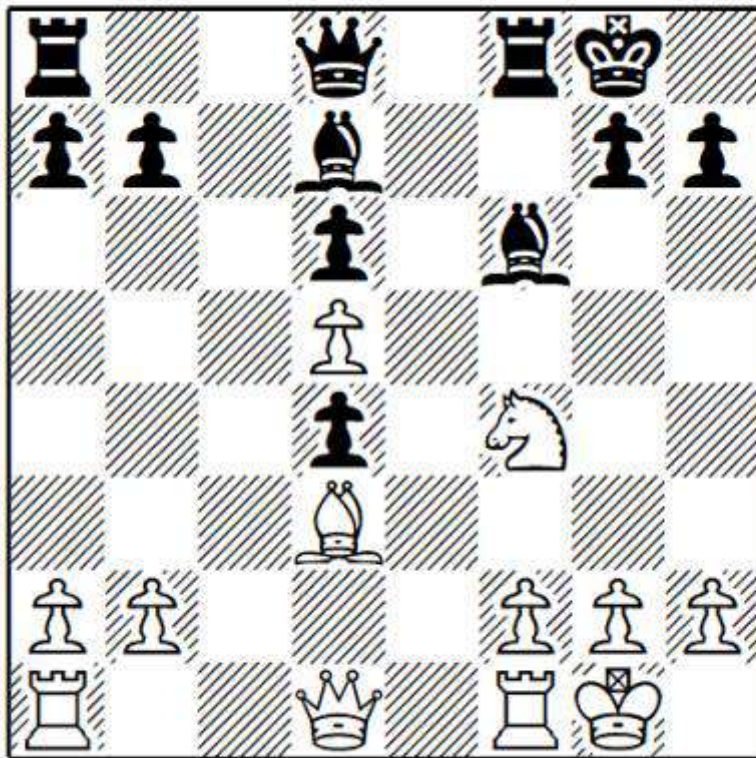
Now that both sides have developed, on every single move there are possibilities to transform the central structure. In particular, White has the strong option of capturing on d4, which would compromise Black's pawn structure for the long term, and sometimes even wins a pawn.

**13 ... g6**

A strange-looking move, as Black voluntarily weakens a few dark squares around his king. I assume he wanted to follow up with ... Nf5 and recapture with the g-pawn should White take on f5, but Black isn't given the chance. Instead:

a) 13 ... Nf5 is met by 14 Bxf5! Bxf5 15 Nb5 and Black is already in difficulties, as we'll see in the next game.

b) 13 ... Nxd5 looks like a reasonable try but White still stays on top. For example: 14 cxd5 (alternatively, 14 Nxd5 Bxd5 15 cxd5 Nf5 16 Bxf5 Rxf5 17 Qg4 g6 18 Rac1 and White is better) 14 ... Bd7 (if 14 ... Bf7 15 Be4 Bf6 16 Qd3 g6, as in L.Nowak-L.Butkiewicz, Szczawno Zdroj 2018, then 17 f4 looks good for White) 15 Bxd4 exd4 16 Ne2 Bf6 17 Nf4



### *Weak light squares*

White is intending 18 Ne6 with light-squared superiority in the middlegame.

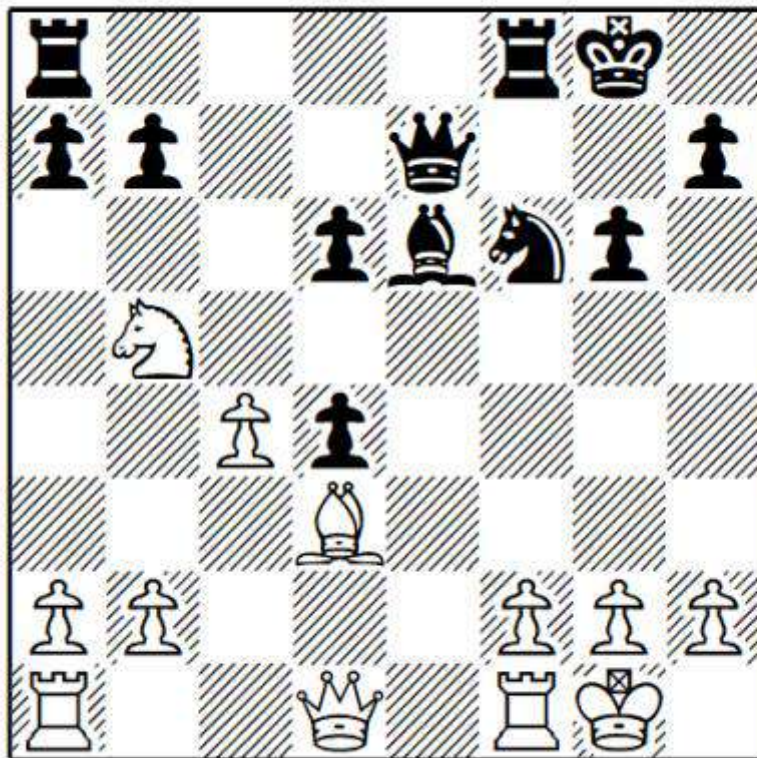
c) 13 ... Bxd5 is also possible, but 14 cxd5 is very similar to the 13 ... Nxd5 variation above, with the drawback that Black does not have the pair

of bishops any longer.

**14 Nxe7+**

White releases the tension in the centre to transform his advantage in activity into a structural one.

**14 ... Qxe7 15 Bxd4 exd4 16 Nb5!**



*Picking up the pawn*

So far, White has not done anything magical, yet Black is already in danger because his d4-pawn is likely to be lost.

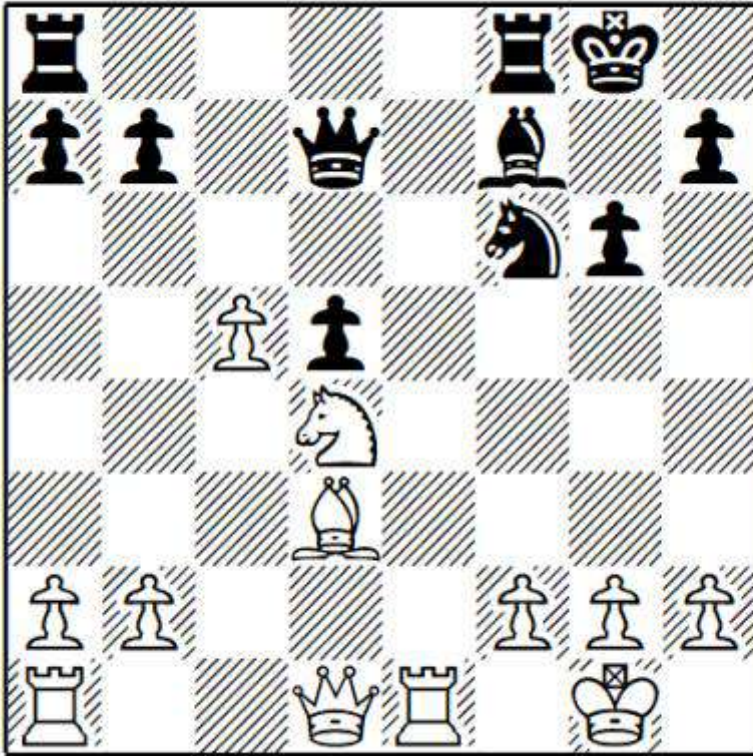
**16 ... d5**

After 16 ... Rac8 17 Re1 Qd7 18 Nxa7 Rc5 19 Nb5 Bxc4 20 Bxc4+ Rxc4 21 Nxd4 White emerges with an extra pawn as well.

With the text move, Black is seeking to activate his forces and obtain counterplay, but White can keep the pressure on with precise play.

**Question:** Do you see how he should continue?

*Answer: 17 Re1 Qd7 18 Nxd4 Bf7 19 c5!*



*White fixed the IQP*

This is much stronger than opening the centre. Now the knight on d4 does a great job and White dominates the game – and he is still a pawn up. Whereas after 19 cxd5? Bxd5 Black at least has the activity he was looking for.

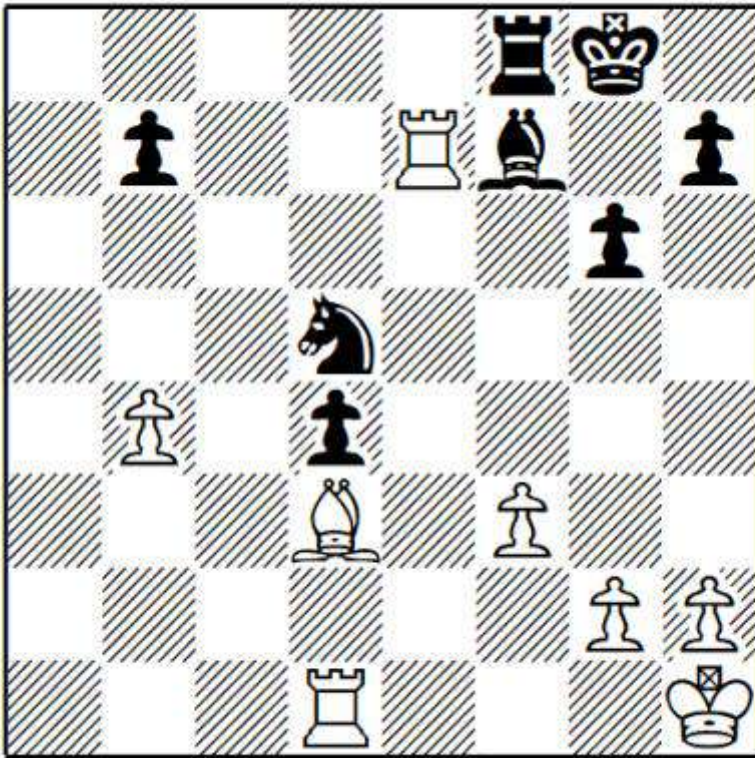
**19 ... Ne4 20 Rc1 Qd8 21 f3 Qf6 22 Bf1 Ng5 23 Qd2**

White is improving his position slowly, not allowing any counterplay.

**23 ... Rad8 24 b4 Ne6 25 Nb5 a5 26 a3 axb4 27 axb4 Nf4 28 Nd6 Rxd6 29 cxd6 Qxd6**

Black gave up the exchange in order to get rid of the strong knight, but now the extra material means White is winning technically.

**30 Rcd1 Rd8 31 Qd4 Ne6 32 Qf6 Rf8 33 Kh1 Qd7 34 Bc4 Nc7 35 Bd3 d4 36 Qe7 Qxe7 37 Rxe7 Nd5**



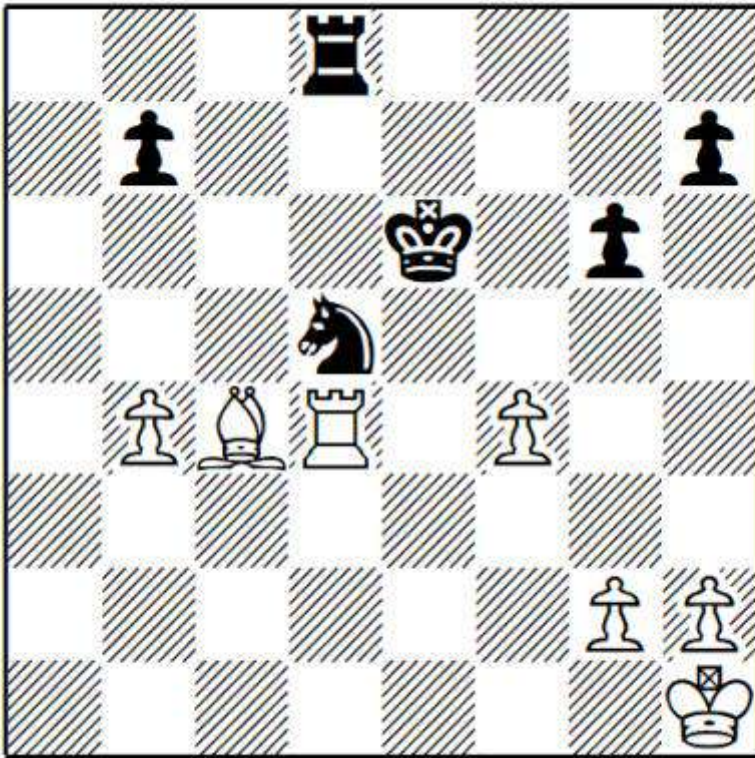
*How to finish the game?*

**Question:** Can you spot the fastest way to finish the game?

**Answer: 38 Rxf7!**

White simplifies the game and Black is lost with no chances whatsoever.

**38 ... Kxf7 39 Bc4 Ke6 40 Rxd4 Rd8 41 f4**



*Black cannot move*

Maintaining the “perpetual” pin. White can now activate his king before exchanging everything on d5 to reach an easily winning pawn endgame.

**41 ... b5 42 Bb3**

42 Bxb5 might win a pawn but the pin is worth more than that!

**42 ... g5 43 g3 1-0**

We’ll see White’s set-up versus ... f7-f5 again in the next game.

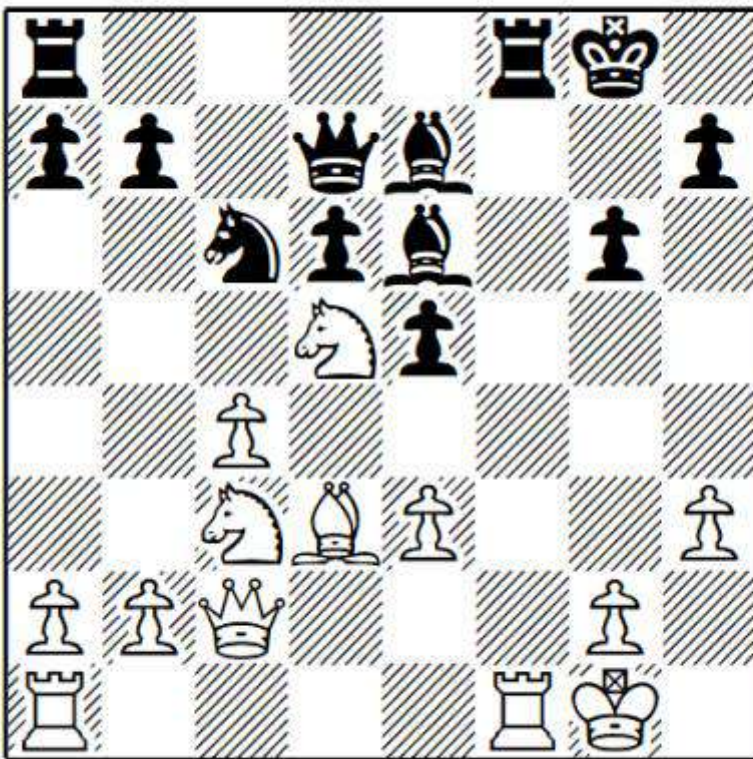
*Game 57*

**J.Hacker-E.Frisk**

Lund 2019

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 e5 5 Nb5 d6 6 c4 Be7 7 N5c3 f5 8 exf5 Bxf5 9 Bd3 Be6 10 Nd5 Nf6 11 Nbc3 0-0 12 0-0 Nd4**

From here it is hard to suggest a plan for Black, who lacks active prospects. Nonetheless, 12 ... Qd7 is a sensible alternative because the d4-knight often turns out to be a target rather than a strong piece in the centre. Play might continue 13 Be3 Ng4 (13 ... Rae8 was seen in B.Lelumees-T.Kabisch, Stuttgart 2017, when there are many ideas for White; I like 14 Qa4! a6 15 Rad1 Ng4 16 Be4 with light-squared dominance) 14 Qc2! (a recurring pattern in this variation: we are not afraid of our dark-squared bishop being exchanged for a black knight) 14 ... g6 15 h3!? Nxe3 16 fxe3! and White again has excellent control over the light squares.

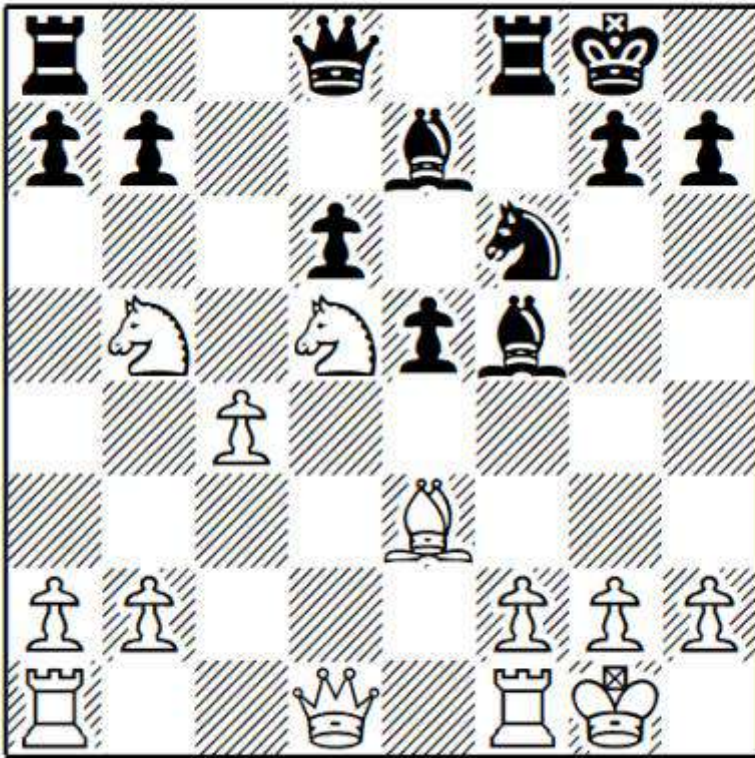


*Light square control*

### **13 Be3 Nf5**

In the previous game Black tried to prepare ... Nf5 with 13 ... g6. This time he plays it once.

**14 Bxf5 Bxf5 15 Nb5!**



### *Concrete threats*

White is threatening to win a pawn in several ways. If allowed he can play 16 Nxe7 and 17 Qxd6 or simply take on a7.

#### **15 ... Ng4**

Now the game changes its slow and positional character and becomes wild and complicated. The good thing is that White is already winning objectively.

Black should probably try to make things complicated with 15 ... Nxd5 16 Qxd5+ Rf7 17 Qxb7 (after 17 Nxa7 Qd7 18 Nb5 Be6 19 Qd3 Qc6 Black gains some counterplay; while 17 Rad1 a6 18 Nxd6?? Bxd6 19 Qxd6 Rd7 would be a way to go wrong) 17 ... Rb8 (if 17 ... Bd3 18 Rfd1 Bxc4 then 19 Nxd6 Bxd6 20 Qc6 regains the piece and keeps the pawn) 18 Qd5 a6 19 Na7 Rxb2 20 Nc6 Qd7 21 Nxe7+ Qxe7 22 Rfd1 and White is better without risk (whereas 22 Qa8+ Rf8 23 Qxa6 only offers a slight edge).

#### **16 Bxa7 Bh4 17 f3**

White is prompting a sacrifice and the consequences will leave him on top.

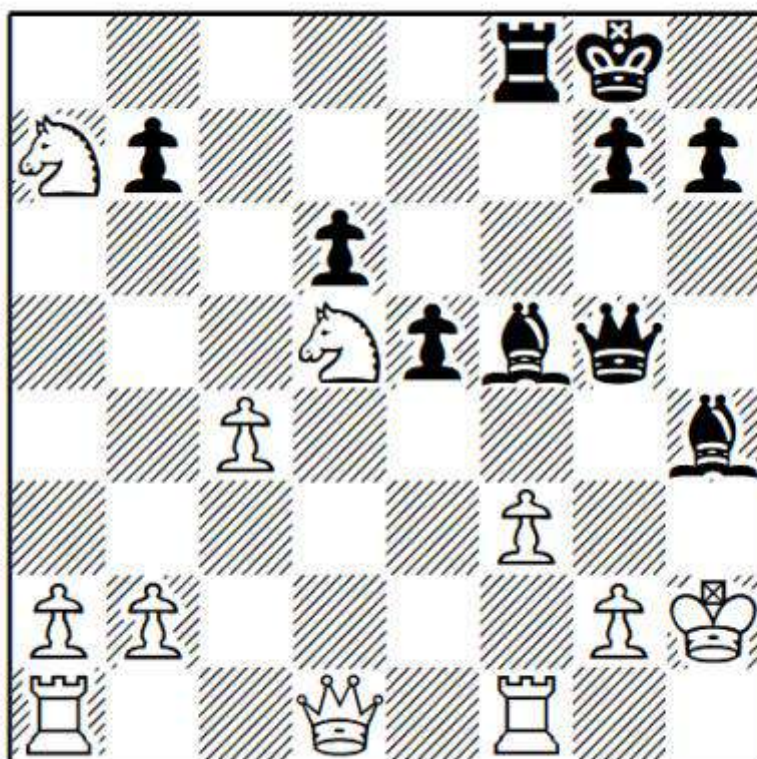
**17 ... Nxf2**

Interesting, forcing – and unsound. But after 17 ... Nf6 18 Bf2 White consolidates easily with a healthy extra pawn and ongoing pressure.

**18 Kxf2 Rxa7!?**

The best practical choice, since 18 ... Qg5 19 Bf2! is easy for humans to defend.

**19 Nxa7 Qg5**



*How to defend?*

**Question:** Now that White no longer has Bf2, how would you defend your king?

**Answer: 20 g4!**

The only way to win. All other moves leave Black on top. For example:  
a) 20 Kg1?? Bg3 21 Re1 Qh4 22 Qd2 Qh2+ 23 Kf1 Bg4 and wins.

b) 20 Ne7+? Qxe7 is also much better for Black, who has already regained some of the material and the white king remains in danger.

**20 ... Bf2**

After 20 ... Bxg4 21 fxg4 Rxf1 22 Qxf1 Qxg4 23 Qd3 White wins, as Black has hardly anything left.

**21 Rxf2 Bxg4 22 Rg2?!**

22 Qh1 would have finished the game sooner.

**22 ... Qh4+ 23 Kg1 Bxf3 24 Qe1**

The only move to remain winning. Black simply has no time to capture the white rook.

**24 ... Qxc4 25 Ne7+ Kh8 26 Qf2 Qe6 27 Nac8**

White is too much material up and the pin on the f-file prevents any quick counterplay.

**27 ... e4 28 Rf1 Rf6 29 Qb6 Qd7 30 Qb3!**

Forcing the black queen into a passive position.

**30 ... Qe8 31 Rg3 h6 32 Qd5 g5 33 Rgxf3 exf3 34 Qd4 1-0**

Black resigned in view of the upcoming mass exchanges, after which White converts his material plus.

### *Game 58*

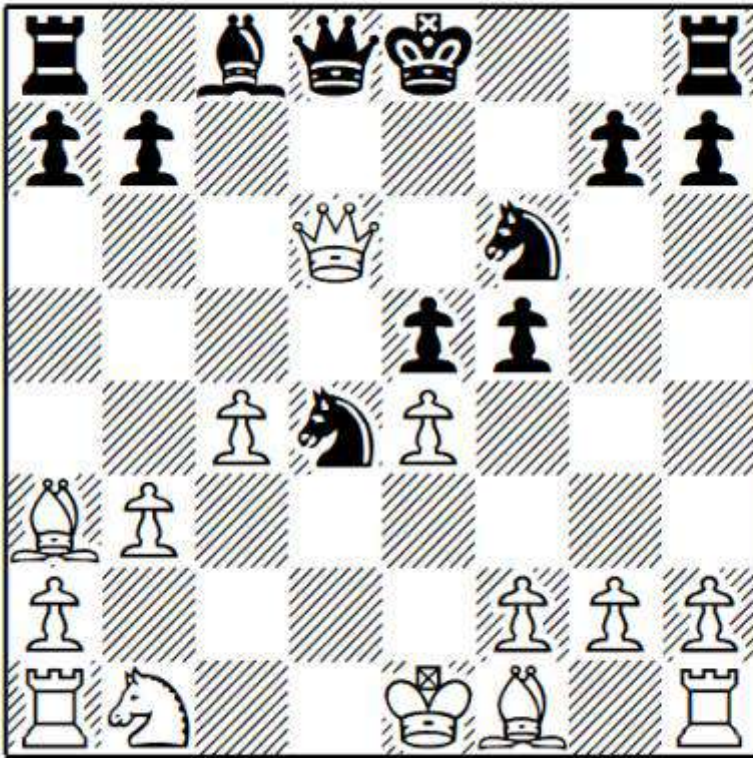
**V.Nevostrujev-V.Sherbakov**

Arkhangelsk 1996

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 e5 5 Nb5 d6 6 c4 Be7 7 b3**

I recommend the move order with 7 N5c3 because it is more flexible. One advantage of not committing to b2-b3 prematurely is that, in the case of 7 ... f5, it is more useful to have a knight on c3 than a pawn on b3. The latter can be more useful if Black threatens ... Bg5, exchanging dark-squared bishops, but so far Black has not shown this intention.

More concretely, after 7 N5c3 f5 8 exf5 Bxf5 9 Bd3 Be6 10 Nd5 we enter our comfortable variation from the previous two games. Whereas after 7 b3 f5 White cannot utilize the b-pawn move with 8 Ba3, since 8 ... Nf6! 9 Nxd6+ Bxd6 10 Qxd6 Nd4! is a well-known pawn sacrifice, giving Black the advantage.



*Great compensation*

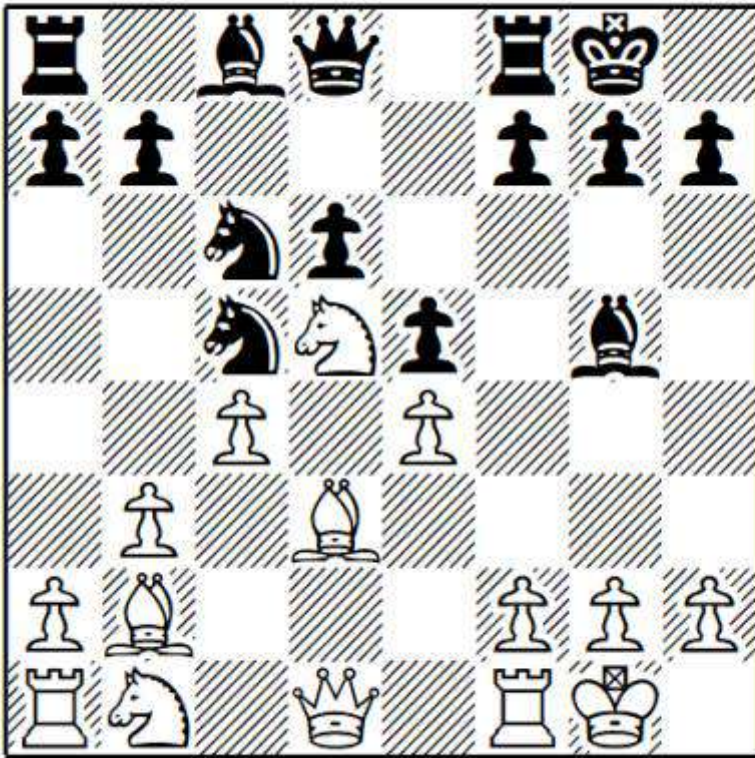
**7 ... Nf6**

Black declines to test White's move order with 7 ... f5, preferring to develop in a normal way.

**8 Bd3 0-0 9 0-0 Nd7 10 N5c3**

Finally, after a slight deviation by White, we reach the main line from the introduction.

**10 ... Nc5 11 Nd5 Bg5 12 Bb2!?**



*White avoids the exchange*

In the theoretical section we concentrated on 12 Ba3, and continue this in the next game, but 12 Bb2 is also in accordance with our overall strategic plan as it avoids the exchange of dark-squared bishops.

**12 ... a6**

One drawback of 12 Bb2 is that Black can consider 12 ... f5, intending to answer 13 exf5 with 13 ... Nxd3 14 Qxd3 Bxf5 and a roughly balanced position; whereas after 12 Ba3 an immediate 12 ... f5 is hardly recommendable, as we saw in the introduction.

**13 Nbc3 Rb8 14 b4 Ne6 15 g3**

The idea of 16 f4 is becoming concrete now. Such an aggressive move is connected with some risk as well, because our kingside pawns advance quite far. However, if we wait for the right moment and our pieces cover the holes, f2-f4 can pose serious problems for Black.

That said, while I recommend playing f2-f4 at some point, be careful not to allow any tactical counterchances. Usually, Black does not threaten



**Answer: 18 Nxb4! Qb6+ 19 Kh1 Qxb4 20 Rb1!**

I think it is enough to foresee those three moves. The arising threats against the kingside, as well as the discovered attacks against the black queen, make the position objectively winning for White.

**20 ... Nc7**

Retreating the queen is no better; i.e. 20 ... Qd8 21 Nd5 Qd8 22 f5 Nc7 23 f6! and wins.

**21 Nd5 Nxd5 22 exd5**

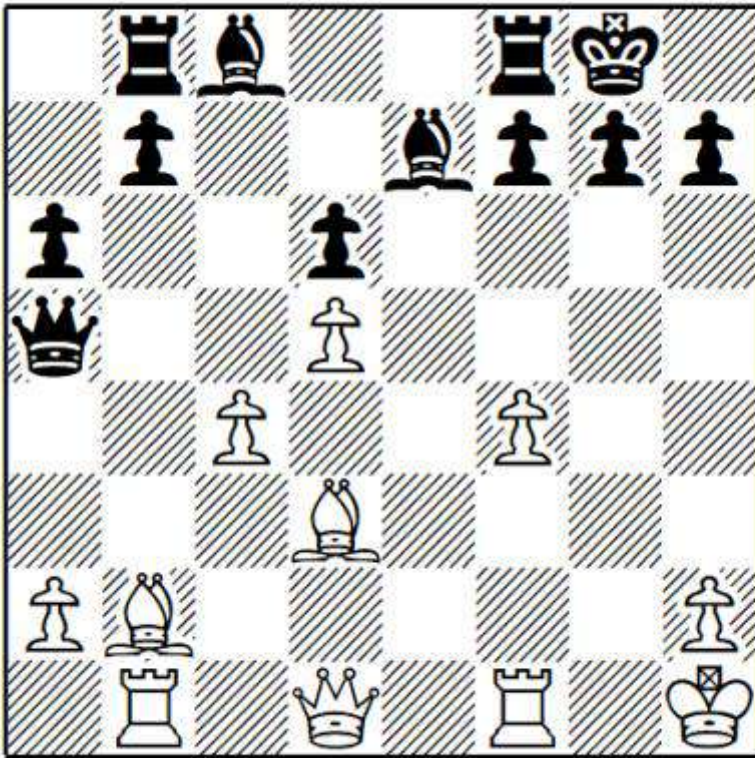
Threatening the devastating 23 Bxg7.

**22 ... Qa5?**

This is not the most tenacious defence.

a) 22 ... f6 doesn't help at all. White wins easily after 23 Qh5 (or just 23 Bxf6) 23 ... f5 24 Bxg7 etc.

b) 22 ... g6 is the best defence, especially from a practical point of view. If White now goes for material with 23 Bf6?, Black gets chances to survive after 23 ... Qxb1! 24 Qxb1 Bxf6, having escaped with rook, bishop and pawn for the queen. Therefore White should decline to cash in and instead play for a mating attack with, for instance, 23 Qe2 Re8 24 Rg1 b5 25 Qh5, intending a fatal sacrifice on g6.



*Find the best way to attack!*

**Question:** White can now finish the game in nice style. Can you calculate it until the end?

**Answer:** White can win with a classic double bishop sacrifice.

**23 Bxh7+ Kxh7 24 Qh5+ Kg8 25 Bxg7 f6**

Or 25 ... Kxg7 26 Rg1+ Kf6 27 Qf6 mate.

**26 Rg1! 1-0**

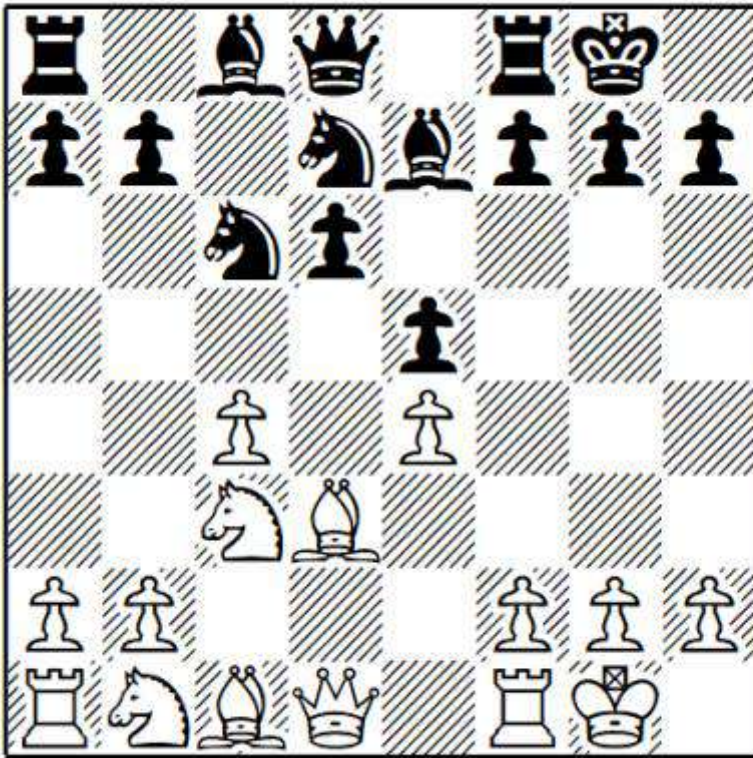
Mate is unavoidable, so Black resigned.

*Game 59*

**E.Alekseev-A.Moiseenko**

Russian Team Championship 2005

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 e5 5 Nb5 d6 6 c4 Be7 7 N5c3 Nf6 8 Bd3 0-0 9 0-0 Nd7**



### *Black's strongest plan*

As mentioned in the introduction, this is the most challenging plan against our system. Black regroupes the knight and wants to exchange the dark-squared bishops. White could still play for an edge, as you can see in the next note, but I like the idea of preserving our bishop which can then fight for the dark squares in the centre.

#### **10 b3**

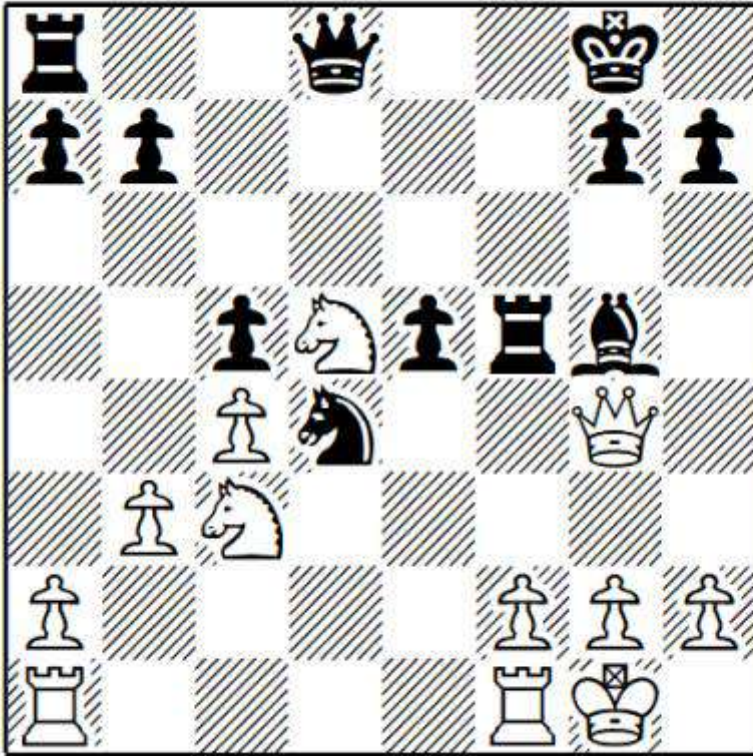
In later games Alekseev has preferred to develop his knights with 10 Nd5 Bg5 11 Nbc3. For example: 11 ... Bxc1 12 Rxc1 Nc5 13 Bb1 Ne6 14 Qd3 Qg5? 15 f4! Nxf4 16 Nxf4 exf4 17 e5 g6 18 exd6 and White was clearly better in E.Alekseev-D.Yevseev, St. Petersburg 2012.

#### **10 ... Bg5 11 Ba3 Nc5 12 Nd5 Kh8**

Black has ideas of a later ... f7-f5, prepared by ... g7-g6, and so first tucks his king out of the way in the corner.

**Remember:** The immediate 12 ... f5?! would be wrong because of 13 Bxc5 dxc5 14 exf5 Bxf5 15 Bxf5 Rxf5 16 Qg4 Nd4 17 Nbc3 and White

dominates the light squares.



### *Light square control*

#### **13 Nbc3 Bh6 14 Re1?!**

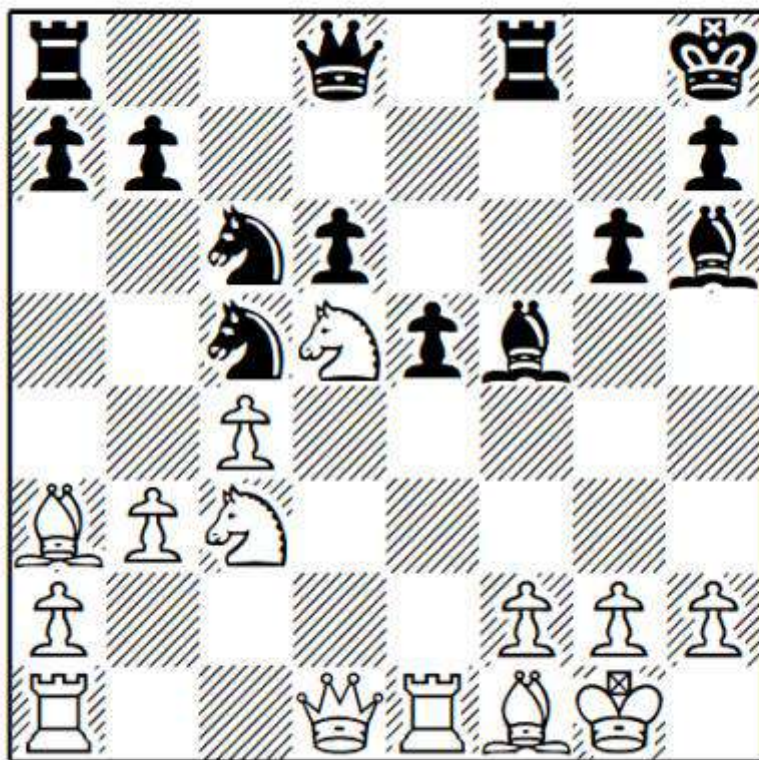
I'm not sure the rook has much to do on the e1-square, so let's improve a few other pieces instead: 14 Bc2 g6 15 Bb2 and White is well prepared for ... f7-f5; for example, 15 ... f5 16 exf5 Bxf5 17 Bxf5 Rxf5 and White is better, considering his safer king and excellent minor pieces. Another possibility is 14 b4 Ne6 15 Bb2 a5, when the ... g7-g6 plan would leave the long diagonal too vulnerable.

#### **14 ... g6**

Again 14 ... f5 15 exf5 Bxf5 16 Bxf5 Rxf5 would be ideal for White who has perfect central squares for his knights. With ... g7-g6 Moiseenko prepares ... f7-f5 by giving himself the option of recapturing there with the g-pawn. He also enables his bishop to retreat to g7, both to defend the kingside dark squares and avoid the possibility of the white queen appearing at h5 with tempo.

### 15 Bf1 f5 16 exf5 Bxf5

With the white bishop back on f1 Black has the freedom to recapture here with his bishop. Indeed, 16 ... gxf5?! would now be a mistake, allowing the white queen to enter the weakened kingside; e.g. 17 Qh5 Bg7 18 Rad1 and Black has a lot of worries.



*Evaluate the position*

Let's sum up what has happened and try to evaluate the outcome.

White's position is still much better from a static point of view. Black has weak central pawns and White thereby has excellent squares for his minor pieces. However, finding an active plan for White is not so easy, while Black has dynamic potential and good activity too (maybe ... Nd4 is a serious move to consider).

As the game progresses, Alekseev misplays his position and quickly ends up worse.

### 17 Ne3

Removing the annoying f5-bishop is a reasonable idea, but White's further intentions don't work out as desired. Possibly 17 b4 Ne6 18 Bb2 was the way to go, when Ne3 is still an option, or if 18 ... Bg7 then 19 Ne2, or 18 ... Ncd4 19 Nb5!?

**17 ... Nd4 18 Nxf5 Rxf5 19 Ne4?**

Instead, 19 Nd5! Qf8 20 f3 would still be okay for White.

**19 ... Nxe4 20 Rxe4**

In just a moment White could play something like 21 Bb2 Ne6 22 Bd3 Qb6 23 Qc2 Raf8 24 Rf1 with a good position. But he isn't given a moment, since Black now starts to create concrete threats and White has trouble with his f2-pawn.

**20 ... Qb6 21 Rh4?**

This is no good at all, so let's check the alternatives.

a) 21 Bb2? Ne6 22 Re2 Raf8 23 Qc2 fails to simply 23 ... Rxf2! 24 Rxf2 Rxf2 25 Qxf2 Be3 and wins.

b) 21 Rb1! was the only way to defend, intending 21 ... Raf8 22 Rb2, when Black is pressing, but White has avoided an immediate disaster. It's significant that Black is unable to exploit the vulnerable a3-bishop; e.g. 22 ... Nb5 (22 ... Qa5? drops the d6-pawn, and 22 ... R8f6 is answered by 23 Qe1!) 23 c5! dxc5 24 Bxb5 Qxb5 25 Rde2 and White will regain the pawn after Bb2 and Qe1.

**21 ... Bg5?!**

The computer shows that 21 ... Raf8! was already winning for Black; e.g. 22 Rxh6 (or 22 c5 Qc6) 22 ... Rxf2 23 c5 (or 23 Bd3 Ne2+) 23 ... Rxf1+ 24 Qxf1 Rxf1+ 25 Rxf1 Qa5 26 Bc1 (or 26 Bb2 Qd2) 26 ... Ne2+ 27 Kh1 Nxc1 28 Rxc1 Qd2 etc.

**22 Rxd4**

White is forced to give up the exchange and then stands clearly worse, but at least he can still fight.

**22 ... exd4 23 Bd3 Re5 24 Qg4 Bf6 25 Rf1 Rae8 26 Bc1 Re1 27 Bd2 Rxf1+ 28 Kxf1**

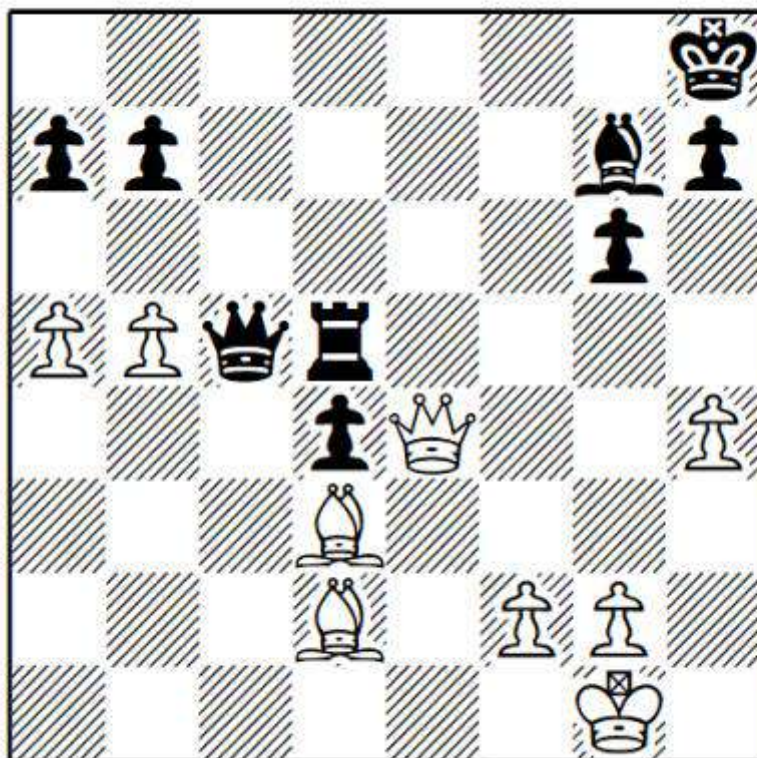
A clever defensive set-up. The bishops prevent the black rook from entering and White can put a lot of resistance.

