

opening repertoire

# the Open Games with Black

Martin Lokander



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**Martin Lokander** is a young FIDE Master with two International Master norms. He has represented Sweden three times at the World Youth Chess Championships. He's an active tournament player and a regular writer for the Swedish chess magazine Tidskrift för Schack.

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The Scotch Game, Yelena Dembo & Richard Palliser (Everyman Chess 2011)  
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Black Repertoire Against 1 e4, Vol. 1, Jan Gustafsson (ChessBase 2010)  
Black Repertoire Against 1 e4, Vol. 2, Jan Gustafsson (ChessBase 2010)  
Chess Openings 24/7.com  
ChessPublishing.com  
Mega Database 2015 (ChessBase)  
New In Chess Yearbook 112  
The Modern Scotch Opening, Parimarjan Negi (ChessBase 2014)  
The Modern Two Knights, Erwin L'Ami (ChessBase 2015)

The variations in this book have been thoroughly analysed with different versions of Stockfish, but also with Komodo 8, Komodo 9 and Houdini 4.

# Foreword

I first met Martin Lokander at the Nordic Championships in 2008, back when we were both quite young. Already Martin's love for chess and in particular the openings was very clear. Being, at least in those days, very similar myself, we got to know each other and since 2010 we've been doing quite a bit of opening work together. Having worked on and off with Martin for around five years, I'm still regularly fascinated by his endless creativity. In positions where I think that I've looked at everything, he usually comes up with moves and ideas that I would never have found even with the aid of a strong computer. A good example of this can be found in Game 24, where the move 13 ... Qf5 seems to breathe new air into an otherwise very boring line.

Of course, modern day chess preparation is not only about finding new ideas in cutting-edge theory. At least as important is to know the history and dig deep into forgotten or semi-forgotten lines. At the very top-level Aronian is famous for that, while in the Open Games Nigel Short also comes to mind. It has been shown again and again how well-established evaluations are based on good wins in the past, but where it is actually possible to improve the play of the losing side. Throughout this book I found a lot of references to old games that I didn't know myself, clearly indicating that Martin knows his stuff.

For example, the 10 ... Be6 of Game 36 shows that we shouldn't just follow what everybody else plays nowadays, but rather look for ourselves and at the history books with fresh and critical eyes. While I don't think objectively speaking 10 ... Be6 is at all better than the usual 10 ... c6, it poses some practical problems for the white player, likely resulting in a time advantage and some psychological initiative for Black – the kind of advantages that I myself have obtained so many times by the use of Martin's ideas.

One of the strongest assets of this book is that Martin continually looks not only for the best moves and lines, but also for the most practical ones. Here it should be mentioned that his style of play consists of always fighting for the initiative with both colours. And while I am certain that the lines suggested are objectively sound, they might not suit the driest of players. As for myself, I always enjoy a good initiative. Not only is it very unpleasant for the opponent having to solve complex and unexpected problems early on with White, but it is also simply much more fun to play aggressively as Black.

Such an approach sometimes involves some risk, as in the line 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 d4 exd4 5 e5 Ng4 6 0-0 Be7 7 Re1 d6, but the good thing is that the risk is no less on White's side. Incidentally, I would personally be initially disgusted by the move 8 exd6 cxd6 here which seems to make no sense at all, but Martin never trusts the first impression and after digging a bit deeper, it's clear that the counterplay obtained by Black fully compensates for his weakened structure.

All in all, I can warmly recommend this book for anyone interested in playing the Open Games with either colour. Even for those who don't, the sheer number of new ideas should make it an enjoyable and inspirational read.

Nils Grandelius,  
Malmö, Sweden,  
October 2015

# Introduction

We all encounter worries and doubts about our opening repertoires. I've had them for many years, I still have them, and I know that I will have them 30 years from now. In fact, deciding which openings to play and study is an entire journey in itself and everyone has their own path to getting to a position they enjoy playing.

Most of my friends learned a solid opening in their youth, and they've kept playing it constantly ever since. My own opening journey has been much more rocky and time-consuming, but I think I've learned a great deal along it. In the course of my eight years as an ambitious junior, I've had the Ruy Lopez, the Caro-Kann, the French, the Modern, two different types of Scandinavian, the Alekhine, Owen's Defence and four different types of Sicilian as my main weapons as Black against 1 e4. Yes, they were not one-time surprise weapons; they were actually all my main weapons.

Of course, studying and playing all those openings required a lot of time and energy for preparation, but in return I've had many practical advantages over the board. I've very seldom been caught in my opponent's preparation and I've won many games due to my preparation.

In 2011, I reached a turning point when I watched Jan Gustafsson's excellent two-volume DVDs on the Marshall Attack and the Open Games. I didn't watch everything from beginning to the end, but I studied it a little here and there, and eventually I found that I enjoyed these positions much more than my Sicilian Najdorf.

Ever since, I've had 1 e4 e5 as a big part of my repertoire and even though I occasionally enjoy playing something different, it's very comforting to have something to lean on. The following game is an excellent example of how Gustafsson's video helped me.

Game 1

**H.Logdahl-M.Lokander**

Stockholm 2011

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bb5**

The Spanish Four Knights.

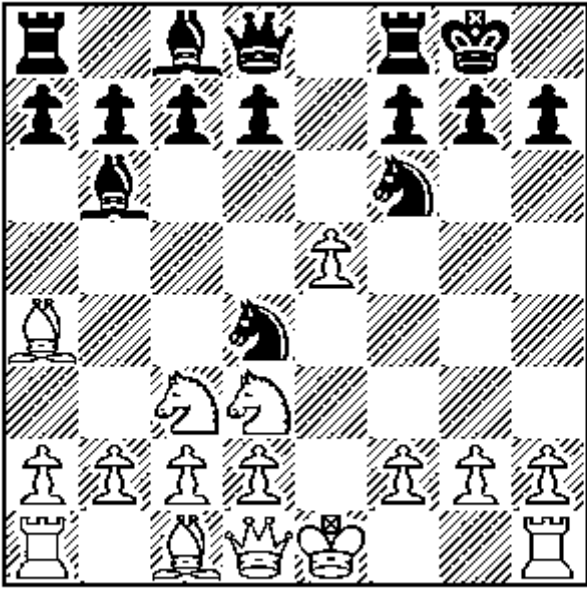
**4 ... Nd4**

Gustafsson's recommendation. As you later shall see, my recommended move is 4 ... Bc5.

**5 Ba4**

Luckily, I was way too weak for my opponent to be interested in 5 Nxd4 exd4 6 e5 dxc3 7 exf6 Qxf6 8 dxc3, which is a well-known idea to reach a very drawish position.

**5 ... Bc5! 6 Nxe5 0-0 7 Nd3 Bb6 8 e5**



This is all well-known theory and if I remember correctly my opponent had already played this position in the database. At this point, I sank into deep thought and after 10 minutes I played the very unusual ...

**8 ... c6!?**

... with a deep sigh.

My opponent probably thought that this was some kind of unsound over-the-board inspiration. After all, 8 ... Ne8 is the theoretical move. Had I played 8 ... c6 instantly there was no way White would have dared to capture the piece, but since I spent 10 minutes 'thinking', it probably wasn't prepared. At least that's what he thought.

**9 exf6?! Re8+ 10 Kf1 Qxf6**

Black has great compensation for the sacrificed piece, as Gustafsson had showed in his video. White's development is gummed up and it's not easy for him to untangle.

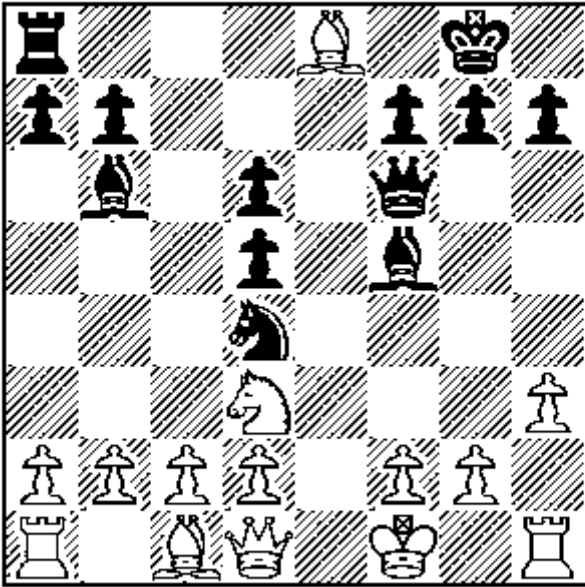
**11 h3 d6**

At this point I must admit that I forgot my preparation and I should have preferred 11 ... d5.

**12 Nd5?**

This looks promising, but it quickly backfires. White should probably play 12 g3! Bf5 13 Nf4 when he might be able to untangle with d3.

**12 ... cxd5 13 Bxe8 Bf5!**



Black has sacrificed an entire rook, yet White is completely defenceless.

#### **14 Ba4 Nxc2!**

The key idea. Black threatens to capture d3 with mate on f2, so White is officially busted. The rest of the game isn't very interesting.

**15 Nf4 Qd4 16 Qf3 Qxa4 17 b3 Qb5+ 18 Kg1 Nxa1 19 Bb2 Nc2 20 Nxd5 Bg6 21 h4 Re8 22 h5 Re1+ 23 Kh2 Rxh1+ 24 Kxh1 Qf1+ 25 Kh2 Bxf2 26 g4 Bg1+ 27 Kg3 Bh2+ 0-1**

I played Logdahl again a few months later and we contested a g3 Vienna where I once again won a good game thanks to Gustafsson's DVD. The next time Logdahl played me he avoided 1 e4 altogether.

#### **Why Should I Play 1 e4 e5?**

The best thing about 1 e4 e5 is the wide variety of positions that can arise from it. Certain openings are closely related to certain structures, such as the French and the Sicilian, whereas 1 e4 e5 leads to a broad variety of structures which develops your chess as a whole.

#### **Isn't it Risky to Play 1 e4 e5?**

My first fears when I was about to start playing 1 e4 e5 was actually not the Ruy Lopez. Even though it's theoretically the most challenging choice, learning how to play against all of White's gambits and attacking ideas in the Open Games seemed like a much more daunting task.

As I eventually realized, this fear was somewhat exaggerated. I shall not lie; White has a few lines that Black needs to be aware of. However, in my experience, as long as Black has some clue about what he's doing, he'll be fine. In fact, against most tries the ambitious player can even fight for an advantage.

#### **What's the General Theme Behind this Book?**

In this book, I've tried to present a high-level repertoire for Black against the Open Games. I've tried to pick variations where Black is aggressive and quickly fights for the initiative, but I would never recommend something that in my opinion gives White an objective advantage. These are not variations one would try once or twice. The variations are aggressive, but most importantly they are strong and theoretically sound.