**28 ... Qc7 29 Qf3 Bg7 30 Kg1 Qc6 31 Qf7 Rf8 32 Qe6 Qa6 33 a4 Qb6 34 b4 Qc6 35 b5 Qc5 36 a5 Qa3 37 Qe2 d5?! 38 cxd5 Rd8 39 h4 Rxd5 40 Qe4**

White has overcome the toughest part and it is now Black who needs to be careful. In time trouble he commits a serious error.

**40 ... Qc5?**

The tables turn at the critical 40th move, as Black's pieces are inconveniently placed for a moment.



*What did Black miss?*

**Question:** How can White make use of this temporary misplacement and fight for the advantage?

**Answer:** Deflection.

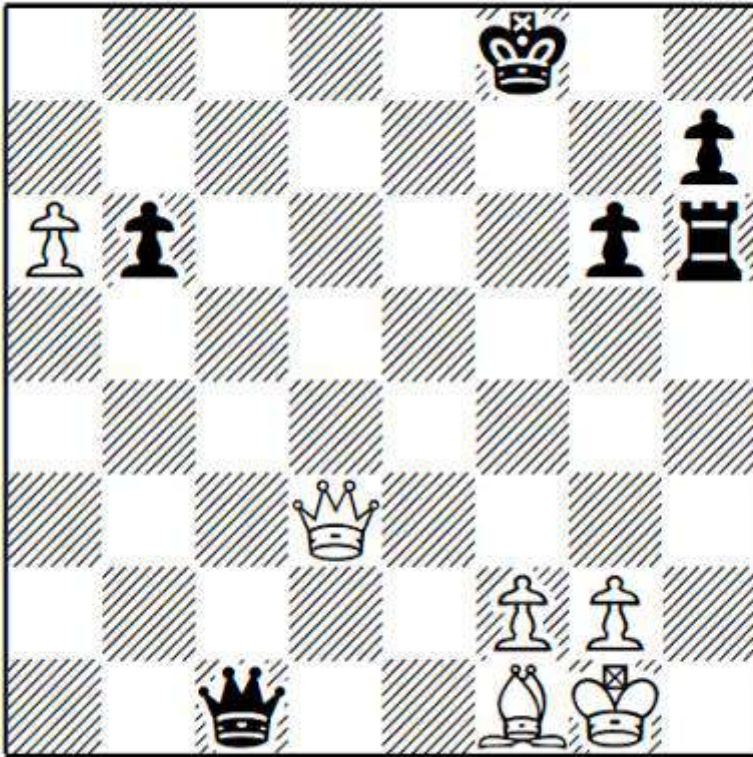
**41 h5! Rxh5**

Not 41 ... gxh5?? 42 Qxh7 mate, while after 41 ... Qd6 42 h6! Bf8 43 Bf4 Black's queen is unable to cover both the rook on d5 and the e5-square; e.g. 43 ... Qd7 44 Be5 Kg8 45 Bc4 and White wins.

**42 Qxb7 Bh6?!**

42 ... Be5 was a better practical try, hoping for 43 b6? axb6 44 a6 Qa3 and White should take the perpetual since 45 a7?? Qa1+ 46 Bf1 Rh1+! is mate next move. However, 43 f4! solves the problem, so that 43 ... Bd6 44 b6! is back on, while 43 ... Qc7 44 Qa8+ Qb8 only delays things; e.g. 45 Qc6 Bd6 46 b6! axb6 47 a6 Rc5 48 Qa4 Bf8 (or 48 ... Qa7 49 Qxd4+) 49 a7 Qa8 50 Be4 and White wins.

**43 Bxh6 Rxh6 44 b6! axb6 45 a6 Qc1+ 46 Bf1 d3 47 Qb8+ Kg7 48 Qe5+ Kf7 49 Qd5+ Kg7 50 Qd4+ Kf8 51 Qxd3**



*A stranded rook*

A nice picture. The passed pawn will run, while the rook is stuck on the other side of the board.

**51 ... Qa1 52 Qf3+ Kg7 53 Qb7+ Kf6 54 a7 Qe5 55 Qf3+ Kg7 56 g3 1-0**

# Chapter Nine

## Sveshnikov Variation

### Introduction

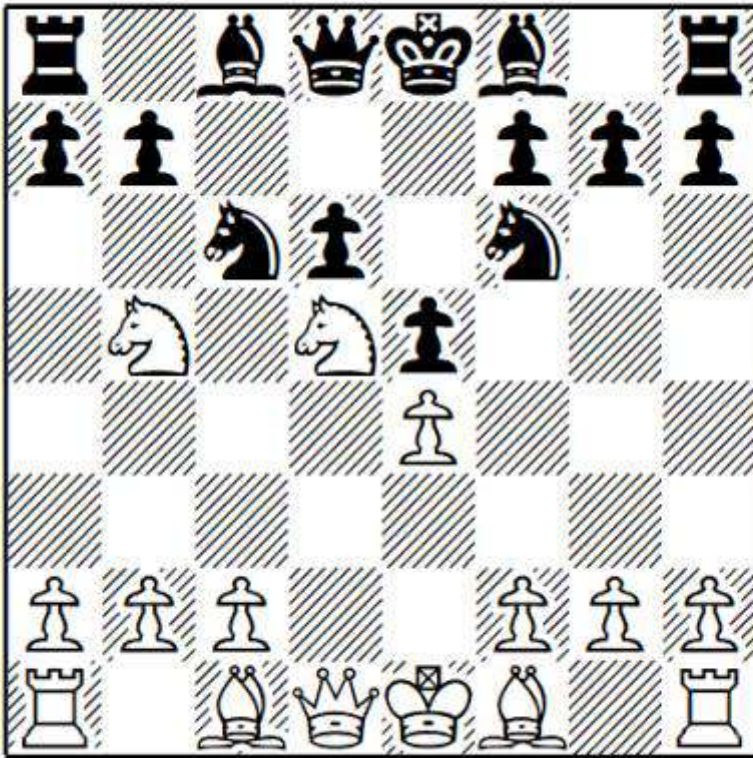
The idea of ... e7-e5, attacking a white knight on d4, is one of the oldest in the Sicilian. Usually this took the form of 2 ... Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 e5, which we looked at in the previous chapter, but 4 ... Nf6 5 Nc3 e5 was seen too, and Lasker used it in a World Championship game against Schlechter.

Nonetheless, for a long time this variation was regarded as suspicious at best, as it weakens the d6- and d5-squares and White can smoothly continue with 6 Ndb5. It wasn't until the 1970s, when the Russian grandmasters and theoreticians Evgeny Sveshnikov and Gennadi Timoshchenko discovered its dynamic potential in return for the structural concession, that the opening began to be taken seriously. Since then its popularity has grown steadily and nowadays it is played at every level.

I am therefore proposing to go for 7 Nd5, which you can play with general positional understanding rather than remembering loads of concrete analysis. Although not as critical perhaps as 7 Bg5, theoretically speaking, 7 Nd5 is more than a surprise weapon. It remains a profound choice, seen regularly in grandmaster games up to the highest level. Caruana even employed it in his world championship match with Carlsen.

Our starting position arises after the following moves:

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 e5 6 Ndb5 d6 7 Nd5**



### *Out initial position*

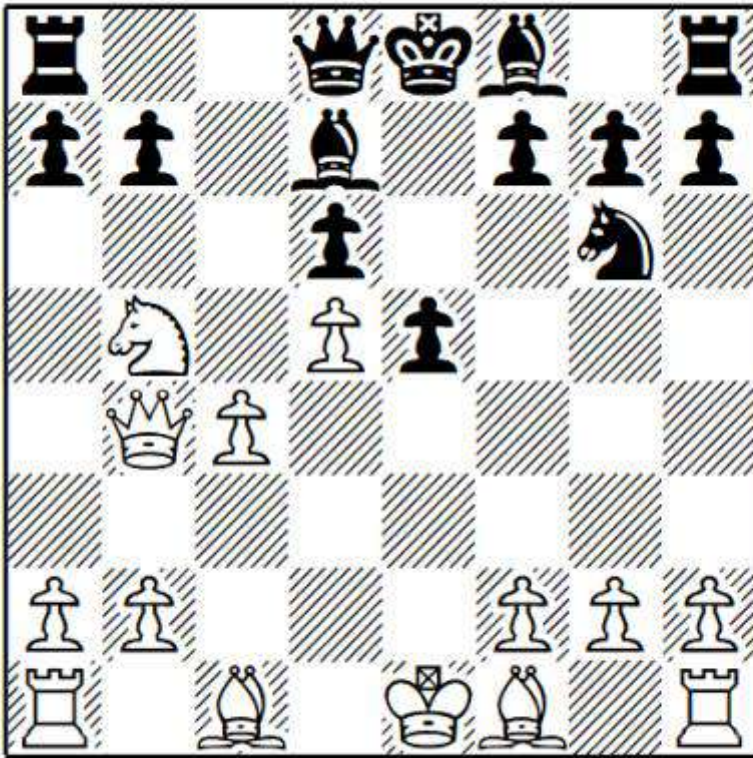
In view of the threatened  $Nc7+$  Black is obliged to exchange knights. On the one hand Black can now be happy to have filled in the hole on d5. On the other, the c6-knight will be attacked after  $8\ cxd5$ , which gives White a little freedom to set up a position.

**7 ... Nxd5 8 exd5 Nb8**

Returning the knight to b8 is Black's most popular option.

The alternative is  $8\ \dots\ Ne7$ , transferring it to the kingside. Here Black must be accurate because White has some tricky ideas in mind. After  $9\ c4$  Black has two good choices:

a)  $9\ \dots\ Ng6\ 10\ Qa4\ Bd7\ 11\ Qb4$  is quite a topical line and has occurred in several of Carlsen's games.

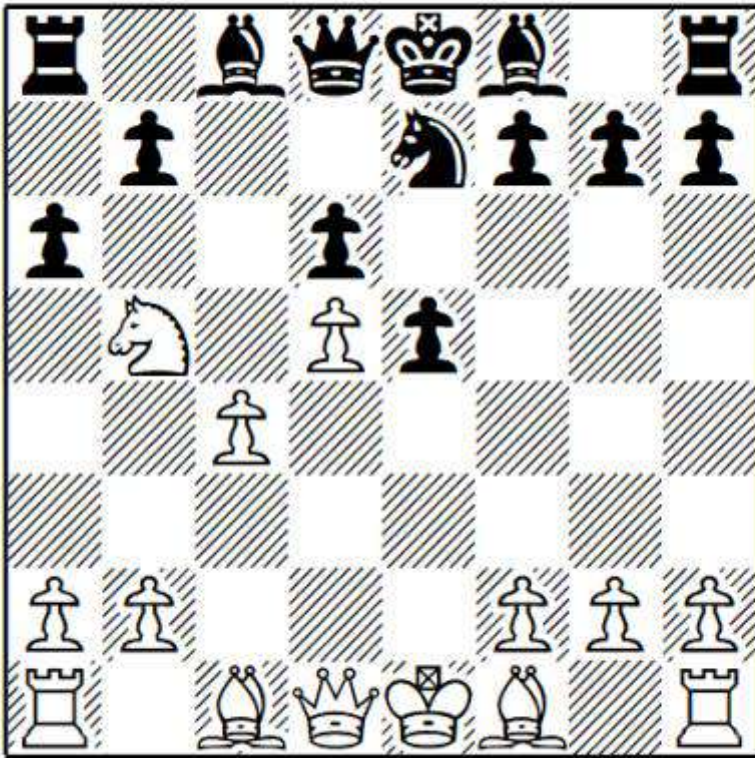


### *How to defend d6?*

Play continues with 11 ... Qb8 (not 11 ... Bc8?! 12 Be3 a6 13 Nc3 and White has good control over the queenside) 12 h4 h5, and now Game 60 saw 13 Be3 b6 14 Be2 with a complex middlegame ahead.

b) 9 ... Nf5 is the main alternative but seems less critical; for example, 10 Bd3 Be7 (Black prefers 10 ... g6 in Game 61) 11 0-0 0-0 12 f4!? exf4 (not 12 ... Qb6+ 13 Kh1 Ne3? since 14 Bxe3 Qxe3 15 Qc2 gives White a huge lead in development) 13 Bxf4 a6 14 Nc3 and White is clearly better.

c) 9 ... a6? is a well-known blunder, after which White can already decide the game.



*A nice trap*

**Question:** Can you find out how?

**Answer:** 10 Qa4! and Black has no defence: 10 ... axb5 (not 10 ... Bd7?? 11 Nxd6 mate) 11 Qxa8 wins the exchange and the queen will easily find a way back.

Note that all moves other than 8 ... Nb8 and 8 ... Ne7 are just bad for Black: 8 ... Qa5+?? 9 Bd2 and 8 ... Na5?? 9 b4 both win a piece; 8 ... Nd4?? 9 Nxd4 exd4 10 Qxd4 wins a pawn for nothing; and 8 ... Nb4? 9 c3 Na6 10 Be3 gains time and gives us an easy position. Our knight can stay on b5 for quite a while; even capturing the a7-pawn might be a threat.

**9 a4**

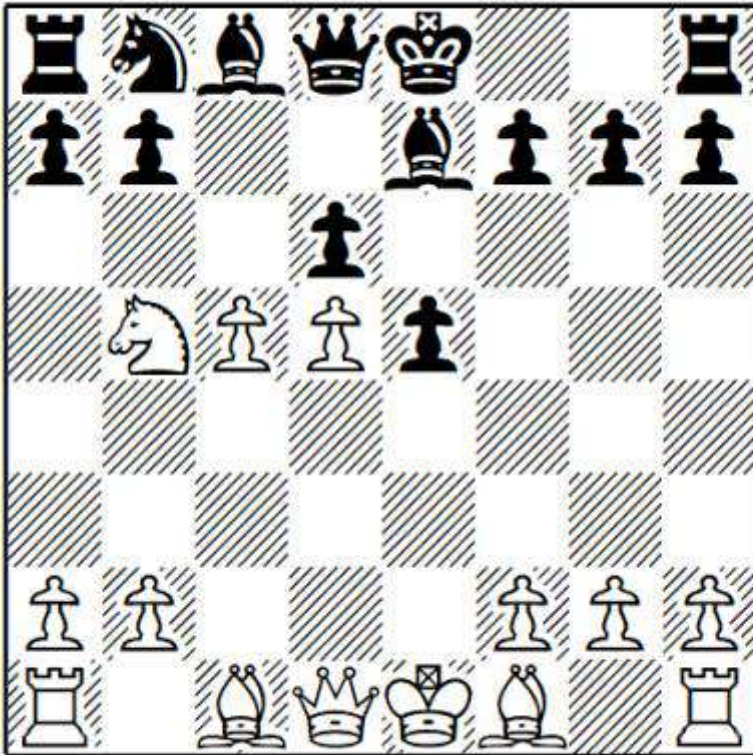
This is the main line nowadays and featured in a couple of the Caruana-Carlsen World Championship games.

The older 9 c4 has rather gone out of fashion. The reasons for this might be that, after 9 ... Be7, the idea of 10 Qa4 (as after 8 ... Ne7) has no point

because Black can already castle. In addition to that, 9 c4 is quite committal as it takes away the c4-square from the white knight, which no longer has plans of penetrating the weak b6-square.

Normal development does not harm Black either; for example, 10 Bd3 0-0 11 0-0 a6 12 Nc3 f5 13 f3 Nd7 14 Be3 Bg5 15 Bf2 Qf6 16 Qc2 Nc5 17 Be2 a5 and Black enjoys a good game.

One interesting idea is to follow up with an immediate 10 c5, as in Game 62.



*Is Black in danger?*

**Question:** How would you handle White's direct play?

**Answer:** 10 ... 0-0! and just wait for White to take on d6, as he cannot really increase the pressure; e.g. 11 Be2 Na6 12 cxd6 Bxd6 13 Nxd6 Qxd6 with a balanced position. Obviously not 10 ... dxc5?? because of 11 d6 followed by Nc7+ and wins.

**9 ... Be7**

If Black inserts 9 ... a6 10 Na3 here, or on the next couple of moves, it usually just means a transposition.

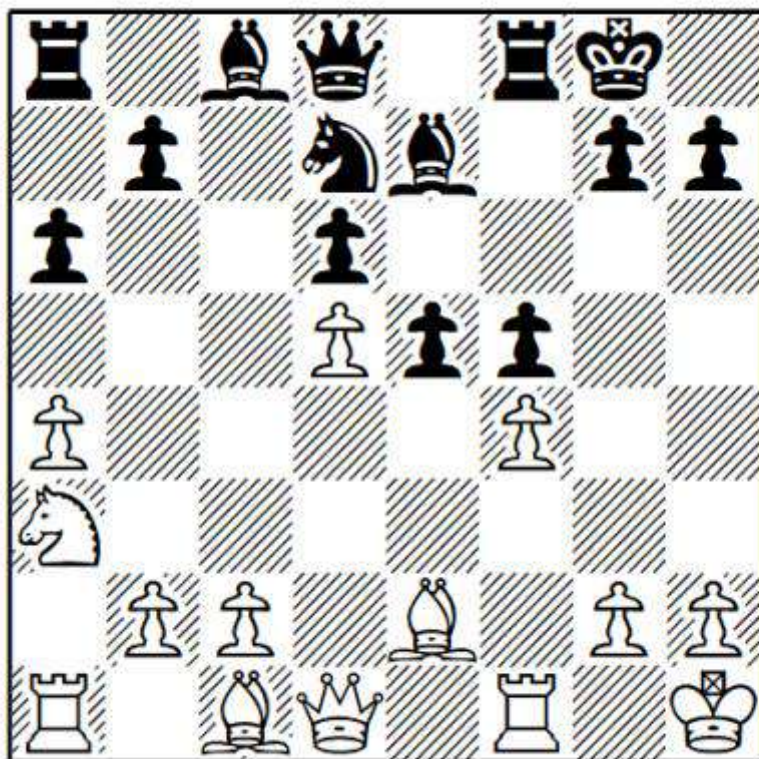
**10 Be2 0-0 11 0-0 Nd7**

Here 11 ... f5 12 f4 a6 13 Na3 Nd7 14 Kh1 is another route to the key diagram below.

**12 Kh1**

Another option is 12 Bd2, which we'll look at in Game 65.

**12 ... a6 13 Na3 f5 14 f4**



*Typical 14 f4!?*

This is a key position in this system and we should carefully understand what we can do and what we should avoid.

Black has a variety of choices here; e.g. 14 ... b6, 14 ... Qc7, 14 ... e4, 14 ... exf4, or 14 ... Bf6. Many of these are viable options which we'll look at in Games 63 and 64. But note that 14 ... e4? is a positional mistake as Black has no play with the centre closed, while White can increase the pressure on the queenside unhindered.

## 14 ... exf4 15 Bxf4

Black can now centralize the knight, either to c5 (having ruled out f4xe5 first) or else to e5 after the creative 15 ... g5!?. The latter move has been played by GM Sarin Nihal amongst others, so we should take it seriously. For details see Game 64.

We end the theoretical part at this point, but we will continue watching the middlegames from here on.

## Illustrative Games

In the first game Carlsen chooses a very aggressive set-up against Gelfand's 8 ... Ne7 and 9 ... Ng6, starting with the typical 10 Qa4, 11 Qb4 and 12 h4!?, which Carlsen had previously faced three times as Black. In Game 61, Fedoseev opts for 9 ... Nf5 instead, and we get to see a nice antidote against this.

After that we move on to 8 ... Nb8. We begin with an example of 9 c4 followed by the immediate 10 c5. Although Black has nothing to fear theoretically, it can nevertheless lead to interesting chances as we'll see in Game 62.

The remaining three games examine the main move 9 a4, which is the best try for an opening advantage.

Firstly, GM Markus Ragger goes for a surprising exchange of bishop for knight in Game 63, after which Black soon finds himself in trouble and Ragger goes on to win convincingly.

In Game 64 a young Indian prodigy tries the unconventional 15 ... g5!? against Vachier-Lagrave and comes out well from the opening, so we will also consider a possible improvement for White.

Finally, Game 65 features a very classical set-up by both sides, and White succeeds in a positional battle.

### *Game 60*

#### **Ma.Carlsen-B.Gelfand**

Legends of Chess, Chess24 (rapid) 2020

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 e5 6 Ndb5 d6 7 Nd5 Nxd5 8 exd5 Ne7 9 c4 Ng6**

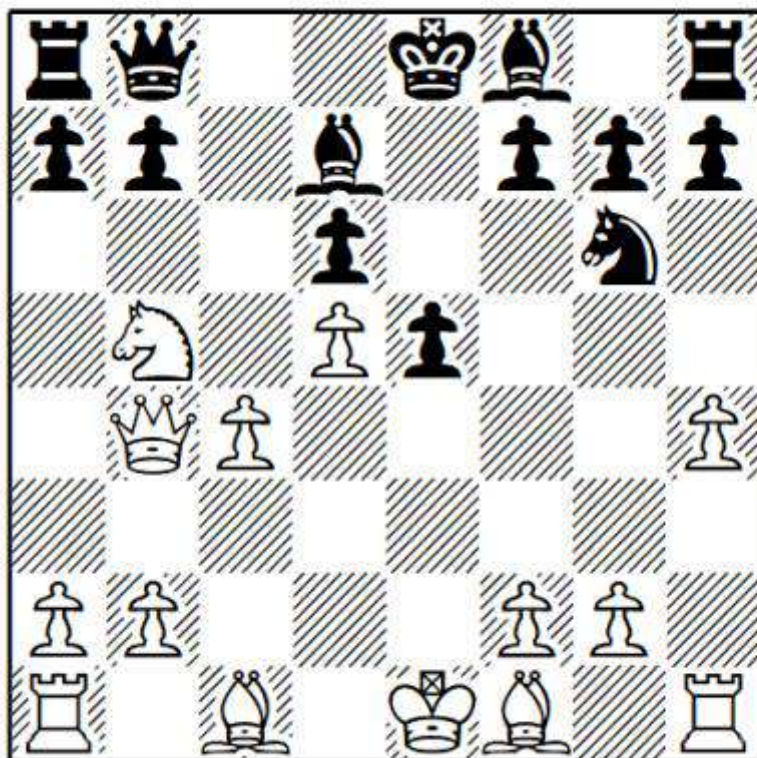
This is Black's main move here. We'll look at 9 ... Nf5 in the next game.

**Remember:** 9 ... a6? is a well-known blunder because of 10 Qa4! and White is virtually winning already. Nonetheless, it has occurred over 160 times in the databases, and even titled players have fallen for it.

**10 Qa4 Bd7 11 Qb4 Qb8**

The best way to defend the d-pawn.

**12 h4**



*12 ... h5 or 12 ... a6 - ?*

**Question:** White is seriously threatening 13 h5 and Black must decide how to react. What would be your decision?

**Answer: 12 ... h5!**

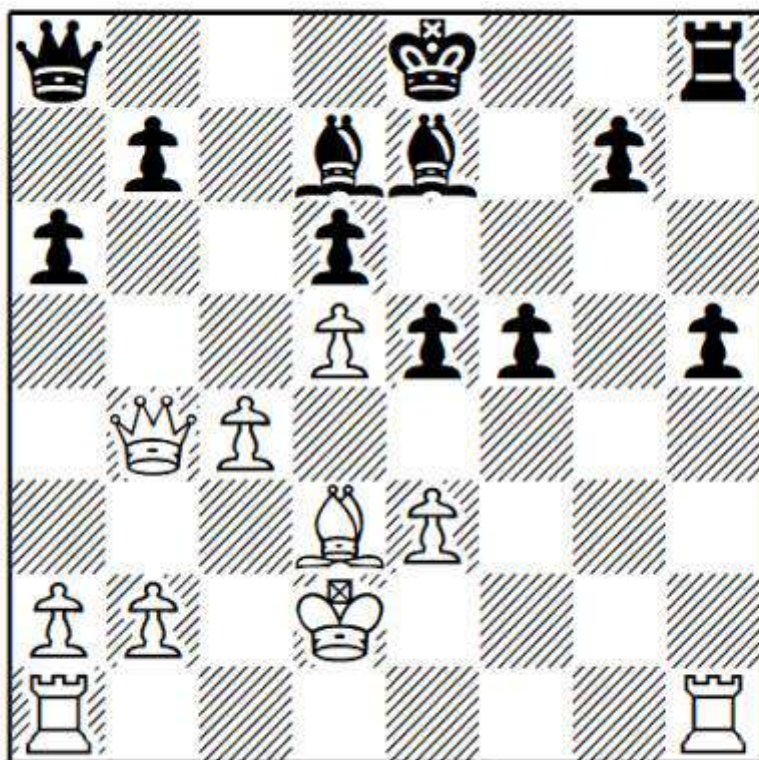
Preventing further expansion on the kingside and thus securing the knight's place on g6.

It is still too soon for 12 ... a6?, because of 13 h5! axb5 14 hxg6 fxc6 15 cxb5 and White is clearly better. He will be able to push his pawns on the

queenside far more easily than Black on the kingside. White scores an impressive 73% from here, and I'm surprised it isn't more than that.

### 13 Be3

Instead, 13 Bd3 was seen in M.Vachier Lagrave-Ma.Carlsen, World Rapid Championship, Moscow 2019. However, I think this has no real point since it encourages a later ... e5-e4, gaining time, as occurred on move 18. In addition, after 13 ... a6 14 Nc3 f5 15 Be3 Be7 16 Na4, Black had a strong option which he missed in the game: 16 ... Nxh4! would have given him an excellent position. If White now goes for 17 Nb6?, Black grabs another pawn with 17 ... Nxg2+ 18 Kd2 Nxe3 19 fxe3 Qd8 20 Nxa8 Qxa8 and stands much better despite the missing exchange.



*Black is much better*

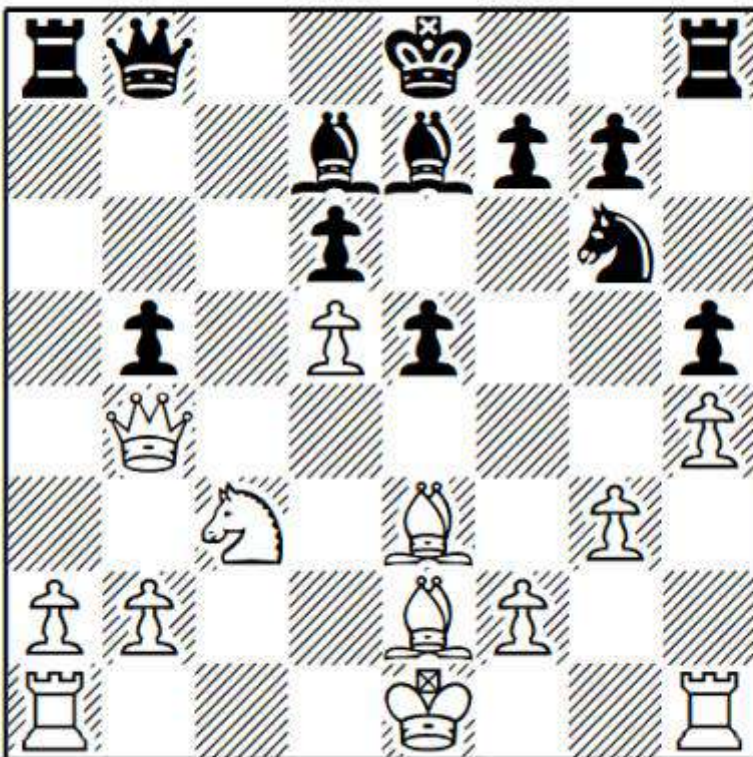
The kingside pawn mass looks very strong. After 17 Rxh4 Bxh4 18 Nb6 a5 19 Qb3 Qd8 20 Nxa8 Qxa8 too, Black's position is preferable.

### 13 ... b6

Gelfand goes for a sideline. The idea is to prevent c4-c5, which would follow after the careless 13 ... Be7; i.e. 14 c5 dxc5 15 Bxc5 a6 16 Nd6+ Kf8 17 Ne4 with a strong initiative for White.

The main line is 13 ... a6 14 Nc3, but this isn't fully satisfactory for Black either; e.g. 14 ... a5 (or 14 ... f5 15 Na4) 15 Qb3 a4 16 Qd1 Be7 17 g3 Qc8 18 Be2 Bg4 19 Rc1 (or 19 Bxg4 hxg4 20 c5!) 19 ... Bxe2 20 Qxe2 and White was slightly better at this stage in F.Caruana-Ma.Carlsen, World Championship (rapid tiebreak), London 2018.

**14 Be2 Be7 15 g3 a6 16 Nc3 b5 17 cxb5 axb5**



*Take the material?*

**Question:** Should White win the b5-pawn now?

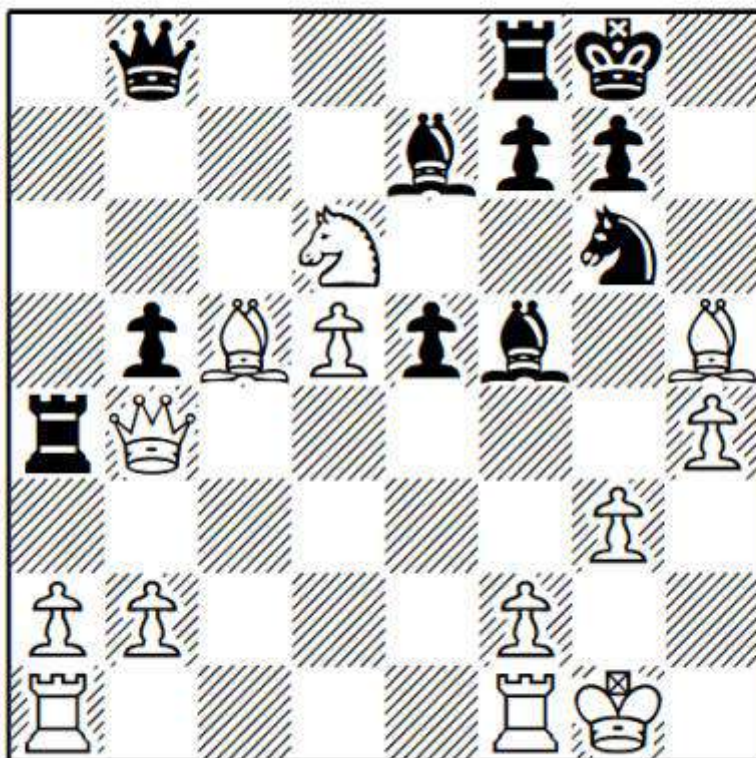
**18 0-0!**

**Answer:** No, the captures on b5 offer Black decent counterplay, e.g. 18 Bxb5 0-0 19 0-0 Bh3 or 18 Nxb5 0-0 19 a4 f5.

Quick development is more important for White. There is no rush to win a pawn in any case, since Carlsen will soon pick up the h5-pawn instead, which would no longer be possible after taking on b5.

**18 ... 0-0 19 Bxh5 Bd8 20 Ne4 Bf5 21 Nxd6 Be7 22 Bc5 Bh3?**

22 ... Ra4 was the best chance, when it may seem that White is in trouble.



*Is White in trouble?*

**Question:** Can you spot what Carlsen must have planned?

**Answer:** 23 Nxf5! (giving up the queen is the only way to keep an advantage) 23 ... Rxb4 24 Nxe7+ Nxe7 25 Bxb4 and White is better in a crazy position, thanks to his strong bishops and passed d-pawn.

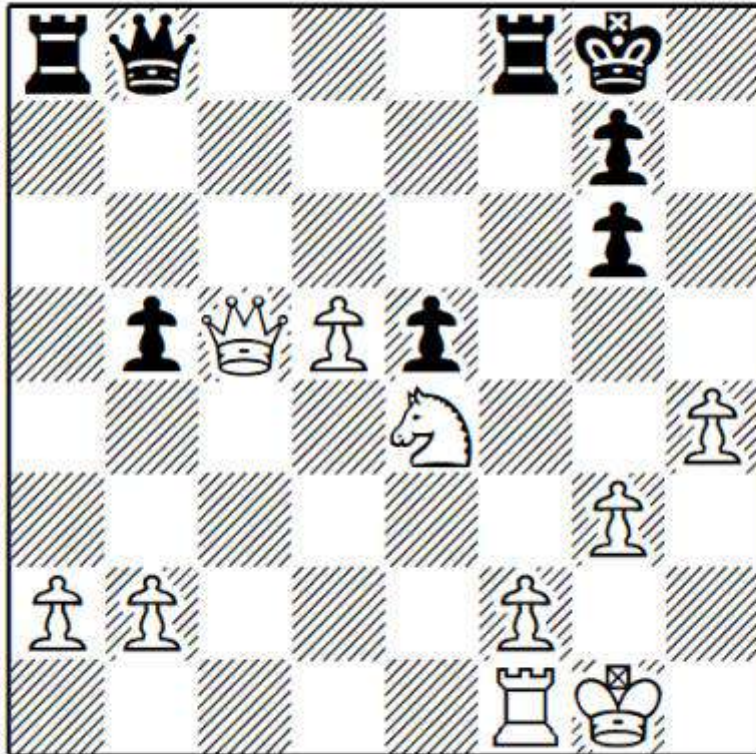
**23 Bxg6**

Simply 23 Rfc1 is even stronger, since after 23 ... Ra4 24 Qxb5 the tactics work in White's favour; e.g. 24 ... Bxd6 25 Qxa4.

**23 ... fxg6 24 Ne4**

Now 24 Rfc1 Ra4 25 Qxb5 Bxd6 26 Qxa4 is no longer possible because the f-file is open, and after 26 ... Bxc5 27 Rxc5 Qxb2 Black has crushing threats. 26 Qxb8 Bxb8 27 Bxf8 Kxf8 still keeps a slight plus for White, but in view of Black's bishops the position becomes quite double-edged.

**24 ... Bxc5 25 Qxc5 Bxf1 26 Rxf1**



*A nice exchange sac*

Since Carlsen gave up the exchange voluntarily I assume that he estimated this position as being very promising, probably even winning for White. So let's see how he converted his plus.

**26 ... Qc8 27 Qxb5 Qg4 28 Qc4 Rf4 29 d6+ Kh8 30 Qd5**

Black's problem is that he has no counterplay, while White has a stable knight and three extra pawns, of which the passed d-pawn which will soon decide the game.

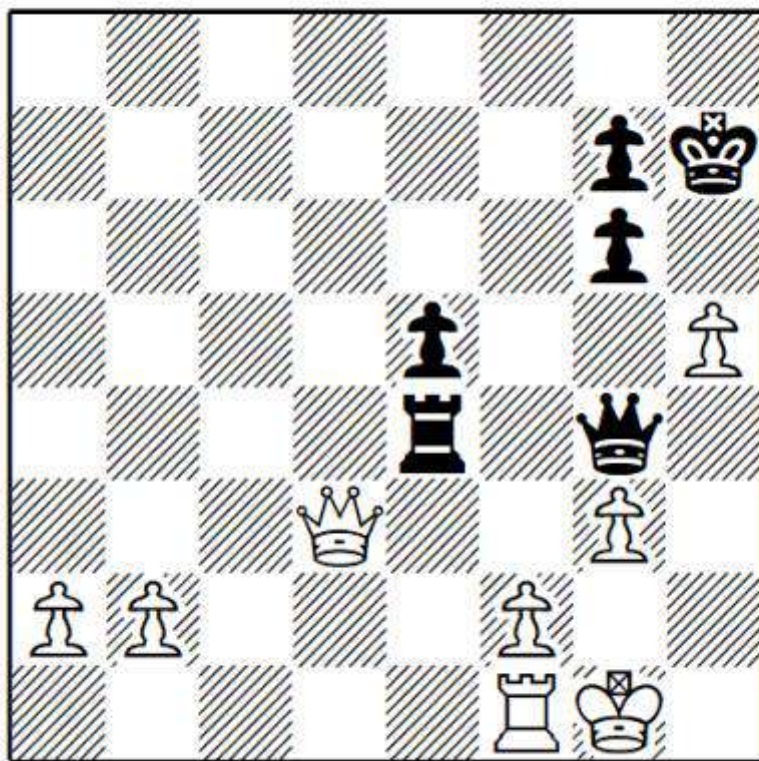
**30 ... Raf8 31 d7 Rxe4**

31 ... Rd8 32 Ng5 doesn't help Black at all.

**32 d8Q Rxd8 33 Qxd8+ Kh7 34 Qd1**

And the rest is just a matter of technique.

**34 ... Qf5 35 Qd3 Qg4 36 h5!**



*Softening Black's kingside*

I like this precise move which opens the position around Black's king.

**36 ... Kh6**

Neither capture works: 36 ... gxh5? 37 Re1 or 36 ... Qxh5? 37 Qxe4.

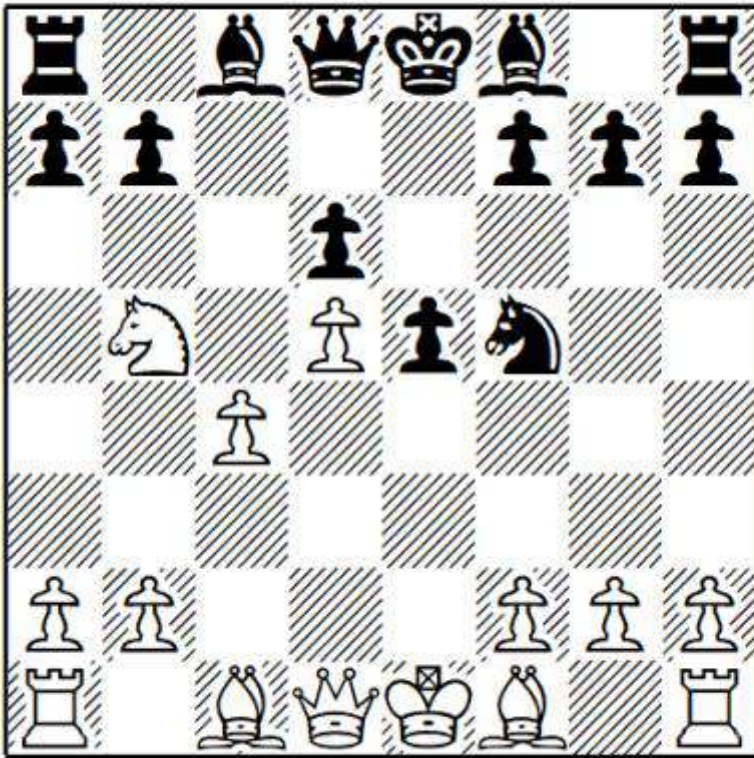
**37 Qd2+ g5 38 Qd6+ Kxh5 39 Kg2 Qf5 40 Rh1+ Rh4 41 Qd1+ 1-0**

*Game 61*

**E.Inarkiev-V.Fedoseev**

European Cup, Budva 2019

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 e5 6 Ndb5 d6 7 Nd5  
Nxd5 8 exd5 Ne7 9 c4 Nf5**

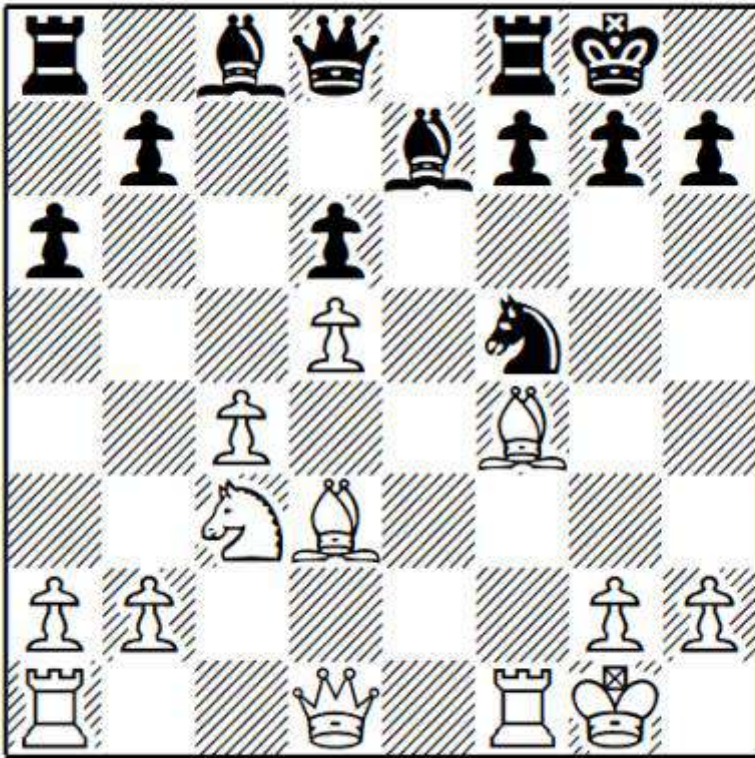


*After 9 ... Nf5*

An alternative to the previous game's 9 ... Ng6. Black protects the d6-pawn, so that he can meet 10 Qa4 with 10 ... Bd7!. Without the knight in the way Black can also fianchetto his kingside bishop. On the downside, Black needs a lot of time before he manages to play ... f7-f5.

### **10 Bd3 g6**

Another set-up is 10 ... Be7 11 0-0 0-0, but here White can open the position more easily since Black has no bishop on the long diagonal; for example, 12 f4 a6 13 Nc3 exf4 14 Bxf4 and White is slightly better.



*Position without fianchetto*

**11 0-0 a6 12 Nc3 Bg7 13 b3 0-0 14 Ne4**

Another drawback to Black's knight being on f5. White can use the e4-square without fearing a quick ... f7-f5.

**14 ... Qc7 15 Ba3 Rd8**

After 15 ... Bd7? White should not try to pick up the material with 16 g4?, as after 16 ... Qa5 17 Bxd6 Nxd6 18 Nxd6 Qc7 19 Ne4 f5 Black has loads of counterplay. Instead, White should keep the tension with 16 Qd2! and Black is stuck with his knight on f5. White can slowly improve with, for example, Kh1, Rc1 and f2-f4, when he stands better.

**16 Rc1 b6**

Naturally 16 ... Nd4 was always an alternative, but the knight might turn out to be exposed after, say, 17 Bb2 f5 18 Ng5.

**17 Re1 Nh6 18 Qd2 f5 19 Ng5 Ng4 20 b4 h6 21 Ne6 Bxe6 22 dxe6 Qe7 23 f3 Nf6 24 Qe3 Rab8 25 Bc2 Kh7?!**

There was no need to move the king just yet. The greedy 25 ... Qxe6 was more interesting, and if 26 Bb3 then 26 ... e4! 27 c5 d5 28 c6 with a crooked but balanced position.

**26 Bb3 Ne8**

Not now 26 ... Qxe6? because of 27 c5 Qe7 28 cxd6 Qxd6 29 b5! Qd7 30 bxa6 with a clear plus for White.

**27 c5 d5 28 cxb6 d4 29 Qd3 Rxb6**

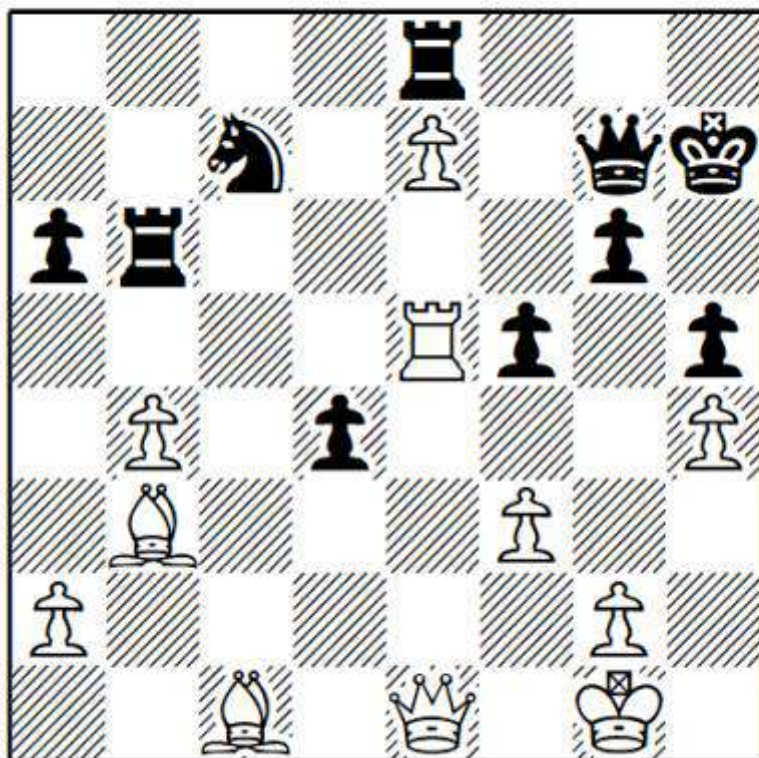
White has managed to keep the e6-pawn which seemed to be lost a few moves ago.