Another factor I've tried to include is a practical one. Whenever possible, I've tried to introduce new ideas that are at least as equally strong as the established ideas. At the beginning of this project I didn't think I would be able to discover as many new ideas as I did, but it still shows that even in today's society, where information is available within seconds, new ideas are still being developed.

### **What Should I Play Against the Ruy Lopez?**

Covering the Ruy Lopez would require an entire book itself, and during the process of this book I've largely played 1 ... e5 in the hope that I wouldn't face the Ruy Lopez. There are in fact many good variations in the Ruy Lopez. I've tried a lot of them, but there are still many I haven't tried. Indeed, I've played 15 different variations of the Ruy Lopez as Black with decent results, so the choice is really yours!

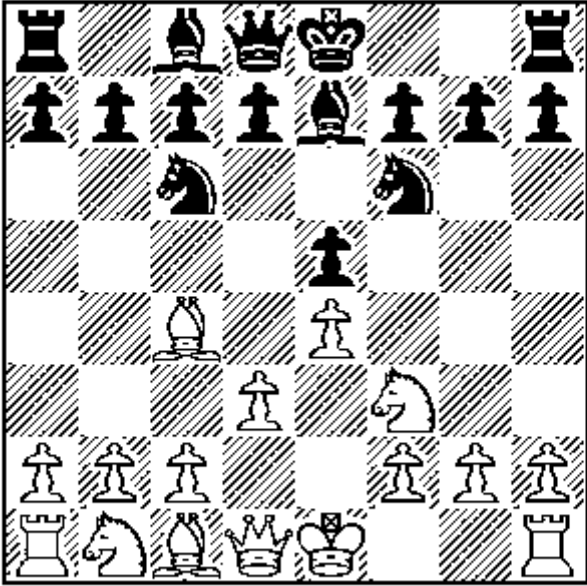
Now, let's get down to business and I wish you great success with 1 e4 e5!

Martin Lokander,  
Stockholm, Sweden,  
October 2015

# Chapter One

## The Quiet Two Knights

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 d3



I want to begin by looking at this line because it's an opening that requires some understanding to play well. The positions that arise are very typical for 1 e4 e5 in general and many positions resemble the Ruy Lopez. When I started playing 1 e4 e5 in 2011, I didn't put any time into these variations because I thought Black would be fine with natural developing moves. It didn't take very long until my opponents noticed my terrible statistics and so they kept playing it against me. It wasn't until recently that I started looking at this opening seriously and I discovered that it isn't as boring as I used to think.

### The Bishop on c4

A huge amount of the existing theory in the Italian Game, Two Knight's Defence and the Ruy Lopez is based on a single piece, White's light-squared bishop. Many players know the typical moves and manoeuvres, but it's important to understand why the moves are played. The bishop on c4 is obviously an actively placed piece, but it's also exposed. It's a very common idea to play ... Na5 and exchange off this bishop if given the chance.

Game 2

**O.Dolzhikova-L.Trent**

Oslo 2013

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 d3 Be7 5 0-0 0-0 6 Nc3!?

This natural developing move isn't very common, perhaps because of its somewhat dull reputation. I once played the Sicilian Dragon just to avoid facing this variation, but after looking at it closer, I've realized that Black has plenty of chances to fight for the win. We will look closer at this move in Game 4.

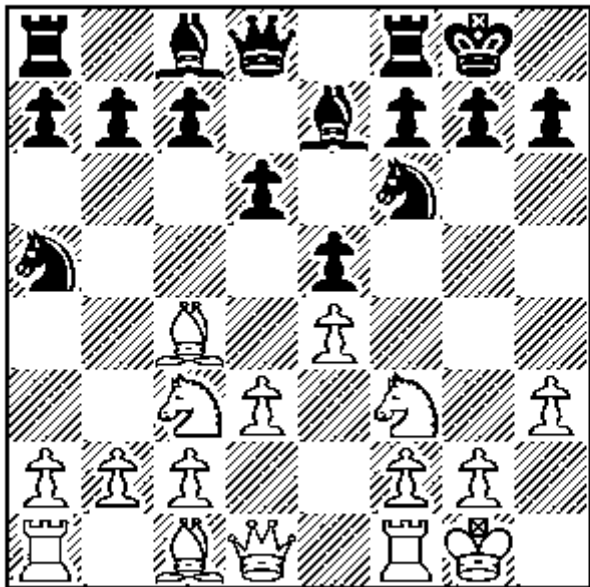
### 6 ... d6

This looks obvious, but some might not realize that Black's last move carries a strategic threat.

### 7 h3

I was shocked to learn that this move has been played over 1,500 times! Black scores a stunning 63% after the next move. White is afraid of ... Bg4 and ... Nd4, but that's not what she should be worried about.

### 7 ... Na5!



Here we go! White can't prevent an exchange of the c4-bishop, after which Black will have an easy game and the bishop-pair. Notice how ... d6 enabled this knight lunge by protecting the e5-pawn.

### 8 Bg5

I assume White wants to control the d5-square, but this fails to worry Black. However, 8 Bb5 doesn't help because 8 ... a6 9 Ba4 b5 forces 10 Bb3 when Black will get the bishop after all.

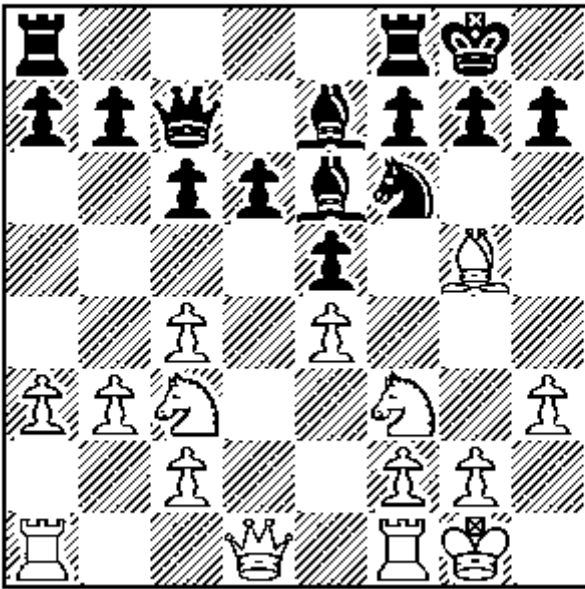
### 8 ... c6

Black doesn't have to hurry; the bishop on c4 won't go anywhere.

### 9 a3

White now threatens to save the bishop by playing Ba2. It's time to take it.

### 9 ... Nxc4 10 dxc4 Be6 11 b3 Qc7



The opening phase is about to finish. What we notice is Black's bishop-pair and White's semi-open d-file. It might seem like White has decent counterplay against the d6-pawn, but it's very difficult to get to it. When looking closely, we notice that White's knights have a hard time finding useful targets. Black's flexible pawn structure eliminates many good outposts and we will throughout the game see how White's knights struggle. Black has a solid advantage.

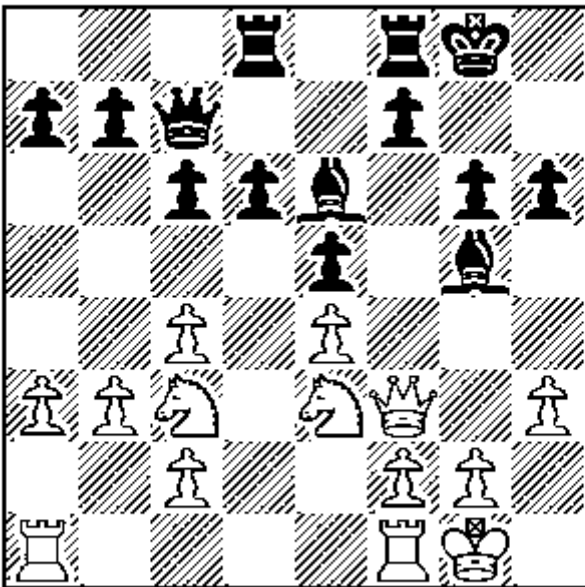
**12 Nh2**

White tries to relocate his knight, but it doesn't turn out very well.

**12 ... Rad8 13 Qf3 h6!**

A clever move which forces some sort of commitment from White.

**14 Bxf6 Bxf6 15 Ng4 Bg5 16 Ne3 g6!**



This nice move kills White's counterplay. It's obvious that White doesn't have a good plan here and although the game continuation isn't the best, it is difficult to suggest anything better.

**17 g4?! Qe7**

Black goes for a favourable endgame, but this might not have been the best way to punish White's last move. 17 ... Kg7 followed by ... Rh8 and ... h5 would have been a very dangerous

idea.

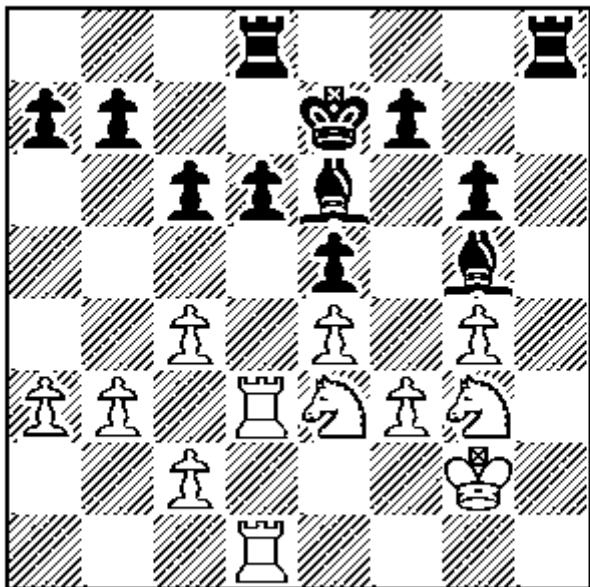
**18 Ne2 Qf6 19 Qxf6 Bxf6**

Black has managed to reach a favourable endgame where he can grind for hours, but I can't help feeling White got more breathing space than she deserved.

**20 Rad1 h5 21 f3 Kg7 22 Rd3 hxg4 23 hxg4 Bg5**

An excellent square for this bishop.

**24 Ng3 Rh8 25 Kg2 Kf6! 26 Rfd1 Ke7**



Black doesn't hurry. He knows that White can't do anything active and thus takes his time to improve his pieces.

**27 Rh1 Rxh1 28 Kxh1 Rc8!**

After trading one pair of rooks, Black no longer needs his rook on d8. Trent prepares the ... b5 break when the rook would be very well placed on the c-file.

**29 Ngf1 b5! 30 cxb5 cxb5 31 Kg2**

Black has managed to open the position and now proceeds to fix the queenside structure to his advantage.

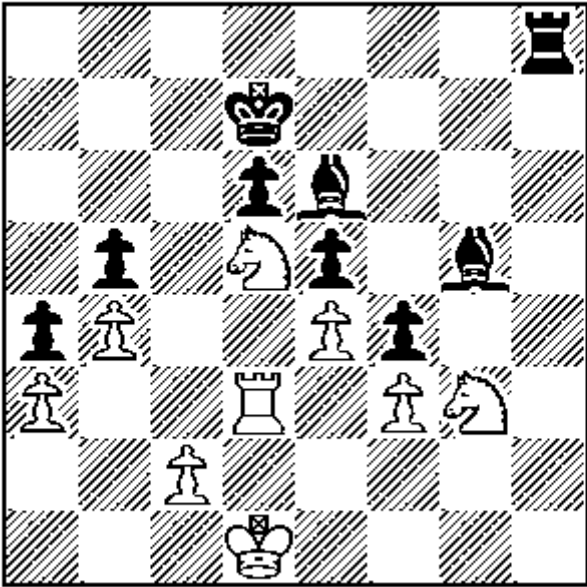
**31 ... a5! 32 Kf2 Kd7 33 Ke1 Ra8 34 Kd1 a4 35 b4 Rh8! 36 Nd5 f5?!**

Probably a slight inaccuracy in an otherwise very well played endgame. Black should probably include 36 ... Rh3 first, to prevent White's opportunity in the game.

**37 gxf5 gxf5 38 Ng3!**

White is still worse, but she has been invited back into the game as her knights finally find useful to work on. Unfortunately for White, the very next move spoils it.

**38 ... f4**



**39 Ne2?**

Dolzhikova could have taken her chance with 39 Nf5!, after which the d6-pawn finally suffers. Should Black take on f5, the d5-knight will relocate to e4 via c3.

**39 ... Rh1+ 40 Kd2 Bh4!**

Now White is busted. Black has fully penetrated White's camp and his bishops can start working against White's weaknesses.

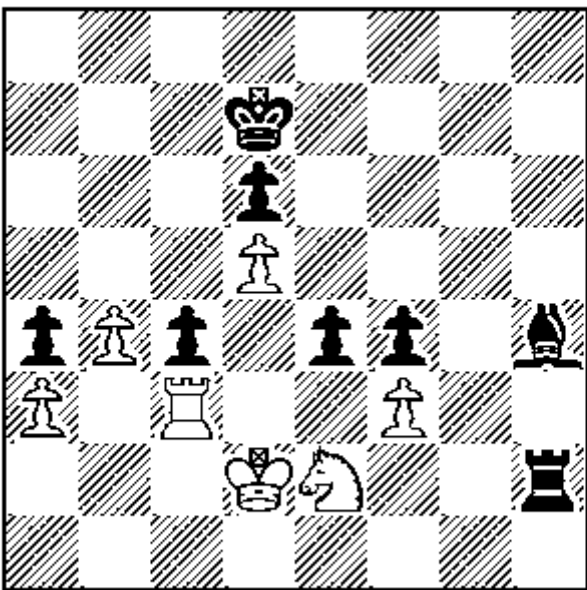
**41 c3 Rh2! 42 c4**

A desperate breakthrough, trying to activate White's passive pieces.

**42 ... bxc4 43 Rc3 Bxd5!**

Trent spots his chance and finds a nice tactic.

**44 exd5 e4!**



A very nice counter breakthrough.

**45 fxe4 Bf6!**

The point. White can't handle Black's passed pawns.

**46 Rf3 c3+ 47 Kd3 c2 48 Nc1 Bb2 49 Rf1**

It looks like White is resisting well, dealing with both the f-pawn and the c-pawn, but Black

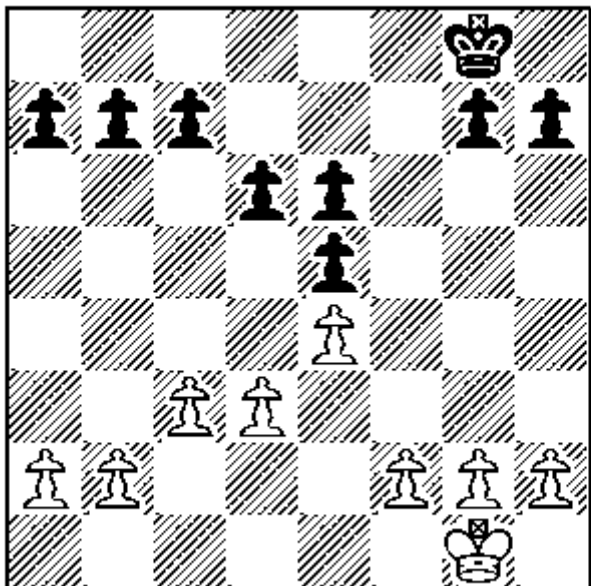
has another pawn coming.

**49 ... Bxa3! 50 Kc3 Bxc1 51 Rxc1 f3 52 Rf1 Re2 53 Kd3 a3!**

Three pawns are more than White can handle.

**54 Rh1 a2 55 Rh7+ Kc8 56 Rh1 Kb7 0-1**

Before we move on to the theory, and the meat and bone of this chapter, I want to look very briefly at the following structure.



It's a well-known idea to play ... d6 and ... Be6 to challenge the bishop on c4, but I've never been very fond of it. I try to avoid such a structure whenever I have good alternatives because I think White's position is generally the more pleasant to play, especially with a pawn on c3. The half-open f-file can certainly come in handy, but Black's pawn structure is very inflexible. Indeed, there are no useful pawn breaks, whereas White can play for a queenside initiative with b2-b4, which is why I only recommend playing ... Be6 against an early Nc3. Now, let's move on to some concrete variations.

## Theoretical Introduction

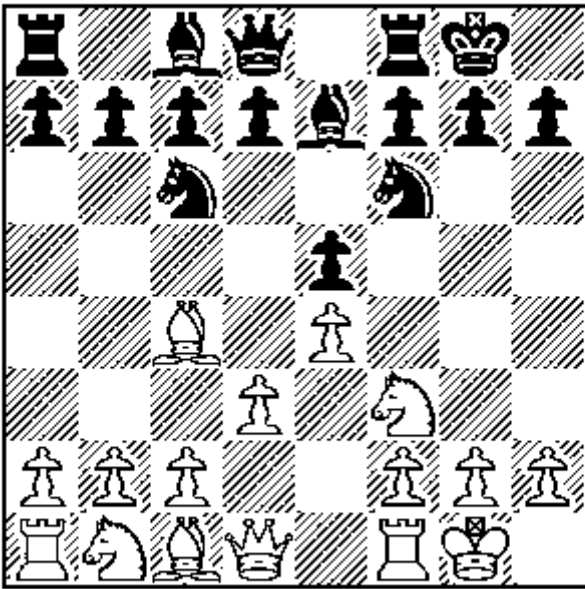
**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 d3 Be7**

I prefer this to 4 ... Bc5, because I think it leads to more interesting positions with more scope for creativity. There's obviously nothing wrong theoretically with the Italian Game, though, so feel free to play it if you wish.

**5 0-0**

In Game 3 you will find coverage of those variations where White delays or avoids castling early. They are not very challenging theoretically, but still require some care by Black.

**5 ... 0-0**



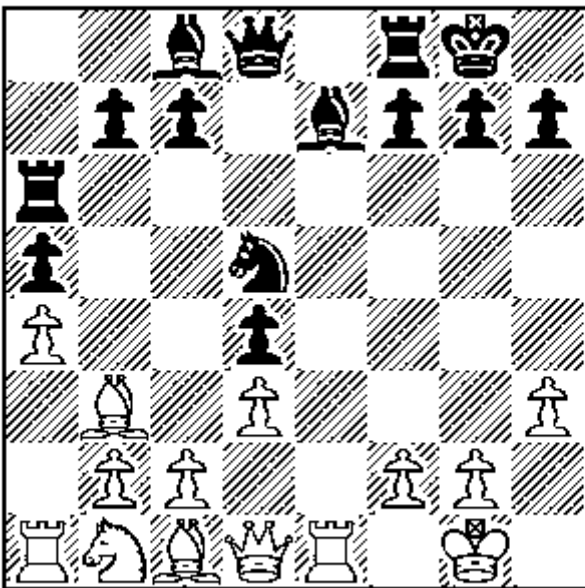
## 6 Re1

White takes his time to prevent ... d5 by exerting indirect pressure on the e5-pawn. Alternatives:

a) 6 Nc3 is a very solid way for White to develop, but one which still has to be met accurately. One critical continuation to remember is 6 ... d6 7 a3 Be6 8 Re1! which should be met with either 8 ... Nxe4!? or 8 ... Nd4. This is covered in Game 4.

b) 6 Bb3!? is frequently played in grandmaster praxis. My first intention was to recommend 6 ... d5!?, which I still think is fine theoretically, but I stumbled across some positions I didn't like too much. Let's check out some critical variations after 7 exd5 Nxd5:

b1) 8 h3 has more or less disappeared because of 8 ... a5! 9 a4 Nd4 10 Nxd4 exd4 11 Re1 Ra6!!.