**30 Rc5 Nd6 31 Rxe5 Bxe5 32 Rxe5 Nb5 33 Bc1 Nc7 34 Qd2 Qg7**

Not 34 ... g5? 35 Qd3 and White wins.

**35 e7 Re8 36 Re1?**

There was no need to retreat the rook, which wasn't en prise in view of 36 ... Qxe5?? 37 Qxh6 mate. So White could just have continued with 36 h4 h5 37 Qe1, when he will be able to secure his e7-pawn with Bg5 and the position is balanced.



## *Dynamically balanced*

### **36 ... Rd6!**

Of course not 36 ... Rxe7?? 37 Rxe7 Qxe7 38 Qxh6 mate.

**37 b5 Nxb5 38 a4 Nc3 39 Ba3 Rb6 40 Bc2 Nd5 41 a5 Rb7 42 h4 Ne3 43 h5?**

White had to play 33 Bc5 to safeguard his bishop. After the game move Black is objectively winning, but the situation is enormously complex and White managed to escape anyway. Again, computers make even 2700-rated grandmasters look like beginners.

### **43 ... gxh5?**

Here 43 ... Nc4! would have won; e.g. 44 hxg6+ Kh8! 45 Qd3 Nxa3 46 Qxa3 Rbxex7 and Black remains an exchange up while keeping his d-pawn.

### **44 Rxe3 dxe3 45 Bxf5+ Kh8 46 Qxe3 Qf6 47 Be4?**

And here White could have drawn with 47 Bd7!, since 47 ... Rxd7? loses to 48 Bb2! Qxb2 49 Qxh6+ Kg8 50 Qg6+ and so on.

### **47 ... Rxe7 48 Bxe7 Rxe7 49 Qc5 h4 50 Bd3 h3 51 gxh3 Qa1+?**

51 ... Qg7+! was the way to win. Once the bishop reaches f1 White has a fortress.

**52 Bf1 Qe1 53 Qc8+ Re8 54 Qxa6 Qg3+ 55 Kh1 Qxf3+ 56 Kh2 Qf4+ 57 Kh1 Rg8 58 Qd3 Rg3 59 Qd8+ Rg8 60 Qd3 Rg3 61 Qd8+ Rg8 ½-½**

## *Game 62*

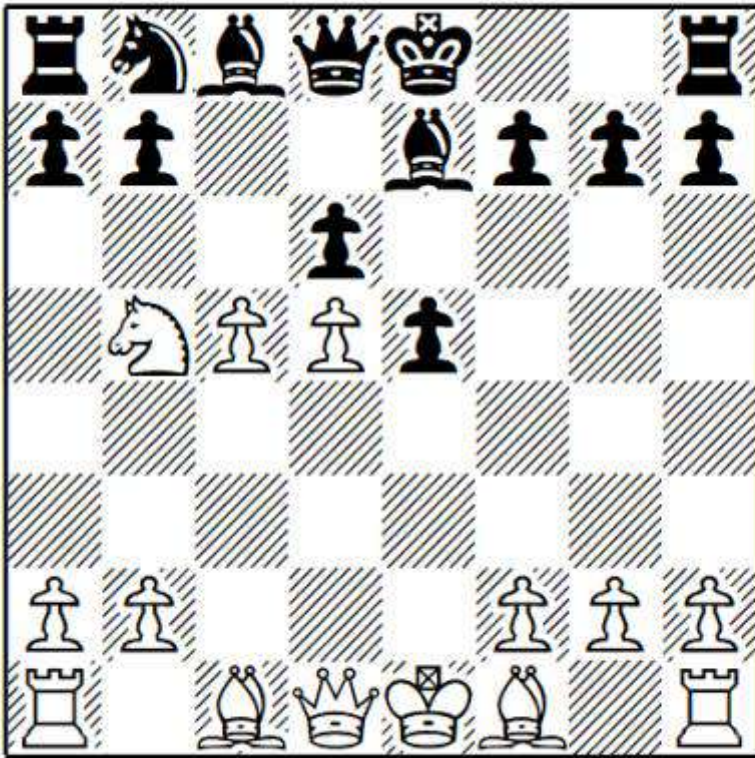
### **I.Cheparinov-A.Moiseenko**

Chess24 (blitz) 2020

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 e5 6 Ndb5 d6 7 Nd5 Nxd5 8 exd5 Nb8 9 c4!?**

In this game we examine a rare but interesting sideline, with the idea of an early pawn assault on the queenside. While it's not theoretically critical, White can still get good and unbalanced positions. For our main move, 9 a4, please check out the next three games.

### **9 ... Be7 10 c5**



*An early attack*

his is White's idea. Of course 10 Qa4?! would make little sense now since Black can just castle and already has a comfortable position.

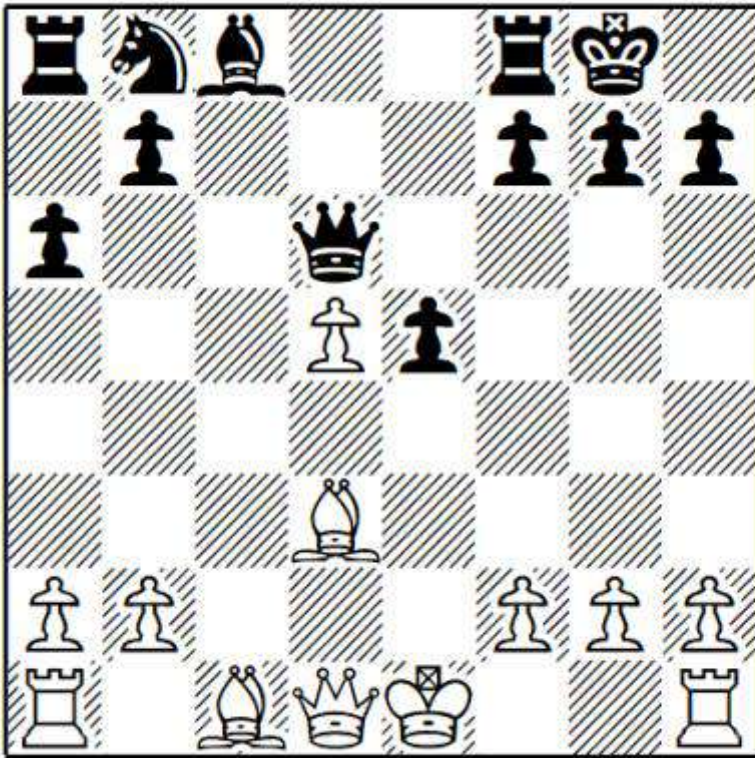
**10 ... 0-0**

Of course not 10 ... dxc5?? 11 d6! and White wins instantly due to the fork on c7.

**11 Bd3**

There's no hurry to take on d6, since 11 ... dxc5 is still answered by 12 d6! and Black loses material; e.g. 12 ... Bxd6 13 Nxd6 Qxd6? 14 Bxh7+ etc.

**11 ... a6 12 Nxd6 Bxd6 13 cxd6 Qxd6**



### *Resolving the tension*

Let's quickly evaluate the outcome of this early exchange on d6. It is not yet clear whether the pawn on d5 will prove to be a strength or a liability. Black will try to set up a blockade and eventually win the pawn, while White will try to push it further. This leads to an interesting positional battle. Note how long White uses tactics to keep the pawn defended rather than protecting it directly.

#### **14 0-0 Nd7**

Of course not 14 ... Qxd5? because of 15 Bxh7+ again, picking up the queen.

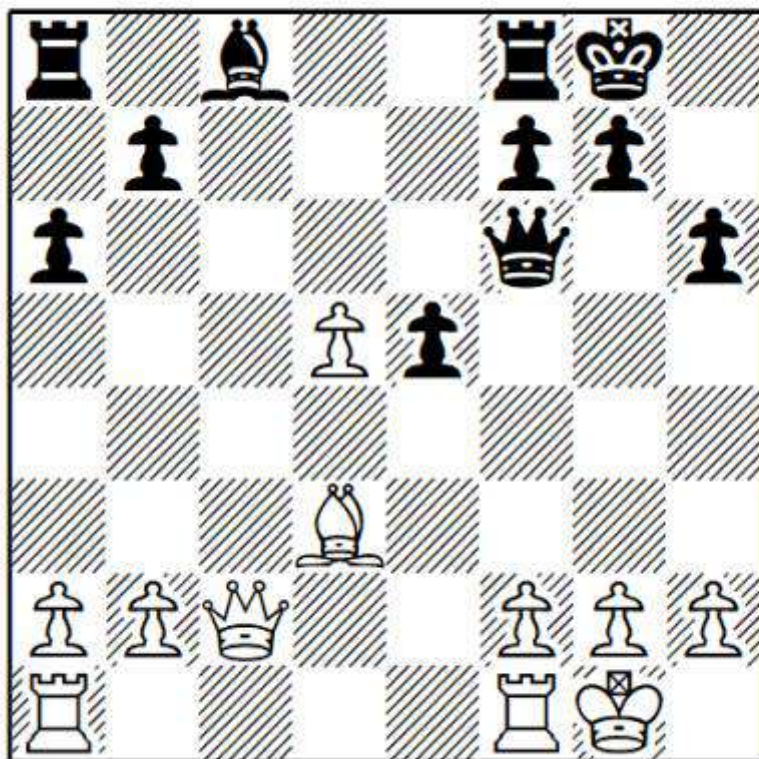
Black could try 14 ... f5 to restrict the light-squared bishop, but White has a good plan in response: 15 b3 Nd7 16 a4, activating the dark-squared bishop via a3 and probably pushing the pawn further with d5-d6.

#### **15 Qc2 Nf6**

In the case of 15 ... g6 16 Be3 Qxd5 17 Rfd1 Qe6 18 Be4 White has a huge lead in development for the missing pawn.

## 16 Rd1

White is still relying on tactics, when it was probably time to ensure its safety with 16 Bg5 h6 17 Bxf6 Qxf6 and the fight around the d-pawn will start.



*An equal position*

The text move allows Black the chance to develop a slight initiative.

**16 ... Bg4 17 f3 Rac8 18 Qb3 Bh5 19 Bg5 b5**

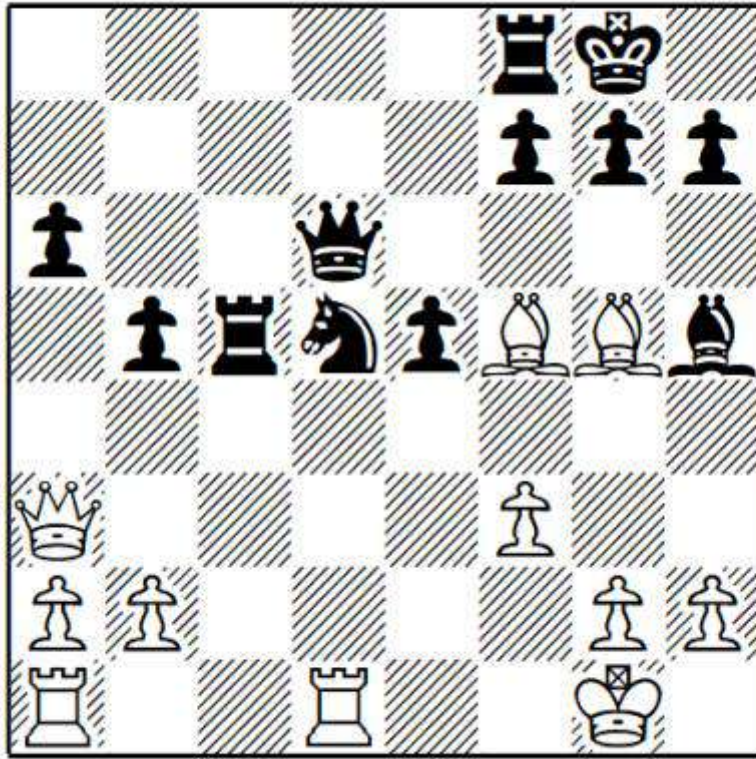
Stronger was 19 ... e4! 20 Bxf6 (or 20 Be2 h6; not 20 fxe4?? Ng4 21 g3 Qc5+ and Black wins) 20 ... exd3 21 Bc3 Bg6 and Black is slightly better thanks to his now passed pawn.

**20 Bf5 Rc5 21 Qa3**

Putting some pressure on Black. For example, White threatens 22 Be3, attacking the pinned rook, and possibly 22 Bxf6, damaging Black's pawn structure since 22 ... Qxf6?? would drop the rook on c5.

**21 ... Nxd5??**

This negates the little threat but not the big one. Black should have played 21 ... Rd8!, not fearing 22 Bxf6 gxf6 because a subsequent ... Bg6 keeps his kingside solid.



*Too many pins*

**Question:** Now Black is caught in a crossfire of pins in the centre. Can you figure out how?

**Answer: 22 Be3!**

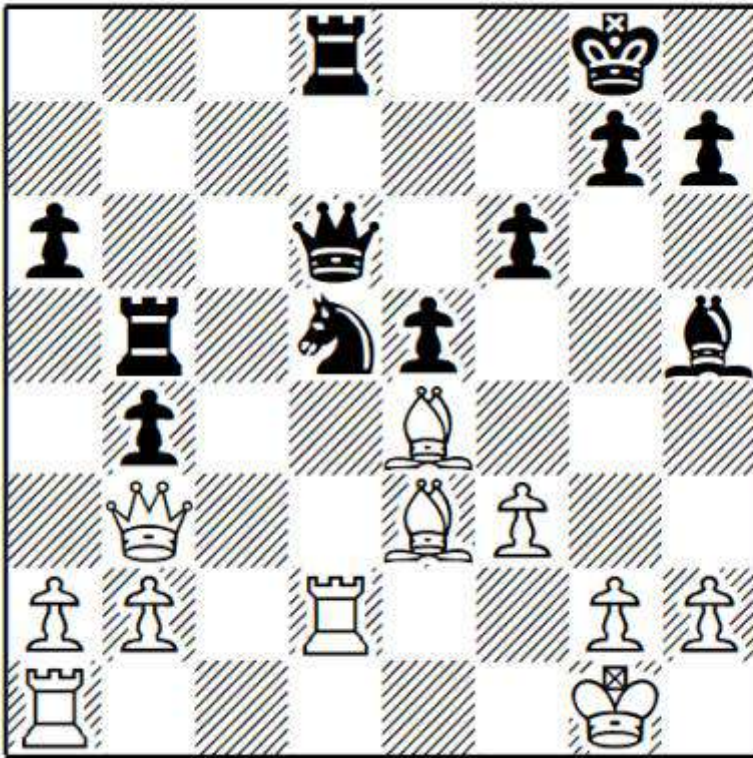
Black is in trouble with his unstable pieces.

**22 ... b4**

The best practical try. 22 ... Rc6? is refuted by 23 Qxd6 Rxd6 24 Bc5, winning the exchange at least.

**23 Qxb4**

23 Qb3! is even better. After 23 ... Rb5 24 Be4 Rd8 25 Rd2 f6 White can win with a tactical nuance.



*How can White win?*

**Question:** Although Black is ready for ... Bf7, protecting d5 once more, White can finish the game at once. Can you see how?

**Answer:** 26 Bxd5+! Rxd5 27 Rxd5 Qxd5 28 Rd1! Qxb3 29 Rxd8+ Kf7 30 axb3 and White is a rook up.

**23 ... Nxb4 24 Rxd6 Rd5 25 Rxd5 Nxd5 26 Bc5 Rb8 27 Rd1 Nf4 28 Ba7 Rf8 29 Bc5 Rb8 30 Ba7 Rf8 31 b4 Bg6 32 Bxg6 hxg6 33 Rd6 Rc8 34 Bc5?**

It is hard to be accurate in a blitz game. Either 34 Be3 or 34 g3 keeps White's big plus.

**34 ... Ne6 35 Rd5**

After 35 Rxa6 Nxc5 36 bxc5 Rxc5 the outside passed pawn is not enough to win the game.

Now 35 ... Nxc5 36 bxc5 (not 36 Rxc5?? Rxc5 37 bxc5 Kf8 and Black wins) 36 ... f6 was best for Black, reaching an equal rook ending at once. Instead, the rest of the game saw some more ups and downs, until Black eventually lost on time.

**35 ... a5 36 a3**

The rest of the game has some ups and downs, until Black lost on time in an equal but difficult rook endgame.

**36 ... axb4 37 axb4 Nxc5 38 bxc5 f6 39 Kf2 Kf7 40 Ke3 Ke6 41 Rd6+ Kf5 42 g4+ Kg5 43 c6 f5 44 h4+ Kxh4 45 Rxc6 fxg4 46 Rxc4+ Kh5 47 Rc4 Kg5 48 Ke4 Kf6 49 c7 Ke6 50 Rc3 1-0**

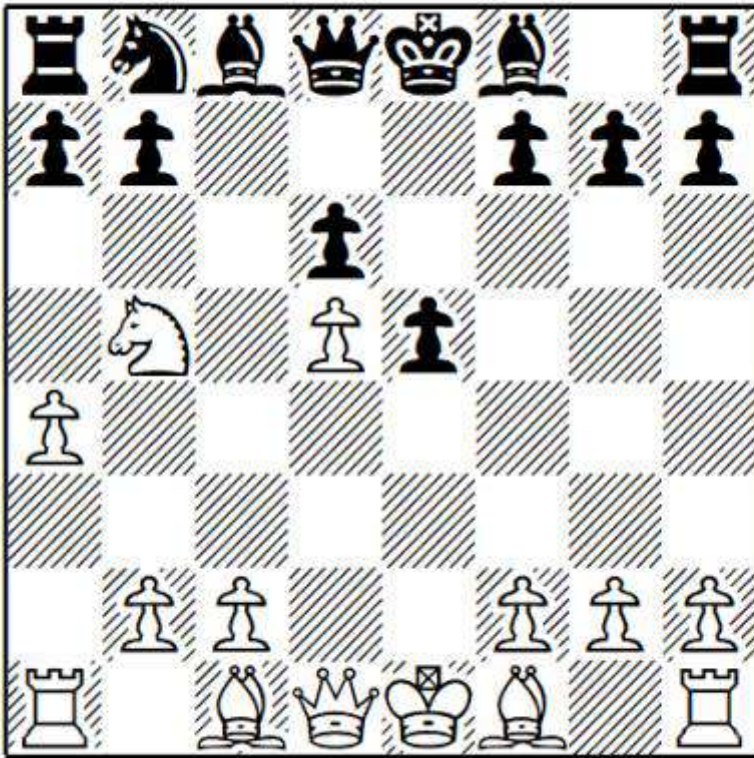
We'll now continue with a game by the strong Austrian grandmaster Markus Ragger, who implements an instructive plan in the most common type of middlegame in this variation. I especially like this game because of the straightforward, and slightly surprising, fight for the central e5-square. So let's begin and see what happened.

*Game 63*

**M.Ragger-L.Dek**

European Championship, Porto Carras 2018

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 e5 6 Ndb5 d6 7 Nd5 Nxd5 8 exd5 Nb8 9 a4**



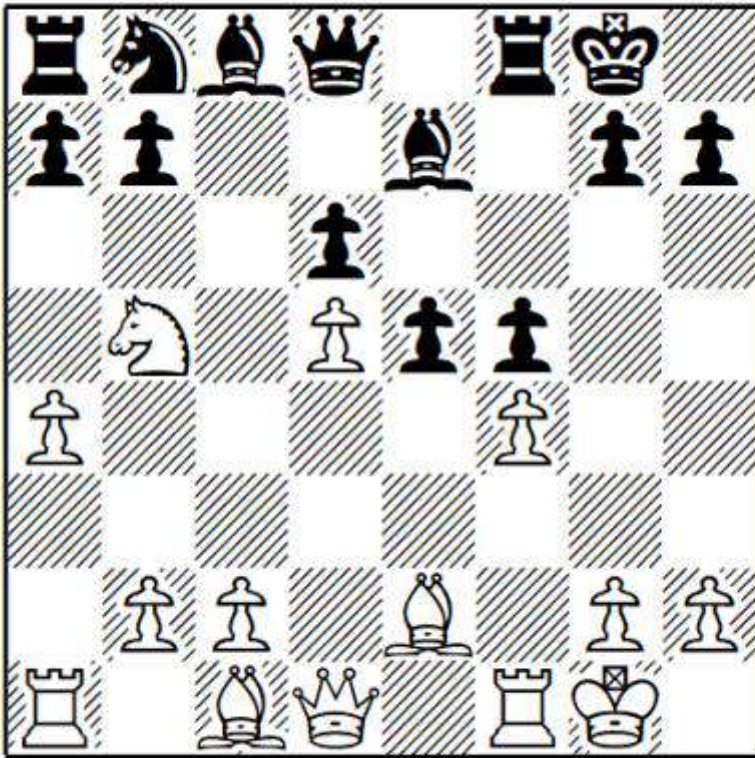
*Starting position after 9 a4*

This is regarded as the most testing continuation against 8 ... Nb8. White stakes out space on the queenside. A typical plan once Black drives the b5-knight away with ... a7-a6, is to reroute it to c4, aiming at the b6-square, supported by the further advance a4-a5.

**9 ... Be7 10 Be2 0-0 11 0-0 f5**

More often Black plays 11 ... Nd7 first, but it can come to the same thing. For instance, 12 Kh1 a6 13 Na3 f5 14 f4 reaches same the position as after 14 Kh1 below. We will look at this move order in the next game.

**12 f4!?**



*Typical central play*

White does not like to allow Black to expand further. In particular, there is no time for a preparatory move like 12 Kh1, as Black would get the option of 12 ... f4, cutting off White's pieces from the kingside.

**12 ... a6 13 Na3 Nd7 14 Kh1 Bf6**

As mentioned in the introduction, Black has a variety of choices here:

a) 14 ... exf4 is examined in the next game.

b) 14 ... e4? is at the very least premature. After 15 Be3 Nf6 (or 15 ... b6 16 c3 intending Nc2-d4) 16 Nc4 Nd7 17 a5, White already has a huge plus, as in V.Moiseenko-K.Novikov, Kolomna (rapid) 2018.

c) 14 ... b6 aims to forestall a4-a5, but White can play it anyway: 15 a5!? Rb8 (15 ... bxa5 16 Nc4 and 15 ... b5 16 c4 are worse) 16 axb6 Nxb6 17 c4 Bf6 18 Nc2 Nd7 and here, rather than 19 b4 exf4 as in C.Aryan-M.Karthikeyan, Moscow 2020, the preliminary 19 fxe5 looks best, with ideas then of Nd4, Ra3 and b2-b4.

d) 14 ... Qc7 has mostly been seen in correspondence games, where play continues 15 Nc4 b6 16 Ra3 Bf6 17 Be3 e4 18 a5 b5 19 Nb6 Rb8 20 c4 Nxb6 21 axb6 Rxb6 22 Bxb6 Qxb6 23 cxb5 axb5. Although the extra pawn and strong dark-squared bishop provide certain compensation for the exchange, such that Black has mostly drawn from here, he is only playing for that at best, which hardly makes it an attractive practical choice.

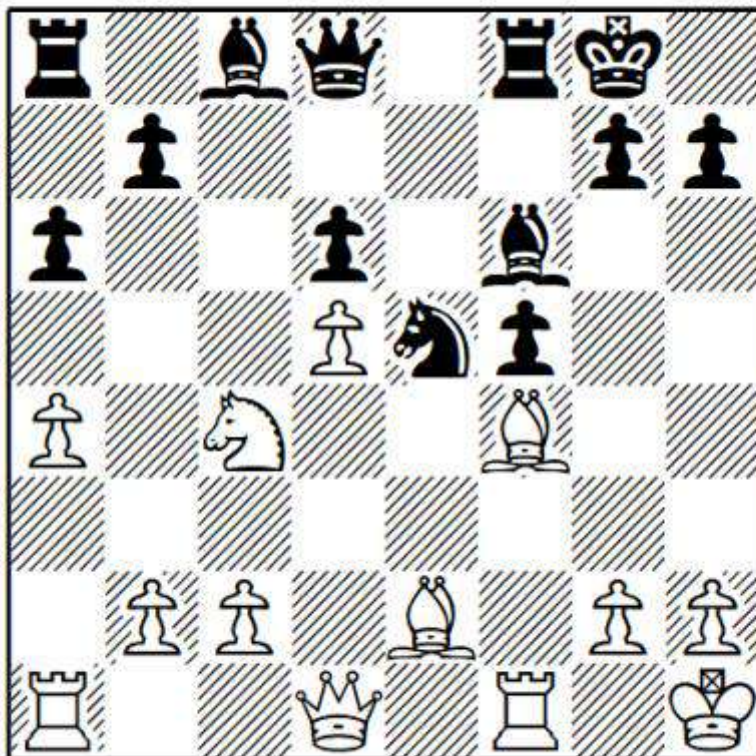
### 15 Nc4 exf4

The alternative 15 ... Nb6 leads to forcing play which is very much in White's favour: 16 fxe5 dxe5 17 Nxb6 Qxb6 18 a5 Qc5 19 c4 e4 20 Qb3 Be5 21 Be3 Qe7 22 c5 Qh4 23 Bg1 Kh8 was I.Smirnov-U.Atakisi, Kharkov 2006, and now after 24 d6 White is basically winning since Black has no real threats; e.g. 24 ... Rf6 (or 24 ... f4 25 Qd5) 25 Qd5 Bxh2 26 Bxh2 Rh6 27 Qe5 and wins.

### 16 Bxf4

16 Nxd6 g5 would be rather unclear and nothing special for White.

### 16 ... Ne5



## *Critical decision*

**Question:** We've arrived at a crucial positional decision which you will face

at some point. Should we keep the tension in the centre and just continue

squeezing Black on the queenside with a4-a5 or should we clarify the situation at once?

**Answer: 17 Bxe5!**

This is by far the strongest move and may be hard to find because we give the bishop up for the knight for no obvious reason. But as we shall soon see, the knight can be very strong! Let's have a look at the alternatives:

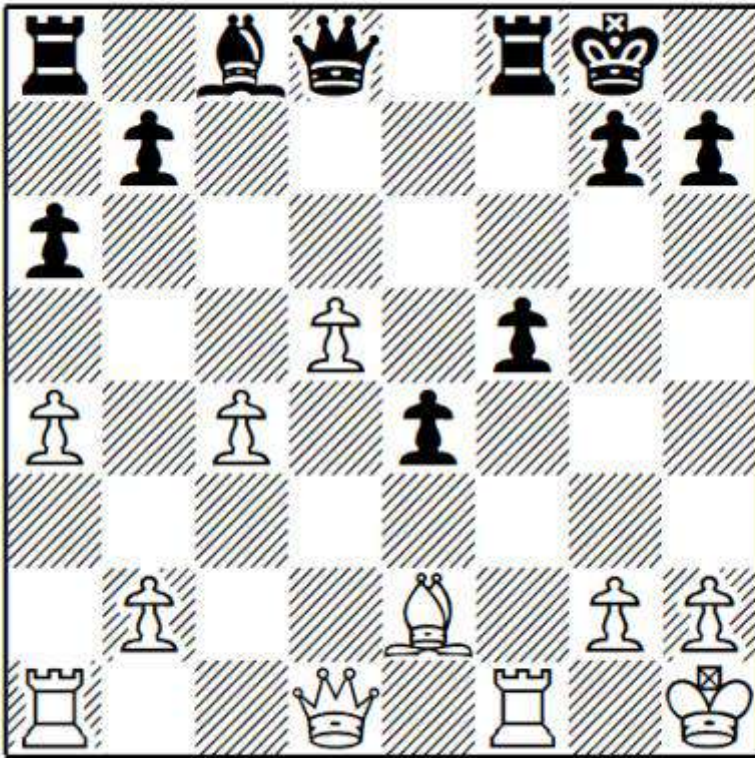
a) 17 a5? Nxc4 18 Bxc4 Bxb2 would drop a pawn.

b) 17 c3 Nxc4 18 Bxc4 is possible but we only get an equal position; the game move is much more ambitious.

c) 17 Nxe5 is another option, but then White must move his bishop several times; e.g. after 17 ... dxe5 18 Be3 f4 19 Bg1 Bf5 with some counterplay on the kingside.

**17 ... dxe5**

Instead, 17 ... Bxe5 leads to a complicated-looking position after 18 Nxe5 dxe5 19 c4 e4.



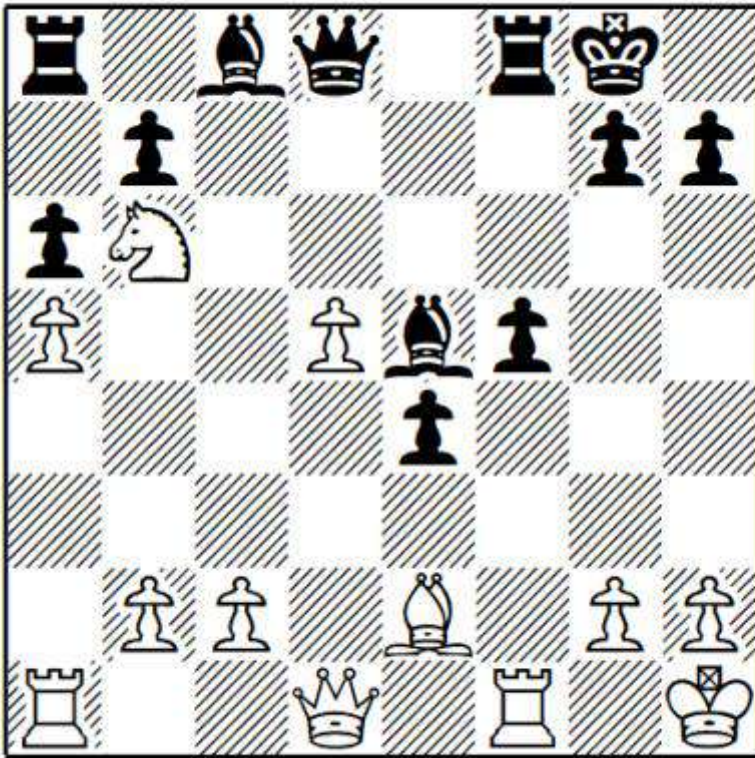
*Passed pawns on both sides*

**Question:** The big question here is whose pawns are more dangerous?  
What is your opinion?

**Answer:** White's pawns are much stronger: they are less vulnerable and they also seriously restrict Black's bishop. White has the advantage after either 20 Qd4 or just 20 c5, gaining more space.

**18 a5 e4 19 Nb6 Be5!?**

Creative but not good. On the other hand, the straightforward 19 ... Rb8 20 d6 Be6 21 Bc4 Bxc4 22 Nxc4 leads to a position where White is much better. The knight is very stable, the d6-pawn safely defended, and White has direct threats against the f5-pawn.



*After 19 ... Be5!?*

**Question:** Can you see what Black has in mind? Can we take the rook on a8 or do we need to be more cautious?

**Answer: 20 d6!**

Threatening Qd5+ so Black has time neither for 20 ... Qh4 nor 20 ... Rb8, saving his rook.

White cannot take the rook yet as after 20 Nxa8?? Qh4 there is no good defence against the mate.

**20 ... Be6**

20 ... Qh4? is now impossible due to 21 Qd5+ and White wins a piece.

**21 Bc4!**

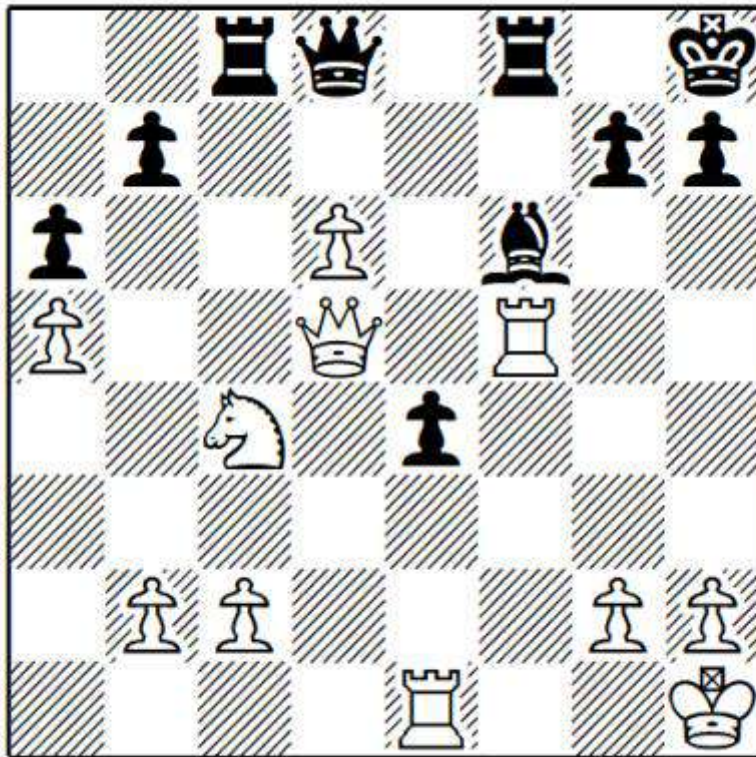
Not giving Black time for his counterattack. Still not 21 Nxa8?? as Black is ready for 21 ... Qh4 again.

**21 ... Bxc4**

Now in the case of 21 ... Qh4, White can take the material and then defend his king: 22 Bxe6+ Kh8 23 g3 Bxg3 24 Qe2, when White is a piece up and there are no threats remaining.

Instead, 21 ... Qf6 was the most tenacious computer line. Many humans would dismiss it in view of 22 Nd7, winning material, but there is 22 ... Bxc4 23 Nxf6+ Rxf6 and although White is still objectively winning, things become a bit messy. At any rate, this was Black's best try.

**22 Nxc4 Bf6 23 Rxf5 Rc8 24 Qd5+ Kh8 25 Re1 1-0**



*Perfect domination*

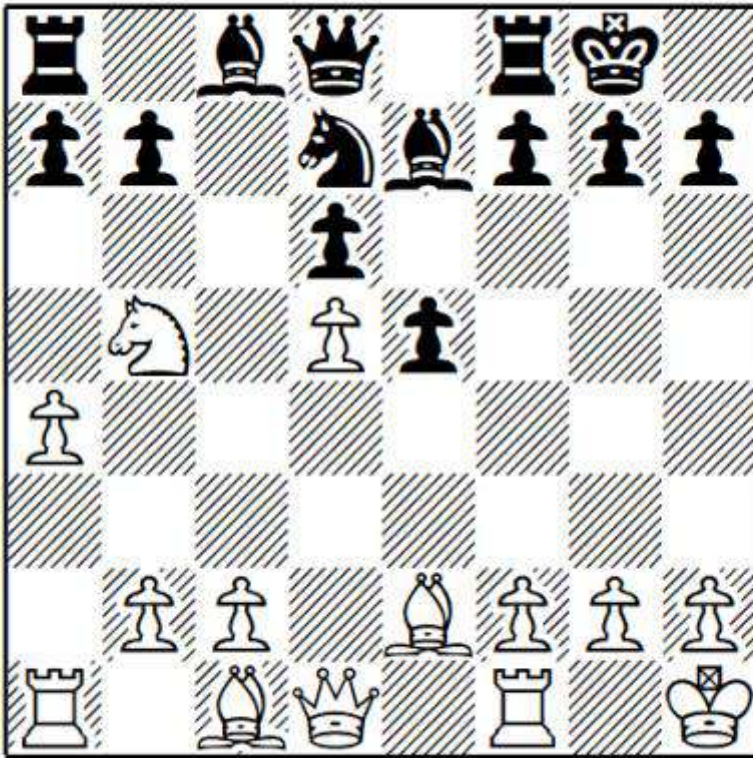
White will win a second pawn while keeping control of everything, so Black resigned.

*Game 64*

**M.Vachier Lagrave-N.Sarin**

World Blitz Championship, Moscow 2019

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 e5 6 Ndb5 d6 7 Nd5  
 Nxd5 8 exd5 Nb8 9 a4 Be7 10 Be2 0-0 11 0-0 Nd7 12 Kh1



*Prophylaxis by White*

A logical move, preparing f2-f4. It is also wise to wait with this move until Black has committed to ... f7-f5. The main alternative is 12 Bd2, for which see Game 65.

All other options are worse. Let's have a look at the most natural tries and understand why they are unconvincing:

a) 12 a5?! would be a systemic mistake because of 12 ... a6! and the white knight is forced to c3. (13 Na3? would drop the a-pawn.)

b) 12 c4 a6 13 Nc3 a5!? is a standard ploy by Black which you should always keep in mind when advancing c2-c4. After this Black has managed to set up a solid blockade on the queenside and can then commence kingside play with ... f7-f5.

**12 ... a6 13 Na3 f5 14 f4**

Via a different route we have now reached the same position as in the previous game. IN this one Black opts to resolve the central tension straight away.

### **14 ... exf4 15 Bxf4 g5!?**

If Black wants to put his knight on e5 then this is a necessary precursor. The immediate 15 ... Ne5?! would invite 16 Bxe5 again, when 16 ... dxe5 17 Nc4 Bf6 transposes to the previous game, while after 17 ... Bd6 18 a5 White has the option to remove the bishop at a convenient moment. Anyway, I would not call 15 ... g5 a risky move because Black's king remains very safe afterwards with so many pawns and pieces around.

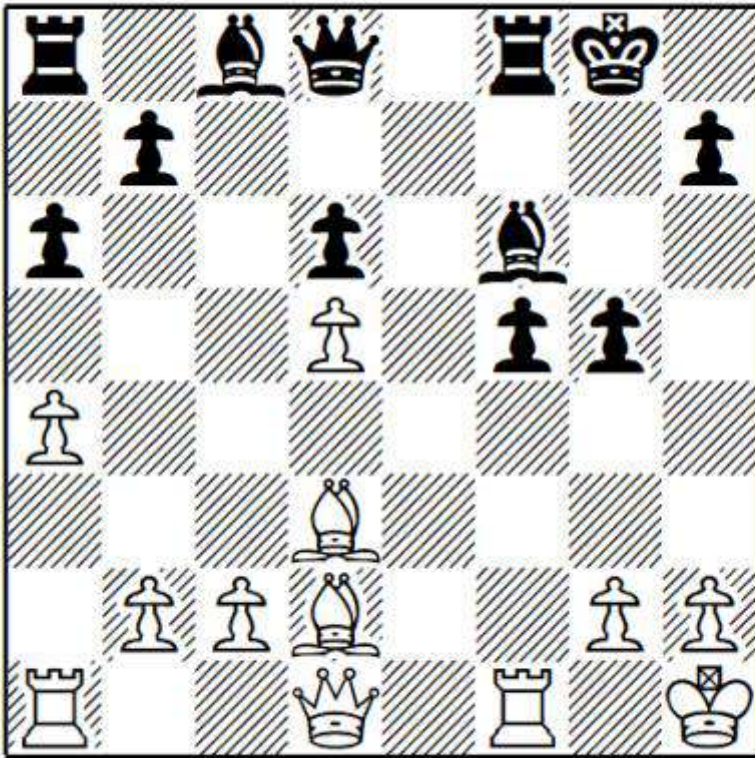
A calmer option is 15 ... Nc5 16 Nc4 a5, aiming to neutralize White's initiative on the queenside. Black will follow up with ... b7-b6 and ... Ba6 to challenge the white knight, while the black knight may later go to e4. This has only been tried a couple of times in "live" chess games, perhaps because it's not very ambitious, but one of those was 17 Bd3 b6 18 Qe2 Ba6 19 Nxb6 Nxd3 20 cxd3 Qxb6 21 Qxe7 Bxd3 22 Qe6+ Kh8 23 Qxd6 Qxd6 24 Bxd6 Bxf1 25 Bxf8 Bc4 26 Be7 Bxd5 27 Rd1 Bb3 28 Rd8+ Rxd8 29 Bxd8 Bxa4 30 Bxa5 Kg8 and the players agreed a draw in M.Vachier Lagrave-Ma.Carlsen, Stavanger 2019.

### **16 Be3**

The first thing I would like to mention is that at this point the paths are already quite unexplored, so there is no concrete theory or deep analysis you have to be afraid of. Keep in mind the plans and you will have a solid base for navigating through the position.

On this move 16 Bd2!? may be better. The bishop is safer than on the e3-square since Black does not win time with 16 ... f4 later. As a general principle after ... g7-g5, White should try to focus on exploiting the weaknesses in Black's kingside rather than the space advantage on the queenside. With that in mind 16 Bd2!? is an interesting approach which can create problems for Black in a practical game.

Let's have a concrete look: 16 ... Ne5 17 Nc4 Nxc4 18 Bxc4 Bf6 was seen in S.Das-D. Gukesh, Chess.com (blitz) 2020, and here 19 Bd3!? is possible, offering the b2-pawn for gain of time.



*Take the pawn?*

For example: 19 ... Bxb2 20 Rb1 Bg7 21 Qh5 h6 22 h4 and White enjoys more than enough compensation.

**16 ... Ne5 17 a5 f4 18 Bb6 Qe8 19 Nc4 Nxc4 20 Bxc4**

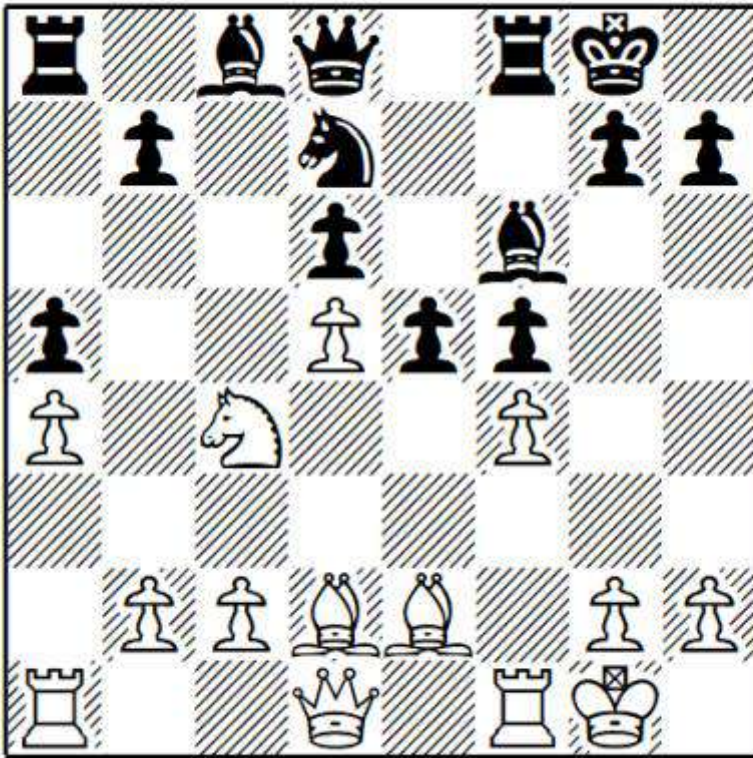
Black is already slightly better. White controls the queenside but there is no way to break through any time soon.

**20 ... Bf5 21 Bd3 Qg6 22 Qd2**

Here 22 Re1, trying to exploit the weak e6-square, looks more active.

**22 ... Bxd3 23 cxd3 Bf6 24 Rae1 Qf5 25 Re4 Qxd5 26 Qe2 Rac8 27 h4**

With his position continuing to go south, Vachier-Lagrave makes a move to disrupt things.



*How to react?*

**Question:** How would you respond? Can Black simply play 27 ... h6, or does he get in trouble after 28 Qh5 - ?

**Answer:** Yes, he can play 27 ... h6, which is the only way to maintain the advantage. After 28 Qh5 Qxd3 29 Rfe1 Bg7 30 hxg5 (not 30 Re7? d3) 30 ... Qd5 Black has everything under control and remains a pawn up.

**27 ... Qf5?**

This gives the advantage away and White gets much closer to equality.

**28 hxg5 Bxg5 29 Bd4 h6 30 b4 Rf7 31 Qf3 Rcf8 32 Rfe1 Bh4 33 g4 Qg5 34 R1e2 Bg3?**

The players now trade a couple of mistakes before Black makes a last fatal one.