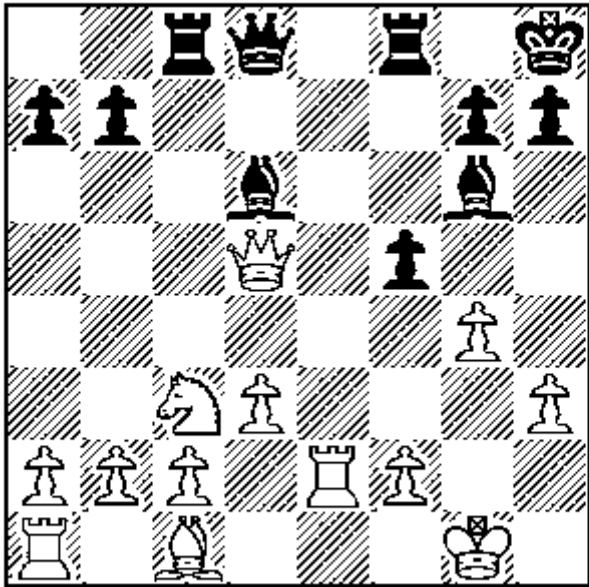


Black went on to score an excellent win in S.Karjakin-B.Gelfand, Khanty-Mansiysk 2009.

b2) 8 Re1 Bg4 9 h3 and now:

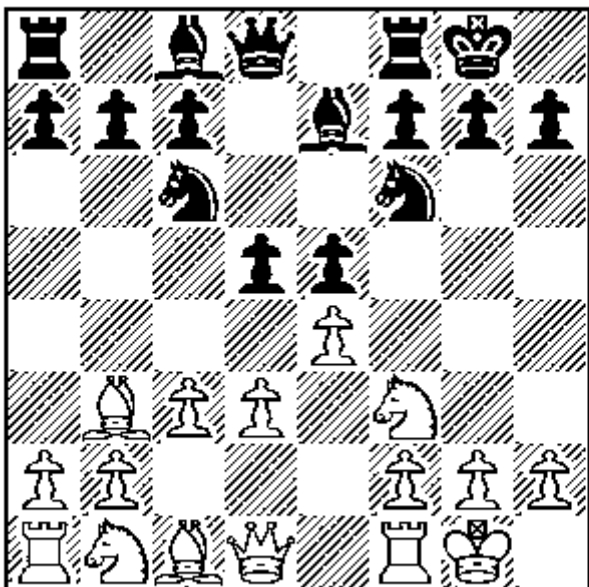
b21) 9 ... Bxf3 is probably the best continuation theoretically. After 10 Qxf3 Nd4! 11 Qxd5 Qxd5 12 Bxd5 Nxc2 13 Rxe5! we reach a very complicated middlegame without queens which I think might be fine for Black, but I don't fancy the strange positions that appear.

b22) 9 ... Bh5 is the daring continuation. I've tried hard to make this work, but Black is certainly the one who has to play accurately to retain compensation: 10 g4 Bg6 11 Nxe5 Nxe5 12 Rxe5 c6 13 Qf3 Bd6! (13 ... Bf6 was played in the stem game V.Kramnik-G.Kasparov, Novgorod 1995, but this is worse) 14 Re2 f5 15 Bxd5+ cxd5 16 Qxd5+ Kh8 17 Nc3 Rc8.



And now I propose 18 Bg5!? which looks like an interesting novelty. Black's compensation seems somewhat sketchy after 18 ... Qxg5 19 Qxd6 fxc4 20 Qg3. Black will probably keep finding resources in this line, but it's simply not a very practical choice if White is well prepared.

After 6 Bb3, I finally decided on a refinement of Black's idea: 6 ... d6 7 c3 d5!



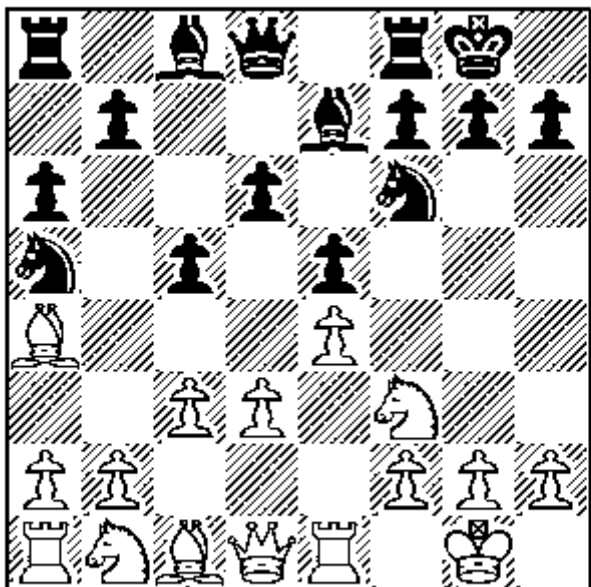
This is a very creative idea by GM Romanishin. The move ... d5 is generally fine against an early c2-c3 and here it's even worth spending a tempo to provoke it. Game 5 shows why 8 exd5 is dangerous for White and in Game 6 we'll take a look at variations where White retains the tension with 8 Nbd2 or 8 Qe2.

c) 6 c3 is often played in practice, but Black can always counter an early c2-c3 with 6 ... d5!, which you will see in Game 7 together with slightly unusual 6th moves, such as 6 a4 and 6 Nbd2.

## 6 ... d6 7 a4!

Establishing a bind on the light squares and preventing Black from seizing too much space on the queenside. This is the most challenging variation in my opinion and in the end I decided to recommend an interesting, dynamic approach which seems to offer good counterplay.

7 c3 is also frequently played in practice, and now ... d5 isn't possible. Black should grab space on the queenside with 7 ... Na5 8 Bb5 a6 9 Ba4 c5! whilst delaying the move ... b5 for now.

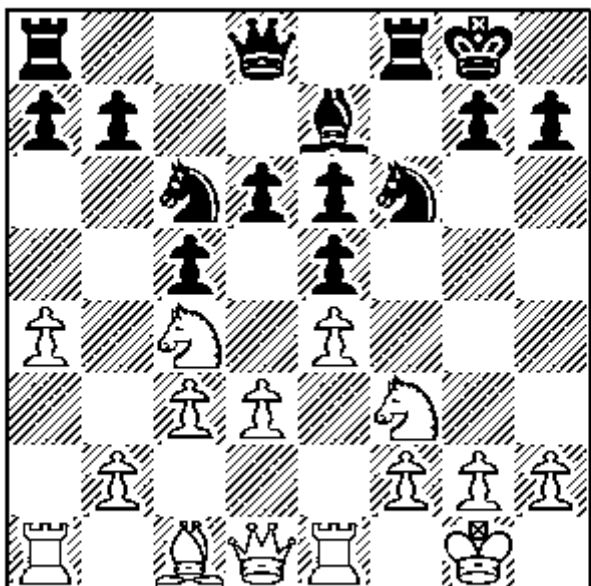


The bishop is probably better on c2 than on a4 and ... b5 isn't immediately necessary. This leads to a rich Ruy Lopez-type of middlegame where the best players usually prevail. This is covered in Game 8.

## 7 ... Kh8!?

Black prepares ... Ng8 and ... f5 if White plays c2-c3, but if White puts his knight on c3 Black might have to change his strategy.

At first, I wanted to recommend 7 ... Na5 8 Ba2 c5, but I think the structure arising after, for instance, 9 Na3 Nc6 10 c3 Be6 11 Bxe6 fxe6 12 Nc4 is slightly more pleasant for White.

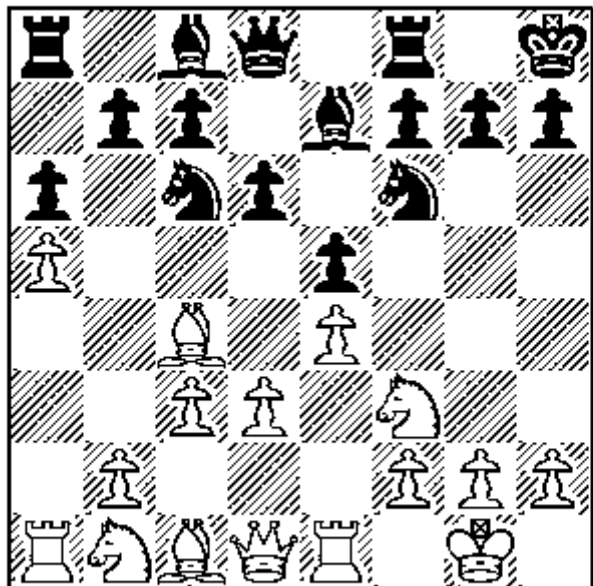


The same goes for the immediate 7 ... Be6 8 Bxe6!? fxe6 9 c3 which is a structure I'd like to avoid.

### 8 a5

Variations where White delays or avoids c2-c3 are covered in Game 9. Game 10 tackles the immediate 8 c3, without including a5 and ... a6. This leads to some important differences that I've tried to highlight in the games.

### 8 ... a6 9 c3



See Game 11 for coverage of this messy variation.

In October 2012 I participated in the BSF IM Cup in Copenhagen, my first closed IM tournament. Unfortunately my play was horrible, but at least I gained valuable experience. In the first round I reached a typical Open Game structure as Black and my 2230-rated opponent launched a violent kingside attack with g2-g4 very early. I reacted poorly and lost, although my opponent certainly should be praised for a well-played game.

The following game is a much better example of how Black should meet such brutal attacks. It's likely that you will meet similar approaches at one point or another, and being aware of their existence helps you keep your cool when facing them in a game. I intend too to cover lines where White delays castling for other reasons as well, but it will soon become clear that White gains nothing from this.

### Game 3

**J. Van der Wiel-G. Flear**

Wijk aan Zee 1987

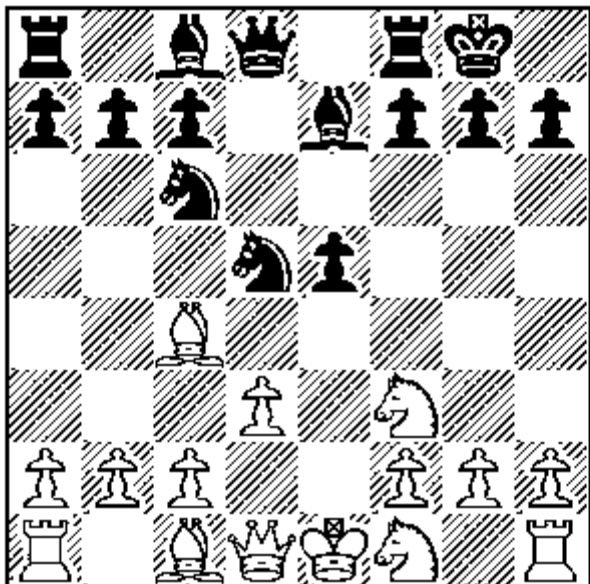
### 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 d3 Be7 5 Nc3!?

A very natural move, if White intends to delay castling. Black would often like to open up the centre quickly (with the ... d5 break) against the uncastled king. With a knight on c3, White makes sure the centre remains closed and increases the chances of succeeding with a delayed-castling strategy.

First, let's see some alternative lines.

a) 5 Nbd2 0-0 6 Nf1?! is a common theme in this structure, but here it's simply a mistake

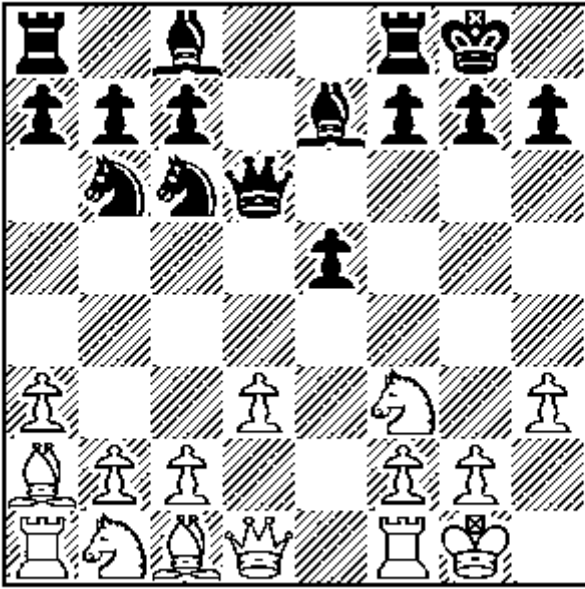
since Black can play 6 ... d5! 7 exd5 Nxd5 and have complete control of the centre.



After 8 Ng3 Black has many different options, but my favourite is the untried 8 ... Na5!?. Obviously Black wants to take the bishop-pair and 9 Nxe5 is very risky because of 9 ... Bb4+ when White has to lose his castling rights (although I'm not sure he wanted them in the first place). Black has more than enough compensation for a single pawn. 8 ... Bg4, as in A.Bayrak-E.Horn, Dresden 2004, is good as well.

b) White can try to play a waiting game with 5 Nbd2 0-0 6 c3, but the move c2-c3 doesn't work very well in an open centre. Black doesn't have to shy away from 6 ... d5! when he has absolutely no problems at all. Black has many different ways to play this type of position and I'd just like to show you an extract from K.Szczepkowska-J.Krecji, Pobedsky 2009, where Black managed to obtain a very nice initiative on the queenside with some creative play: 7 Bb3 a5 8 0-0 Bg4 9 Re1 b5!? 10 a3 d4 11 c4 b4 12 Ba4 Nb8! 13 h3 Bxf3 14 Nxf3 Nfd7 15 Bb5?! c6 16 Ba4 Qc7 17 Bc2 Na6 18 a4 Nac5 19 b3 and by this point it was clear that Black's creative strategy had succeeded very well. The game later ended in a draw, but his positional advantage here is beyond doubt.

c) 5 h3 is a pet variation of GM Oratovsky. After 5 ... 0-0 he plays 6 a3 which actually isn't bad. I like the continuation 6 ... d5 7 exd5 Nxd5 8 0-0 Nb6 9 Ba2 Qd6!?.



This will be followed by ... Be6 when Black has equalized, but the best player will usually win this type of position which might explain Oratovsky's success in this variation.

**5 ... d6 6 h3 0-0**

I would rather play 6 ... Na5 to gain the precious c4-bishop, but there's nothing wrong with the text move either.

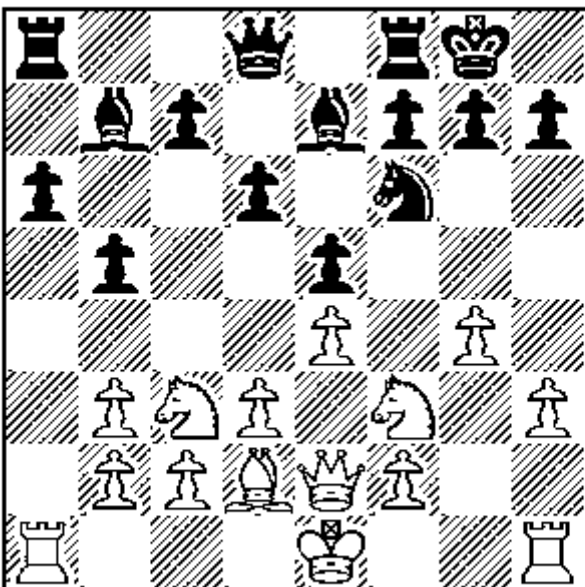
**7 g4?!**

It would be interesting to know what van der Wiel had in mind when he went for this caveman attack. It's probably a good idea to take a deep breath and remember the famous saying 'The threat is stronger than the execution', because White's attack isn't really dangerous and it shouldn't succeed.

**7 ... Na5!**

Flear proceeds as usual. The bishop on c4 is eliminated and White is free to develop his so-called attack.

**8 Bb3 a6 9 Bd2 b5 10 Qe2 Nxb3 11 axb3 Bb7**



Flear's play is admirable. He has continued just as normal with standard development and

White's so-called attack is not nearly enough compensation for the bishop-pair.

**12 Rg1**

12 g5 Nd7 13 h4 isn't dangerous either and after 13 ... Nb6 Black can start counterplay in the centre.

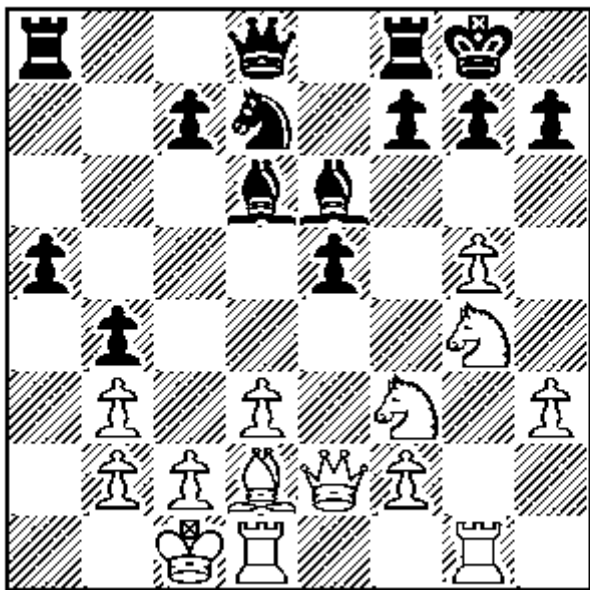
**12 ... b4 13 Nd1 d5!**

Everything looks like it comes straight out of the textbook. Flank play is met with a strike in the centre. Black is clearly in charge of the game.

**14 g5 Nd7 15 exd5 Bxd5 16 Ne3 Be6 17 Ng4 Bd6 18 0-0-0?!**

A bad mistake, but the position was already difficult.

**18 ... a5!**



Now White's king isn't safe anywhere, and the a-file opens up very quickly. Van der Wiel probably felt the need to complicate the position, but it doesn't work too well.

**19 Nf6+ Nxf6 20 gxf6 g6 21 Bg5 a4 22 bxa4 b3!**

A strong move, opening up the queenside as quickly as possible. White's king is busted.

**23 Qe4 bxc2 24 Kxc2 Qd7 25 Ra1**

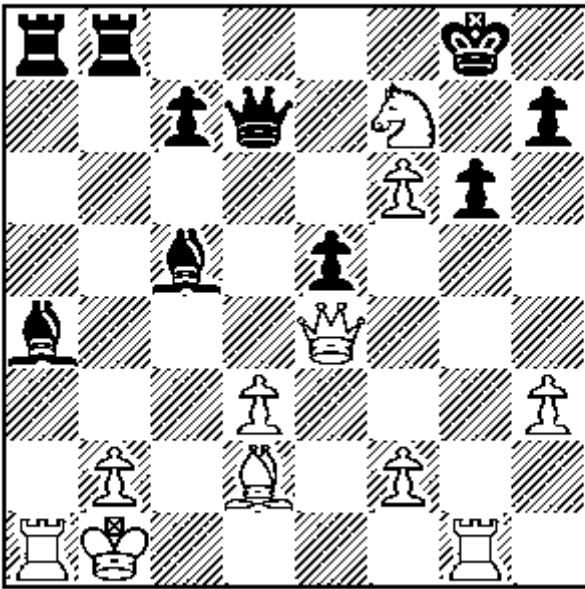
The white king's shelter is close to non-existent and it's just a matter of time until Black gets to it.

**25 ... Rfb8**

Even the cool rook-lift 25 ... Ra5!? looks decisive.

**26 Bd2 Bb3+ 27 Kb1 Bxa4 28 Ng5 Bc5 29 Bc3**

White has the sneaky 29 Nxf7!? ...



... but Black has the nice 29 ... Qd4! which crowns his centralizing strategy. White loses heavy material after 30 Qxd4 Bxd4 31 Nh6+ Kf8.

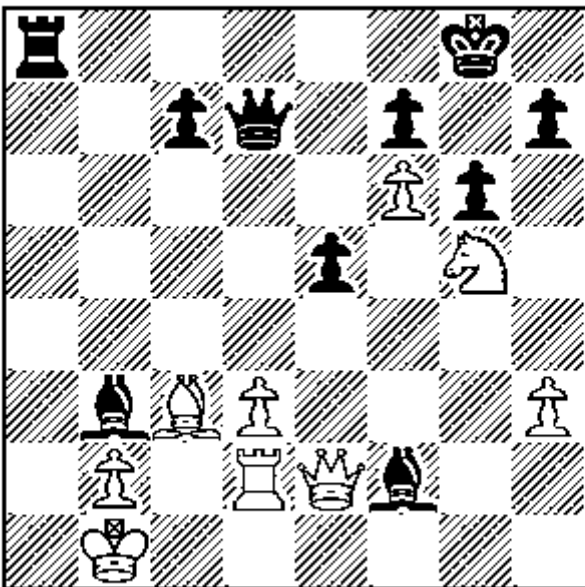
**29 ... Bc6 30 Rxa8 Rxa8 31 Qe2 Bxf2!**

Accurate until the end.

**32 Rc1**

32 Qxf2 doesn't work because of 32 ... Qxd3+ 33 Qc2 Ra1+! when White drops his queen.

**32 ... Bb5 33 Rd1 Ba4 34 Rd2 Bb3**



A well-known mating pattern appears.

**35 Bb4**

35 Qxf2 leads to immediate mate after 35 ... Ra1+ 36 Kxa1 Qa4+ 37 Kb1 Qa2+ 38 Kc1 Qa1#.

**35 ... Qc6! 36 Qf1 Be3 37 Rg2 Bxg5 0-1**

Game 4

**D.Barua-S.Ganguly**

**1 e4 e5 2 Bc4**

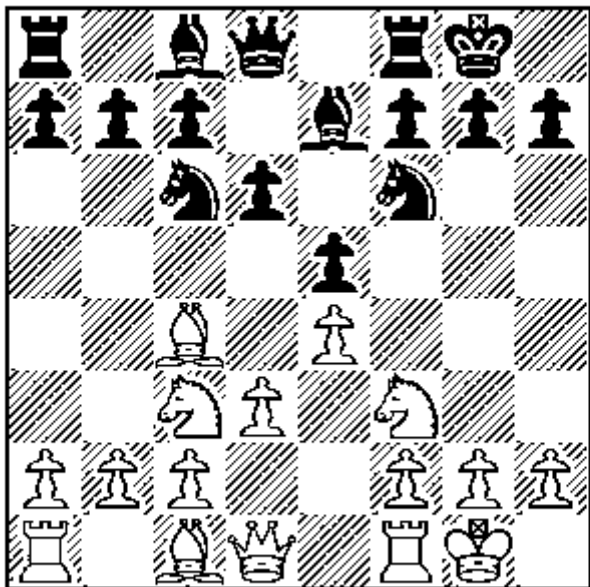
The most common way for us to reach the game is through 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 d3 Be7.