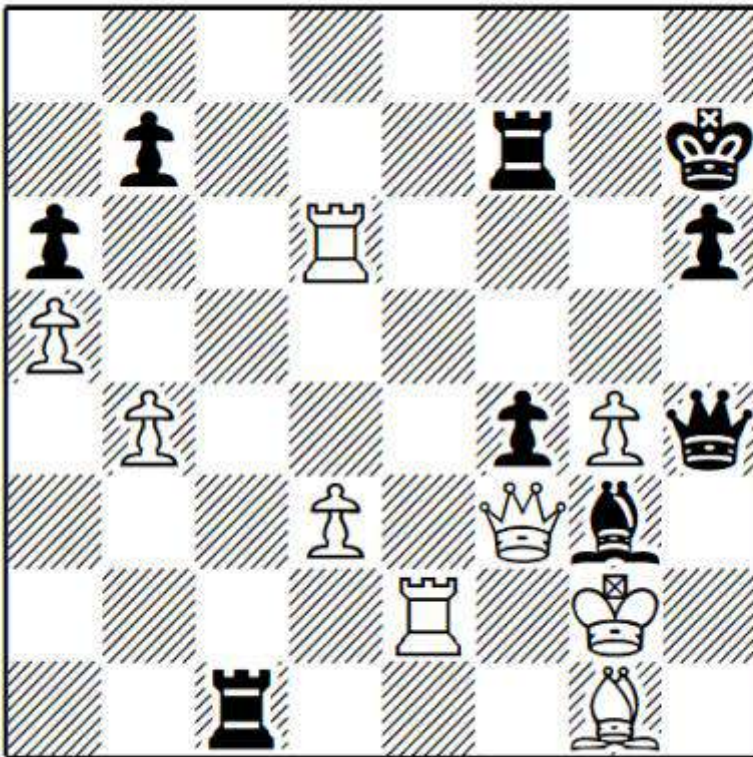
**35 Re6 Rc7 36 Kg2? Qh4 37 Bg1 Rc1??**

This is too ambitious by the young Indian prodigy, but such things can happen in a blitz game, even to the most talented players. The problem is that 38 ... Rxc1+ is not even a threat, so White can go for an immediate counterattack.

**38 Rg6+ Kh7**

After 38 ... Kf7 39 Rxd6! the king is even more exposed than on h7 and White will quickly launch a decisive attack.

**39 Rxd6 Rf7**



*How to checkmate?*

**Question:** White is obviously winning here, but can you quickly calculate to mate?

**Answer: 40 Qe4+ Kg8 41 Rg6+**

Not 41 Qg6+?? Kf8 and White has blown it. He must now take the perpetual with 42 Re8+ Kxe8 43 Qg8+ Rf8 44 Qg6+ Rf7, as otherwise ... f4-f3 mate will follow.

**41 ... Rg7 42 Qe8+ Kh7 43 Rxd7 Kxd7 44 Bd4+ 1-0**  
Black resigns before 44 ... Kh7 45 Qf7 mate.

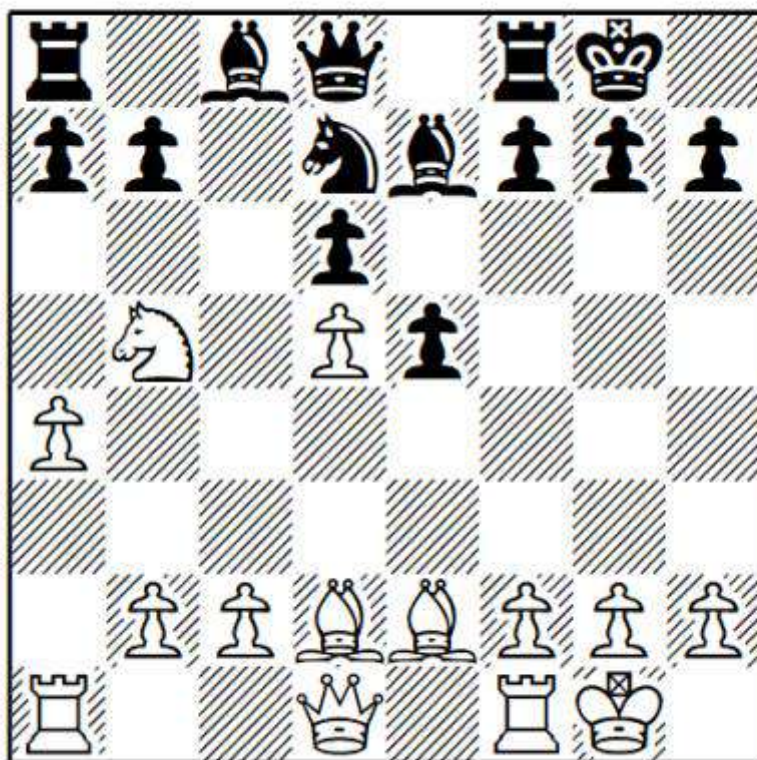
We end the chapter with a nice positional game by White, featuring a creative plan with 12 Bd2.

*Game 65*

**J.C.Schröder-J.Chittka**

Schwäbisch Gmünd 2020

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 e5 6 Ndb5 d6 7 Nd5  
Nxd5 8 exd5 Nb8 9 a4 Be7 10 Be2 0-0 11 0-0 Nd7 12 Bd2**



*12 Bd2 – quiet but powerful*

What is the point behind this move? At first sight there seems to be nothing for the bishop to do on this diagonal, but White has two ideas in mind. First, he can now expand with a4-a5 which, if played immediately, would run into

12 ... a6 and White must retreat the knight to c3 in order not to lose the a-pawn. Second, there is the possibility of b2-b4, either sooner or later, when ... a7-a5 is already prevented, although I think the latter plan is far less common than the first.

### **12 ... a6**

A more common option to blocking the queenside is to allow everything and just generate counterplay on the kingside. For example: 12 ... f5 13 a5 a6 14 Na3 e4 15 Nc4 Ne5 16 Nb6 Rb8 17 f4 exf3 18 Bxf3 Bf6 (improving on 18 ... g5?! 19 c4 f4 20 Bc3 Bf5 21 c5 Nxf3+ 22 Qxf3 dxc5, as in F.Caruana-Ma.Carlsen, World Championship, Game 8, London 2018, where 23 g4! Bg6 24 Rad1 Bd6 25 Rfe1 would have been very strong indeed) 19 c3 g5 20 Be2 f4 21 Nxc8 Qxc8 22 Kh1 with a double-edged game, P.Svidler-F.Caruana, Karlsruhe/Baden Baden 2019.

### **13 Na3 a5!?**

Black is afraid of 14 a5, but he should probably just allow it with 13 ... f5 14 a5 as in the previous note.

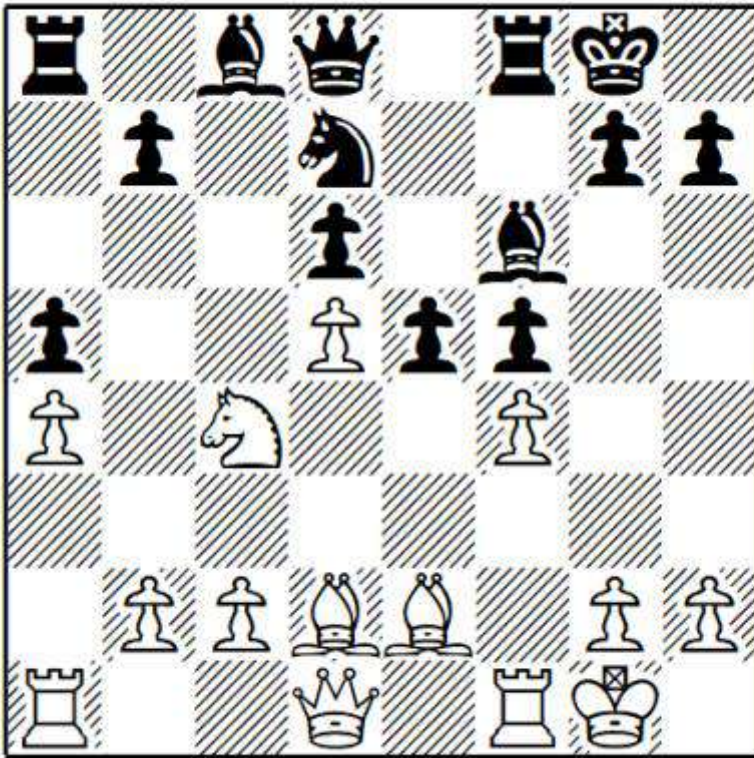
### **14 Nc4 f5 15 f4**

White's pieces are actively placed and he starts pressuring the e5-pawn.

### **15 ... Qc7!?**

Black plays to reinforce the central dark squares, getting ready for 16 ... Bf6, and even ... e5xf4 and ... Ne5 which is not possible yet.

An interesting alternative was to play 15 ... Bf6 first, seeing that the d6-pawn is still protected indirectly by ... Qb6+.



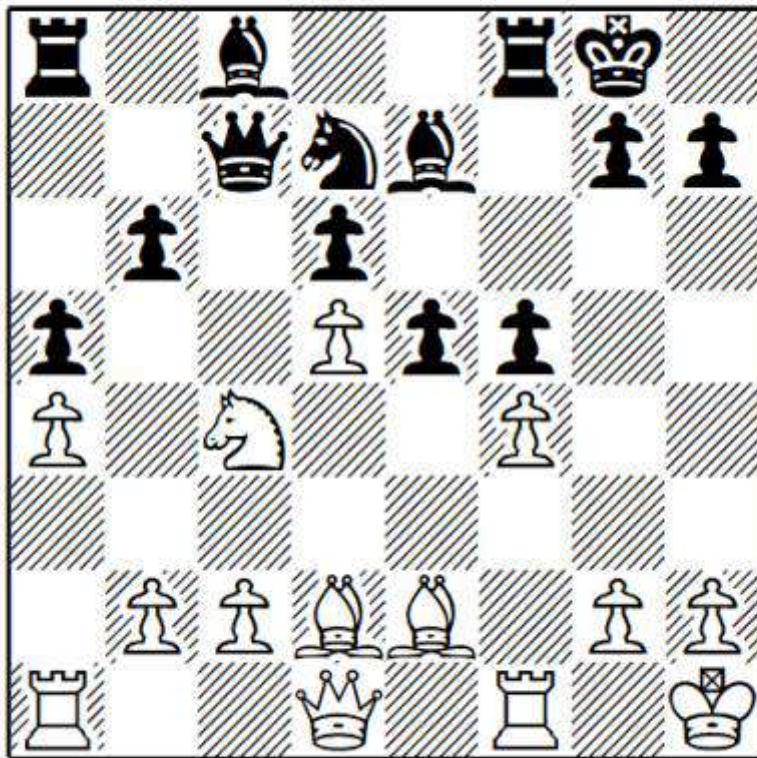
*After 15 ... Bf6*

After 16 Kh1!?, threatening d6 for real, Black can try the dynamic 16 ... exf4 (not 16 ... Qe7? 17 Bxa5 exf4 18 Bb4 Be5 and White is much better, while 16 ... Qc7 17 Be3! is similar to the game) 17 Nxd6 (if 17 Bxf4 Ne5, the position is roughly equal; Black saved time by not playing ... Qc7) 17 ... g5 and the play becomes very double-edged.

As usual, 15 ... e4? is a bad idea when the centre is locked with f2-f4 and ... f7-f5. White can slowly expand on the queenside, while Black does not have any particular counterplay.

### **16 Kh1 b6**

Still not 16 ... exf4 17 Bxf4 Ne5?? because of 18 Bxe5 dxe5 19 d6 and White wins, or if 17 ... b6 then 18 Ra3! Ba6 19 Re3 gives White a great initiative.



*What's the plan?*

**Question:** This is a critical position in the game and it is not so easy to see White's plan from here. What would be your intentions if you were White?

### **17 Be3**

With nothing much to do on d2 any more White switches the bishop to a more useful diagonal.

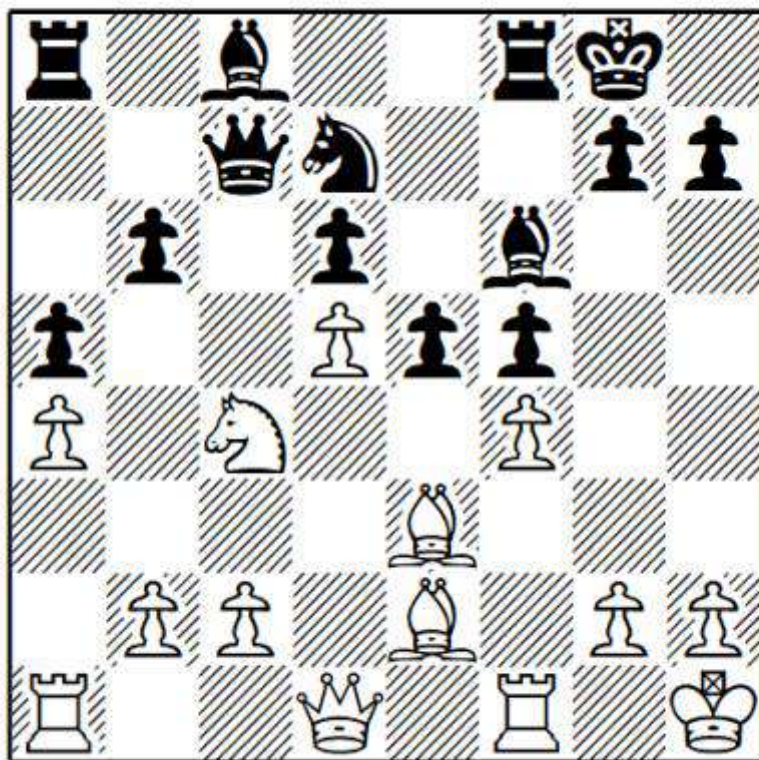
The immediate 17 Na3! is also possible, trying to make use of the b5-square, but Black can continue with 17 ... Bf6, and after 18 Nb5 Qb8 19 Be2 Nc5 White has not achieved very much.

Instead, 17 fxe5 Nxe5 18 Nxe5? dxe5 is not advisable. The resulting position is better for Black due to his flexible pawns, whereas White's pawns are safely blocked.

### **17 ... Ba6?!**

This just encourages White to play Na3. The exchange of light-squared bishops only helps White, as the b5-square becomes more vulnerable. If Black retreats the bishop again, White has gained some time.

Again 17 ... Bf6 should always be considered because the e5-square is crucial.



*Everything as usual?*

**Question:** Does 17 ... Bf6 solve Black's problems or is it not unsatisfactory at this moment?

**Answer:** Sadly, not really. After 18 fxe5 the desired 18 ... Nxe5 would drop the b6-pawn; nor is 18 ... dxe5 any good work because Rxf5 wins another important pawn. Even 18 ... Bxe5 has some drawbacks, as White can either grab the bishop pair or first improve his position with 19 Qd2.

Probably Black's best option is to play 15 ... exf4 16 Bxf4 Nc5, similar to 15 ... Nc5 in the notes to the previous game. As we saw there, it is very

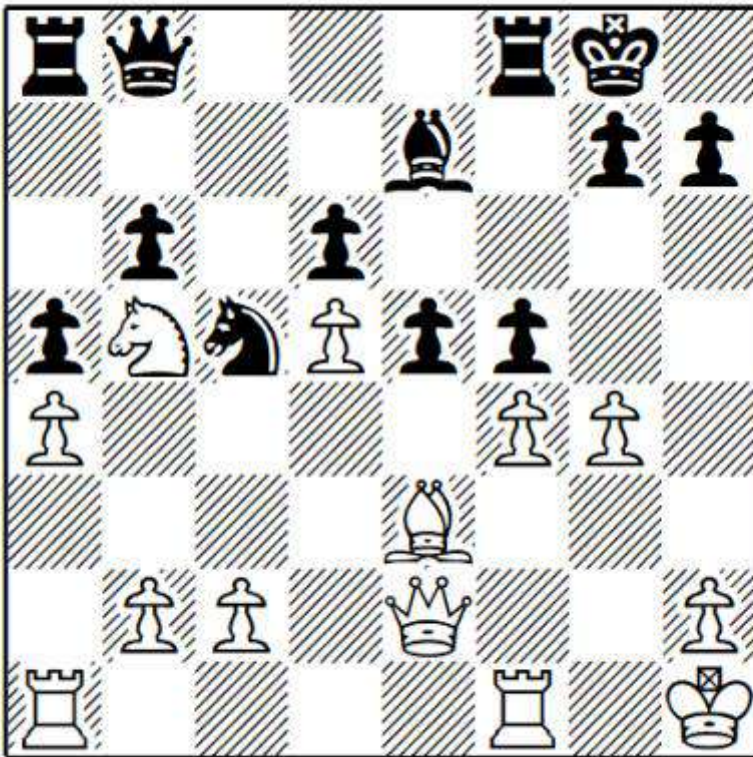
difficult for White to make progress in this sort of position.

**18 Na3 Bxe2 19 Qxe2**

Now White gets an initiative by natural moves.

**19 ... Rac8**

Here 19 ... Nc5 does not fully convince me in view of 20 Nb5 Qb8 21 g4, when White has a favourable version of his plan in the game. Black's pieces are stranded on the queenside, so we can start opening things up on the other wing. Black is under a lot of pressure.

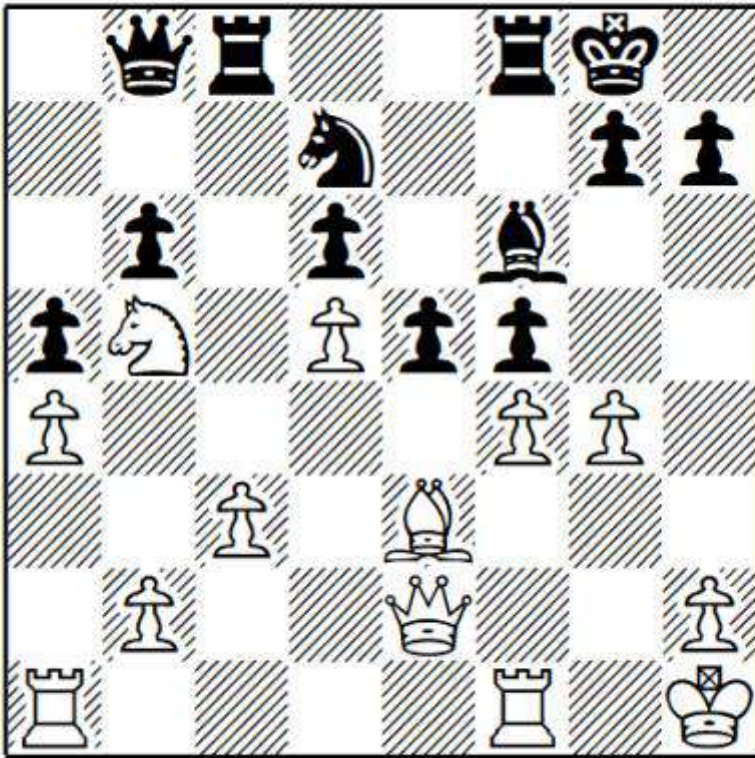


*White is attacking*

**20 c3 Bf6 21 Nb5 Qb8 22 g4!?**

With the black queen out of play defending the queenside pawns, White takes the opportunity to attack on the kingside.

Nonetheless, 22 fxe5 Bxe5 23 Nd4 might have been a better option. Black is pretty much forced to take the knight, and after 23 ... Bxd4 24 Bxd4 White is very much in control and can look to create pressure with moves like Rae1 and Qb5.



*How to defend?*

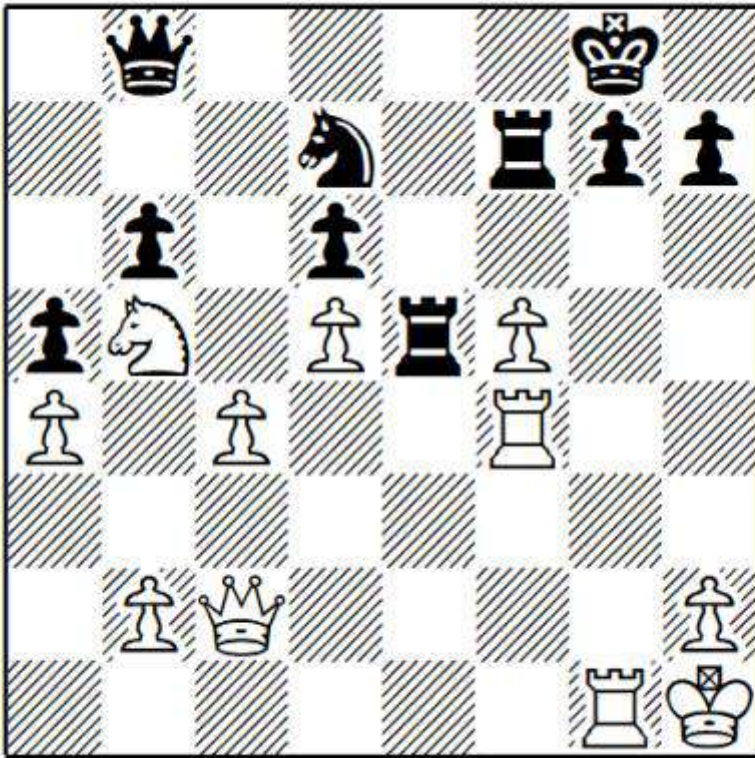
**22 ... exf4**

The immediate 22 ... Rce8 was a stronger defence and more consistent with Black's whole strategy of defending the dark squares. For example: 23 exf5 (if 23 fxe5 Rxe5 24 Rxf5, then 24 ... Qe8 gives Black enough counterplay) 23 ... exf4! 24 Rxf4 Bg5 25 Rf3 Re5 26 Rg1 Bxe3 27 Rxe3 Rxf5 and Black is fine, having safely regained the pawn.

**23 Bxf4 Rce8 24 Qc2 Be5 25 gxf5 Bxf4 26 Rxf4 Re5**

Black's position here is very similar to that after 25 ... Re5 in the previous note, except that the dark-squared bishops have been removed which changes the assessment entirely.

**27 Rg1 Rf7 28 c4**



*White dominates everything*

White is dominating, having stabilized the queenside, created pressure down the g-file and, most significantly of all, managed to defend the extra pawn on f5 which gives him a winning position.

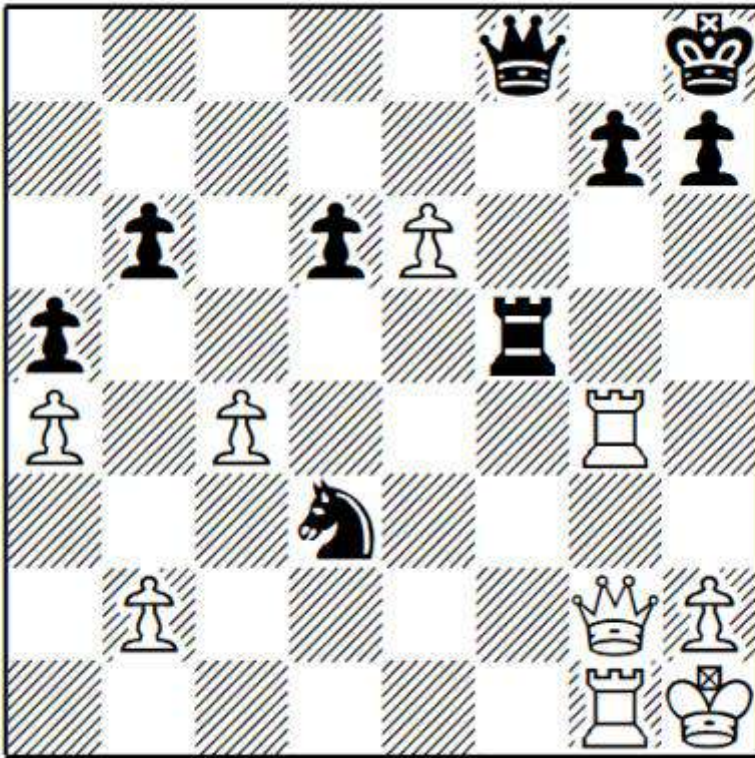
**28 ... Qf8 29 Nd4 Nc5 30 Rfg4 Kh8 31 Qg2 Nd3**

Black was probably setting one last trap, but White's next move avoided any kind of counterplay.

**32 Qg3!**

With Ne6 to follow, so Black resigned.

Black was likely hoping for 32 Ne6 Rxe6 33 dxe6 Rxf5, when 34 ... Nf2+ is a very big threat.



*How to win?*

**Question:** White is still winning here but the path has gotten narrower.  
Can you find White's only way to success?

**Answer:** 34 e7! and if 34 ... Qxe7 then 35 Rxc7! Nf2+ 36 Qxf2 Rxf2 37 Rg8 mate. No other 34th move works for White, as you can convince yourself!

# Chapter Ten

## Scheveningen Variation

### Introduction

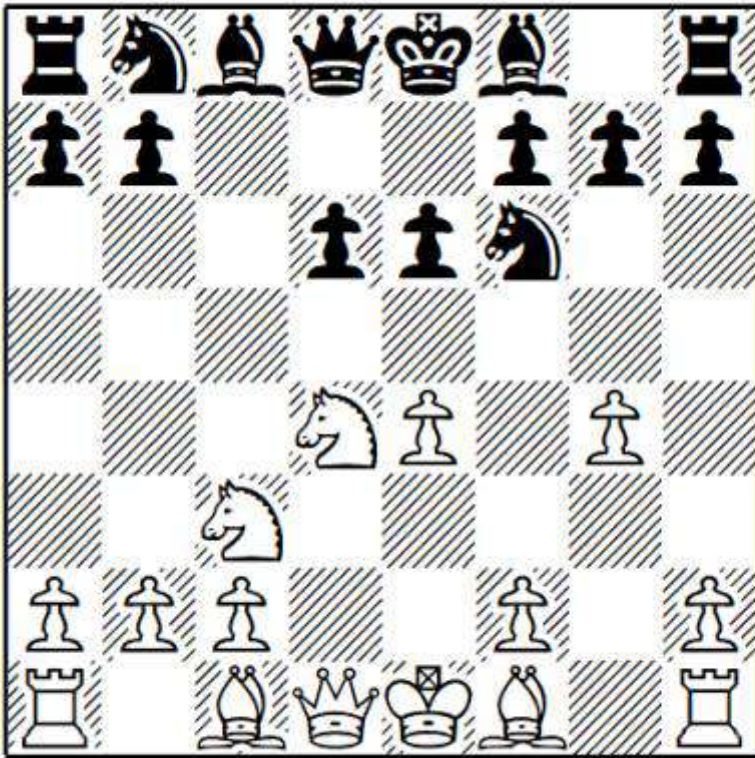
In this chapter we will deal with the Scheveningen Variation, another classical line of the Sicilian. Black stays flexible in the centre and aims for a slower positional game. The distinctive “small centre” system (with ... d7-d6 and ... e7-e6) got its first major attention in 1923 when it was employed by Dutch players, including the future World Champion Max Euwe, in a match against “Foreigners” in the village of Scheveningen, from which the variation got its name.

White has several possible approaches against the Scheveningen, including Classical set-ups with 6 Be2, the English Attack with 6 Be3, and the Tal Variation with 6 f4. However, I would like to propose we go for 6 g4, the so-called Keres Attack, named after the world-class 20th century Estonian grandmaster, Paul Keres. According to current opening theory, 6 g4 is one of the most ambitious lines versus the Scheveningen and White can secure a small plus.

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 d6**

This is the traditional starting position of the Scheveningen Sicilian. It can also be reached via 2 ... d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 e6, though in that case we would play our Anti-Najdorf 5 f3. Incidentally, that has added significance here, because Scheveningen players often prefer a Najdorf route of 5 ... a6 first, and 6 ... e6 only if it seems appropriate. And their primary reason for the altered move order is: to avoid the Keres Attack!

**6 g4!?**



### *Keres Attack*

The starting move of the Keres Attack. This variation is characterized by its sharp and straightforward nature and the attempt to create early problems with the disruptive 7 g5. Black has different ways to handle this immediate pawn advance which we will see below.

Before going into details, let me briefly explain why I chose this particular line and why it fits into our repertoire well. First, the Keres Attack is an aggressive approach and very concrete in its nature, so Black has no opportunity to move order us into any kind of Najdorf (which is a definite possibility after less forcing moves, such as 6 Be2 or 6 Be3). Thus we stay away from any independent major theoretical discussions. Second, the system is objectively fine for White and scores a fantastic 60% in practice.

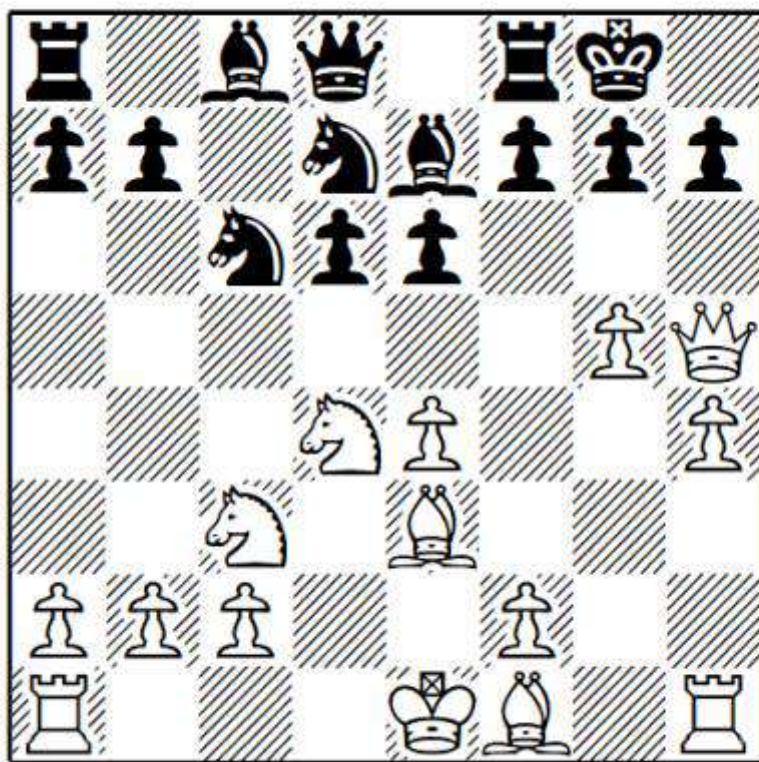
#### **6 ... h6**

This is by far the main line and is seen in about 60% of all games. Black interferes with White's kingside expansion, so we must decide between the

solid 7 h3 or trying to make g4-g5 work anyway.

Before getting to that, let us analyse a bunch of alternatives for Black:

a) 6 ... Nc6 allows us to push the g-pawn again, so we should of course go for it: 7 g5 Nd7 8 Be3 (another move order is 8 h4 and often they transpose into each other, but I prefer starting with Be3 as it is more in accordance with general principles: development first) 8 ... Be7 (in the case of 8 ... Nxd4 9 Qxd4! White is much better since the centralized queen hinders Black from developing and cannot be challenged soon) 9 h4 0-0 and now 10 Qh5! is the best scoring move, with an impressive record of over 70% for White.



### *Kingside expansion*

10 Qh5 seems quite a surprising move because it blocks the h-pawn voluntarily. So let me quickly point out a few ideas and why it is not stupid at all to put the queen in front of the h-pawn. First, White is trying to provoke a weakening of Black's kingside. Second, White has various

sacrifices in mind and the queen is already in the right place to attack. Let's see a few sample continuations:

a1) 10 ... Nxd4 11 Bxd4 a6 12 0-0-0 b5 13 f4 b4 looks normal enough, but White already has the option to sac with 14 Bxg7!? Kxg7 15 e5 and gets a great initiative. This lets us guess how dangerous the tactical ideas are with the queen on h5. Black can reach a forced draw with perfect defence, but the path is very narrow. Alternatively, White can just play 14 Ne2 for a risk-free plus.

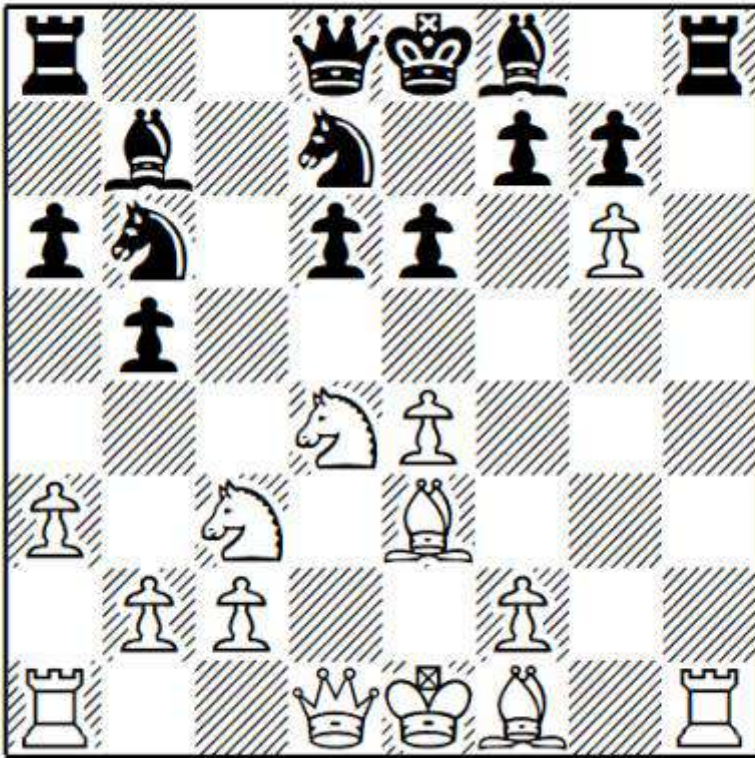
a2) 10 ... a6 11 0-0-0 reaches a standard position where we have typical plans and better chances due to our advanced pawns. We examine these further in Game 66.

**Remember:** As a rule, proceeding with g4-g5 is almost always correct, when Black did not take countermeasures to prevent it.

b) 6 ... a6 is the third most popular move. The main difference from line 'a' is that, by omitting ... Nc6, Black is able to play ... b7-b5 and ... Bb7 quickly, attacking our e4-pawn which we must be ready to secure. After 7 g5 Nfd7 8 h4 b5, 9 a3! is a key move, not letting Black expel our defender of the e4-pawn. Then:

b1) 9 ... Nb6?! 10 h5 Bb7 11 Qg4!? (the main move is 11 Rh3 with the same idea of preparing g5-g6) 11 ... N8d7 12 Rh3 (if 12 g6 Black can try 12 ... f5!?) 12 ... Ne5 13 Qg3 and White has a great initiative with ideas of f2-f4 and g5-g6.

b2) 9 ... Bb7 10 Be3 Nc6 is a better option with only a slight plus for White (see Game 67). But not 10 ... Nb6? 11 h5 N8d7 12 g6! hxg6 13 hxg6



*A nice rook sacrifice*

13 ... Rxh1 14 gxf7+ Ke7? (but after 14 ... Kxf7 15 Qf3+ White regains the rook with a huge plus) 15 Qg4 Qc8 16 Qxe6+ Kd8 17 Qe8+ Kc7 18 Ne6+ Kb8 19 Nxf8 Nxf8 20 Bxb6 and White wins.

c) 6 ... e5!? is answered by 7 Bb5+ Bd7 8 Bxd7+ Qxd7 9 Nf5 h5 10 gxh5 Nxh5 11 Qf3 and White has a more comfortable position because the exchange of light-squared bishops eases the task of exploiting the hole on d5.

d) 6 ... d5? is premature. After 7 exd5 Nxd5 8 Bb5+ Bd7 9 Nxd5 exd5 10 Qe2+ Qe7 11 Be3 White gets a big advantage, as in R.J.Fischer-S.Reshevsky, US Championship, New York 1967.

**7 h4**

White intends 8 Rg1, followed by a quick 9 g5.

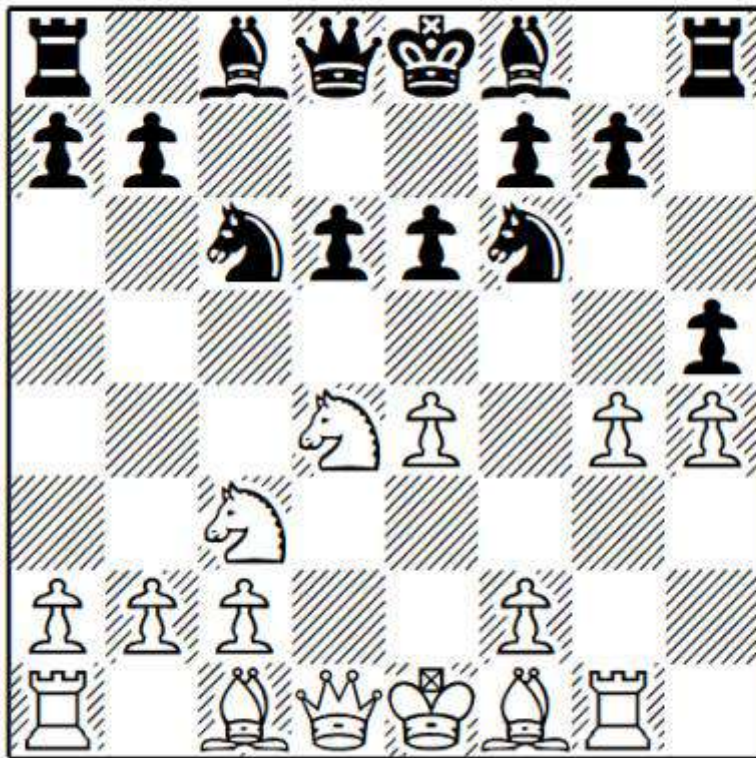
**7 ... Nc6**

Instead:

a) 7 ... d5? is not improved by the two h-pawn moves. After 8 exd5 Nxd5 9 Bb5+ White is still clearly better.

b) 7 ... Be7 8 Rg1 d5 9 exd5 Nxd5 10 Nxd5 Qxd5 is similar to 8 ... d5 in the main line. Here White can choose between 11 Be3 Nc6 (11 ... Bxh4?! is too risky in view of 12 Nb5 Qe5 13 Nd6+ Ke7 14 Nc4 Qc7 15 Qf3 with tremendous compensation) 12 Nxc6 Qxc6 13 Qd2 and 14 0-0-0 with a slight plus; or 11 Bg2 Qc4 12 c3 Bxh4 13 Qb3!? Qxb3 14 axb3 0-0 15 Be3 with full compensation for the pawn in A.Delorme-J.Duquesnoy, Marseilles 2009, since Black will find it hard to complete development.

**8 Rg1 h5**



### *Countering on the kingside*

The main move! You might wonder why Black has played ... h7-h5 in two steps, but it is quite reasonable. Before playing h2-h4 White can respond to ... h7-h5 with g4-g5, and if ... Ng4 then h2-h3!. Thus it makes sense for Black to postpone pushing the h-pawn to h5 until White has given up control of the g4-square.

Alternatively:

a) 8 ... d5!? is another concrete approach, but I think White's activity should ensure at least a slight advantage; e.g. 9 exd5 Nxd5 10 Nxd5 Qxd5 (if 10 ... cxd5 11 Be3 Qxh4, White has good compensation and usually regain the pawn anyway, as we'll see in Game 71) 11 Bg2! Qe5+ 12 Be3 with a stable plus (see Game 70).

b) 8 ... g6 9 g5 hxg5 10 Bxg5 Be7 11 Qd2 is comfortable for White. Black must solve the problem of where to put the king, while White will conveniently castle queenside.

c) 8 ... e5?! 9 Nb3 is also nice for White; e.g. 9 ... Be6 (not 9 ... h5?! 10 g5 Ng4? 11 Rg2 and 12 f3 wins because the e5-square is no longer available for the knight) 10 g5 hxg5 11 hxg5 and White has succeeded in implementing his plan.

### **9 gxh5**

Here 9 g5 Ng4 is considered to be fine for Black and hence is no longer seen at the top level; e.g. 10 Be2 Qb6 with central counterplay.

### **9 ... Nxh5 10 Bg5**

A critical point!

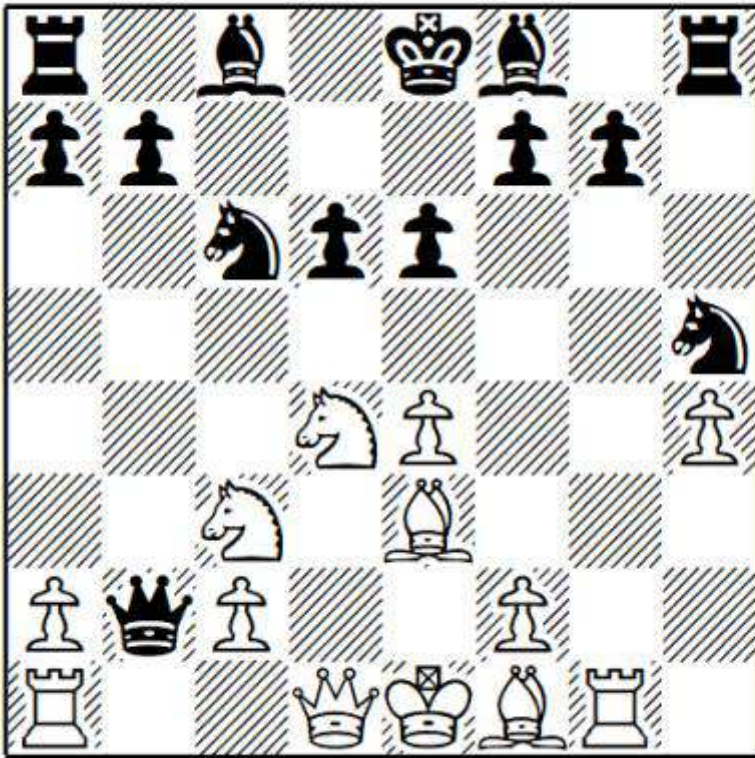
### **10 ... Nf6**

This is played in 90% of games, and it makes sense to bring the knight back to the centre. However, there are several other moves to consider:

a) 10 ... Be7 11 Bxe7 (forcing matters and playing against the weakened d6-pawn; 11 Qd2 would be the usual way to handle the position) 11 ... Qxe7 12 Ndb5 d5 13 exd5 exd5+ 14 Qe2 Be6 15 Nxd5 Bxd5 16 Nc7+ and White takes an extra pawn into an endgame, M.Eggink-J.Garbowski, Warsaw 2015.

b) 10 ... Qa5? is not good because of 11 Ndb5 and Black is in trouble.

c) 10 ... Qb6 11 Be3 (here 11 Nb3 is also good, when White can finish his development smoothly by 12 Qd2 and 13 0-0-0) 11 ... Qc7 12 Qd2 and White enjoys the usual advantage. Instead, the greedy 11 ... Qxb2? loses on the spot.



*A poisoned pawn*

**Question:** Can you find a way to punish Black's last move?

**Answer:** 12 Ndb5! (threatening a fork on c7 as well as 13 Rb1, trapping the queen) 12 ... Qb4 (12 ... Nb4 fails to 13 Rb1 Qxc2 14 Rxb4) 13 Rg5! and White wins.

**11 Qd2 Qb6**

Driving the white knight from its central position.

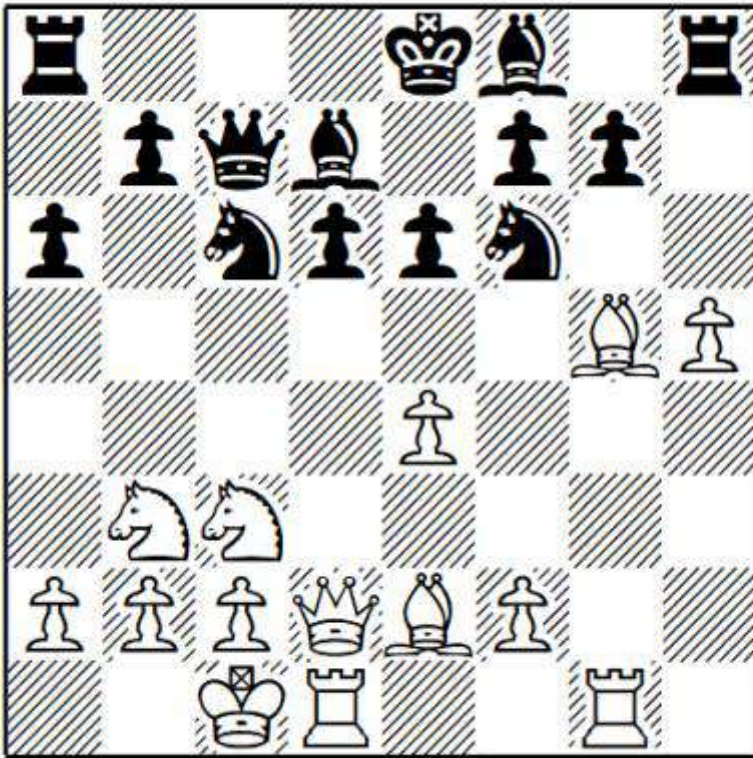
**12 Nb3**

Not 12 0-0-0?! since Black would just exchange twice on d4 with equality; while after 12 Be3!? Black can safely take the b2-pawn; e.g. 12 ... Qxb2 13 Rb1 Qa3 14 Rg5! e5! 15 Ndb5 Qa5.