**2 ... Nf6 3 d3 Nc6 4 Nf3**

After a slightly different move order than we're used to, we've arrived at the key position.

**4 ... Be7 5 0-0**

As we saw in our previous game, White earns nothing by delaying castling. 5 Nc3 d6 6 a3 is very similar to the game; Black can play in similar fashion with 6 ... Be6.

**5 ... 0-0 6 Nc3 d6**

This is the starting position for our Nc3 coverage. We've already seen this position in our introductory game Dolzhikova-Trent, where we saw what happened to White's position if Black is allowed to play ... Na5 and capture the bishop on c4. Black's last move defended the e5-pawn and thus ... Na5 is a threat.

**7 a4**

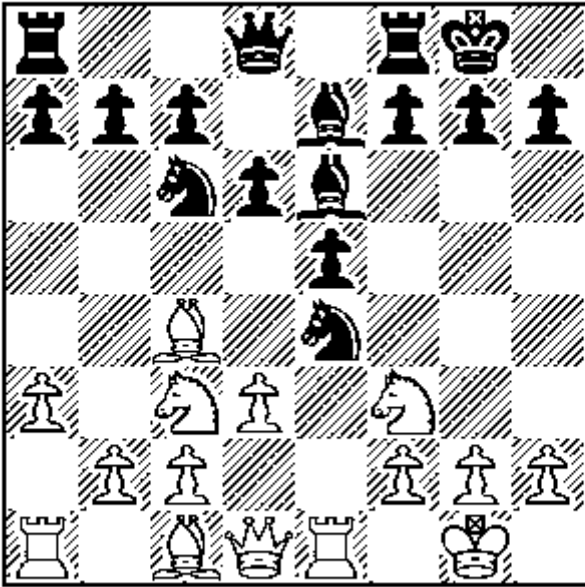
White grabs space on the queenside while giving the bishop a safe home on a2.

Another critical continuation is the more cautious 7 a3 Be6 8 Re1!. Black's last move prepared the ... d5 break (having the knight on c3 doesn't prevent it forever), so White takes precautions against the black centre. This position is critical for this variation, and Black could easily find himself in a slightly passive position if he continues by playing slow developing moves. Note too that allowing ... Bxc4 is more harmonious for White with a pawn on a3 than on a4, because there is no hole on b4. Here Black has a choice:

a) One move is 8 ... Qd7, which looks very natural, but White can play 9 Nd5! and although Black is probably fine, White might just have a tiny edge here.

b) Bologan mentions 8 ... Nd4!? which I think is a good, solid move. After 9 Nxd4 exd4 10 Bxe6 fxe6 11 Ne2 Black is probably fine after 11 ... c5. If Black feels uneasy with my main recommendation, he can always rely on Bologan's move.

c) 8 ... Nxe4!? is a surprising strike worth remembering.



After 9 Nxe4 (9 Bxe6 Nxc3 10 Bxf7+ Rxf7 11 bxc3 Qd7 is very pleasant for Black, who can exert pressure on the kingside) 9 ... d5 10 Bb5! (10 Neg5 dxc4 11 Nxe6 fxe6 12 dxc4 Qxd1 13 Rxd1 Rad8 is probably about equal; the e-pawns cover some important central squares and Black could even push ... e4 if White isn't careful) 10 ... dxe4 11 Bxc6 bxc6 12 Nxe5 it looks like Black is the one who got tricked by the complications, but we're not done yet: 12 ... Bd6! 13 Rxe4 Bd5 14 Re1 Re8. White's rook is forced to retreat and Black can look forward to very decent Marshall-style compensation. On top of a good initiative on the kingside, Black's two bishops can make White's life very uncomfortable.

### 7 ... h6

Generally a useful move, although it's not clear whether it's necessary at this point.

I would prefer the immediate 7 ... Be6!, after which 8 Re1 can be met in a similar fashion as after 7 a3, with 8 ... Nxe4 or Bologan's 8 ... Nd4!?

### 8 h3 Be6

Simple moves often do the trick. Black prepares ... Qd7, will centralize his rooks, and might even be able to strike in the centre as in this game.

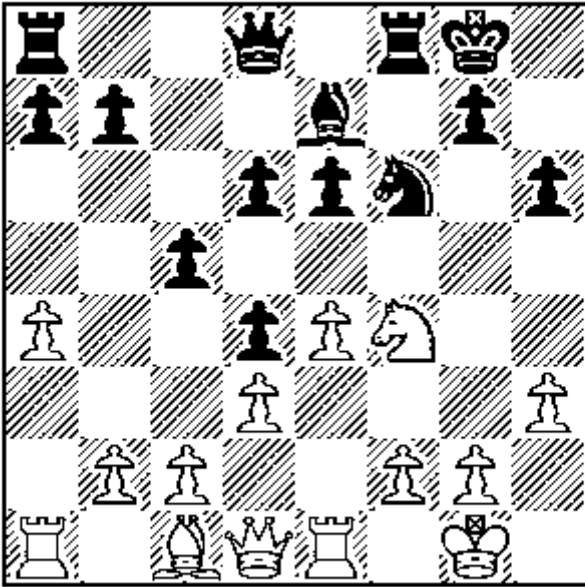
### 9 Qe2

Not very challenging.

The problems lie in 9 Re1!, after which it's not completely clear what Black should play:

a) After 9 ... Nxe4 10 Nxe4 d5 11 Bb5 dxe4 12 Bxc6 bxc6 13 Nxe5 Bd6 14 Rxe4 Bd5 Black finds it more tough to find a free-flowing initiative on the kingside than with the pawns on h2 and h7. White should be better.

b) 9 ... Nd4 isn't pleasant either because of 10 Nxd4 exd4 11 Bxe6 fxe6 12 Ne2 c5 13 Nf4!.



This exploits the big weakness on g6 that was caused by the ... h6 move.

c) Maybe Black has to go for 9 ... Qd7 10 Nd5 when he's a tiny bit worse, but there's a long game ahead.

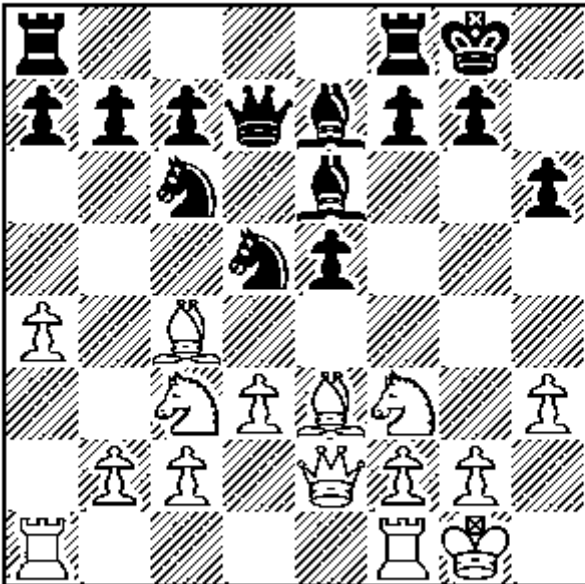
**9 ... Qd7**

Black could also go for simplifications with 9 ... Nd4.

**10 Be3 d5!**

Black seizes his chance and breaks in the centre. This break is very typical when White has played Be3, but it wasn't clear what White should have done anyway.

**11 exd5 Nxd5**



We have a typical Open Games position where Black has more space in the centre and White tries to prove the black centre is weak. Chances are balanced.

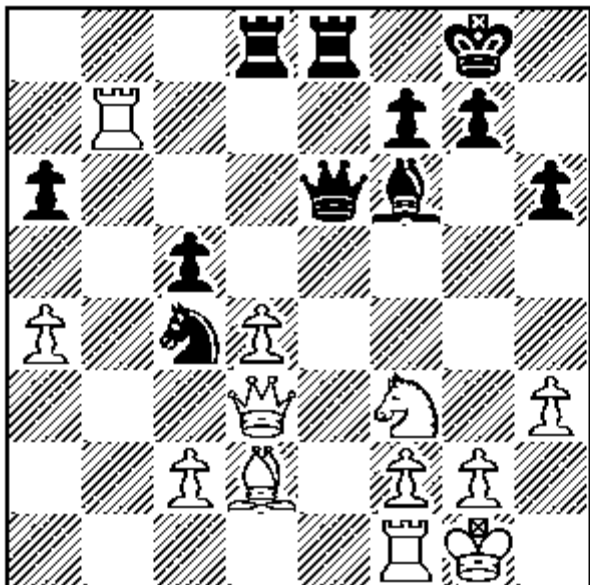
**12 Bb5 Nxc3 13 bxc3 Bf6 14 d4 exd4 15 cxd4 a6 16 Bc4 Na5 17 Bxe6 Qxe6**

White has managed to grab his own space in the centre, but is leaving holes behind. The c4-square is especially weak and while the engine might think the position is equal, Black is the one with the more comfortable position.

**18 Rab1 Rfe8 19 Qd3 Rad8 20 Bd2**

It looks like White has managed to trick Black by attacking both the a5-knight and the b7-pawn, but Ganguly has seen further. White's centre is about to crumble.

**20 ... Nc4 21 Rxb7 c5!**

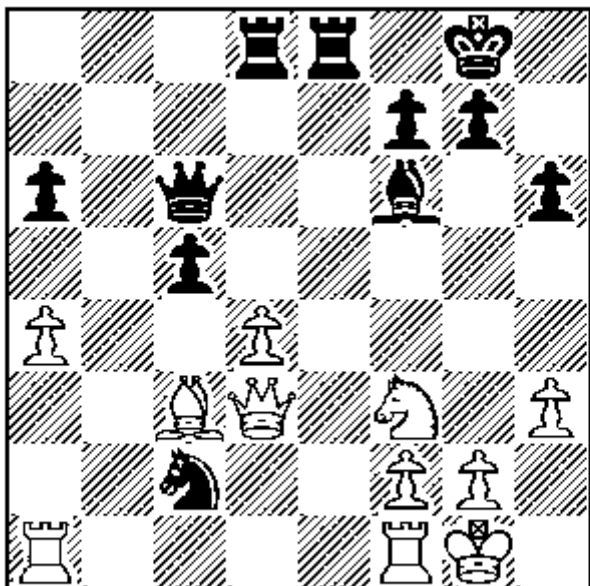


The enormous pressure in the centre gives Black excellent counterplay.

**22 Bc3 Qc6 23 Rbb1 Na3 24 Ra1?!**

Barua cracks under the pressure and after this error Black's advantage is indisputable. White could have kept the position equal with 24 Ba5! Nxb1 25 Bxd8 Rxd8 26 Rxb1 cxd4 27 a5! when he creates counterplay against the pawn on a6.

**24 ... Nxc2!**



Ganguly doesn't miss a chance like this.

**25 Rac1**

After 25 Qxc2? cxd4 the pin along the c-file is decisive.

**25 ... Nxd4 26 Nxd4 Qd6 27 Rfd1 cxd4**

After the complications, Black has ended up with a clear extra pawn, but translating an extra pawn into victory isn't always easy. Ganguly does it excellently.

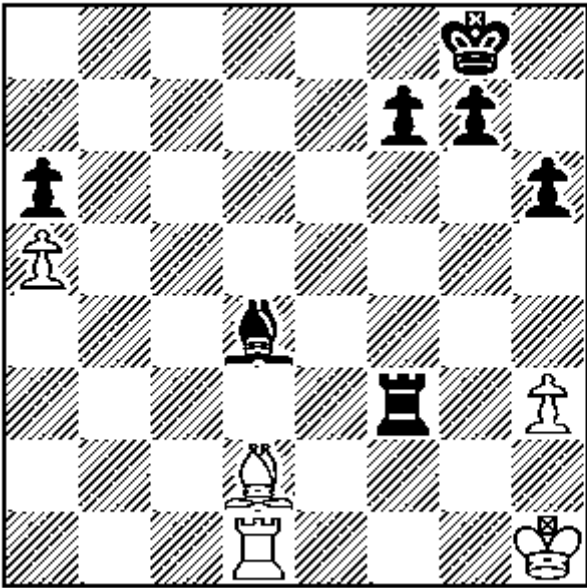
**28 Ba5 Rc8 29 Rxc8 Rxc8 30 Rb1 Qc6!**

The a4-pawn is weak.

**31 Qd1 Qc4 32 Bd2 Re8 33 a5 d3 34 Rc1 Qd5 35 Qf3 Qxf3 36 gxf3 Re2**

Black's rook has managed to penetrate to the second rank. White now has trouble defending both d2 and f2.

**37 Rd1 Bd4 38 Be1 d2! 39 Bxd2 Rxf2 40 Kh1 Rxf3**



Black's extra d-pawn is transformed into two extra kingside pawns. The win is now a technicality, but it still requires care.

**41 Be1 Rf1+ 42 Kg2 Rg1+ 43 Kf3 Bf6 44 Kf2 Rg5 45 Rd6 Re5 46 Kf1 Re6 47 Rd7 g5 48 Bb4 Kg7 49 Bc5 Bc3 50 Bb6 Kg6 51 Rc7 Bb4 52 Rc4 Be1 53 Rc8 h5 54 Rg8+ Kf5 55 Rh8 Bc3 56 Rc8**

56 Rxf3 Kg6 is a very cute entrapment of White's rook.

**56 ... Bb4 57 Rh8 h4 58 Ra8 Kg6 59 Rg8+ Kh6 60 Rh8+ Kg7 61 Ra8 Kg6 62 Kg2 f6 63 Kf3 Kf5 64 Rxa6 Bc5 65 Kg2 Rc6 66 Kf3 Rd6 67 Ra8 Bxb6 68 axb6 Rxb6 69 Ra5+ Kg6 70 Kg2 Rb2+ 71 Kg1 Re2 72 Rb5 Re3 73 Kg2 Re2+ 74 Kg1 Re5 75 Rb6 Kf5 76 Kg2 Re2+ 77 Kg1 Ke5 78 Kf1 Re3 79 Kg2 f5 0-1**

A great game by Ganguly.

Game 5

**G.Souleidis-M.Ragger**

German League 2007

In this game we will see another way for White to deal with the threat of ... Na5, by giving the bishop a square on c2.

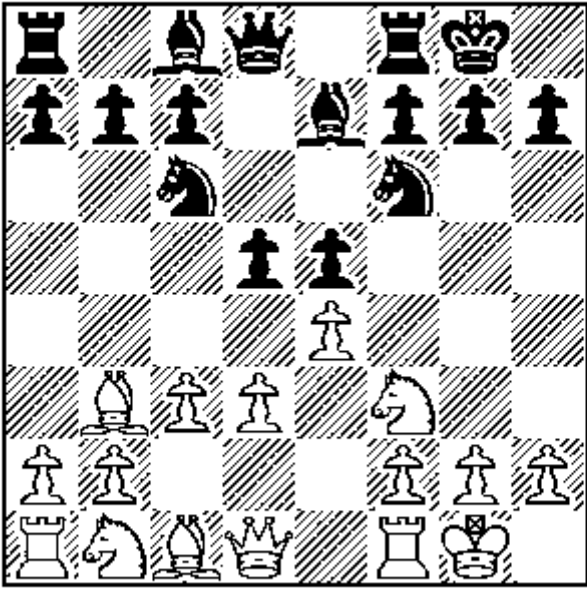
**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 d3 Be7 5 0-0 0-0 6 Bb3**

A good move. The bishop can be tucked away on c2 and White waits for ... d6 before playing c3.

**6 ... d6**

There's some coverage of 6 ... d5 in the theoretical introduction, above, but this is my main recommendation. Once again, Black has ... Na5 on his mind.

**7 c3 d5!**



What's going on here? Black just moved his pawn to d6, and on the very next move he moves it again. Compared to 6 ... d5, we simply gave away a free tempo to White. But what's important is the inclusion of c2-c3, which isn't White's dream move. It weakens the d3-pawn a lot and assures Black of good counterplay. Technically Kupreichik played it first, but Romanishin made it popular by using the variation repeatedly in 1988.

### **8 exd5**

In this game we will deal with this capture. It's more popular to maintain the tension in the centre with 8 Nbd2 or with 8 Qe2. These moves will be dealt with in our next game.

### **8 ... Nxd5 9 Re1**

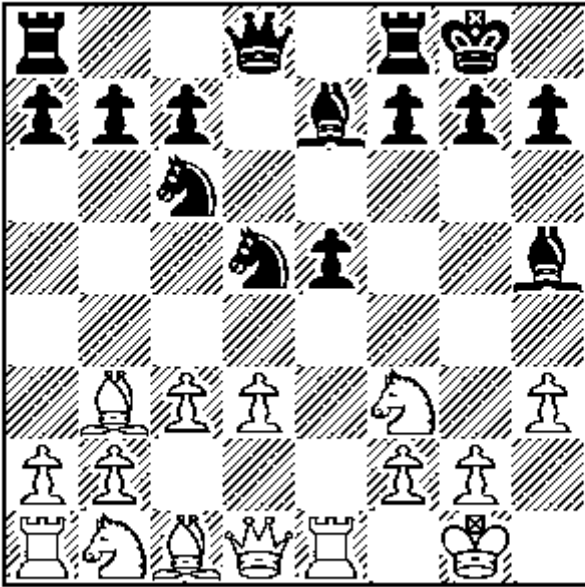
The usual continuation, putting immediate pressure on the e5-pawn.

9 h3 is the calmer alternative, which eliminates the pin with ... Bg4. On the other hand, Black gets more time to consolidate his centre. 9 ... Bf5! puts pressure on White's d3-pawn and after 10 Re1 Bf6 White would like to find a way to develop his pieces. The manoeuvre Nb1-d2-e4 would be nice to accomplish, but the d3-pawn is a constant problem. Of course, 11 Bc2 Nb6! (keeping more pressure on d3 and making sure Nbd2 is impossible) 12 Qe2 Nd5! (now White probably has nothing better than repeating the position as ... Nf4 is an issue) 13 Qf1 is playable, but White's development has undoubtedly become quite artificial. One decent way to continue is 13 ... a5 14 Nbd2 a4, grabbing space on the queenside. Chances are about equal.

### **9 ... Bg4!**

Compared to 6 ... d5, White's weak d3-pawn makes Black's pawn sacrifice very attractive.

### **10 h3 Bh5**



**11 g4**

Generally the critical continuation, but White should probably stay clear of it. That said, 11 Nbd2 Nf4! is not pleasant to face either.

**11 ... Bg6 12 Nxe5 Nxe5 13 Rxe5 c6**

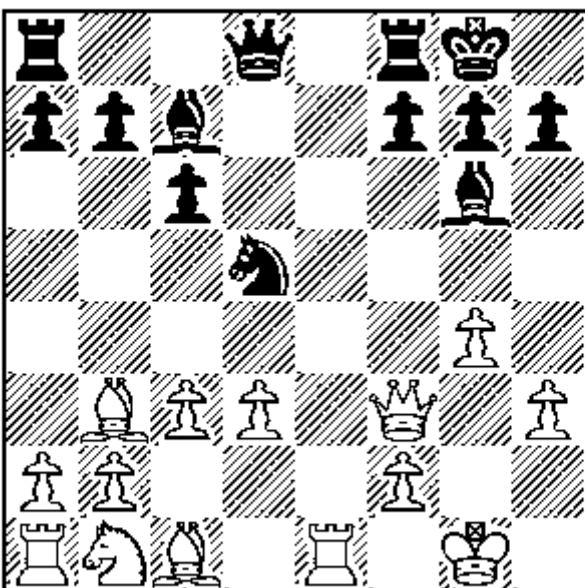
Black's compensation lies in his rapid development and the numerous weaknesses in the white camp. Apart from White's kingside, the d3-pawn is again an issue.

**14 Bxd5?!**

A mistake after which Black's initiative becomes very dangerous. Instead:

a) 14 Nd2 is a common idea, but here 14 ... Nf4! is a huge problem.

b) 14 Qf3 might be the best try, but Black still seems to be better after 14 ... Bd6 (14 ... Bf6!? is an interesting alternative as well) 15 Rxd5 (trying to give back some material to consolidate) 15 ... cxd5 16 Bxd5 Qe7 when his rapid development continues to count for something and White no longer has a material advantage. Also possible here is 15 Re1 Bc7!.



This prepares ... Qd6 with a very dangerous attack.

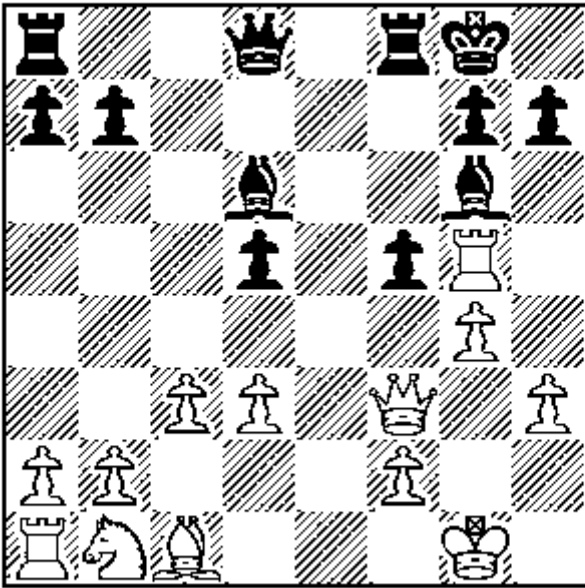
**14 ... Bd6**

14 ... Bf6 might be even better.