**12 ... a6 13 0-0-0 Bd7 14 Be2**

The precautionary 14 Kb1 is another option, which we'll look at in Game 68.

**14 ... Qc7 15 h5**



### *Pressure on the kingside*

Here we stop the theoretical overview. We'll examine this position further in Game 69.

### **Illustrative games**

In the first two games Black allows the white g-pawn to advance again straight away. In Game 66 (with 6 ... Nc6), GM Movsesian employs 10 Qh5 which was briefly discussed above. White continues his creative attacking play and finishes with a neat mating attack.

In Game 67 (with 6 ... a6) Black tries a quick ... b7-b5 and ... Bb7 instead, but White is much better out of the opening and wins another convincing attacking game.

The remaining games all feature the main line with 6 ... h6. White responds with h2-h4 and Rg1, preparing g4-g5 again, at which point Black has a choice.

In the 8 ... h5 line, Bacrot goes for the plan of advancing f2-f4-f5 in Game 68, while in the following game we encounter a different idea of h4-h5, putting pressure on the kingside.

In the final two games, Black switches the fight to the centre with 8 ... d5!?. In Game 70, White gets a slightly better ending after 10 ... Qxd5 11 Bg2 and converts the plus in good style. In Game 69, Black elects to trade his d-pawn for the white h-pawn and manages to reach a roughly level position, but eventually loses the game anyway.

That concludes the overview. Let's dive into the details!

### *Game 66*

#### **S.Movsesian-O.Cvitan**

German Bundesliga 1997

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 d6 6 g4 Nc6 7 g5!**

Always advance the g-pawn to g5, if you can.

**7 ... Nd7 8 Be3**

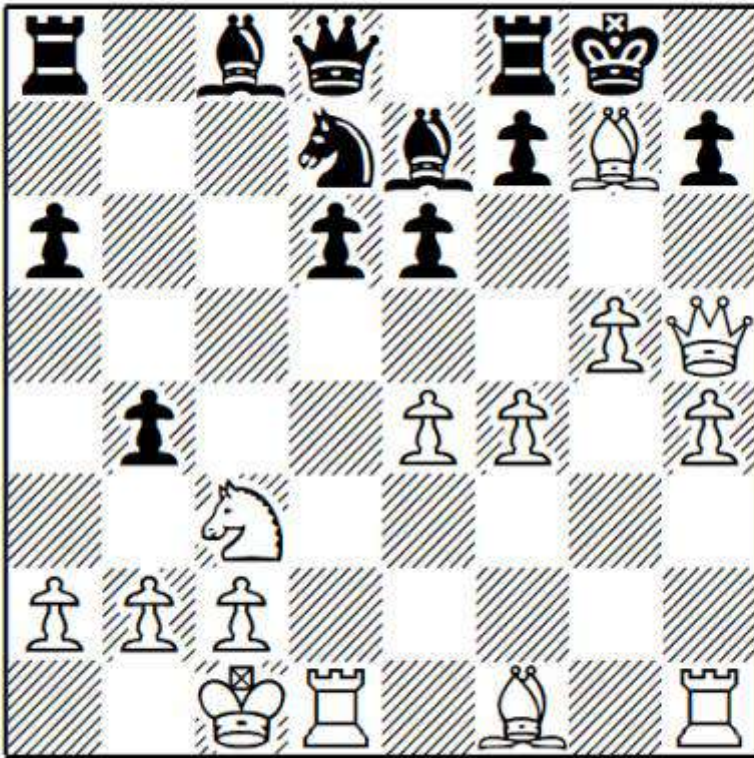
Stabilizing the central knight first.

**8 ... Be7 9 h4 0-0**

Here 9 ... a6 is an attempt to avoid the 10 Qh5 variation, because Black has not castled yet and White does not have a clear waiting move. However, White can switch plans and go for a pawn storm with 10 f4, and f2-f4 proves to be more useful than ... a7-a6. Another option is to play 10 Qh5 anyway and bother Black on the kingside, hoping for ... 0-0 after all due to the lack of alternatives.

**10 Qh5!? a6 11 0-0-0 Nxd4 12 Bxd4 b5 13 Bd3**

I prefer 13 f4!? first, holding back Bd3 until later so that the bishop cannot be challenged by ... Ne5. After the most common reply 13 ... b4 White scores 85%, which tells us a lot about the position. Here White has a pleasant choice between 14 Ne2, which is the best option, and the immediate sacrifice 14 Bxg7!?, which leads to fascinatingly complex play.



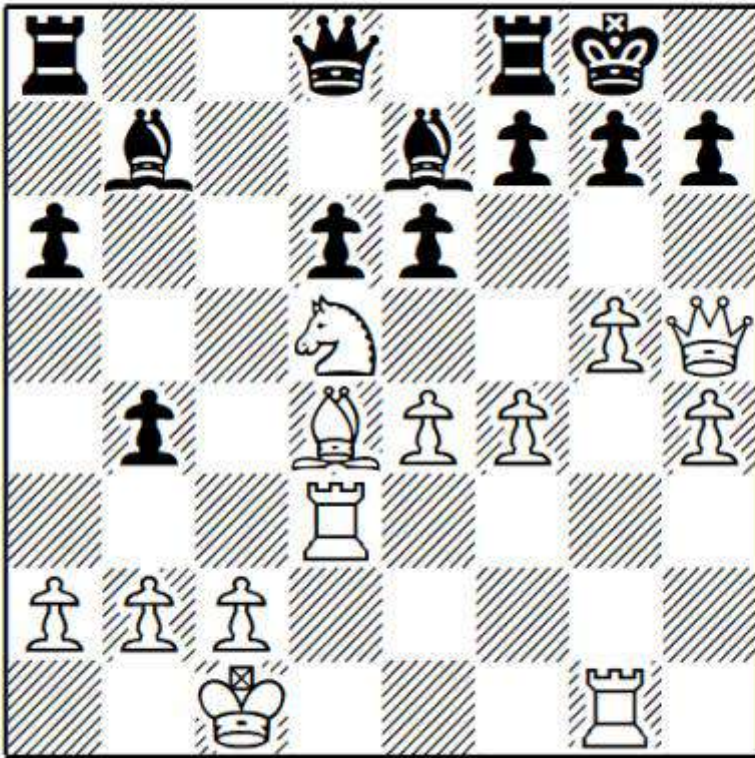
### *A surprising sacrifice*

Although the piece sac leads to equality, Black must find accurate moves in order to avoid a quick loss and his lifetime score of +0 =4 -12 shows that it isn't very easy: 14 ... Kxg7 15 e5! Rg8! (or 15 ... Nc5 16 Na4! d5! 17 Qh6+ Kh8 18 Nxc5 Bxc5 19 Bd3 f5 20 exf6 Ra7 21 Kb1 with a dynamically balanced position; not 15 ... Rh8? which loses after 16 Ne4, e.g. 16 ... dxe5 17 Qh6 Kg8 18 Rxd7 Bxd7 19 Nf6+ Bxf6 20 gxf6 and White will checkmate soon) 16 Bd3 Nf8 17 Ne4 Kh8 18 exd6 Bxd6 19 Nf6 Rg7 20 Rhf1 Qe7 21 Qh6 Bb7 22 Nh5 Rg8 23 Nf6 Rg7 24 Nh5 with a draw.

**13 ... Ne5 14 f4 Nxd3+ 15 Rxd3 Bb7?**

The immediate 15 ... b4 was correct, expelling the knight while it cannot jump to d5. Here 16 Nd5?? gives a piece away for nothing: 16 ... exd5 17 Rg3 dxe4 18 Rhg1 Bf5! and wins. White does not the same tricks as in the game because Black can always block the g-file with ... Bg6.

**16 Rg1 b4 17 Nd5!!**



*A stunning idea*

### 17 ... exd5

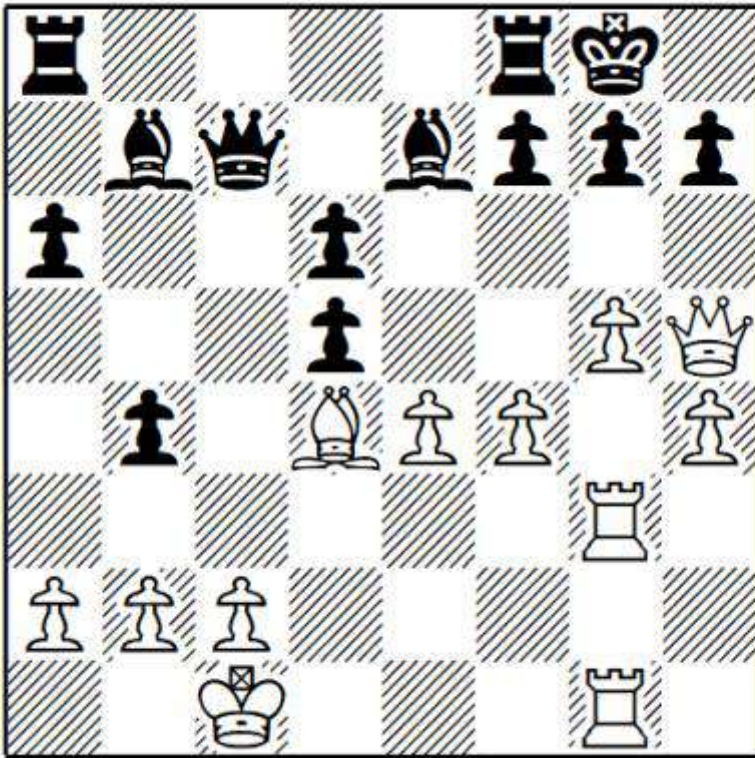
Black demands to be shown. Objectively, 17 ... Bxd5 was more resilient, but after 18 exd5 Rc8 19 Qe2 it is obvious that Black is much worse, whereas White's idea in the game is not yet at all obvious.

### 18 Rdg3! Qc7

Alternatives do not help; e.g.

a) 18 ... Kh8 19 g6 fxg6 20 Rxc6 breaks through with a crushing attack.

b) 18 ... g6 19 Qh6 f6 20 gxf6 Rxf6 21 Rxc6+ hxg6 22 Bxf6 Bxf6 23 Qxc6+ Kf8 24 Qh7 and White wins.



*White to play and win*

**Question:** What continuation did White have in mind when he played 17 Nd5 - ?

**Answer: 19 Qh6!**

Threatening Qxg7 mate, while 19 ... gxh6 just leads to another mate after 20 gxh6+ etc.

**19 ... Qxc2+**

This was the only way to avoid mate at once, but now White is just completely winning!

**20 Kxc2 Rfc8+ 21 Kd2 gxh6 22 gxh6+ Bg5 23 Rxc2 Kf8 24 exd5 Ke7 25 Rf5 Rc4 26 Kd3 Rac8 27 Rg7 1-0**

*Game 67*

**N.Short-V.Babula**

Istanbul Olympiad 2012

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 e6 6 g4 a6**

The second main way of allowing g4-g5. Black wants to go for a quick ... b7-b5 and put pressure on the e4-pawn, for example with ... Bb7 and ... b5-b4.

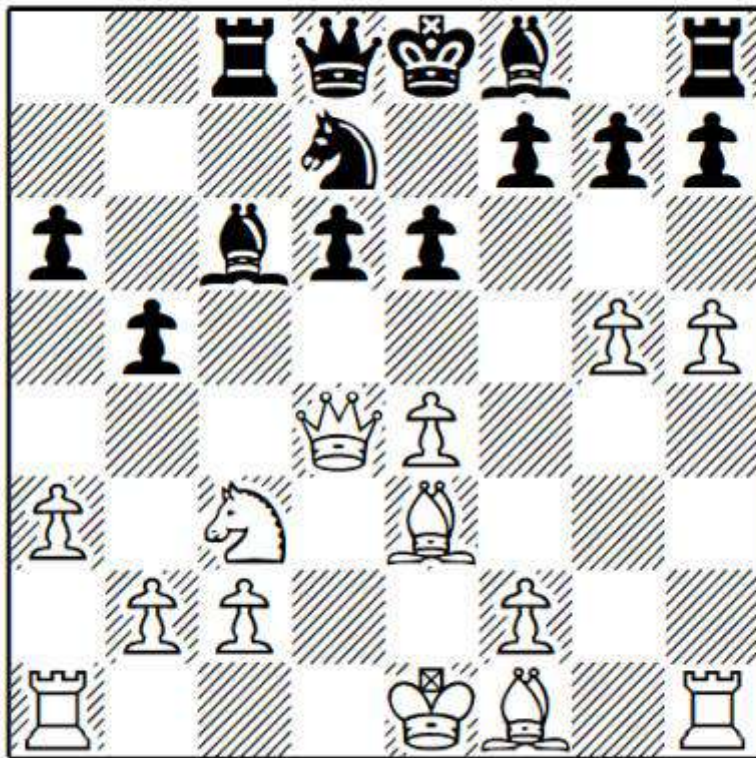
**7 g5 Nfd7 8 h4**

8 Be3 is also possible.

**8 ... b5 9 a3!**

A key move: White prevents ... b5-b4 and Black will need a lot of time to renew the threat.

**9 ... Bb7 10 Be3 Nc6 11 Nxc6 Bxc6 12 h5 Rc8 13 Qd4!**



### *Problems with the g7-pawn*

Very strong. Black is not allowed to finish his development with ... Be7.

Let's examine a few alternatives:

a) 13 g6? hxg6 14 hxg6? Rxh1 15 Qf3 does not work here, since after 15 ... Qh4 16 Qxf7+ Kd8 there is no mate and Black is a rook up.

b) 13 Bg2? is no good either. Black can just develop and bring the knight to c4 later; e.g. example 13 ... Be7 14 Qg4 Ne5 15 Qg3 Nc4 and Black is fine.

c) 13 Be2 and 13 Qd2 are reasonable ways to keep an edge, but the text is more ambitious.

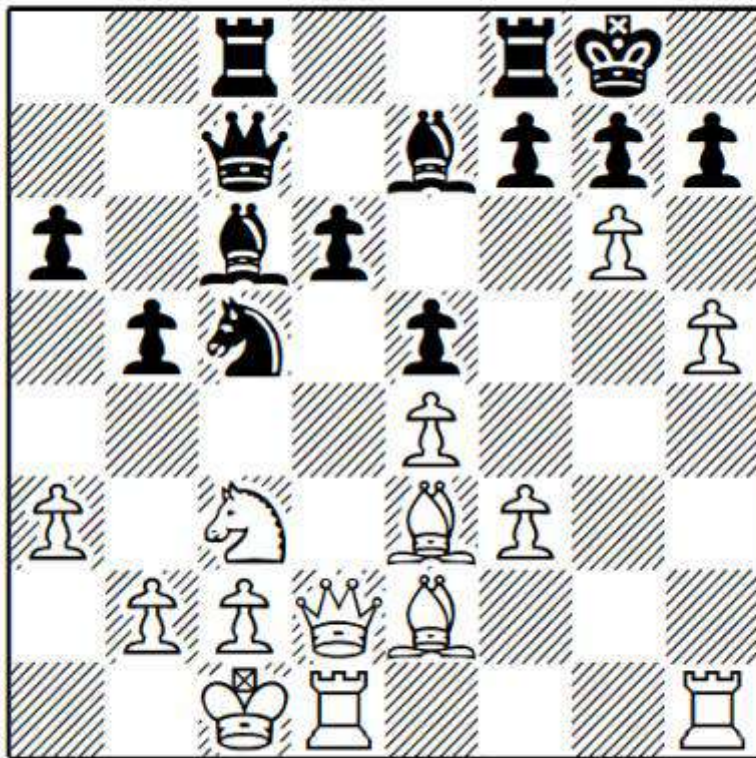
**13 ... Qc7**

13 ... e5 is the kind of move White wants to provoke. Black has weakened the d5-square and h3-c8 diagonal irreversibly, and after 14 Qd2 Be7 15 Bh3 White has a big plus.

**14 Be2 Nc5 15 f3**

Black is running out of useful moves, so he finally agrees to make a concession.

**15 ... e5 16 Qd2 Be7 17 0-0-0 0-0 18 g6**



*Opening files*

**18 ... Ne6**

The standard response 18 ... fxc6 19 hxg6 h6, trying to keep everything closed, fails to 20 Bxh6! and White finishes the game quickly.

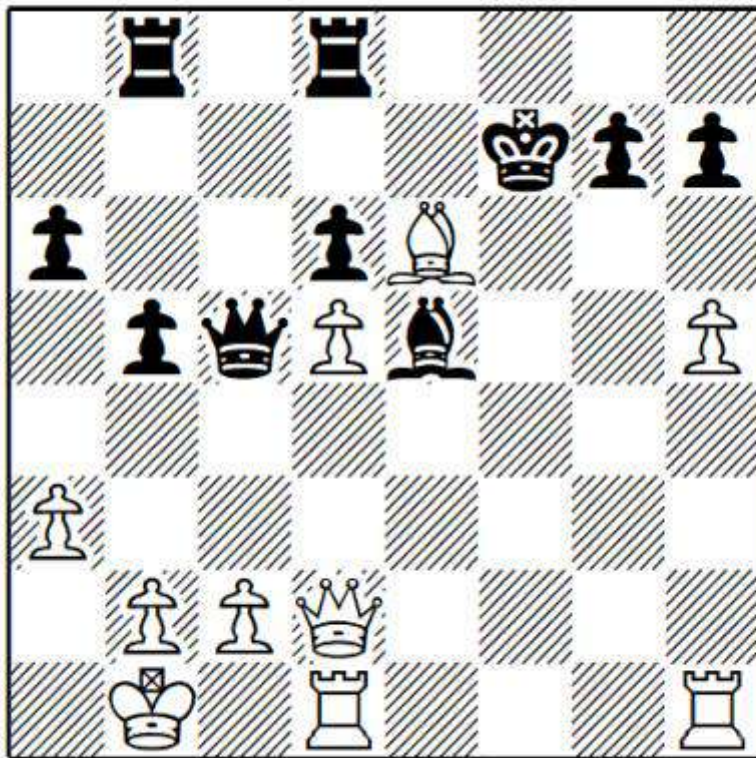
**19 Kb1 Rfd8 20 Nd5 Bxd5 21 exd5 Nc5 22 gxf7+**

22 gxh7+ Kh8 is also good, but Black's king is not as exposed as in the game.

**22 ... Kxf7 23 f4 Bf6 24 fxe5 Bxe5 25 Bg4 Rb8 26 Bxc5!**

White already has many ways to launch the decisive blow; e.g. 26 h6 g6 27 Rhf1+ Kg8 28 Bd4 Re8 29 Rde1 Bxd4 30 Qxd4 a5 31 b4, when 32 Be6 will come with devastating effect. However, I like the solution in the game, opting for a position with opposite-coloured bishops, when Black is helpless on the light squares.

**26 ... Qxc5 27 Be6+!**



*A crushing attack*

And the attack on the light squares will be decisive.

**27 ... Ke8**

27 ... Kf8?! 28 Rhf1+ Bf6 29 Rxf6+! gxf6 30 Qh6+ Ke8 31 Qg7 leads to mate even faster.

**28 Qd3 Ke7 29 Rhf1 Rf8**

Even here 29 ... Bf6 is answered by 30 Rxf6! and either recapture leads to mate; i.e. 30 ... gxf6 31 Qxh7+ Ke8 32 Qf7 mate or 30 ... Kxf6 31 Qf5+ Ke7 32 Qf7 mate.

**30 Qxh7 Qe3 31 Qg6**

Threatening 32 Rf7+.

**31 ... Rf2 32 h6 1-0**

Black resigned in view of 32 ... gxh6 33 Qh7+.

Now we move on to Black's most popular option: 6 ... h6, not allowing the instant 7 g5.

*Game 68*

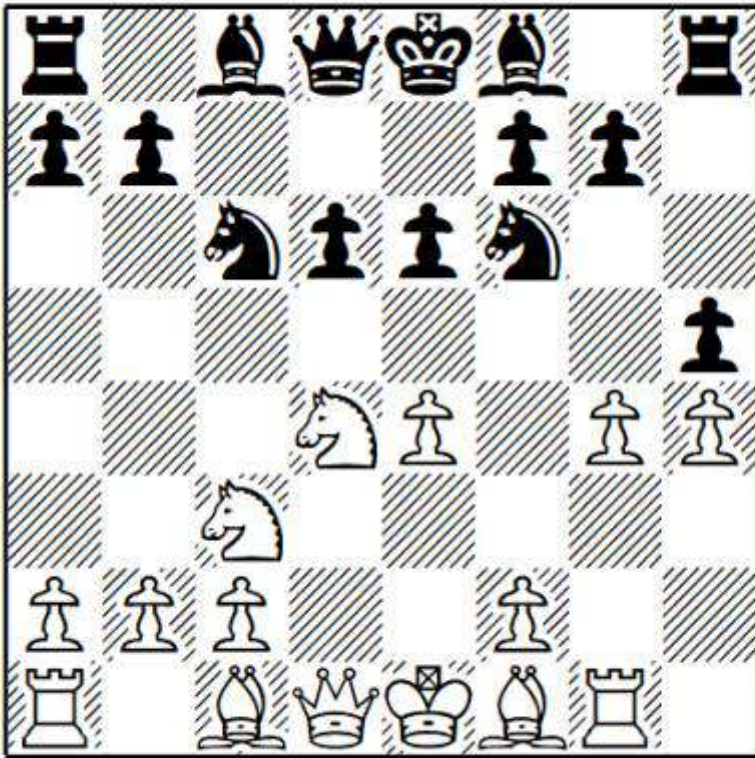
**E.Bacrot-J.Riff**

French League 2010

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 Nf6 4 Nc3 cxd4 5 Nxd4 e6 6 g4 h6**

Black decides to slow down our usual kingside play. To achieve g4-g5 now will take an extra tempo moving the rook off the h-file.

**7 h4 Nc6 8 Rg1 h5**



*A typical counter*

With this second push, Black deters our plan altogether, since 9 g5?! allows the f6-knight find a stable place: 9 ... Ng4 10 f3 (after 10 g6? fxg6 gives White no compensation and the h4-pawn is also under attack) 10 ... Nge5 and the knight will be safe. In the case of 11 f4 it can return to g4.

**9 gxh5 Nxh5 10 Bg5 Nf6 11 Qd2 a6**

So far, we have been following the main line of the theoretical section. Now Black generally plays 11 ... Qb6, when 12 Nb3 a6 13 0-0-0 Bd7 14 Kb1 would transpose below; while 14 Be2 is examined in the next game. Delaying the attack on the d4-knight gives White the option of leaving it in the centre, but Bacrot is happy to retreat it as normal.

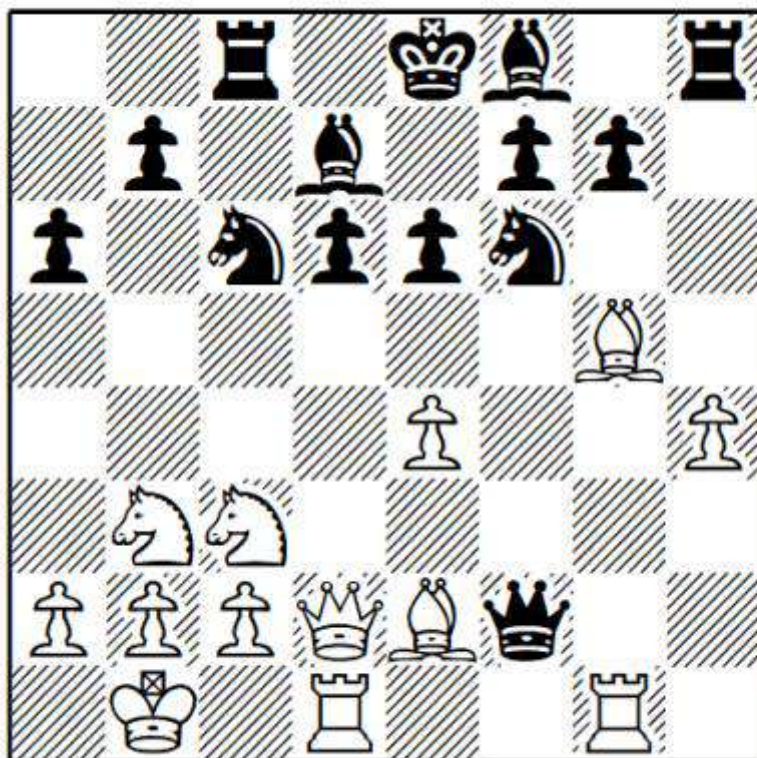
**12 0-0-0 Bd7 13 Kb1 Qb6 14 Nb3 Qc7**

Black retreats the queen again to increase his control in the centre, avoid Be3 at an inconvenient moment, and free the b-pawn to advance. Instead:

a) 14 ... 0-0-0?! is not really an option because of 15 Be3 Qc7 16 f4 and Black is already in trouble. The threat is Qf2 and Bb6, and 16 ... Rxh4 17

Qf2 Ng4 18 Qxh4 Nxe3 19 Rd2 doesn't leave Black with enough for the exchange.

b) 14 ... Rc8 is an alternative, but White can simply continue developing with 15 Be2 and Be3 is always in the air as long as the queen remains on b6. Grabbing the f2-pawn with 15 ... Qxf2? is ambitious but should also land Black in trouble.



*Risky play by Black*

**Question:** How to continue after Black's greedy capture?

**Answer:** 16 h5! is very strong, increasing the pressure on Black's kingside, with the threat of 17 Rfd1 Qb6 18 h6 and wins, or if 16 ... Be7 then 17 Rdf1 Qb6 18 Be3 and 19 Rxc7 wins. Finally, if Black plays 16 ... Nxe5 again, White gets a crushing attack after 17 Be3 Qf6 18 Rg5 g6 19 Nc5 Rb8 20 e5! Nxe5 21 N3e4.

**15 Qe3**

The first new idea, Usually White tries to implement h4-h5 at this stage, trying to soften Black's kingside.

### **15 ... Rc8**

Now that Be3 has been temporarily ruled out, Black might consider castling, but it is the wrong plan on principle. Black needs counterplay and the c-file or the queenside is the best place for that. After 15 ... 0-0-0 Black has no active prospects; e.g. 16 f3 Be7 17 Qf2! Nh5 18 Be3! and White has a huge advantage as the bishop will penetrate on b6.

### **16 f4!?**

A very interesting idea. At first glance this seems illogical as our bishop on g5 is now stuck, but Black can hardly play to win the piece as we will see below. Meanwhile 17 f5 will soften up Black's position.

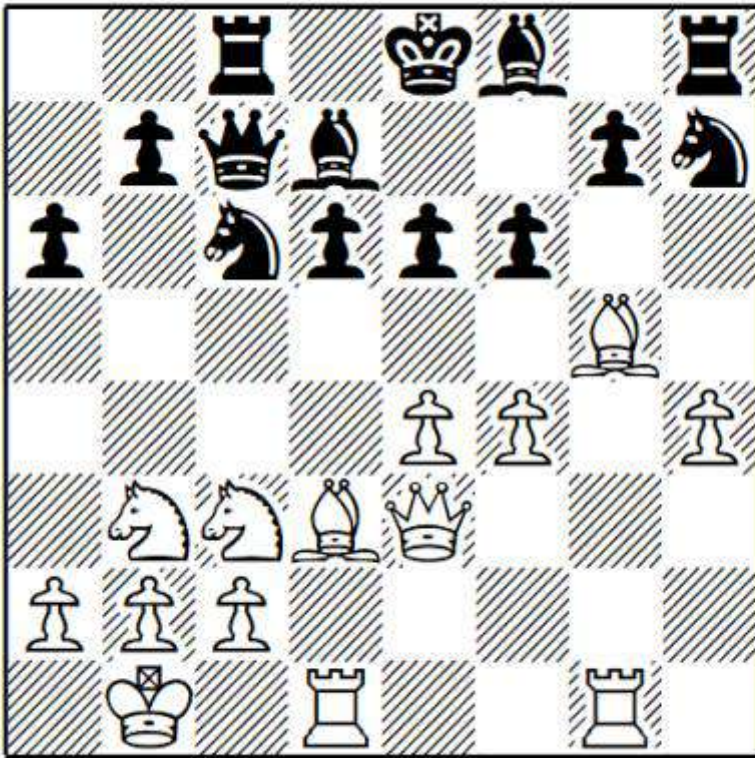
The alternative was to play for h4-h5 again. For example: 16 Be2 b5 17 a3 Ne5 18 h5 Nc4 (not 18 ... Nxh5? 19 Rh1 g6 20 f4 Nc4 21 Bxc4 bxc4 22 Nd5 White is winning) 19 Bxc4 bxc4 20 Nd2 Nxh5 21 Nd5 Qc5 22 Nb6 and White regains the pawn while keeping threats alive.

### **16 ... Nh7 17 Bd3**

The immediate 17 f5 was also possible, but the text move tempts Black to go wrong with 17 ... f6, "trapping" our bishop on g5.

### **17 ... Nxf5**

Black declines the offer. 17 ... f6? is of course a critical move to check because we must give up a piece.



*Trapped piece?*

**Question:** Can you find a good way to continue after that?

**Answer:** There are quite a few solutions to this question, so it is impossible to show all of them. For example, 18 e5 fxg5 19 hxg5 dxe5 20 Qh3, or similarly 18 f5 fxg5 19 hxg5 followed by 20 Qh3. The idea of Qh3 is very simple and a good motif to remember.

Another option is to continue on the queenside with 17 ... b5 18 a3 Qa7, but after 19 Qg3 b4 20 axb4 Nxb4 21 f5 White is much better due to the safer king and more coordinated pieces.

**18 hxg5 g6**

Otherwise 19 g6 f6 20 f5 would follow, with complete domination of the light squares.

**19 f5 Ne5**

19 ... Bg7 20 f6 Bf8 21 Rh1 Rxh1 22 Rxh1 is hopeless for Black.

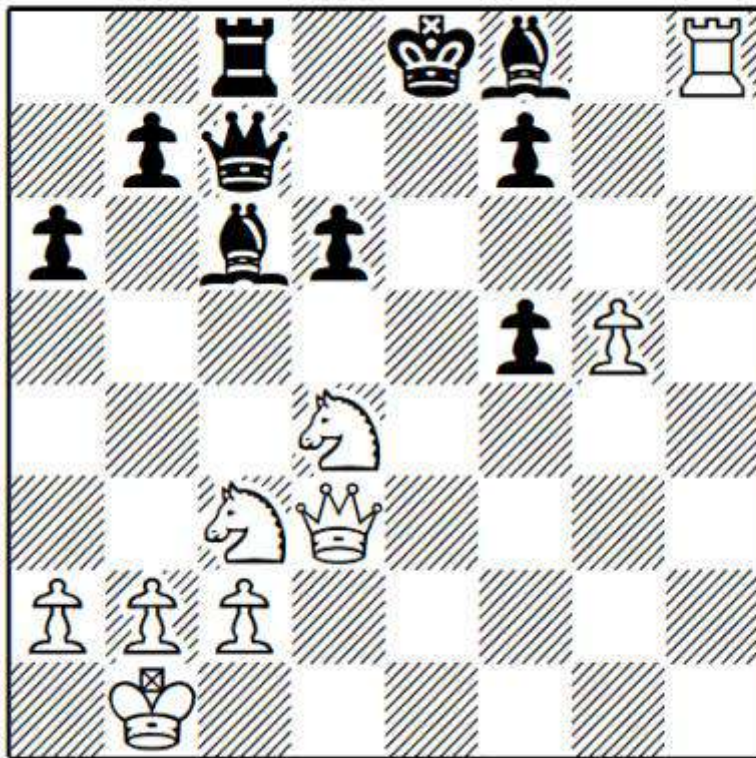
**20 Rh1!**

A last accurate move, after which the rook invades and the game is basically over. Note that White needs to maintain the tension to crack the defence. 20 fxg6? fxg6 would achieve nothing, because Black has all the important squares protected; e.g. 21 Rh1 Rxf1 22 Rxf1 Bg7 and Black is still in the game.

**20 ... Rxf1 21 Rxf1 Bc6?**

Here 21 ... gxf5 was the only way to put up any resistance, though White is still winning; e.g. 22 Rh7! (maintaining the tension; 22 exf5 exf5 23 Nd5 Qc6 24 Nf6+ Kd8 is less clear) 22 ... f4 (or 22 ... Ng4 23 Qd4) 23 Qxf4 Qb6 24 Ne2 Ba4 25 g6! and White breaks through.

**22 Rh8 Nxd3 23 Qxd3 exf5 24 exf5 gxf5 25 Nd4**



*White is winning*

Black has too many weak squares, as well as weak pawns, and White will soon launch a decisive attack against the black monarch.

**25 ... Be4 26 Nxe4 fxe4 27 Qh3 Qc4 28 g6 Ke7**

After 28 ... fxg6!? White wins with the unique solution 29 b3!, when the black queen can no longer cover both the rook and the e6-square.

**29 Rh7 1-0**

*Game 69*

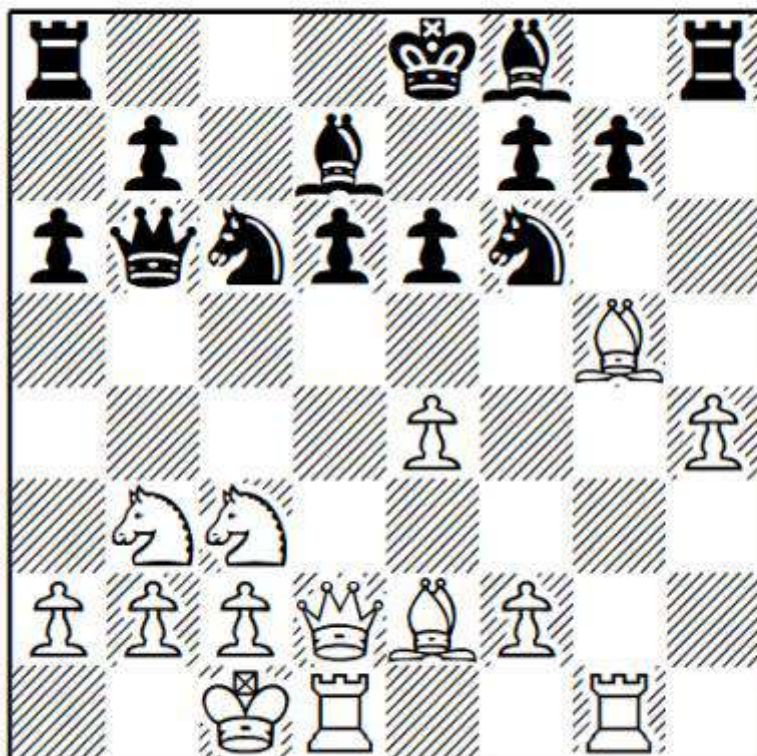
**Y.Kryvoruchko-K.Kulaots**

Abu Dhabi 2015

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 d6 6 g4 h6 7 Rg1 Nc6 8 h4 h5 9 gxh5 Nxh5 10 Bg5 Nf6 11 Qd2 Qb6 12 Nb3 a6 13 0-0-0 Bd7**

So far we are familiar with everything from the introductory section and know that White has two different plans. First, f2-f4 followed by f4-f5, which Bacrot went for in Game 68; and second, Be2 and h4-h5, putting pressure on the kingside, which is how White chooses to play the position here.

**14 Be2**



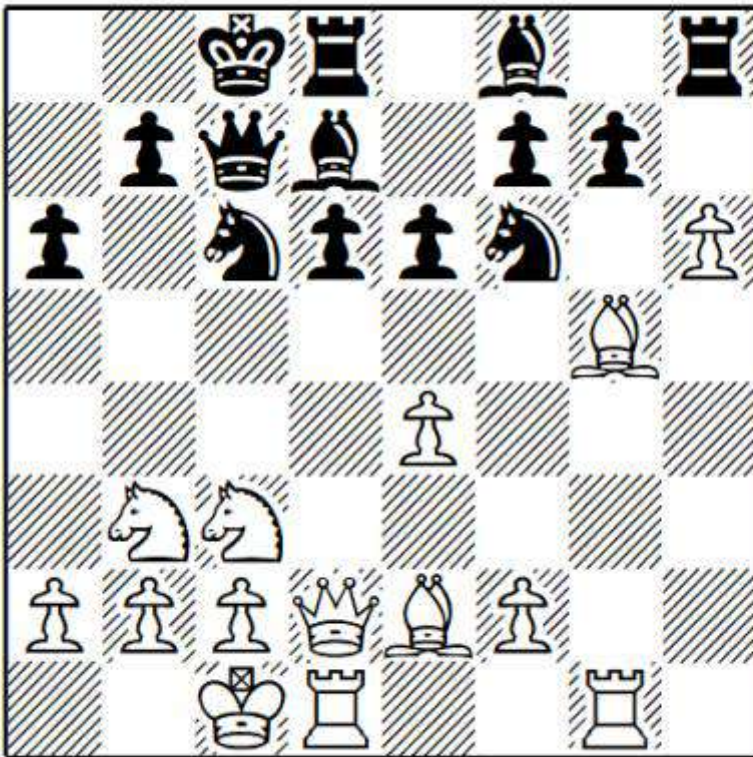
## *White plans 15 h5*

### **14 ... Qc7**

Having accomplished its task on b6, pushing the white knight away, the black queen retreats to its usual square. As we have seen already, grabbing the f2-pawn is far too greedy; e.g. 14 ... Qxf2? 15 h5 Nxh5 16 Be3 Qf6 17 Rg5 g6 18 e5 Nxe5 19 Ne4 Qe7 20 Rxe5 gives White a crushing initiative.

### **15 h5! Nxh5**

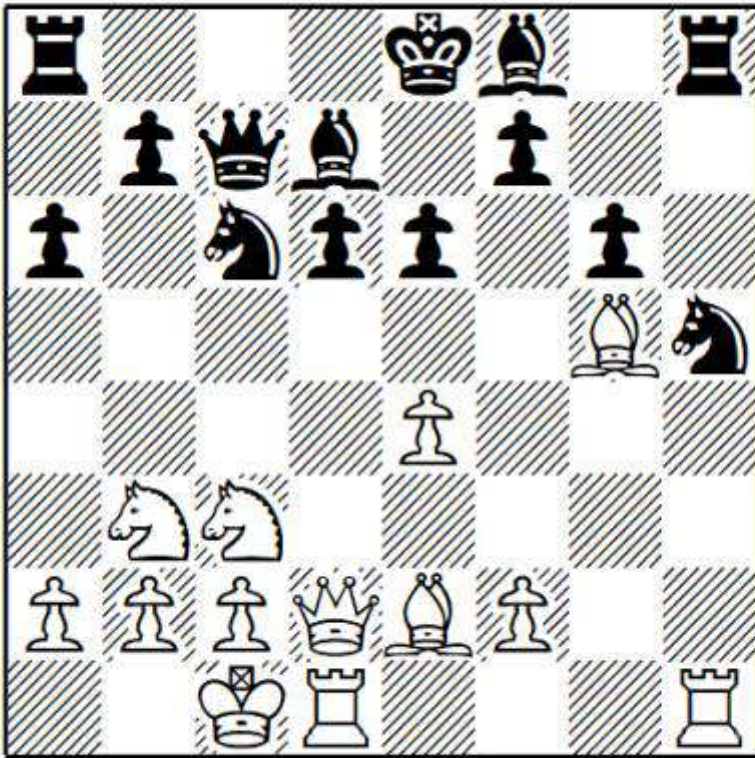
Black is not obliged to take the pawn, because after 15 ... 0-0-0 16 h6



### *A paralysed kingside*

White has no immediate threat, but Black cannot reshuffle his pieces either. For example, after 16 ... Be7? 17 hxg7 or 16 ... Rg8? 17 Bxf6 Black loses at once. As a result, White can slowly increase the pressure while Black must just hope for the best.

### **16 Rh1 g6**



### *Good compensation*

White has good compensation for the pawn and just sitting on it looks very promising; for example, with 17 Kb1 Be7 18 Be3, and if 18 ... 0-0-0 19 Na4 or 18 ... b5 19 f4. Instead, Kryvoruchko prefers to regain the pawn at once, seeing that he will likely pick up the d6-pawn as well.

**17 Bxh5 gxh5 18 Qe2**

Regaining the pawn, while Black must finish his development.

**18 ... Be7 19 Bxe7 Nxe7 20 Rxh5 0-0-0 21 Rxh8 Rxh8 22 Qd2 Bc6!?**

Black must surrender the d-pawn. The counterattacking 22 ... Rh2 would not help, as 23 Qf4 wins the pawn anyway and the rook's journey proves to be a waste of time; e.g. 23 ... Rh7 24 Qxd6 Qxd6 25 Rxd6 and White is slightly better.

**23 Qxd6 Qxd6 24 Rxd6**

So White has won a pawn, but now Black has a lot of activity plus ideas of regaining the pawn himself

**26 ... Rh4 25 Kd2**

Instead of trying to protect the e4-pawn with 25 Rd4, White activates his king.

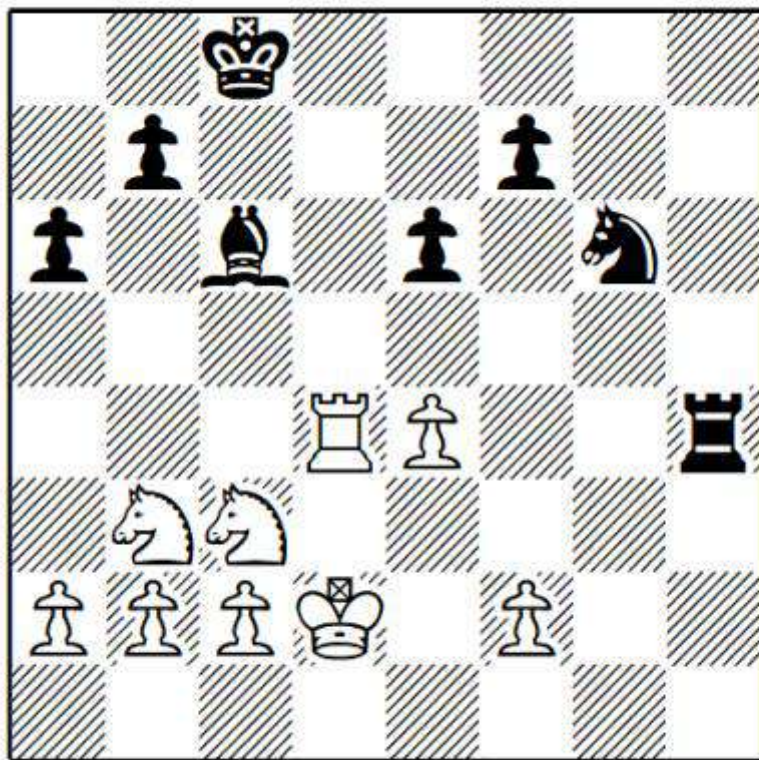
**Question:** Is Black ready to regain the pawn with 25 ... Bxe4 - ?

**Answer:** No, he should protect the rook first.

**25 ... Ng6!**

Preparing 26 ... Bxe4. Note that 25 ... Bxe4? would be premature because the annoying pin with 26 Rd4 forces Black into 26 ... f5 27 Nxe4 fxe4 28 Nc5, when White will soon get the pawn back again and in a much better position.

**26 Rd4**



*White defends the pawn*

White defends the pawn with the rook after all, but now Black has fully enough compensation because White can hardly do anything constructive. Similarly, after 26 Ke3 Ne5 27 Rd4 b5 28 Nd2 Kc7.

**26 ... Rh2 27 Ke3 Rh3+ 28 f3 Nh4 29 Nd2 Rh2 30 Nc4**

If 30 Kd3 Black can resort to 30 ... Rxd2+ 31 Kxd2 Nxf3+ etc, or just play 30 ... Rh3 again.

**30 ... Rxc2 31 Kf4**

After 31 Nd6+ Kc7 32 Nxf7 Ng2+ 33 Kd3 Rxb2 34 Ng5 Black has no problems either.

**31 ... Kc7 32 Rd2**

With material equal again, White decided to force a draw.

**32 ... Rxd2 33 Nxd2 f6 34 Ke3 Ng2+ 35 Kf2 Nf4 36 Ke3 Ng2+ 37 Kf2**

**1/2-1/2**

Now we switch to an alternative at Black's eighth move, opening the centre with a timely ... d6-d5. This is a reliable option but a bit boring for my taste, as Black will have to defend a slightly inferior endgame.

*Game 70*

**H.Raja-K.Chukavin**

PRO Chess League (rapid) 2019

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 d6 6 g4 h6 7 h4 Nc6 8 Rg1 d5!?**



Now 10 ... exd5 is a possibility. In contrast to 9 ... exd5 Black is threatening the h4-pawn and thus creates some counterchances. We will look at this in the next game.

**11 Bg2!**

White continues developing and tries to spoil Black's queenside structure slightly.

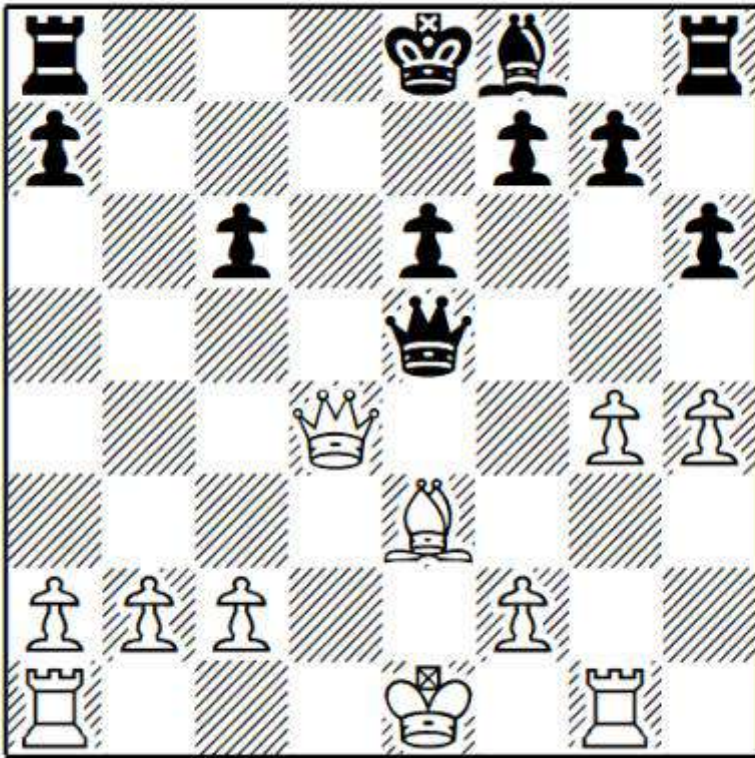
**11 ... Qe5+ 12 Be3 Bd7**

With 12 ... Nxd4? Black could keep his pawn structure as it is, but White's activity is too strong. After 13 Qxd4 Qxd4 14 Bxd4 Black cannot move either bishop and must make a further concession like 14 ... f6 in order to bring his pieces out.

**13 Nxc6**

13 Qd2 is also possible; e.g. 13 ... Bc5 (13 ... Nxd4 14 Qxd4 Qxd4 15 Bxd4 Rc8 16 0-0-0 b6 develops the queenside but still leaves Black's kingside stuck) 14 f4 Qd6 15 Nxc6 Qxd2+ 16 Kxd2 Bxe3+ 17 Kxe3 Bxc6 18 Bxc6+ bxc6 19 Rad1 Ke7 20 Rd4 with only a slight plus for White but in an absolutely risk-free endgame.

**13 ... Bxc6 14 Bxc6+ bxc6 15 Qd4**



*An early endgame?*

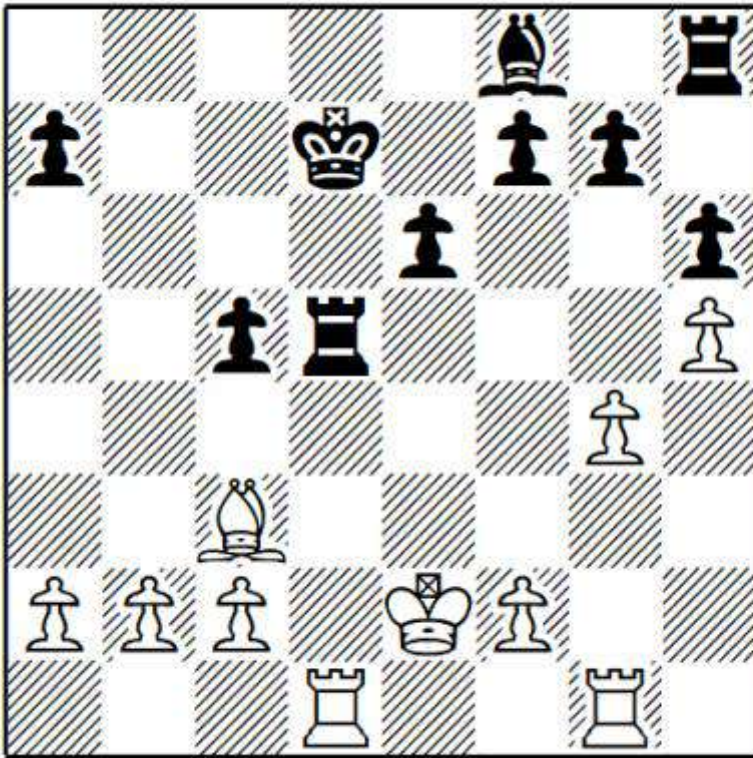
### **15 ... Qxd4**

15 ... Qa5+ could be tried, keeping the queens on the board, but after 16 c3 Rd8 17 Qe4 Black has not solved his problems.

### **16 Bxd4**

This position is very comfortable for White, who has collected a few pluses: a superior bishop and pawn structure, while Black still has a concrete developing issue.

**16 ... c5 17 Bc3 Rd8 18 Rd1 Rd5 19 Ke2 Kd7 20 h5!**



### *Fixing weaknesses*

Fixing Black's pawns on the same colour as his bishop.

**20 ... f6 21 Ba5!?**

Preparing 22 c4 as the enemy rook on d5 is quite annoying. An alternative is to improve the pieces slowly and gaining space with 21 f4 Kc6 22 Rge1 Bd6 23 Kf3. White is better here as well, but the rook stays on d5 for a long time and protects many important squares.

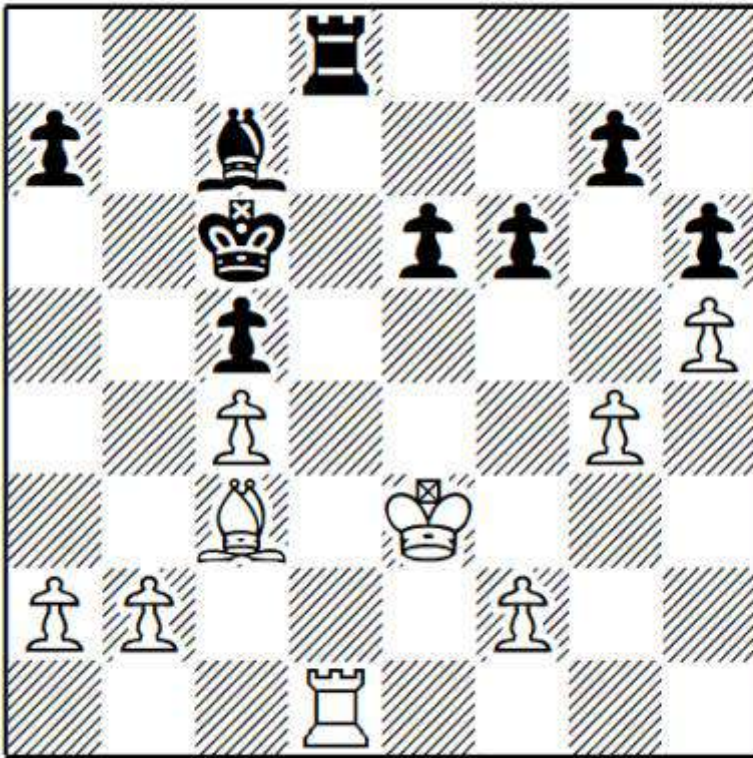
**21 ... Bd6?!?**

Here 21 ... c4!?! 22 b3 Bd6 23 Bc3 Rc8 24 b4 would have made White's task harder.

**22 c4 Rxd1**

Not 22 ... Rd4? 23 Rxd4 cxd4 24 Kd3 e5 25 b4 Bc7 26 Bxc7 Kxc7 27 c5 Kc6 28 Kc4 and the comparative activity of kings makes the difference.

**23 Rxd1 Kc6 24 Bc3 Bc7 25 Ke3 Rd8?**



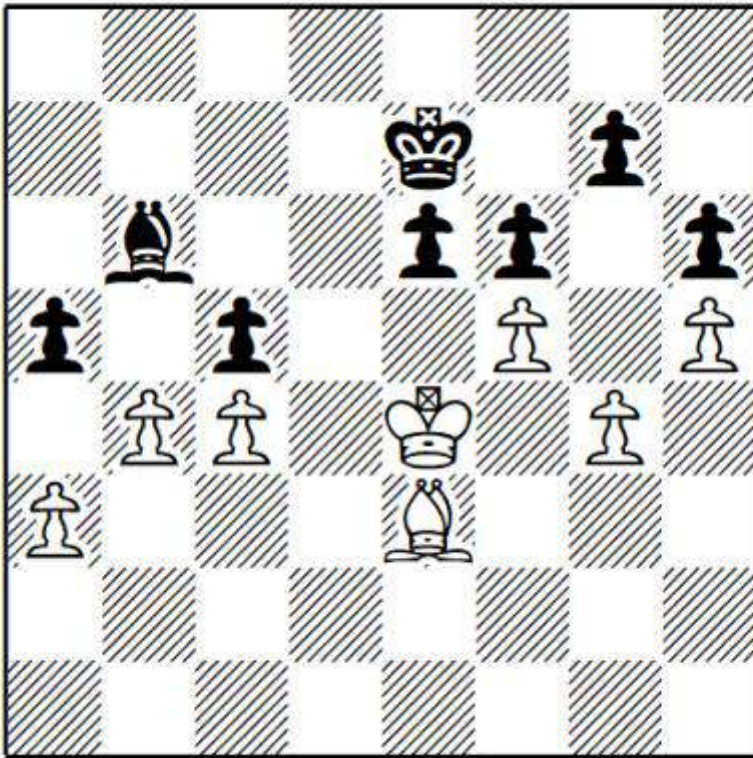
### *A fatal exchange*

The white rook is not doing anything useful yet. Black should seek counterplay with ... a7-a5-a4 in combination with his rook. After the exchange of rooks Black has no counterplay and the bishop ending will soon be lost.

**26 Rxd8 Bxd8 27 f4**

White is completely winning. The breakthrough with g4-g5 and the idea of f4-f5, planning to invade with the king, are both good enough to win.

**27 ... Kd7 28 Ke4 Ke7 29 a3 a5 30 b3 Bc7 31 Bd2 Kf7 32 Be3 Bd6 33 Bc1 Bc7 34 Bd2 Bd8 35 f5 Ke7 36 Be3 Bb6 37 b4!**



*Black is lost*

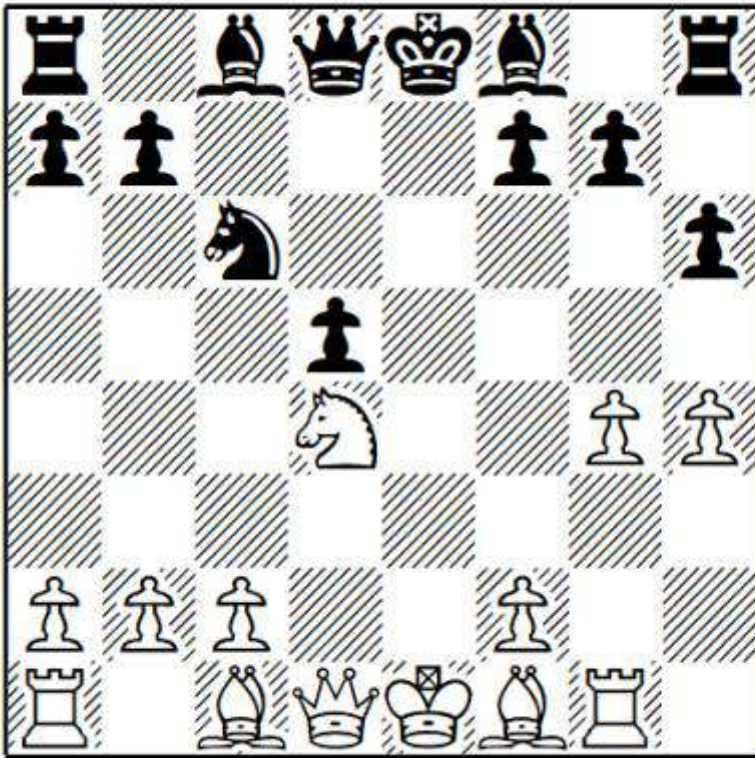
**37 ... axb4 38 axb4 Kd7 39 fxe6+ Kxe6 40 Bxc5 Bc7 41 b5 Ba5 42 Bf8 Kf7 43 Bd6 g6 44 hxg6+ Kxg6 45 c5 h5 46 gxh5+ Kxh5 47 b6 1-0**

*Game 71*

**VI.Kovalev-D.Shengelia**

European Team Championship, Heraklion 2017

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 e6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 d6 6 g4 h6 7 h4 Nc6 8 Rg1 d5 9 exd5 Nxd5 10 Nxd5 exd5!?**



*Another recapture*

In the previous game Black played 10 ... Qxd5, but accepting an isolated pawn is a viable option too. Black is now threatening the h4-pawn and White should have an idea how to handle this.

**Question:** How would you deal with the threat of 11 ... Qxh4 - ?

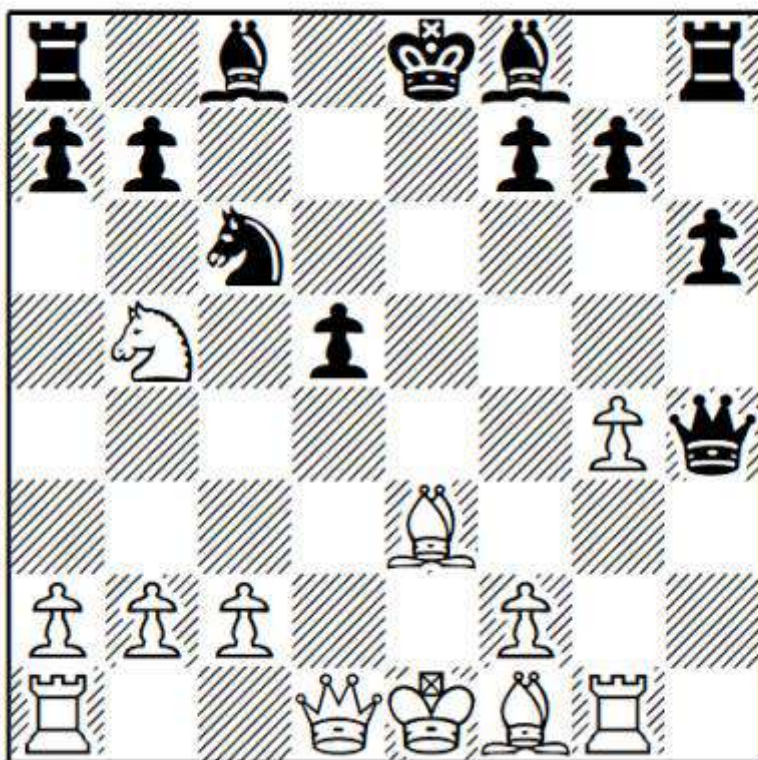
**Answer: 11 Be3!**

Ignoring the threat and counting on quick development. Instead, after 11 h5?! Be7 12 Be3 0-0 13 Qd2 Nxd4 14 Bxd4 Bg5 Black is fine thanks to his lead in development.

**11 ... Qxh4**

Declining to take the pawn would be inconsistent and inferior; e.g. 11 ... Be7 12 g5 hxg5 13 hxg5 and White scores a convincing 70% from here.

**12 Nb5**



*White regains the pawn*

So Black has taken the pawn, but White has several ways of restoring the material balance. Personally, I like the text move as it does not lead to mass exchanges. 12 Qe2 or 12 Qf3 are also viable options for White, so let's briefly check them:

a) 12 Qe2 Nxd4 13 Bxd4+ Qe7 14 Qxe7+ Kxe7 and White had good compensation in Q.Loiseau-Q.Burri, French League 2019.

b) 12 Qf3 Nxd4 13 Bxd4 Qe7+ 14 Be2 Qe4 15 0-0-0 Qxf3 16 Bxf3 Be6 17 Rge1 and White soon won the pawn back in F.Vallejo Pons-Yu Yangyi, Changsha 2019.

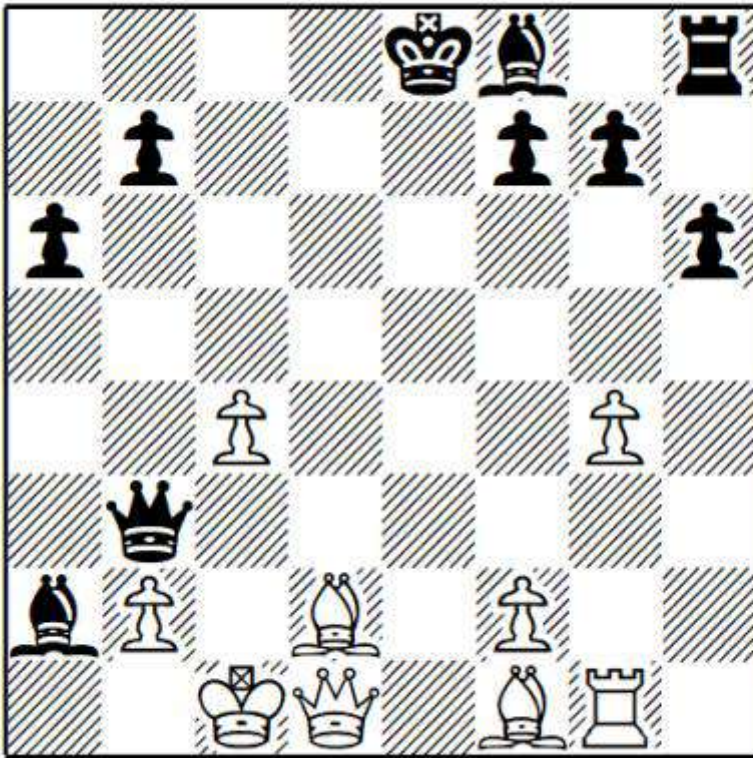
**12 ... Qe7**

12 ... Qd8 does not save the d-pawn in view of 13 Qxd5 Bb4+ 14 c3 Qxd5 15 Nc7+ Kf8 16 Nxd5 and White is better.

**13 Qxd5 Be6**

Instead, 13 ... a6 14 Nc3 Nb4 15 Qd2 Be6 16 0-0-0 Rd8 17 Qe1 Rxd1+ 18 Qxd1 Nxa2+ 19 Nxa2 Bxa2 was D.Baramidze-L.Ftacnik, German

Bundesliga 2018, where White went on to win quickly after 20 c4 Qb4 21 Bd2 Qb3.



*How to win material?*

**Question:** Can you find how White finally won the bishop on a2?

**Answer:** 22 Qe1+! Be7 23 Rg3 Qa4 24 Ra3 1-0, since the bishop is lost and Black has no hope of survival.

**14 Qe4 a6 15 Nc3 Qb4 16 0-0-0 Bc5 17 Bxc5**

Here I think 17 Qf3 should be preferred. Black's biggest problem is still his king and the more pieces remain, the harder this problem will be.

**17 ... Qxc5 18 Qf4 Rd8**

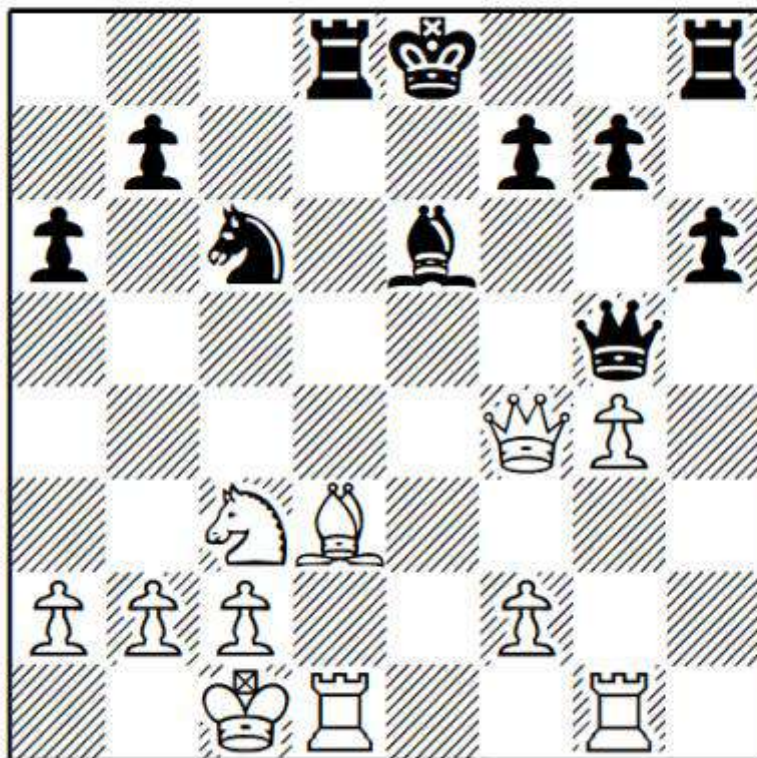
18 ... 0-0? 19 g5 is clearly too risky for Black.

**19 Bd3**

After 19 Rxd8+ Kxd8! the king goes over to the queenside where he finds a safe place.

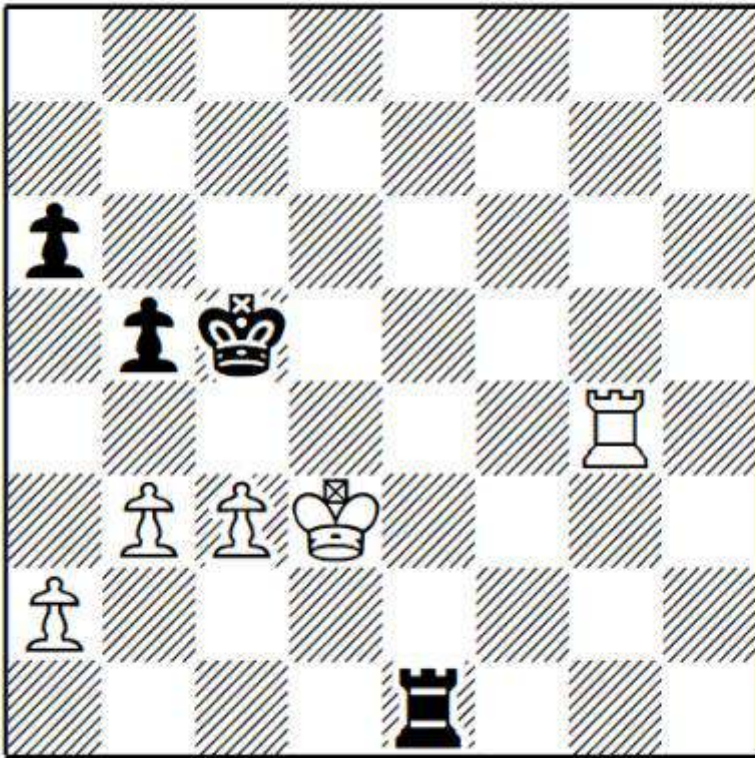
## 19 ... Qg5

Now, after the exchange of queens Black is fine.



*Equal position*

20 Qxg5 hxg5 21 Ne4 f6 22 Nc5 Bc8 23 Be4 Rxd1+ 24 Kxd1 Ne5 25 f3  
Ke7 26 Re1 Kd6 27 Nd3 Nxd3 28 Bxd3 Be6 29 Be4 b5 30 Kd2 Bd5 31  
Bxd5 Kxd5 32 Re2 Rh1 33 b3 Rf1 34 Ke3 Ra1 35 Rd2+ Kc5 36 c3 Rc1  
37 Kd3 g6 38 Rc2 Rf1 39 Ke3 f5 40 gxf5 gxf5 41 Rg2 g4 42 fxg4 fxg4 43  
Rxc4 Re1+ 44 Kd3



*A technically drawn endgame*

White's advantage is too small to win, but that didn't stop him trying. After defending correctly and straightforwardly for over 60 moves, Black eventually made a decisive mistake on move 106 and resigned shortly after.

# Chapter Eleven

## Classical Variation

### Introduction

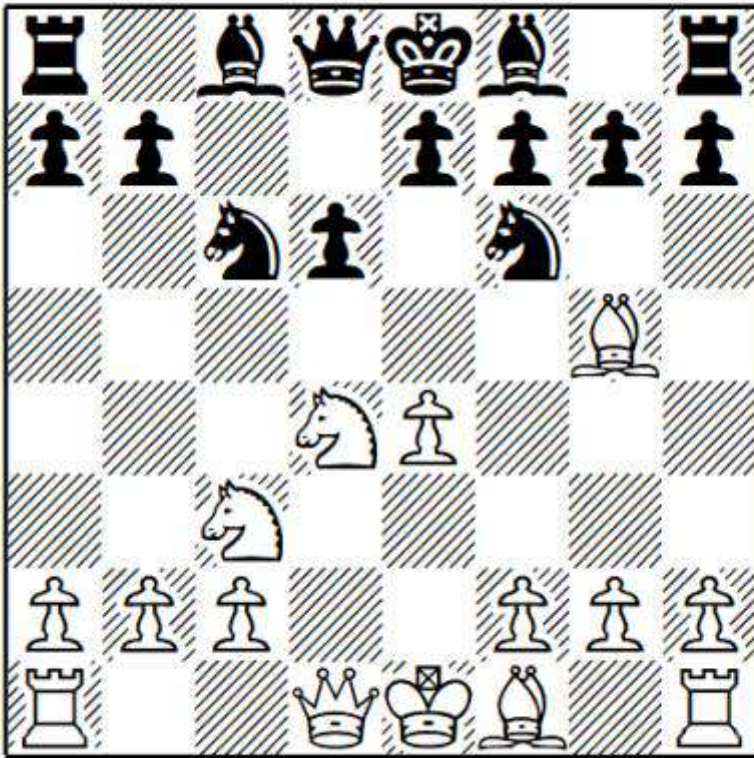
The Classical Variation is one of the oldest in the Sicilian. The initial position can be reached via two different move orders: 2 ... Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 d6 and 2 ... d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 Nc6. We avoid the latter with our repertoire choice 5 f3, but not the first move order, so this chapter is essential to our repertoire. Our choice against the Classical Sicilian will be the so-called Rauzer Attack, introduced in the 1930s by the Soviet master and theoretician Vsevolod Rauzer.

His system is characterized by the move 6 Bg5 followed by a quick 7 Qd2 and castling queenside. A recurring pattern is to double Black's pawns on f6, if possible. The pawn structure becomes unique and this leads to interesting play where the black monarch often does not even leave the centre. Let's start with the moves.

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6**

If Black tries to reach the Classical Sicilian via 2 ... d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6, disappointment awaits, as we respond with our usual 5 f3 Nc6 6 c4 and successfully set up our central pawn structure.

**3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 d6 6 Bg5**



### *Start of the Rauzer*

#### **6 ... e6**

There are a few alternatives, but I think they have one thing in common. So, let's remember the general motif plus the plans.

**Remember:** When you can take on f6 and the recapture by a pawn is forced, it is always a viable option, and the arising pawn structure gives us a straightforward plan.

1. In the case of ... e7xf6?, the d6-pawn is a clear target. Black should not even consider this move.

2. After ... g7xf6 we usually continue with Qd2 and 0-0-0, followed by f2-f4-f5, putting pressure on the e6-pawn. We want to force ... e6-e5 or ... e6xf5 at some point in order to gain control over the d5-square.

With those general plans in mind, let's quickly look at a few sidelines. In each the typical structure arises on the board and you will see the plans for both sides in the collection of sample games.

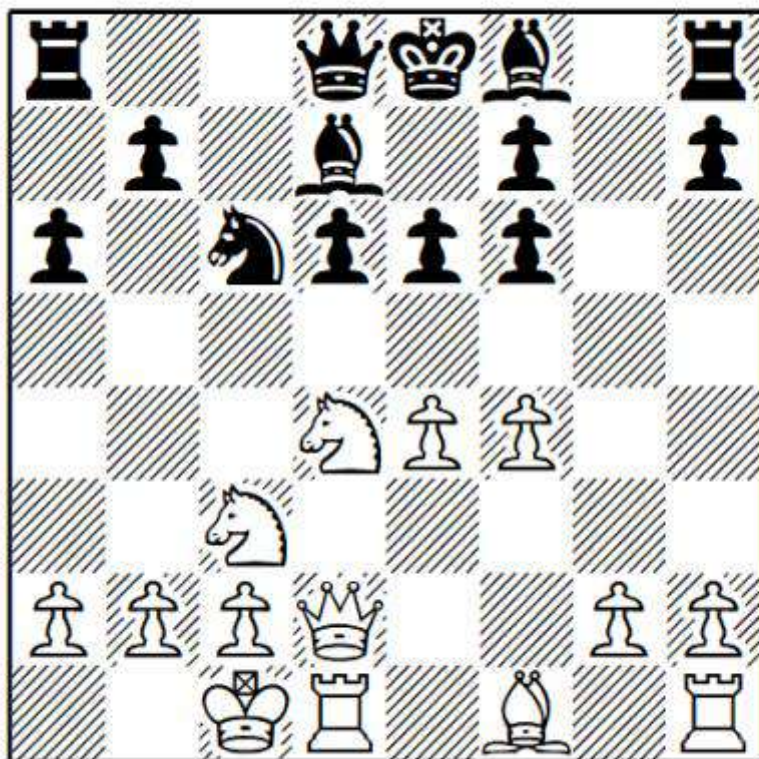
These include:

a) 6 ... Bd7 7 Bxf6 gxf6 8 Nf5 is examined in Game 72.

b) 6 ... Qb6 7 Nb3 e6 8 Bxf6 gxf6 9 Qd2 transposes to 7 ... Qb6 below.

c) 6 ... a6 can also be met by 7 Bxf6!? gxf6 8 Qd2 e6 (for 8 ... Qb6 9 Nb3 e6 see 7 ... Qb6 again) 9 0-0-0 Bd7 10 f4.

White intends the typical plan of a later f4-f5, aiming to create holes in Black's massive pawn formation. Here 10 ... b5 in fact transposes to the main line.



*Rauser pawn structure*

## 7 Qd2 a6

Let's have a look at a few alternatives:

a) 7 ... h6?! is premature as 8 Bxf6 forces 8 ... gxf6 (after 8 ... Qxf6?! 9 Ndb5 Qd8 10 0-0-0 White wins a pawn) 9 0-0-0 a6 10 f4! with advantage for White.

b) 7 ... Be7 8 0-0-0 0-0 (not 8 ... h6? 9 Bxf6! and Black loses the d-pawn after either 9 ... gxf6 10 Ndb5 or 9 ... Bxf6 10 Nxc6 bxc6 11 Qxd6) 9

f4 Nxd4 10 Qxd4 Qa5 is a major sideline, and now I suggest 11 Bc4!?. The bishop is well-placed here as it stabilizes White's queenside and will have an open diagonal if Black becomes active with ... e6-e5. For example: 11 ... Bd7 (11 ... e5 is no longer attractive for Black) 12 e5! (a very common pawn push in the Sicilian in order to seize the initiative) 12 ... dxe5 13 fxe5 (now Black needs to know his stuff in order not to lose, but even then White has a decent position) 13 ... Bc6! (the only move) 14 Bd2 (not 14 exf6? Qxg5+) 14 ... Nd7 15 Nd5 Qd8 16 Nxe7+ Qxe7 with a rich middlegame ahead.

c) 7 ... Qb6 8 Bxf6 gxf6 9 Nb3 leads to the Rauzer pawn structure. An early ... Qb6 can happen at different stages, so we will try to understand the general plans when the knight retreats to b3. Play can continue 9 ... a6 10 f4 Bd7 11 0-0-0 0-0-0 12 Be2.

Here the main difference becomes apparent: the standard plan of f4-f5 is not convincing. White's knight is missing on d4, so there is less pressure against e6. So, if Black continues 12 ... h5, White should not go for the immediate 13 f5, but instead head for the interesting option 13 Rhf1, intending Rf3, with flexible play: either attacking the h5-pawn or slowly preparing an eventual f4-f5 push. For example, 13 ... Be7 14 Rf3 Rdg8 15 Bf1! (15 g3?! creates a hook and Black is ready to continue with 15 ... h4, opening files on the kingside) 15 ... Kb8 16 Kb1 h4 17 Qe1 Rg4 18 a3 Qc7 19 Ne2 Rh5 20 h3 Rg8 21 f5 with a plus for White in G.Kamsky-R.Ponomarev, World Cup, Khanty-Mansiysk 2007.

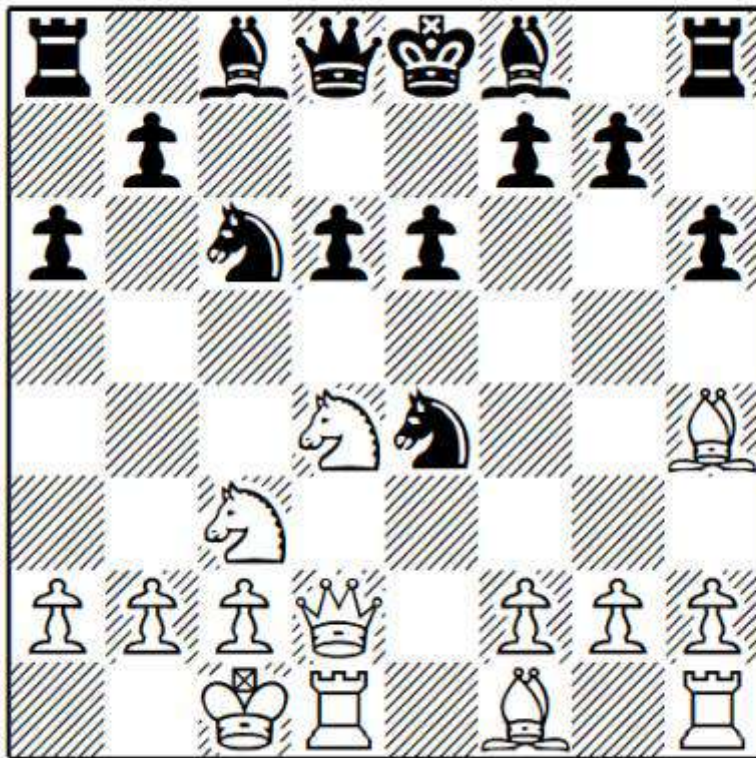
### **8 0-0-0 Bd7**

This is the absolute main line, intending ... b7-b5 or ... h7-h6 next. It is also very common that the black king, hidden behind the mass of central pawns, will stay in the centre for quite a long time.

For 8 ... Be7 9 f4 Bd7 see the note with 9 ... Be7 below. Again 9 ... h6?! is mistimed, due to 10 Bxf6 gxf6 (10 ... Bxf6? 11 Nxc6 bxc6 12 Qxd6 wins a pawn) 11 Be2 and White is better. In general, ... h7-h6 is not enhanced by an earlier ... Be7.

On the other hand, once Black has played ... a7-a6 (preventing Ndb5) then ... h7-h6 becomes a serious option because Bxf6 can be answered by ... Qxf6. Furthermore, playing 8 ... h6 at this moment actually changes how we respond:

a) 9 Bh4? would be a mistake because of the discovered attack 9 ... Nxe4.



### *Tactics*

Practice proves that since White achieves a mere 35% from here. For example: 10 Qf4 (10 Bxd8 Nxd2 11 Nxc6 bxc6 12 Bc7 Nxf1 13 Bxd6 Nxf2 favours Black) 10 ... Ng5 11 Qe3 Nxd4 12 Rxd4 Be7 13 f4 Nh7 14 Bxe7 Qxe7 and although White has some compensation, it is questionable whether it is enough.

b) 9 Nxc6 bxc6 10 Bf4 is Negi's recommendation in *1.e4 vs the Sicilian II* and I agree with him that we should choose this way. After 10 ... d5 (the only way to save the pawn) 11 Qe3, I would like to explain some general ideas to you, rather than going into concrete variations too deeply. With this move, White unveils a pin on the black d-pawn, avoids a pin on the c3-knight, and can swing the queen over to g3 where it creates play on both wings. Furthermore, if Black continues 11 ... Be7 12 Be2 0-0 13 h4 c5? (threatening ... d5-d4), there is 14 Bxh6!, opening up the kingside. With possibilities like Rh3-g3, the position is winning for White; e.g. 14 ... gxh6

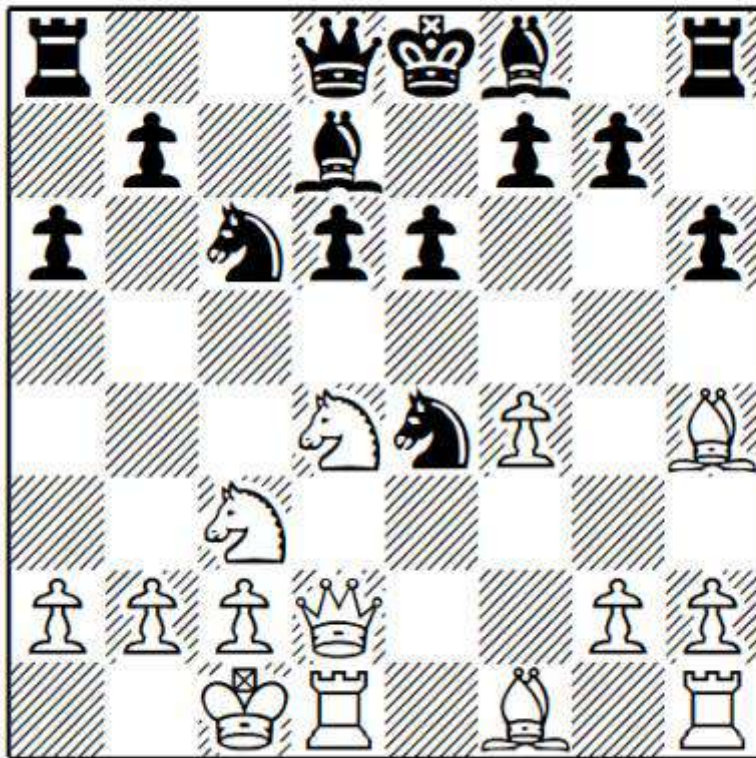
15 Qxh6 Nh7 16 exd5 followed by a rook lift or Bd3. We'll look at this line a bit more in Game 73.

**9 f4 b5**

Instead:

a) 9 ... Be7 is an inferior option in view of 10 Nf3 b5 11 Bxf6, when 11 ... Bxf6?! gives the d-pawn away for insufficient compensation. So Black has to play 11 ... gxf6 anyway and has then misplaced the bishop which, unless Black is intending to castle short, usually prefers to stay on f8.

b) 9 ... h6 is correctly met by 10 Bh4 this time, since the situation is subtly different from the 8 ... h6 line above, as we'll see if Black replies with 10 ... Nxe4.



*How to proceed?*

**Question:** What do you think about this sacrifice here? Does White have something in mind or just blundered?

White gets nowhere with a straightforward capture. For example, 11 Bxd8? Nxd2 leaves White a pawn down with no compensation, while 11 Nxe4 Qxh4 12 Nf3 Qe7 13 Nxd6+ Qxd6 14 Qxd6 Bxd6 15 Rxd6 0-0-0 is just equal. However, the fact that White has already played f2-f4 gives him another option:

**Answer:** 11 Qe1! defends the h4-bishop and generates strong play in the centre. White soon regains the pawn after 11 ... Nf6 12 Nf5 Qa5 (trying to hang on to the pawn with 12 ... Qc7? allows 13 Bxf6 gxf6 14 Nd5 Qd8 15 Qe3 and White is positionally winning, since Black can hardly finish his development) 13 Nxd6 Bxd6 14 Rxd6 with a small plus for White. Further discussion of this position will follow in Games 74 and 75.

### **10 Bxf6 gxf6 11 Kb1 Qb6**

This by far Black's most popular option. In response Negi recommends the concrete 12 Nxc6 Bxc6 13 f5 and I agree that this is the most ambitious try.

After other moves too White will play in the same way. For example: 11 ... h5 12 Nxc6 Bxc6 13 f5 is similar to the positional scenario below, while after 11 ... b4 12 Nce2 Qb6 13 Nxc6 Bxc6 14 f5 we have just transposed to the dynamic scenario.

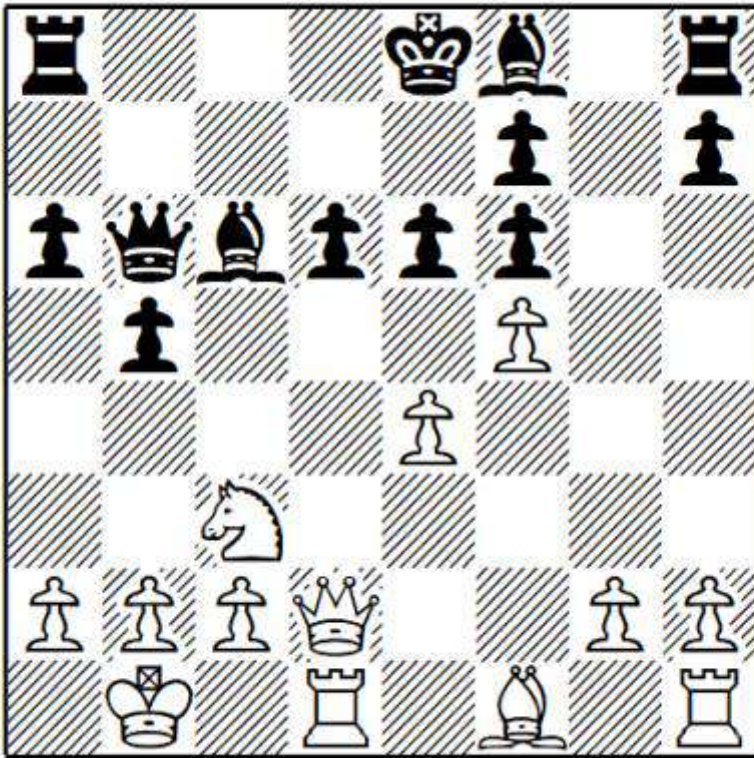
### **12 Nxc6**

I might also mention that 12 Nce2 is another interesting plan. For example:

a) 12 ... h5 13 h4 0-0-0 14 Rh3! (a nice rook manoeuvre, intending to join a possible attack against the enemy king) 14 ... Kb7 15 Nxc6 Bxc6 16 Nd4 Bxe4 17 Rb3 with a big plus for White in V.Krugansky-V.Kireev, correspondence 2012.

b) 12 ... Na5 13 Ng3 h5 14 h4! Rc8 15 Be2 (going after the h5-pawn in typical style) 15 ... Nc4 16 Qd3 Qc5 17 Nxh5 Rxh5 18 Nb3 Qe3 19 Bxh5 Qxf4 20 Nd4 and White was clearly better in V.Bernadsky-A.Gupta, Budapest 2018.

### **12 ... Bxc6 13 f5**



*The correct advance: f4-f5*

To keep things simple, I will not examine every possible branch. Instead, I will explain the most likely scenarios and the plans connected with them.

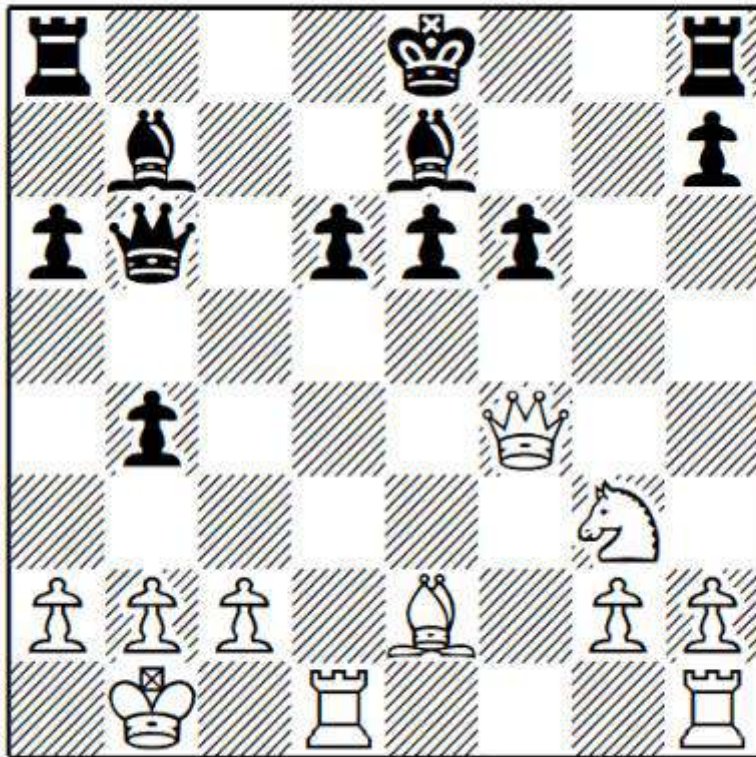
**13 ... b4**

**Positional scenarios:** Those with 13 ... h5, 13 ... 0-0-0 and 13 ... Qc5, which have one thing in common: Black is not yet committing to a specific pawn structure in the centre, but first improves one or another piece. 14 fxe6 fxe6 is our choice against all of them. We soften up Black's central pawns, after which our target is the e6-pawn. But note that there is not just one way to attack it. Many ideas come to mind, such as Ne2-d4 or Ne2-f4 and sometimes Bh3 or even Bb3. We will not go into concrete variations here because Black has too many different move orders and it is hard to analyse move by move, but an example of one implementation (after 13 ... h5) can be seen in Game 77.

**14 Ne2 e5!?**

**The dynamic scenario:** Black removes the pressure on the e-pawn, taking away all the important squares from White's knight at the same time, and tries to play an active game. True, the d5-square is now a bit weak, but White has no easy way exploiting it.

**The materialistic scenario:** Black can grab a pawn with 14 ... Bxe4!? but is playing with fire. White gets excellent counterplay after 15 Ng3 Bb7 (or 15 ... Bd5 16 Nh5 Be7 17 Nf4! and Black is in trouble) 16 fxe6 fxe6 17 Qf4 Be7 18 Be2 and already has a huge plus.



### *Problems for Black*

For a continuation of this line, please consult Game 76.

**15 Ng3!**

Solving the problem with the bad knight and preparing Bc4.

**15 ... h5**

Immediately harassing the knight again, not allowing 16 Nh5, nor giving White enough time for Bc4-d5. From here we can choose between two plans:

**1. The pawn capture:** Blocking the h-pawn with h2-h4 in order to attack it afterwards and finally win it. Meanwhile Black tries to generate counterplay on the queenside.

**2. The pawn sac:** White plays 16 Bc4 anyway, offering his central pawns and counting on rapid development to provide compensation.

### **16 h4**

Going for the first plan, which is objectively the most critical way to play.

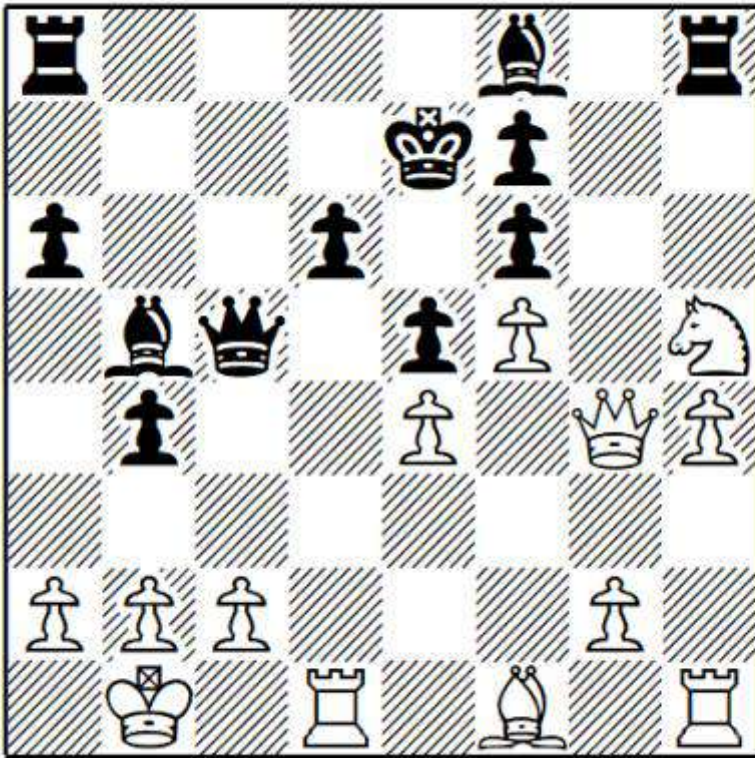
Nevertheless, the second plan is interesting too. After 16 Bc4 h4 17 Nf1 Bxe4 18 Qe2 Bxf5 19 Ne3 Be6 and now 20 Qf3, White has given up material but gains a strong initiative with chances against the black king in the centre.

There is also a rare but strong alternative in 20 Nd5 Bxd5 21 Bxd5, which can be especially annoying over the board, Despite the two extra pawns, I think Black has a very difficult task with the inferior bishop. For more details on this, see Game 78.

### **16 ... Qc5**

Another option is 16 ... Bh6 at once, offering a pawn for faster mobilization. However, it's not clear that Black gets enough compensation after either 17 Qxd6 Rd8 18 Qxd8+ Qxd8 19 Rxd8+ Kxd8 20 Nxf5 or 17 Qe2 Ke7 18 Nxf5.

### **17 Qe2 Ke7 18 Nxf5 Bb5 19 Qg4!**



*White threatens Nxf6*

This is superior to 19 Qf3, because after 19 Qg4 we threaten 20 Nxf6 (with the idea 20 ... Kxf6?? 21 Qg5 mate). We'll study this position further in Game 79.

In fact we will stop the theoretical discussion at this point and see how all the plans work out in practice.

### **Illustrative Games**

We begin with a rare sideline, 6 ... Bd7, where Black allows Bxf6 ... g7xf6 before having played ... e7-e6. This leads to a very original pawn structure in the centre, especially after the further Nf5 ... Bxf5, e4xf5, as we see in Game 72.

After that we look at another relatively rare line, 8 ... h6, in Game 73 where White goes for the most precise 9 Nxc6 bxc6 10 Bf4 d5 11 Qe3! with a lot of tactical possibilities .

Then we move on to the variation with 9 ... h6, followed by 10 Bh4 Nxe4, leading to complex central play in Games 74 and 75. In both games Black's defences prove less resilient than it might appear. In the first, White breaks through with a typical f4-f5, while in the second it's a Nd5 discovery shot that does the trick.

In the remaining examples we examine 9 ... b5, the most common line of the Rauzer.

To start, Game 76 shows the materialistic scenario we discussed in the introductory section. Black grabs a pawn in a risky way and White wins it back with interest after a few precise moves.

We continue with the positional scenario in Game 77, where Anand plays an instructive game, defeating Caruana in a convincing way.

Finally, we look at the dynamic scenario. In Game 78 we see a theoretically uncritical but practically highly recommendable approach. White chooses to play a middlegame with opposite-coloured bishops where his superior bishop offers him fantastic attacking chances.

Last of all, in Game 79 we examine the theoretically most challenging option versus the dynamic scenario. Svidler decides to block Black's h-pawn and then attack it by means of Qe2 and Nxe5. Dubov creates counterplay and both players demonstrate some interesting resources hidden in the position.

### *Game 72*

**A.Biolek-Kr.Saric**

Pardubice 2011

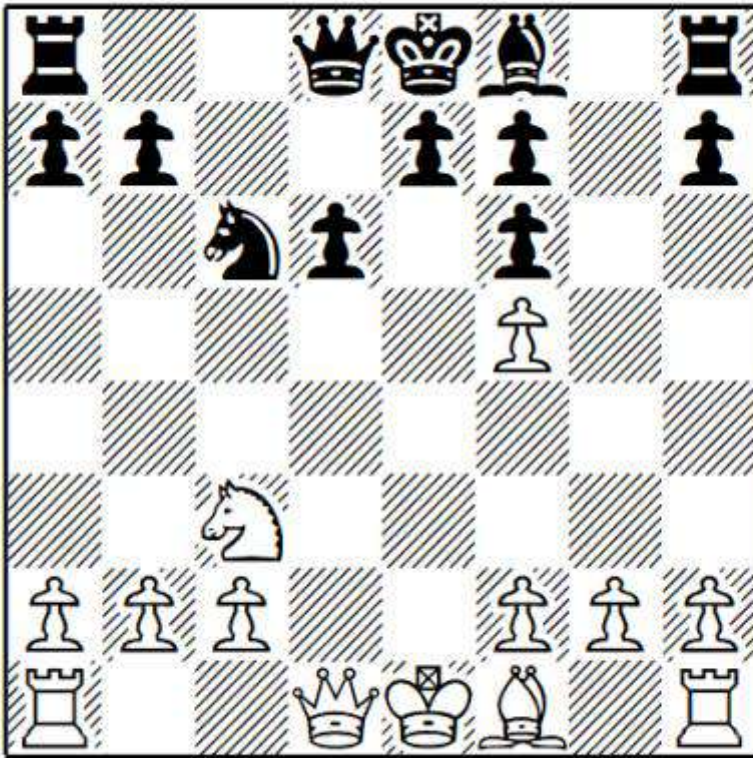
**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 Nc6 6 Bg5 Bd7 7 Bxf6 gxf6 8 Nf5!?**

Preventing ... e7-e6 because of Nxd6+.

**8 ... Bxf5**

Black is not forced to take the knight, but it is difficult to develop without doing so. For example, 8 ... Qa5 9 Bb5 a6 10 Bxc6 Bxc6 (10 ... bxc6 11 Qd3 Bxf5 12 exf5 transposes to the game) 11 0-0 Qe5 was R.Biolek-S.Vesselovsky, Czech League 2017, where 12 Qd3 e6 13 Rael is good for White, in view of 13 ... Qc5 14 b4! Qxb4 15 Nd5.

**9 exf5**



### *Unique pawn structure*

The pawn takes over the job of cramping Black's centre and it's not easily removed.

**9 ... Qa5 10 Bb5 a6 11 Bxc6+ bxc6 12 Qd3 Rg8?**

If Black's plan was to target the f-pawn with ... Rg5, he soon realizes that it's too slow, so what should he do instead? Black can neither improve his pawn structure nor his bishop without pushing the e-pawn. Although it is a bit risky to open the position, at least he fights for something with his central pawn mass:

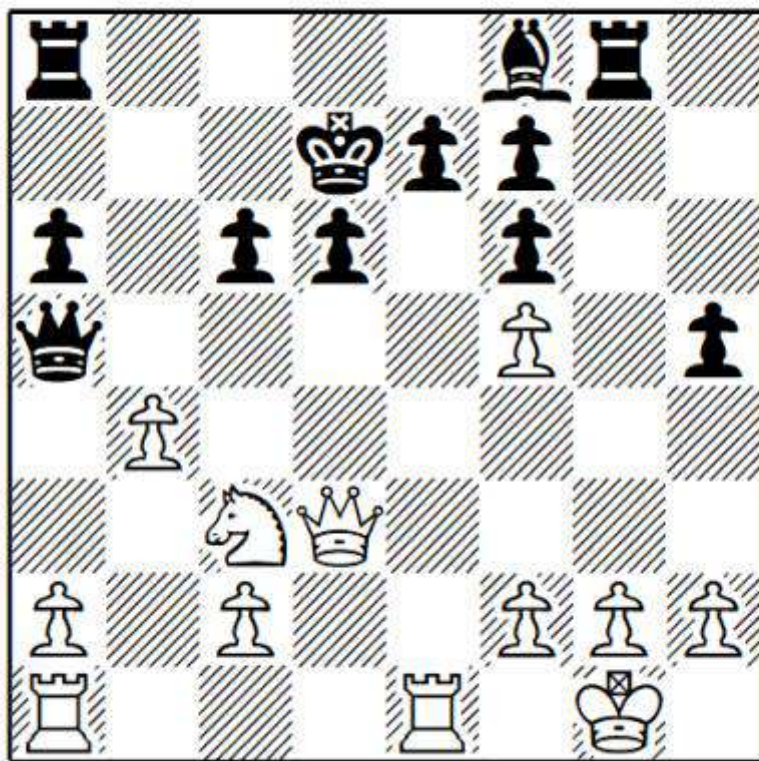
a) 12 ... e6 13 fxe6 fxe6 looks too direct, as White can attack energetically before Black consolidates; e.g. 14 0-0 Kf7 15 Qf3 Rc8 16 Ne4 Be7 17 Rad1 Rcd8 18 Rfe1 h5 19 h4 Qf5 (forced due to the Ng5+ threat) 20 Qxf5 exf5 21 Ng3 with a clear advantage.

b) 12 ... Qe5+ 13 Kf1 d5 14 Re1 Qd6 is perhaps a better try, aiming for ... e7-e5 next move or even ... Bh6-f4-e5. On the other hand, the black king will struggle to find a safe space anywhere on the board.

### 13 0-0 h5

If 13 ... Rg5 then 14 Rfe1 Rxf5 (or 14 ... Qxf5 15 Ne4) 15 b4! and White wins.

**14 Rfe1 Kd7 15 b4!**



*Seizing the initiative*

### 15 ... Qb6

If 15 ... Qxb4?! 16 Rab1 Qc5 17 Rb7+ Kc8 18 Reb1, White has a winning attack with threats of 19 Ne4, 19 Na4, and even 19 Qxa6!.

**16 a4 Bh6 17 a5**

The knight will enter b6 soon. The game is effectively over already and White converted convincingly.

**17 ... Qa7 18 Na4 Kd8 19 Nb6 Rb8 20 Qc4 Rg7 21 Rad1 Qb7 22 Qe2 Qc7 23 Qxh5 Rh7 24 Qg4 Rh8 25 Qc4 Qb7 26 Qxf7 Bf4 27 g3 Be5 28 Rxe5 fxe5 29 f6 d5 30 Qg7 1-0**

We continue by studying a game with an early 8 ... h6. At this stage White is not yet ready for 9 Bh4, and Black is prepared against the idea of doubling the pawns with Bxf6. So White must come up with something else and Vachier-Lagrave shows a nice idea.

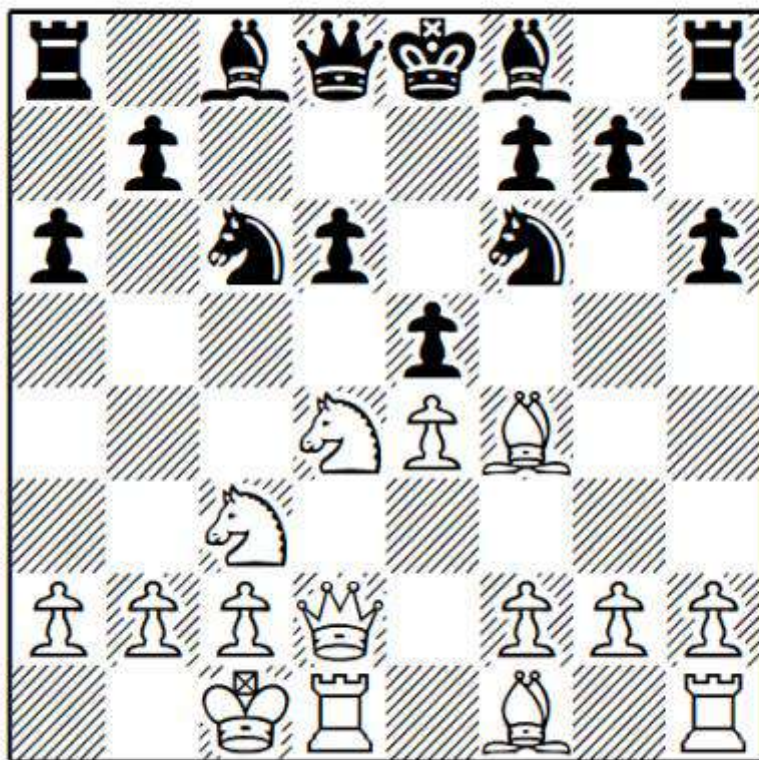
*Game 73*

**M.Vachier Lagrave-R.Kempinski**

German Bundesliga 2010

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 Nc6 6 Bg5 e6 7 Qd2 a6 8 0-0 h6 9 Nxc6**

Not 9 Bh4? due to 9 ... Nxe4, nor 9 Bxf6?! due to 9 ... Qxf6. White does has viable alternatives in 9 Be3 or 9 Bf4. Those are another story, though note that after 9 Bf4 it isn't possible for Black to win a piece by means of 9 ... e5.



*How to answer the fork?*

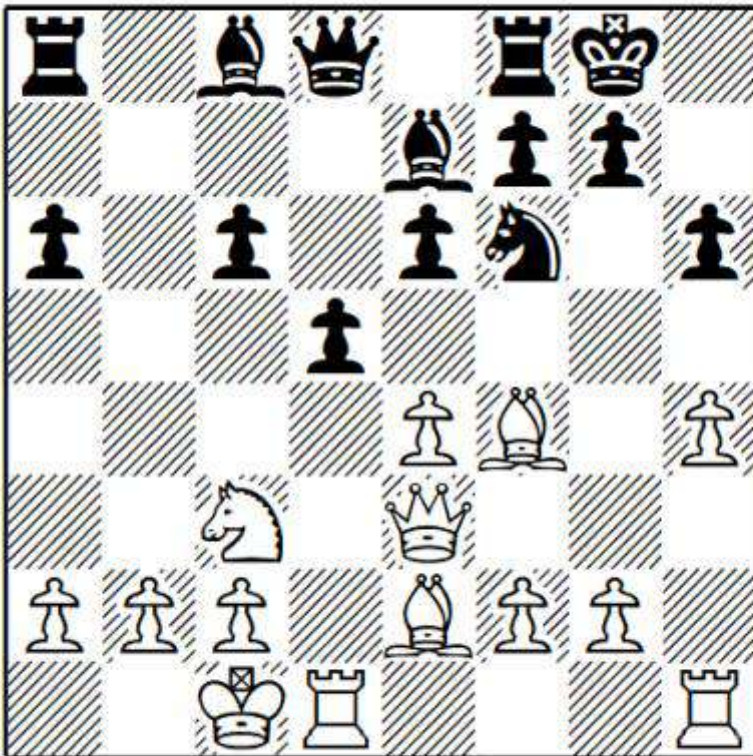
**Question:** Two pieces are forked. Does this not win at once for Black?

**Answer:** No, White replies 10 Nxc6 bxc6 11 Bxe5 and Black cannot recapture because of the pin along the d-file.

**9 ... bxc6 10 Bf4 d5 11 Qe3!**

The theoretically best try for an advantage.

**11 ... Be7 12 Be2 0-0 13 h4**



*14 Bxh6 is in the air*

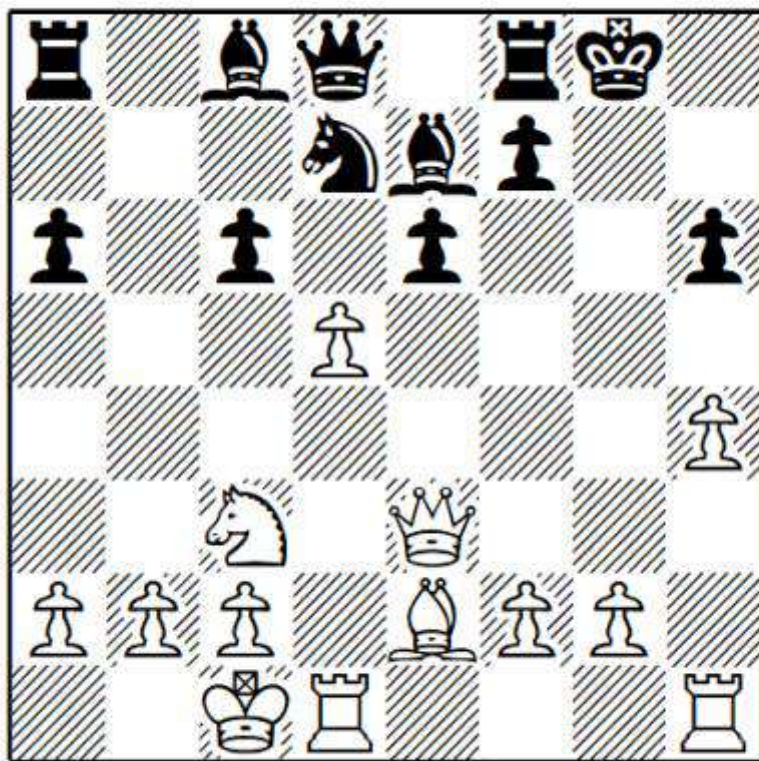
**3 ... Nd7**

**Remember:** Black must be very accurate. Many moves allow 14 Bxh6, so, be ready for the sacrifice and the launch of a kingside attack!

For example, 13 ... c5? 14 Bxh6! wins, as we saw in the introduction; and 13 ... Bb7?! 14 Bxh6 gxh6 15 Qxh6 Nh7 16 Rh3 Kh8 17 exd5 cxd5 18 Rg3 Rg8 19 Bd3 f5 20 Qxe6 is also good for White.

**14 Qg3**

Even here 14 Bxh6!? was an option. Although Black should hold, he is forced to defend precisely and the position is equal then: 14 ... gxh6 15 exd5!?



*How to defend?*

**Question:** Black has only one defence. Can you find it and refute the others?

**Answer:** 15 ... exd5! (not 15 ... cxd5?, which leads to problems after 16 Qxh6 Ne5 17 Ne4 f5 18 Rh3 f4 19 Ng5 Rf7 20 Nxf7 Nxf7 21 Qg6+ etc) 16 Qxh6 Ne5! 17 Rd3 (17 Bd3? f5 18 Rh3 Bf6 is good for Black) 17 ... Qd6 18 Rg3+ Ng4 19 Qxd6 Bxd6 20 Rxc4+ Bxc4 21 Bxc4 reaches a roughly balanced game.

**14 ... Kh8 15 Bc7 Qe8 16 Rhe1 Bb7**

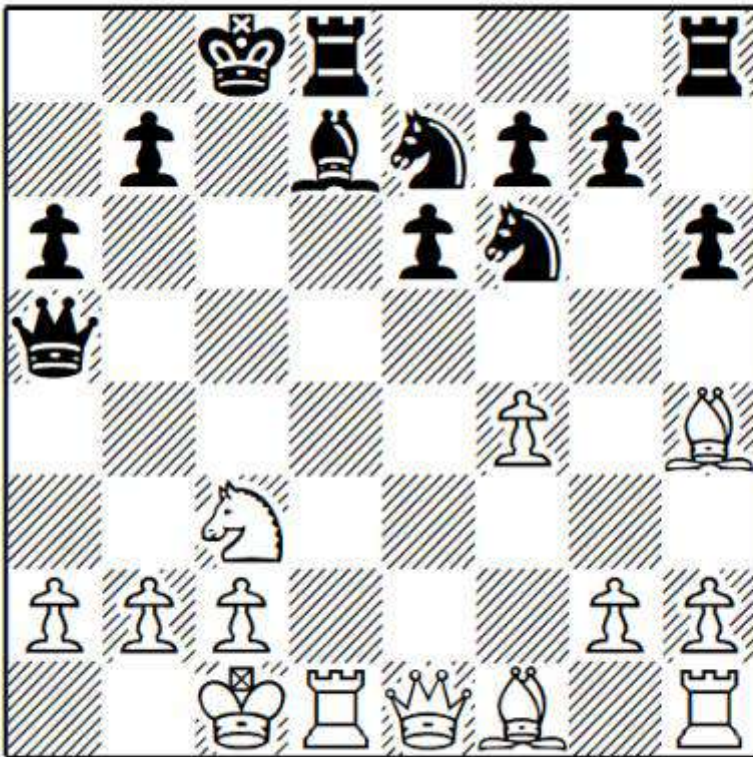
The game has changed its tactical character and become a positional fight now.

**17 Bf3 Rc8 18 Bd6 Bxd6 19 Qxd6 Qd8 20 g4?!**

This direct kingside assault doesn't lead to much,. Instead, White should fight for control on the other flank: 20 Na4 Qc7 21 Qxc7 Rxc7 22 Re3, followed by Rc3 with a slight plus.

**20 ... Qc7 21 Qxc7 Rxc7 22 g5 hxg5 23 hxg5 g6 24 Bg4 Kg7 25 f4 Rh8 26 f5 gxf5 27 exf5 exf5 28 Bxf5 Nb6 29 Ne2 Bc8 30 Nd4 Bxf5 31 Nxf5+ Kg6 32 Ne7+ Kg7**

Exposing the king with 32 ... Kxg5?! is risky: after 33 Rd2 f5 34 Rg2+ Kf6 35 Rge2 f4 36 Re5 Black would have to give up the exchange to avoid immediate danger; e.g. 36 ... Rh4? allows White to checkmate by force.



*Mate in six moves*

**Question:** Can you find the mate in six?

**Answer:** 37 Rf5+ Kg7 38 Rg1+ Kh8 39 Rg8+ Kh7 40 Rf7+ Kh6 41 Rg6+ Kh5 42 Rh7 mate.

**33 Nf5+ Kg6 34 Re7 Rxe7 35 Nxe7+ Kxg5 36 Rg1+ Kf4 37 Rf1+ Ke4 38 Nxc6 f5 39 Re1+ Kf4 40 b3 Kg3 41 Re6 Nd7 42 Rd6 Rh7 43 Rxd5 f4**

**44 Rg5+ Kh4 45 Rg1 ½-½**

After 45 ... Rf7 Black has enough counterplay with the rook behind the f-pawn.

*Game 74*

**At.Kolev-A.Bove**

Plovdiv 2010

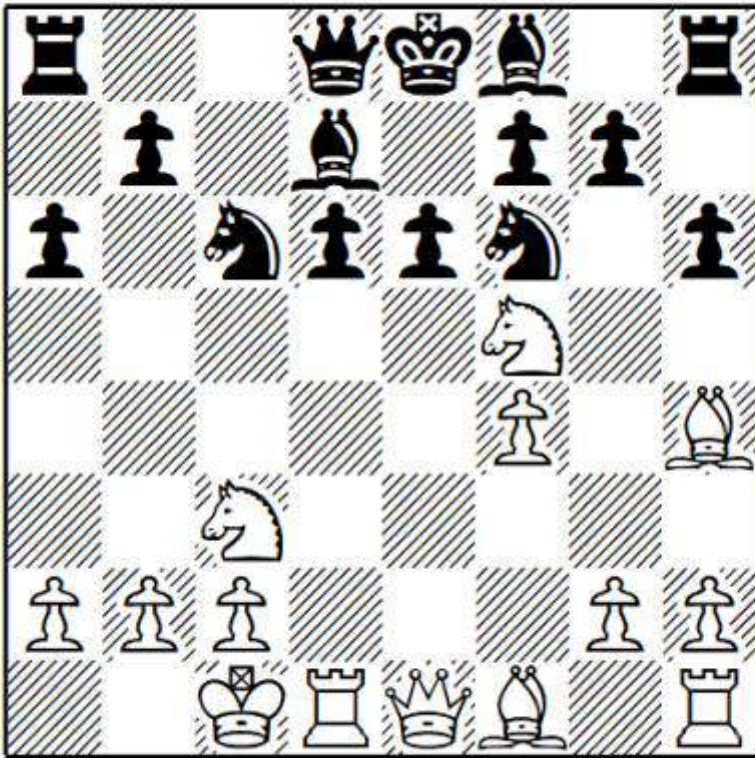
**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 d6 6 Bg5 e6 7 Qd2 a6 8 0-0-0 Bd7 9 f4 h6 10 Bh4**

There is no point in 10 Bxf6 now, since Black has the strong reply 10 ... Qxf6!, and the typical tactics 11 e5 dxe5 12 Ndb5 Qd8 13 Nd6+ Bxd6 14 Qxd6 exf4 do not achieve anything good for White.

**10 ... Nxe4 11 Qe1!**

Keeping the tension is the only way to fight for an advantage. As we saw in the introduction, alternatives are worse: 11 Bxd8? Nxd2 is good for Black, and 11 Nxe4?! Qxh4 12 Nf3 Qe7 13 Nxd6+ Qxd6 14 Qxd6 Bxd6 15 Rxd6 0-0-0 is just equal.

**11 ... Nf6 12 Nf5**



*Sharp play*

Attacking d6 while exploiting the pin along the e-file.

**12 ... Qa5!**

The best reply.

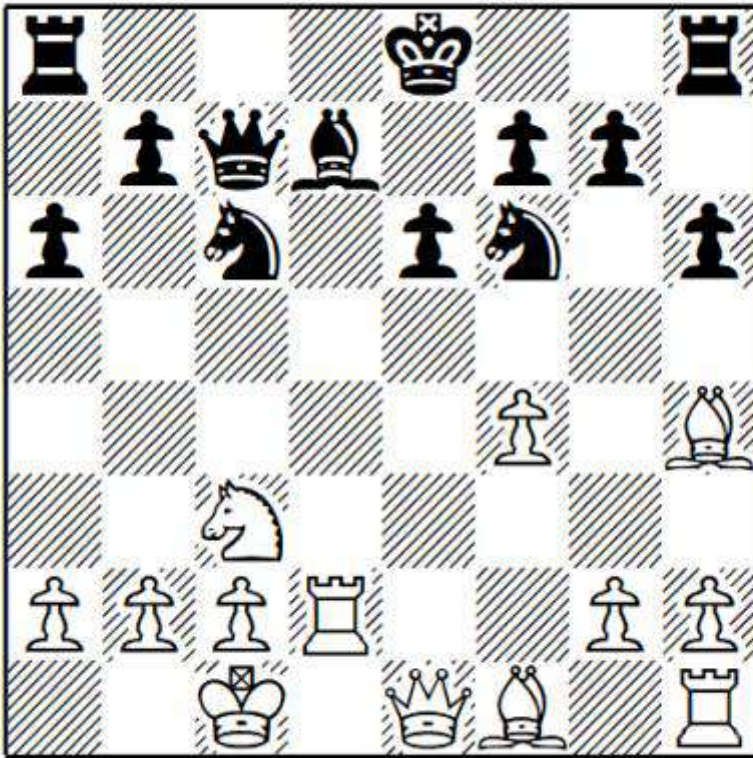
a) 12 ... d5? is no good since White can simply take the pawn: 13 Nxd5 g5 14 fxg5 Nxd5 15 Rxd5 hxg5 16 Bg3 with a huge plus.

b) 12 ... Qc7 saves the pawn at the cost of a terrible bind: 13 Bxf6 gxf6 14 Nd5 Qd8 15 Qe3 Rc8 16 Kb1 and Black can hardly move. The tactical 16 ... Ne5!?! attempts to untangle, but after 17 fxe5 fxe5 18 Nxd6+ Bxd6 19 Nb6 Rc6 20 Nc4 White is much better.

**13 Nxd6+ Bxd6 14 Rxd6**

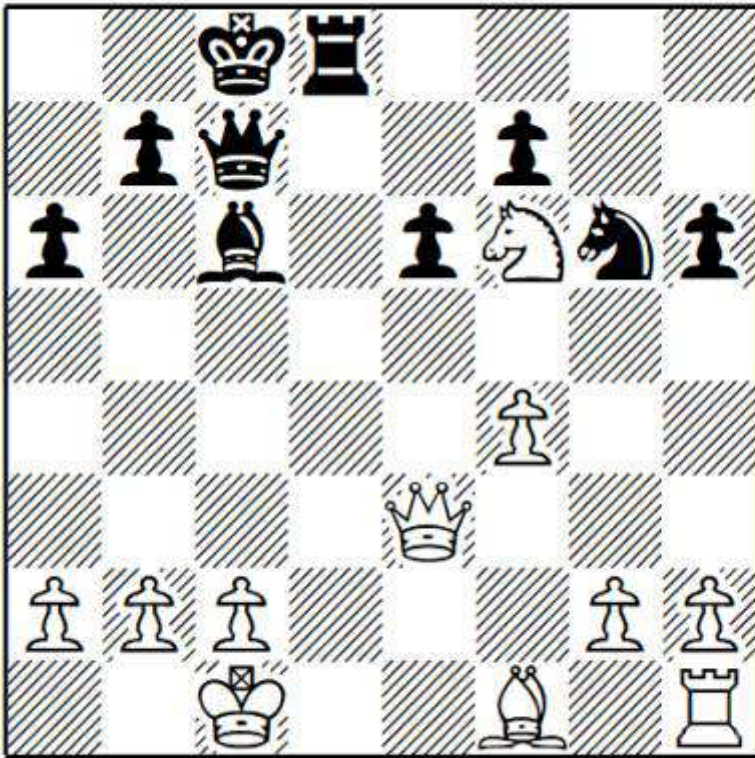
White has regained the pawn with a slight advantage.

**14 ... Qc7 15 Rd2!**



### *Offering the f4-pawn*

any amateurs are tempted by 15 Qd2?! because it defends the f4-pawn. However, the rook is then stuck on d6 and White cannot claim any advantage; e.g. 15 ... Ne7 16 Bxf6 gxf6 17 Ne4 (winning a pawn but Black gets excellent compensation) 17 ... 0-0-0! 18 Nxf6 Bc6 19 Rxd8+? (19 Rd3 keeps the balance) 19 ... Rxd8 20 Qe3 (not 20 Bd3? Rxd3! 21 Qxd3 Qxf4+ 22 Kb1 Qxf6) 20 ... Ng6 and Black takes over the initiative.



### *Initiative for Black*

#### **15 ... 0-0-0**

The feared 15 ... Qxf4? is not a good idea. After 16 Be2 0-0-0 (not 16 ... Qc7? 17 Bxf6 gxf6 18 Ne4) 17 Rf1 Qc7 White could easily get the pawn back with 18 Bxf6 etc, but his positional compensation with the dark-squared bishop is much stronger; e.g. 18 Bf3 and Bg3 at some point, when the black king will start to feel uncomfortable.

#### **16 Qf2 Ne7 17 Bd3**

White doesn't get anywhere with 17 Qa7? Bc6 18 Qa8+ Qb8 19 Qxb8+ Kxb8, and the exchange of queens made Black's task easier in Iv.Saric-N.Djukic, Sarajevo 2010.

#### **17 ... Bc6 18 Rhd1 Nfd5?**

A logical-looking move which leads to a near forced loss. However, Black's position was already difficult; e.g. 18 ... Ng6 19 Bg3 Nh5 20 f5 or 18 ... Kb8 19 f5 e5 20 Qg3 and White is clearly better.

#### **19 Nxd5 Rxd5**

If 19 ... Bxd5 then 20 f5! exf5 (or 20 ... Bxa2 21 Qa7) 21 Bg3 is crushing.

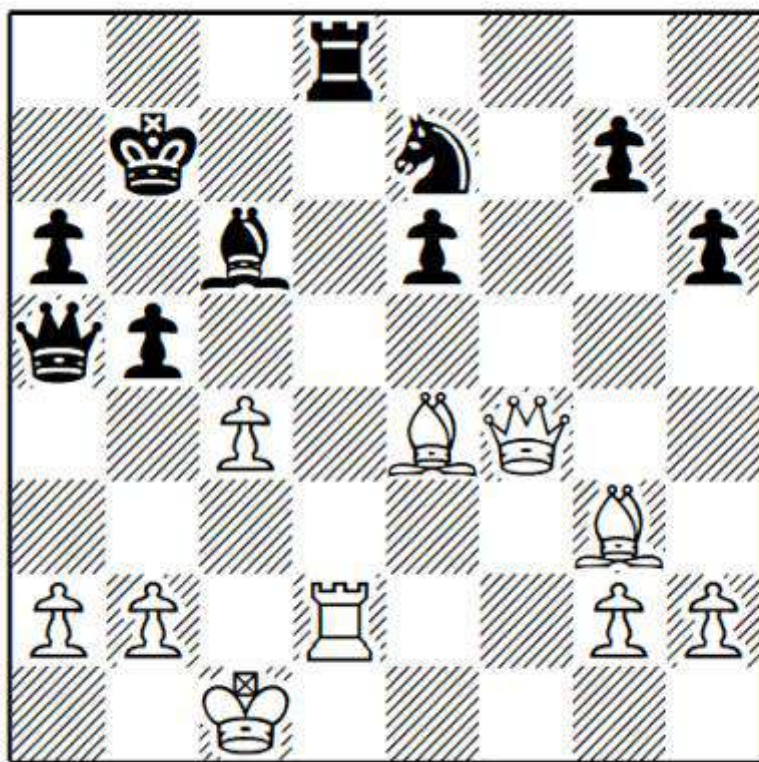
**20 c4 Rd7**

There are no safe squares on the fifth rank in view of 20 ... Rh5 21 g4 or 20 ... Ra5 21 b4.

**21 f5! Qa5**

Black tries to create space for his king, since after 21 ... exf5 22 Bg3 Qa5 23 Qa7 or 21 ... e5 22 f6 gxf6 23 Bxf6 Re8 24 Qa7 the white queen's more timely infiltration is decisive.

**22 fxe6 fxe6 23 Bg3 b5 24 Qf4 Kb7 25 Be4 Rxd2 26 Rxd2 Rd8**



*White to play and win*

**Question:** Black's defence hangs by a thread. How did White finish the game?

**Answer: 27 Rd7+!**

The rook cannot be taken because the c6-bishop is pinned and 27 ... Rxd7 28 Qb8 is mate.

**27 ... Ka8 28 Rxe7 1-0**

*Game 75*

**A.Istratescu-H.Rau**

Deizisau 2016

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 d6 4 d4 cxd4 5 Nxd4 Nf6 6 Bg5 e6 7 Qd2 a6 8 0-0-0 Bd7 9 f4 h6 10 Bh4 Nxe4 11 Qe1 Nf6 12 Nf5 Qa5 13 Nxd6+ Bxd6 14 Rxd6**

So far we have been following the previous game. This time Black elects to castle long straight away.

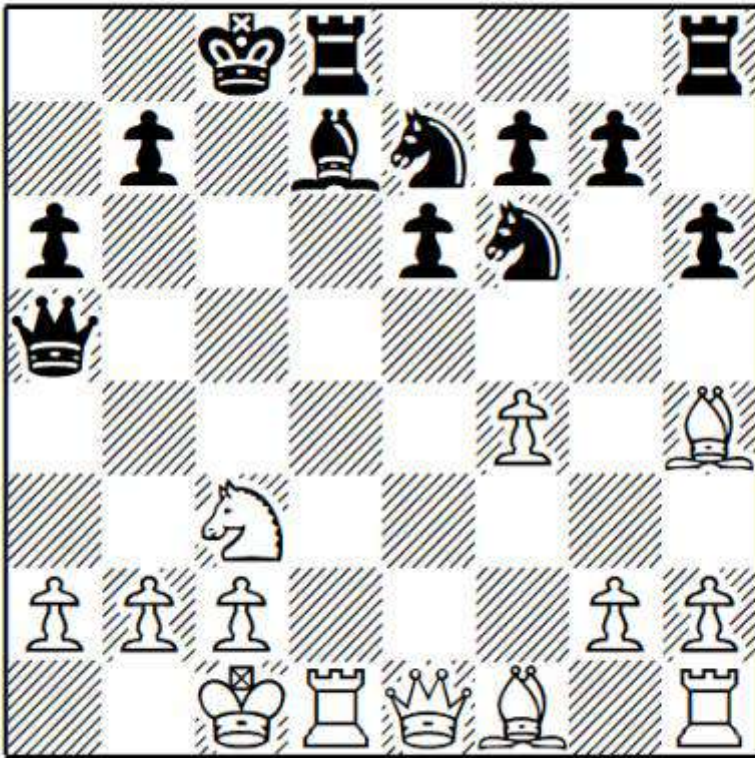
**14 ... 0-0-0 15 Rd1**

This move was a bit surprising to me, but it is the main choice and White has scored an impressive 70% with it. The retreat is quite logical: White wants to put his bishop on d3 without leaving his rook trapped in the opponent's camp.

The rare alternative 15 Bf2 also looks logical to me, pointing towards the weakened dark squares on the queenside. Then 15 ... Qc7 16 Qd2 Kb8 17 Bc5 Bc8 18 Be2 b6 19 Ba3 Ne7 20 Rd1 Ned5 21 Nxd5 Nxd5 22 Rxd8 Rxd8 23 g3 was seen in P.Svidler-T.Gharamian, German Bundesliga 2010, but despite Svidler's win nobody has repeated the idea.

**15 ... Ne7?**

The idea of bringing the knight to f5 is not so uncommon, but here it was a big mistake.



*Black blundered*

**Question:** What did Black overlook?

**Answer: 16 Nd5! Qxa2**

The best try.

a) 16 ... Qxe1 loses a piece after 17 Nxe7+ Kc7 18 Bxe1! and White is able to secure it with 19 Bb4.

b) 16 ... Qc5 17 Bf2 Qxd5!? 18 Rxd5 Nexd5 does not help either, White is winning.

**17 Nb6+**

The computer suggests 17 Bc4! as even stronger; e.g. 17 ... Qa1+ (or 17 ... Qxc4 18 Nb6+ etc) 18 Kd2 Qxb2 19 Nxe7+ Kc7 20 Qe5+ Qxe5 21 fxe5 and White emerges a piece up.

**17 ... Kb8 18 Nxd7+ Ka8**

Not 18 ... Nxd7? 19 Bxe7 Qa1+ 20 Kd2 and White wins, since the discovered check does not achieve anything; e.g. 20 ... Ne5+ 21 Bxd8

Rxd8+ 22 Bd3.

**19 Rd3!**

Inserting 19 Bxf6? gxf6 before 20 Rd3 Qa1+ 21 Kd2 Qxb2 would give away the advantage, as the knight remains trapped.

**19 ... Qa1+ 20 Kd2 Qxb2 21 Nxf6 gxf6 22 Be2 Qb4+**

Here 22 ... Rxd3+ 23 Bxd3 Nd5 24 Rf1 Rg8 would offer more resistance, though White should win with accurate play.

**23 Kc1 Qxf4+ 24 Qd2 Qc7 25 Bxf6**

Now it is over. White has won a pawn back and consolidated his position.

**25 ... Rxd3 26 Bxd3 Rc8 27 Bxe7 Qxe7 28 Qxh6 Qa3+ 29 Kd1 Qa1+ 30 Qc1 Qg7 31 g3 Qg4+ 32 Kd2 e5 33 Qe1 Qb4+ 34 Kd1 Qb1+ 35 Kd2 Qb4+ 36 Kd1 Qb1+ 37 Ke2 Qa2 38 Kf3 Qe6 39 Qe4!**

Preventing ... f7-f5 forever, which means Black will have no counterplay.

**39 ... Rd8 40 Rb1 1-0**

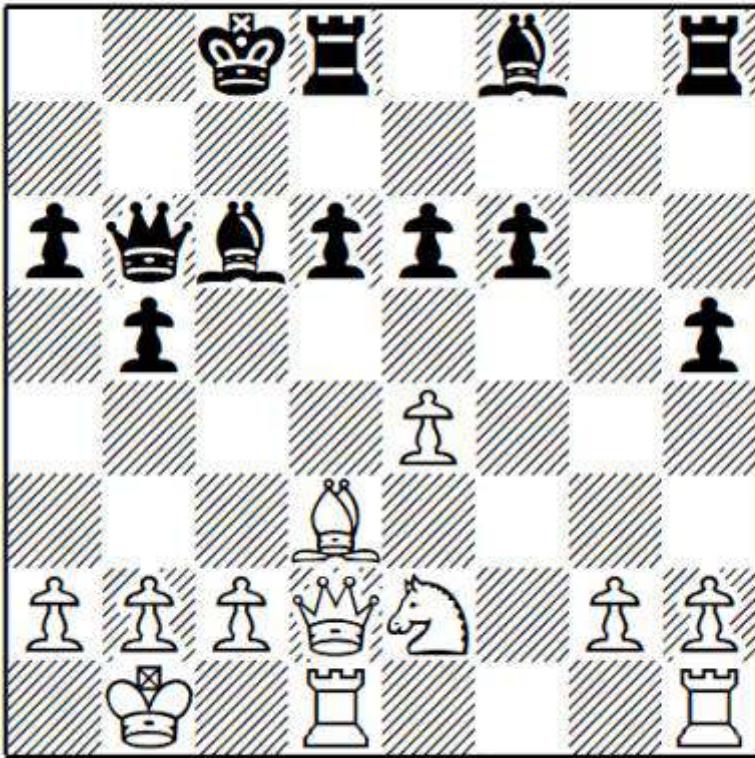
The following game is a nice miniature where Black ambitiously takes White's pawn in the centre. In return White gets excellent positional compensation and soon wins the pawn back, after which he is clearly better.

*Game 76*

**P.Harikrishna-A.Shabalov**

World Blitz Championship, Berlin 2015

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 Nc6 6 Bg5 e6 7 Qd2 a6 8 0-0-0 Bd7 9 f4 b5 10 Bxf6 gxf6 11 Kb1 Qb6 12 Nxc6 Bxc6 13 f5 b4 14 Ne2 Bxe4**



*Black is too greedy*

Deciding to go for the materialistic approach. Although this was merely a blitz game, it highlights the dangers Black encounters here. Harikrishna chooses the same variation proposed in the theoretical section and gets a winning position very early.

**15 Ng3**

Not 15 fxe6 fxe6 16 Ng3? because of 16 ... Bg6! and Black is okay. 16 Qf4 is another good try but that is a different story.

**15 ... Bb7**

Other options do not solve the problems either:

a) 15 ... Bxf5 16 Nxf5 exf5 is hopeless for Black whose king is in danger and his bishop is by far worse than White's.

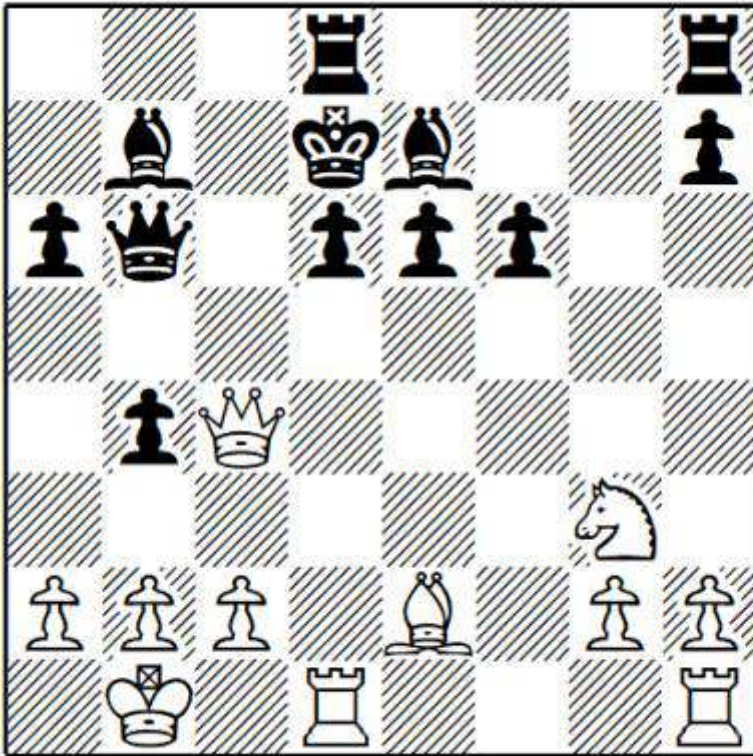
b) 15 ... Bd5 16 Nh5 Be7 is met by 17 Nf4! and Black has problems with the e6-pawn.

**16 fxe6 fxe6 17 Qf4 Be7**

Others are no better: 17 ... Ke7? 18 Nh5 wins on the spot as f6 is undefendable; while after 17 ... h5 18 Bd3 0-0-0 19 Qxf6 White wins the pawn back instantly with a big plus.

**18 Be2 0-0-0 19 Qc4+ Kb8**

Defending the crucial e6-pawn with 19 ... Kd7!? was more unclear.

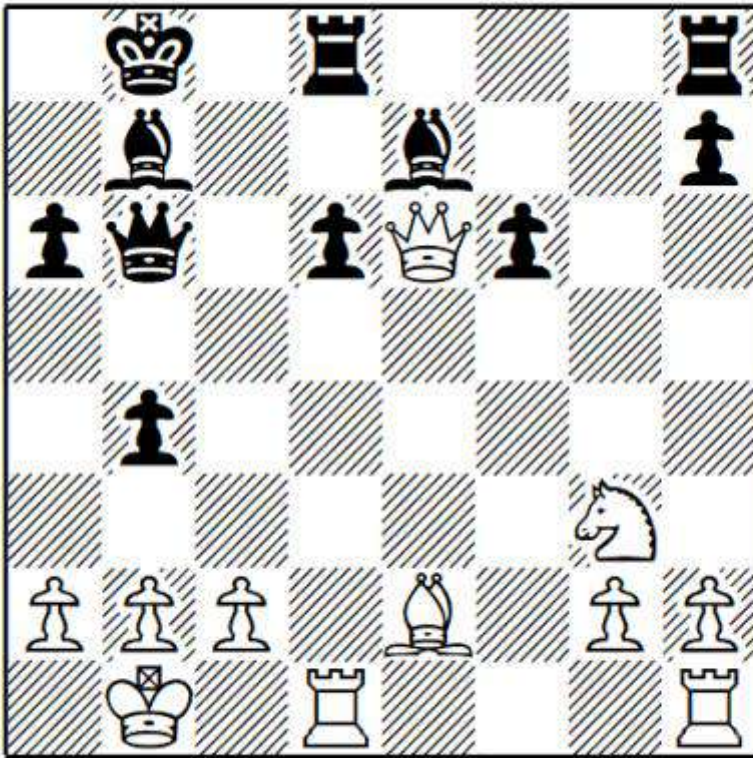


*Exposed black king*

**Question:** Can you find a way for White to proceed then?

**Answer:** White wins in an instructive way, increasing the pressure against e6 with 20 Rhe1! (if 20 Bg4 f5 21 Nxf5 at once, then 21 ... Qb5! offers more resistance) 20 ... d5 21 Bg4 f5 22 Nxf5! with a huge plus. Black cannot take the knight due to 22 ... exf5 23 Bxf5+ Ke8 24 Qh4 Qd6 25 Qh5+ Kf8 26 Be6 with inevitable mate.

**20 Qxe6**



### *Four pawn islands*

**emember:** When White has gained control over the central squares d5 and f5, Black is usually in big trouble.

**20 ... Qc7 21 Bf3 d5 22 Nf5 Bc5 23 Nd4 Rhe8 24 Qxf6**

The computer is critical of White's past few moves. Nonetheless, he is still much better and it is hard to suggest a plan for Black.

**24 ... Qe5**

After 24 ... Bb6 25 Rd3 White slowly improves his position.

**25 Nc6+! Bxc6 26 Qxc6 Qd6 1-0**

Black has huge problems on the light squares and probably lost on time.

### *Game 77*

**V.Anand-F.Caruana**

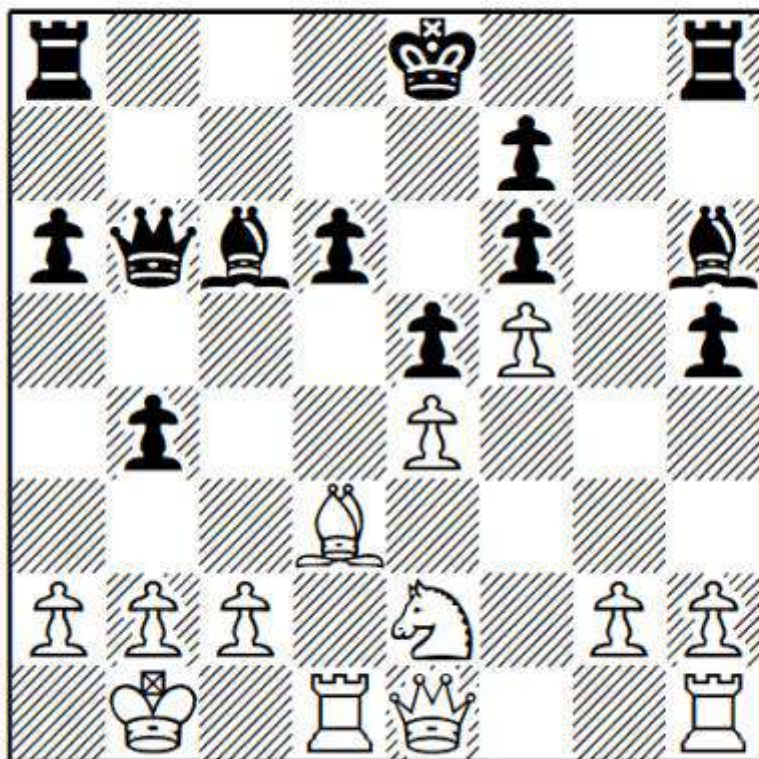
Grand Chess Tour (blitz), Paris 2019

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 Nc6 6 Bg5 e6 7 Qd2 a6 8 0-0-0 Bd7 9 f4 b5 10 Bxf6 gxf6 11 Kb1 Qb6 12 Nxc6 Bxc6 13 f5 h5**

This time we have the positional continuation on the board. Anand chooses the simple and strong plan of an early exchange on e6, as described in the theoretical section.

### **14 fxe6**

If 14 Bd3 first, Black can go for 14 ... b4 15 Ne2 Bh6 16 Qe1 e5!, when White has problems finding a good place for the knight.



*Black is in control*

In the game ... e6-e5 is impossible since White could then use the f5-square for his pieces.

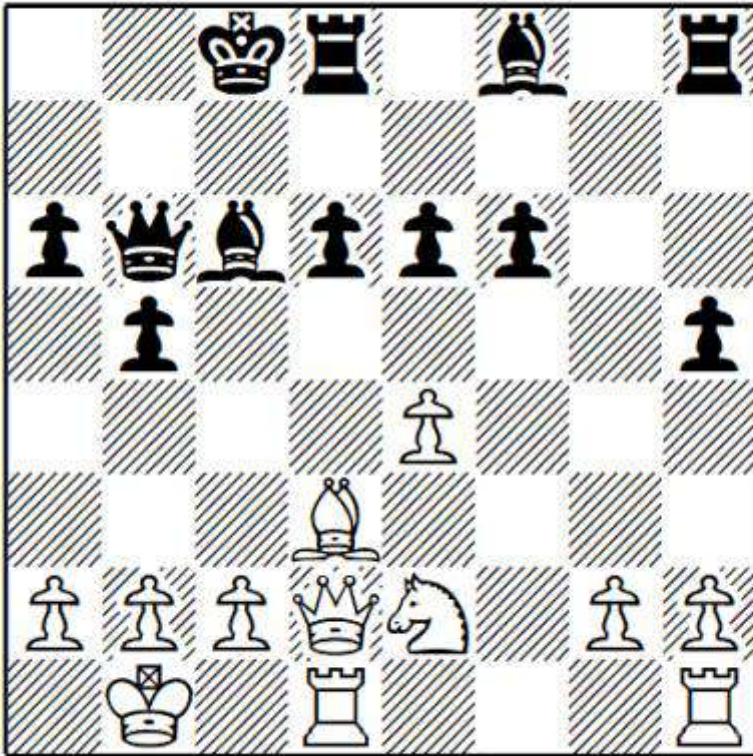
**14 ... fxe6 15 Bd3**

Instead:

a) 15 Qe1 sets a small trap, but I see no point in going for it since Black has several good moves; e.g. 15 ... 0-0-0! and Black is fine. Not 15 ... b4? 16 Nd5! Qd8 17 Nf4 and White exerts huge pressure.

b) 15 Qf4 is another possibility, attacking the pawns immediately. Black has two major options: 15 ... Be7 16 Bd3, when we can continue our usual plans; or the inventive 15 ... Qc5 16 Qxf6 Qe5, sacrificing a pawn but getting counterplay on the dark squares. This has been employed twice by one of the biggest experts in the Rauzer, GM Zdenko Kozul, so I think it is a serious choice.

**15 ... 0-0-0 16 Ne2!**



*Making use of the knight*

A key manoeuvre, rerouting the knight to create pressure against the e6-pawn.

**16 ... Qc5?!**

Better was 16 ... Bh6, when White should play 17 Qc3 Rhf8 18 Rhf1 (after 18 Nd4 Kd7 19 Nxc6 Qxc6 20 Qe1 Bf4 21 Qh4 Be5 22 Qxh5 Black's bishop on e5 offers him good compensation for the pawn) 18 ... Qc5 19 Qa5 Bb7 20 g3 with the idea of 21 Nf4.

**17 Rhf1 Qe5 18 Qe3?!**

Missing 18 Qa5! Bb7 19 a4, when Black is in trouble; e.g. 19 ... b4 20 Qxb4 d5 21 Qb3 dxe4 22 Bc4 and so on.

**18 ... Kb7 19 Nd4**

Threatening 20 Nxc6 followed by 21 Qa7.

**19 ... Bd7 20 c3**

Stabilizing the centre before transferring the bishop to b3.

**20 ... Be7**

It is important to note that Black has no good way to push his central pawn mass. For example: 20 ... d5 21 Nb3 and the king becomes the main concern; or 20 ... f5 21 Qe2 Bg7 22 exf5 (22 Nf3 may be even stronger) 22 ... Qxe2 23 Nxe2 exf5 24 Bxf5 with an extra pawn for White.

**21 Bc2 a5**

After 21 ... Qxh2? 22 Nb3! Black's queen is too far away and his king lacks defenders; e.g. 22 ... Ra8 23 g3 Qh3 24 Nc5+! Kc7 25 Nxd7 Kxd7 26 e5! fxe5 27 Rf7 followed by Qb6 with a decisive attack.

**22 g3 Rc8 23 Qf2 Rc7 24 Rfe1 Rhc8 25 Bb3**

A quite unusual way of attacking the e6-pawn. 25 Nf5 is another idea but after 25 ... Bf8 White must retreat his knight again. (Not 25 ... exf5? 26 exf5 and White regains the material with a winning position.)

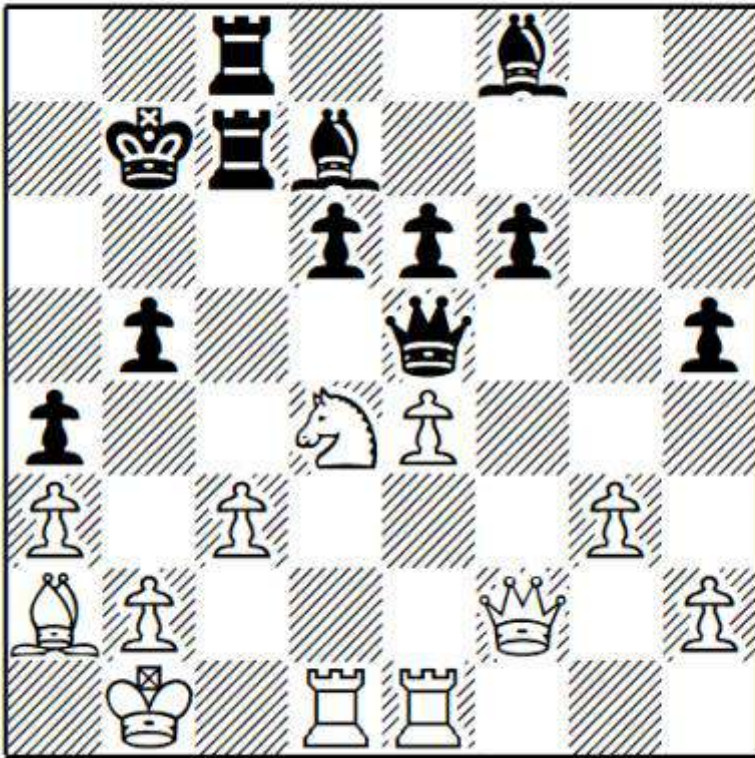
**25 ... Bf8?**

Black should have hit the bishop at once with 25 ... a4, despite White's strong response of 26 Bd5+! exd5 (26 ... Ka6? 27 Nf3 catches the queen) 27 exd5 Qxd5 28 Rxe7, since the computers think that 28 ... Bg4! (28 ... a3? 29 bxa3! clearly favours White) 29 Rde1 Rxe7 30 Rxe7+ Rc7 31 Rxc7+ Kxc7 is equal. Nonetheless Black might suffer in practice because of White's good knight.

**26 a3 a4?!**

It is too late for this. Now Black has no counterplay and Anand improves his position step by step. 26 ... b4!? would have offered Black more dynamic chances, although after 27 cxb4 axb4 28 axb4 Kb8 29 Qe3 Rb7 30 b5 White is clearly better.

**27 Ba2**



*No counterplay left*

**27 ... Re8 28 Ka1 Bh6 29 Nc2 Bg7 30 Nb4 Qc5 31 Qf3 Ka7 32 Nd3 Qb6**

If 32 ... Qg5 then 33 h4 Qg4 34 Qe3+ Kb7 35 Nf2 and White is ready to take on d6.

**33 Qxh5 Rec8 34 Qg4 Bh8 35 Bxe6**

Now the game is over and White won quickly.

**35 ... f5 36 exf5 d5 37 Bxd7 Rxd7 38 Re6 Qc7 39 f6 d4 40 Ne5 Rd5 41 Re7 1-0**

Finally, we will see two games featuring the dynamic 13 ... b4 14 Ne2 e5 variation and examine two different options for White.

*Game 78*

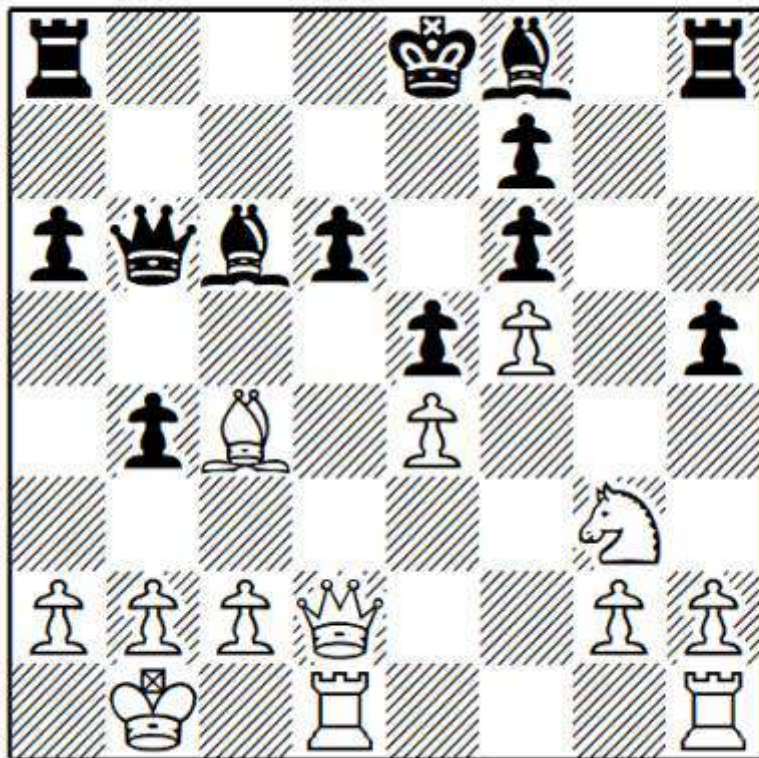
**A.Timofeev-U.Eliseev**

Moscow 2016

**1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 d6 6 Bg5 e6 7 Qd2 a6 8 0-0 Bd7 9 f4 b5 10 Bxf6 gxf6 11 Kb1 Qb6 12 Nxc6 Bxc6 13 f5**

So far we are familiar with everything from the introduction. Now Black goes for the dynamic scenario.

**13 ... b4 14 Ne2 e5 15 Ng3 h5 16 Bc4**



*Take the central pawns?*

Here 16 h4, as in the next game, is theoretically more critical but the text move also poses a lot of questions to the second player.

**16 ... h4 17 Nf1 Bxe4 18 Qe2 Bxf5 19 Ne3 Be6 20 Nd5!?**

White is aiming for opposite-coloured bishops in the middlegame and playing for an attack afterwards. White has one extra piece on the light squares and tries to exploit this advantage.

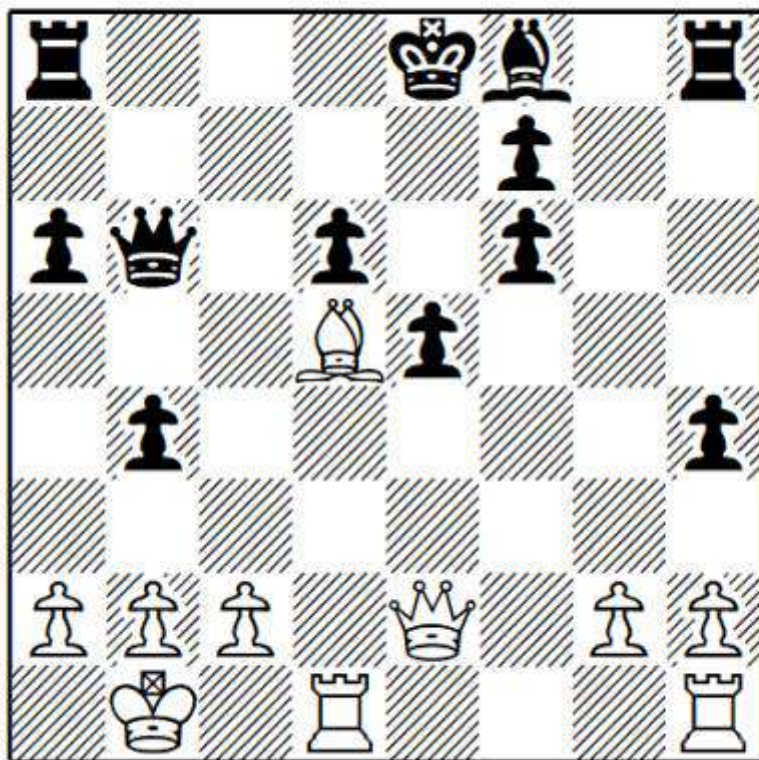
Another option is 20 Qf3, as seen in A.Grischuk-U.Eliseev, Moscow (rapid) 2014.

**20 ... Bxd5**

Black was not obliged to exchange, but after 20 ... Qd8 21 Nxb4 White starts regaining the pawns while Black must figure out how to develop further.

Not 20 ... Qc5?, which loses on the spot to 21 Nxf6+ Ke7 22 Bxe6 fxe6 23 Ne4 with a crushing attack.

**21 Bxd5**



*Weak light squares*

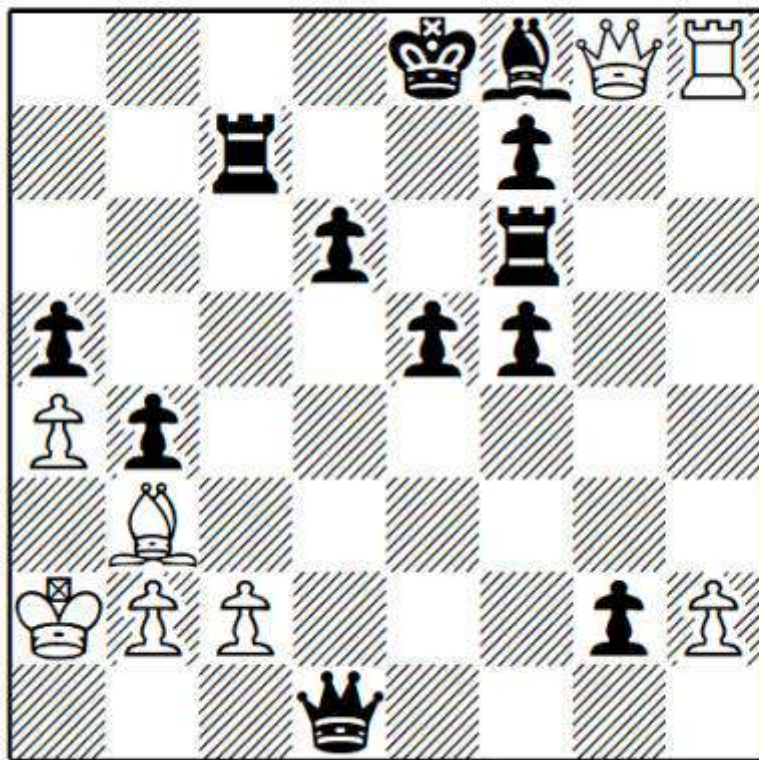
The situation on the board does not feel like White is two pawns down. He is much more active, while Black struggles to find coordination.

**21 ... Rc8 22 Qg4 Rc7 23 Rhf1 Rh6 24 Rf3 h3 25 Rg3**

Timofeev has a clear attacking plan in mind with ideas like Qg8 and Rg7, so he did not wish to play 25 g3. Nevertheless, 25 g3 looks quite promising. White disallows any counterplay on the kingside and can either activate his rooks or win the h3-pawn; e.g. 25 ... a5 26 a3 Qc5 27 Bb3 Qb5 28 axb4 axb4 29 Rd5! with an invasion on the queenside.

**25 ... a5 26 a4 Qf2 27 Bb3 f5 28 Qg8 hxg2 29 Rg7 Rf6 30 Rh7 d5**

Black can win a rook with 30 ... Qf1? but loses after 31 Rh8 Qxd1+ 32 Ka2 due to White's mating attack.



*Helpless against Qxf8+*

**31 Rh8 Qc5 32 Qxg2 d4 33 Qg7 Rcc6 34 Ka2 Rce6 35 Rg1 Rh6 36 Rg5?**

White has more pressure with all the heavy pieces on the board, so 36 Rg8 is an improvement. For example: 36 ... Rhf6 (if 36 ... Rxh2 then 37 Rg6! wins, or 36 ... Ref6? 37 Bxf7+ Rxf7 38 Qxh6) 37 h4 (White can send this pawn down the h-file while his rook on g1 can defend the black pawns) 37 ... f4 38 h5 f3 39 Re1 f2 40 Rxe5! Rxe5 (or 40 ... Qxe5 41 Qxf8+ Kd7 42 Qc8+ Kd6 43 Rd8+ Ke7 44 Qd7 mate) 41 Qxf6 and White stops the f-pawn while the black king will remain in fatal danger.

**36 ... Rxh8 37 Qxh8**

After this exchange Black should objectively be fine.

**37 ... Rh6 38 Qg8 Rf6 39 Rg7 Qe7 40 h4 f4?!**

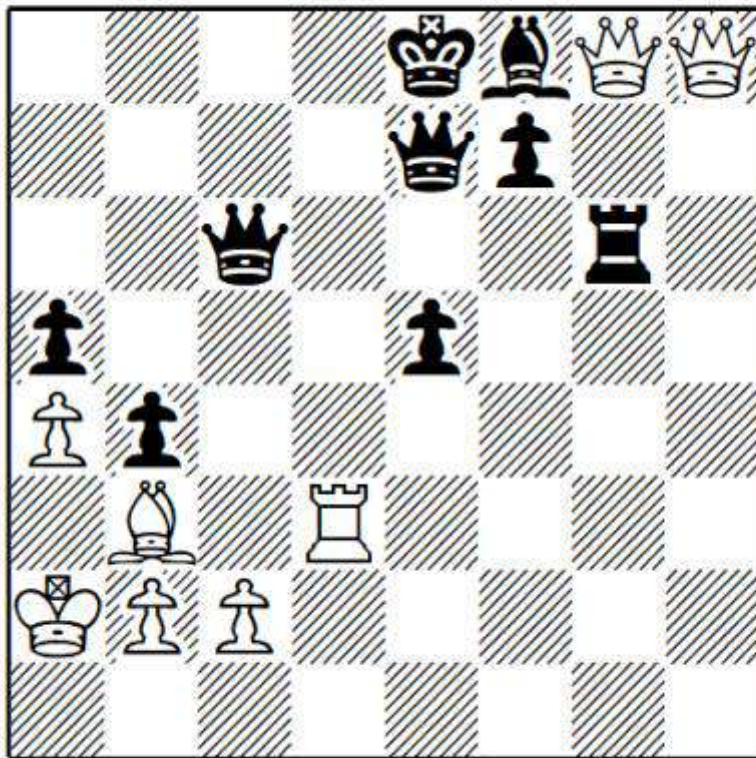
Here 40 ... e4 41 h5 Kd7! would have kept the balance; e.g. 42 h6 Bxg7 43 Qxg7 Rg6 44 Qxd4+ Rd6 45 Qa7+ Ke8 46 Qb8+ Rd8 47 h7 Rxb8 48 h8Q+ Qf8 49 Qe5+ with a draw.

**41 h5 f3 42 h6 f2**

It was still not too late for 42 ... Kd7! to continue the fight: 43 h7 Bxg7 44 Qxg7 f2 45 Qg4+ Re6! (the only move; otherwise h8Q followed by Qhc8+ gives White a decisive attack) 46 h8Q f1Q 47 Qxe5 Qa6! 48 Qgxd4+ Kc8 and the result is not yet clear.

**43 h7 f1Q 44 h8Q d3 45 Rg1 Qf3 46 Rg3 Qc6 47 Rxd3 Rg6**

A final mistake by Black which eases White's job.



*How to checkmate?*

**Question:** Can you find the beautiful finish in this crazy position with four queens on the board?

**Answer: 48 Qxe5! 1-0**

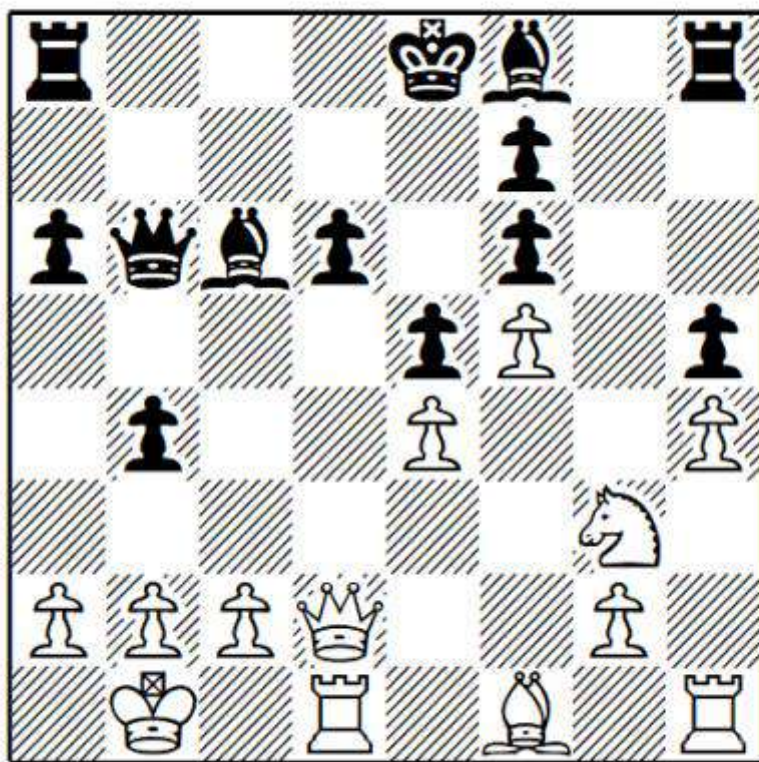
Checkmate is coming on either f7 or b8; for example, 48 ... Qxe5 49 Qxf7 mate or 48 ... Rxc8 49 Qb8+ with mate to follow.

*Game 79*

**P.Svidler-D.Dubov**

Russian Championship, Moscow 2012

1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 Nc6 6 Bg5 e6 7 Qd2 a6 8 0-0 Bd7 9 f4 b5 10 Bxf6 gxf6 11 Kb1 Qb6 12 Nxc6 Bxc6 13 f5 b4 14 Ne2 e5 15 Ng3 h5 16 h4



*Theoretical battle*

Now we see the theoretically most forcing line against 15 ... h5.

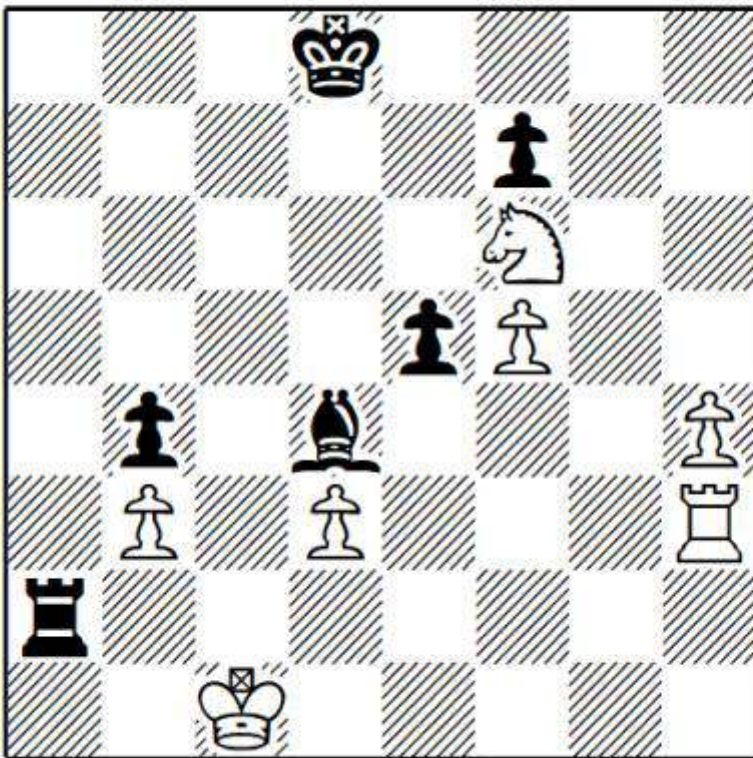
**16 ... Qc5**

16 ... Bh6 seems less precise, since White can either play as in the main line or simply take the d6-pawn to reach an endgame with a few extra

pawns. Black has some counterplay, but a draw is the maximum, which is a good indicator:

a) 17 Qe2 Ke7 18 Nxb5 Qb7 (not yet 18 ... b3?! 19 axb3 a5, E.Bacrot-R.Swinkels, German Bundesliga 2017, since 20 Rh3! a4 21 Nxf6! is very good for White) 19 Re1 b3 with complex play.

b) 17 Qxd6 Rd8 18 Qxd8+ Qxd8 19 Rxd8+ Kxd8 20 Bxa6 (or 20 Nxb5 Ke7 21 Bd3) 20 ... Rg8 21 Rh3 Bf4 22 Nxb5 Rxb5 23 Rh1 Bxe4 (or 23 ... Ke7 24 Nxf4 exf4 25 Bd3 f3 26 Rf1 f2 27 Kc1 Rh2 28 Kd2 and White is much better) 24 Bd3 Bxd3 25 cxd3 Be3 26 Nxf6 Bd4 27 b3 Rb2+ 28 Kc1 Rxa2 29 Rh3, when White can press for a long time and eventually won in F.Rambaldi-E.Hedman, Reykjavik 2016.



*White has all the chances*

**17 Qe2 Ke7 18 Nxb5 Bb5**

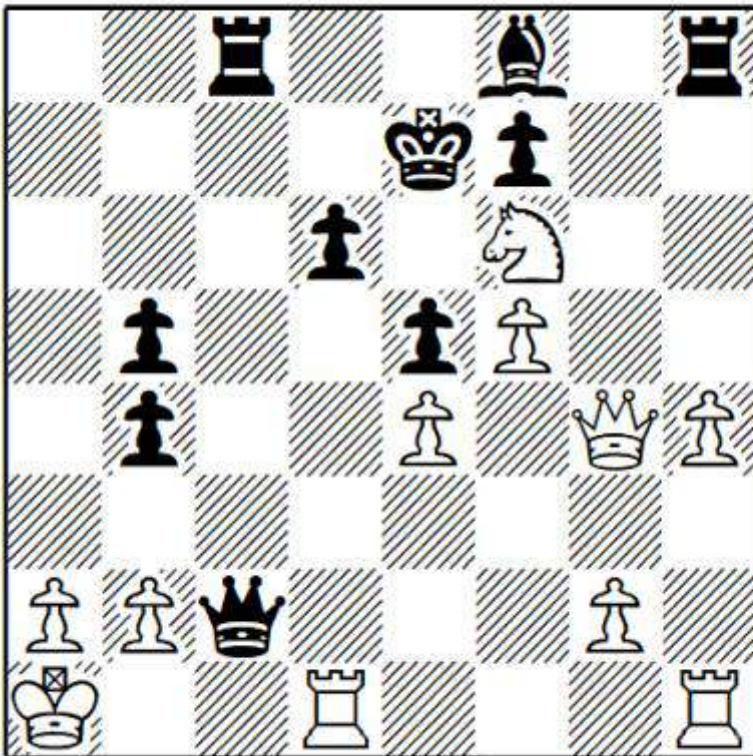
Note that 18 ... Bh6 19 g4 Bb5 20 Qf3 Rbc8 21 Qg2! is a key resource for White, who is winning with threats like 22 g5.

**19 Qg4**

If instead 19 Qf3 then 19 ... Rc8 attacks the c2-pawn before White can play Qg2 in response, so Black is okay. Not 19 ... Bh6? 20 g4 Rhc8 21 Qg2! and White is winning again.

### 19 ... Bh6

Here 19 ... Rc8? is not good, since after 20 Bxb5 Qxc2+ 21 Ka1 axb5 White has the strong 22 Nxf6! which makes the difference compared to the line in the previous note.

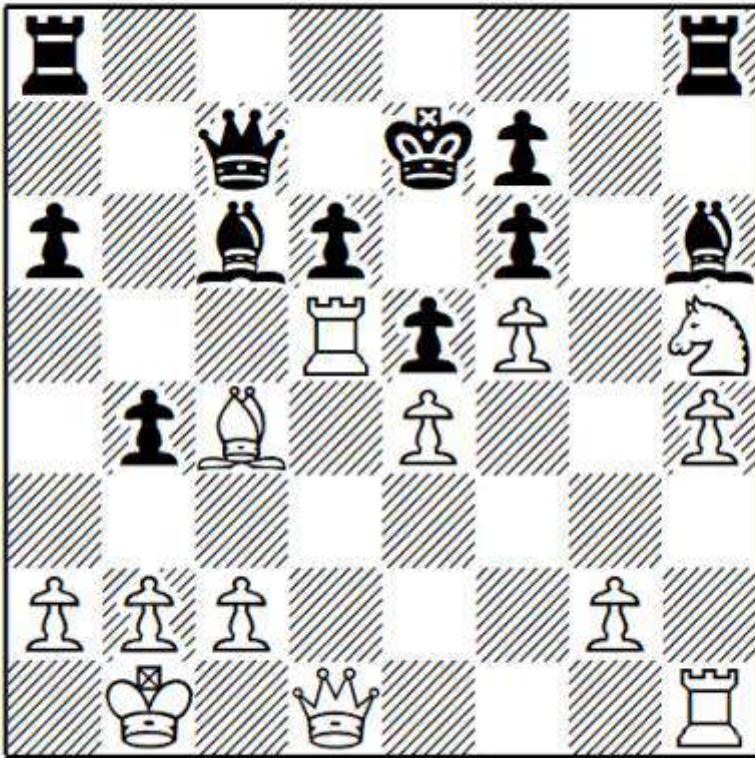


*Typical tactics*

### 20 Rd5

The alternative is 20 Bd3, but then 20 ... Rhg8 21 Qe2 Qe3! 22 Bxb5 axb5 23 Qxb5 Qa7 has been shown to give Black sufficient counterplay.

**20 ... Qc7 21 Qd1 Bc6 22 Bc4**



*Strong exchange sac*

## 22 ... Rac8

If Black accepts the exchange sacrifice immediately with 22 ... Bxd5 23 Qxd5 Rhf8 24 g4, White is much better and Black is condemned to passivity.

## 23 Bb3?!

IM Sasa Velickovic's suggestion of 23 g4 Bxd5 24 Bxd5 looks like an improvement, when I would still prefer the white pieces.

## 23 ... a5 24 Rd3 a4

White is running into trouble and Svidler tries to force matters.

## 25 Bxf7 Bxe4 26 Be6?

Instead, 26 Bd5! is the computerish defence.

## 26 ... d5!

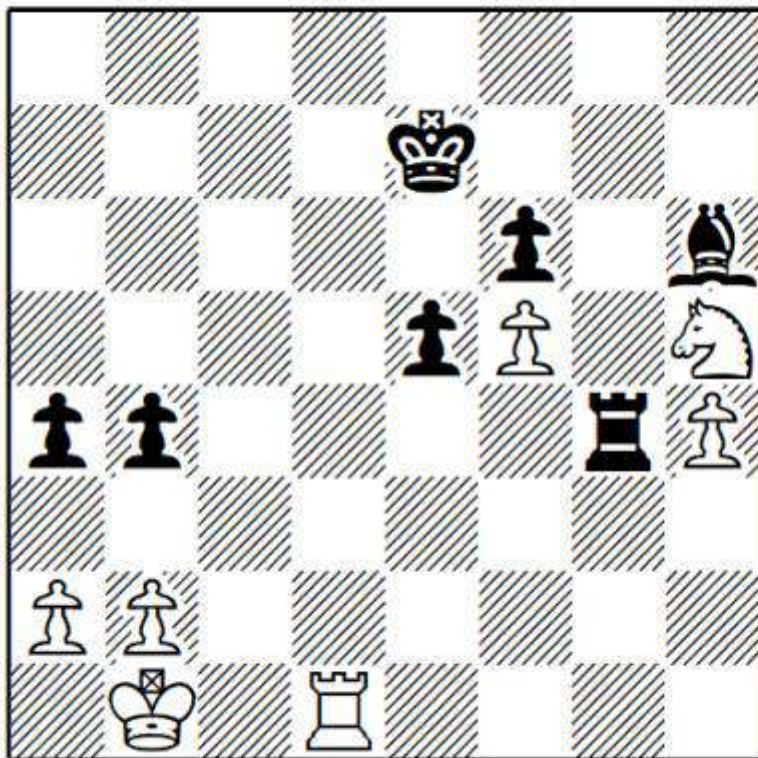
The direct 26 ... b3 27 axb3 axb3 28 Bxb3 Ra8 is thwarted by 29 Rd4! exd4 30 Qxd4 and White survives.

## 27 Bxd5 Bxd3 28 cxd3 Rhd8?!

After 28 ... Qc1+! 29 Qxc1 Rxc1+ 30 Rxc1 Bxc1 31 Nxf6 Kxf6 32 Kxc1 Kxf5 Black is much better.

**29 Bc4 Qxc4 30 dxc4 Rxd1+ 31 Rxd1 Rxc4 32 g4 Rxc4?**

Black could keep practical chances alive with 32 ... b3 33 axb3 axb3 34 Nxf6 Kxf6 35 Rd6+ Kg7 36 g5 Rxh4 37 gxh6+ Rxh6 38 Rd7+ Kf6 39 Kc1 Rh3 40 Kd2 Kxf5, although the tablebases declare the position to be a draw.



*How to draw?*

**Question:** After 32 ... Rxc4 White is able to reach a draw at once. Can you spot how to achieve this goal?

**Answer: 33 Rd7+! Kf8**

Black has to allow perpetual check, as after 33 ... Kxd7? 34 Nxf6+, followed by 35 Nxg4, White is the one with the chances.

**34 Rd8+ Ke7 35 Rd7+ Kf8 36 Rd8+ Ke7 37 Rd7+ Kf8 ½-½**

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[Krasenkow.M-Managadze.N, Greek Team Championship 2004](#)  
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[Kryvoruchko.Y-Papin.V, World Rapid Championship, Berlin 2015](#)  
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[Michalik.P-Sethuraman.S, Czech League 2016](#)  
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## opening repertoire

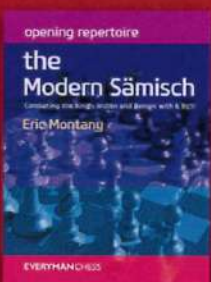
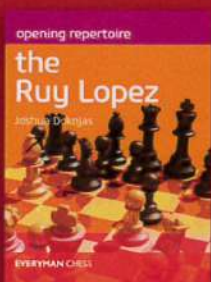
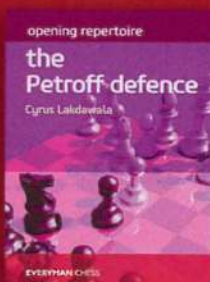
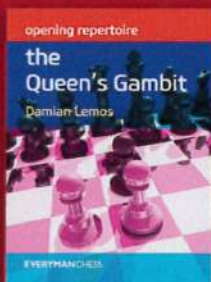
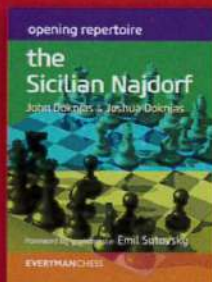
# Beating the Sicilian main lines

The Sicilian Defence is the most popular reply to 1 e4. With 1...c5 Black comes out fighting, immediately challenging any sense of a "natural white advantage". Sicilian Defence players are often very well prepared theoretically and the tremendous dynamism of the Sicilian can often disturb their opponents. In this book, German FIDE master Jonas Hacker provides a complete repertoire for White when facing the Sicilian. The recommended systems are based on solid strategic considerations. The backbone of the repertoire is the line 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 f3!? This is a perfect line to throw Najdorf and Dragon players off their stride. White will (usually) follow up with c2-c4 and establish a useful space advantage. Many of the other recommended lines are also based around the space-gaining c2-c4 advance providing cohesion across the whole repertoire.

In *Opening Repertoire: Beating the Sicilian main lines*, Jonas Hacker guides the reader through the complexities of the Sicilian and carves out a repertoire for White. He examines all aspects of this highly complex opening and provides the reader with well-researched, fresh, and innovative analysis. Each annotated game has valuable lessons on how to play the opening and contains instructive commentary on typical middlegame plans.

- A complete repertoire for White against the Sicilian.
- A question and answer approach provides an excellent study method.

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