**15 Rg5**

Not good, but White already has serious problems as 15 Re1 cxd5 is extremely dangerous for him.

**15 ... cxd5 16 Qf3 f5!**

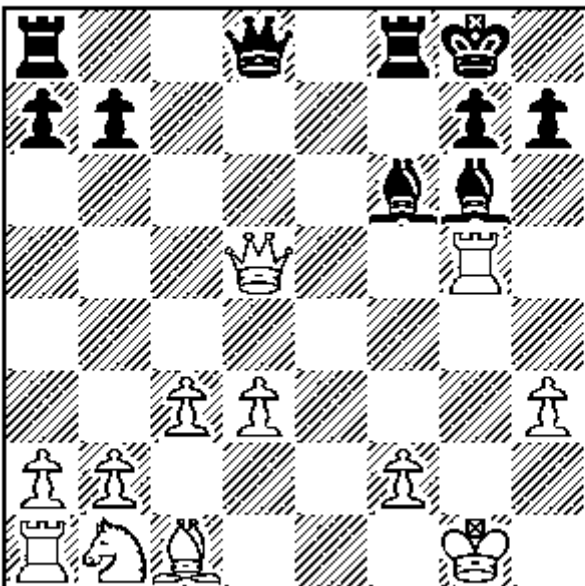


A very strong move by Ragger. Opening the f-file is the highest priority.

**17 gxf5 Be7**

The tactical reason why 16 ... f5 works. If Black manages to open up the f-file for nothing, White will be busted.

**18 f6 Bxf6 19 Qxd5+**



**19 ... Rf7!**

Very strong. The natural 19 ... Kh8 isn't as accurate as 20 Qxd8 Raxd8 21 Rxc6! hxc6 22 d4 keeps White in the game.

**20 Qxd8+ Rxd8 21 Rxc6 hxc6 22 Be3**

The reason 22 d4 doesn't work well now is because 22 ... Bh4! wins the f2-pawn.

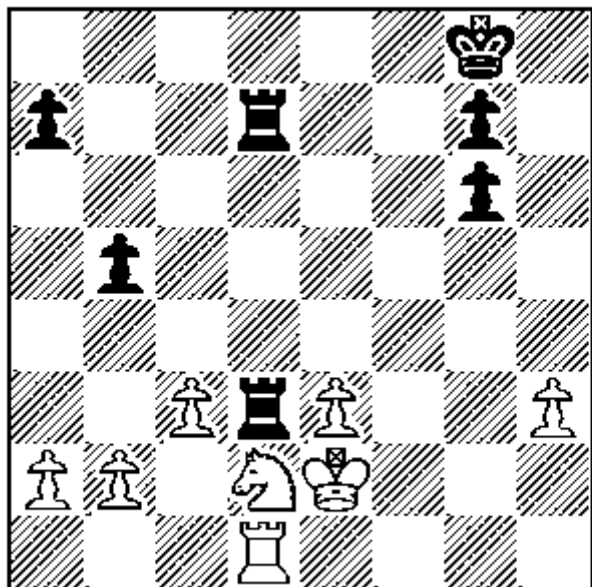
**22 ... Rxd3 23 Nd2 Rfd7**

Black has a comfortable extra exchange and he would love to trade a pair of rooks which would leave White's queenside up for grabs. Winning is just a matter of technique.

**24 Rd1 Bd8!**

Black exchanges the bishop on e3 which holds White's position together.

**25 Kf1 Bb6 26 Ke2 Bxe3 27 fxe3 b5!**



White is stuck in a kind of zugzwang where only his pawns can move.

**28 h4 Kh7 29 a4 a6!**

Black doesn't need to give White any passed pawns and Ragger went on to win after activating his king.

**30 axb5 axb5 31 e4 Kh6 32 Ke1 Kh5 33 Ke2 Rd8 34 Ke1 Re3+ 35 Kf2 Rxe4 36 Nxe4 Rxd1 37 b3 Kxh4 38 Ke2 Rb1 39 b4 g5 40 Nd6 g4 41 Nf5+ Kh3 42 Nxg7 g3 43 Nh5 g2 44 Nf4+ Kg3 45 Nxg2 Kxg2 46 Kd3 Rd1+ 0-1**

Game 6

**A.Sitnikov-O.Romanishin**

Kavala 2006

**1 e4 e5 2 Bc4 Nf6 3 d3 Nc6 4 Nf3 Be7**

Again we meet this move order. Once more, the usual path to reaching this position is 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 d3 Be7.

**5 c3**

Another transposition. 5 0-0 0-0 6 Bb3 d6 7 c3 d5 is the 'normal' path to the position in the game.

**5 ... 0-0 6 0-0 d6**

As you will notice in Game 7, in this particular position (with an early c2-c3), I like the immediate 6 ... d5.

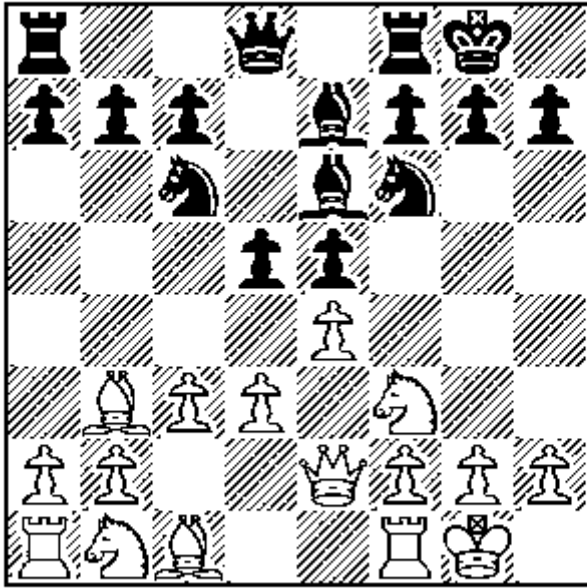
**7 Bb3 d5**

And here we are! Black's ingenious tempo loss, played by none other than the inventor himself, Oleg Romanishin. We saw what happened after 8 exd5 in our previous game. In this game we will see what happens if White maintains the tension in the centre.

**8 Nbd2**

The most popular move.

8 Qe2 is quite a logical move too as it protects e4, puts pressure on e5 and prepares a future Rd1. I used to find 8 Qe2 the most challenging move, until I found 8 ... Be6!, which has only been played once, back in 1990.

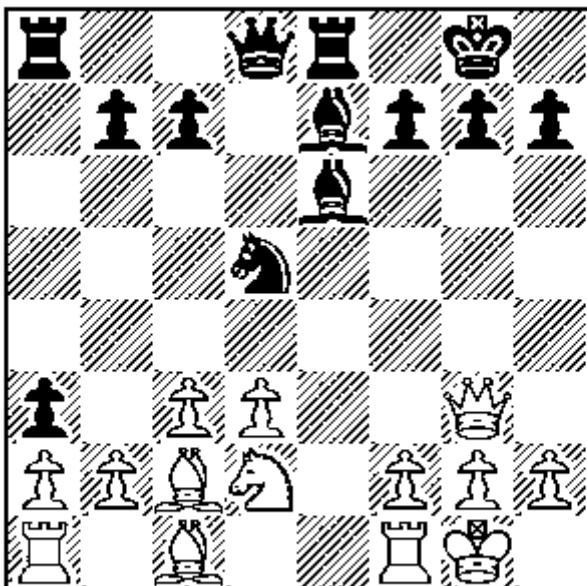


Now:

a) Normal developing moves like 9 Nbd2 can never be a refutation of Black's idea. Indeed, Black is definitely not worse after simple developing moves such as 9 ... Qd7 followed by placing the rooks in the centre.

b) 9 Ng5 Bg4 is nothing for White either.

c) Grabbing the pawn is the obvious challenge to Black's idea, but this also involves some risk-taking: 9 exd5 Nxd5 10 Nxe5 Nxe5 11 Qxe5 Re8 (11 ... Bd6 is probably good as well; the nature of the position doesn't change much) and compared to the similar Marshall Attack, Black has aggressive ideas that go beyond mating the white king. He could, of course, hunt down the king, but I also like the following approach: 12 Qg3 a5! (this pawn is a strong, advancing wedge that will weaken the white queenside even further) 13 Nd2 a4 14 Bc2 a3!



It's clear that White isn't in charge. Black has full compensation.

### 8 ... dxe4

The simple equalizer. White can hardly hope for anything substantial in the symmetrical structure that arises.

### 9 dxe4

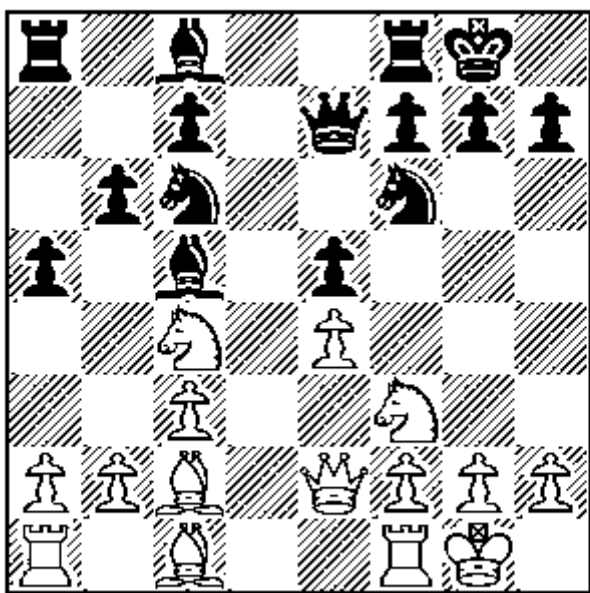
After 9 Nxe4 Black won't be helpful by letting White get rid of his weak d3-pawn. 9 ... Bf5 is probably to be preferred, with at least equality.

### 9 ... Bc5!

A standard idea worth remembering. The bishop goes to the more active a7-g1 diagonal and frees a very natural square on e7 for the queen.

### 10 h3

10 Qe2 immediately looks more to the point, but it doesn't change the nature of the position: 10 ... Qe7 11 Nc4 (in a very similar position, GM Slavisa Brenjo thinks White is slightly better, but he only consider the slightly passive ... a6) 11 ... a5! 12 Bc2 (12 Ba4 h6 13 Rd1 Bd7 14 Ne3 is equal as well) 12 ... b6.

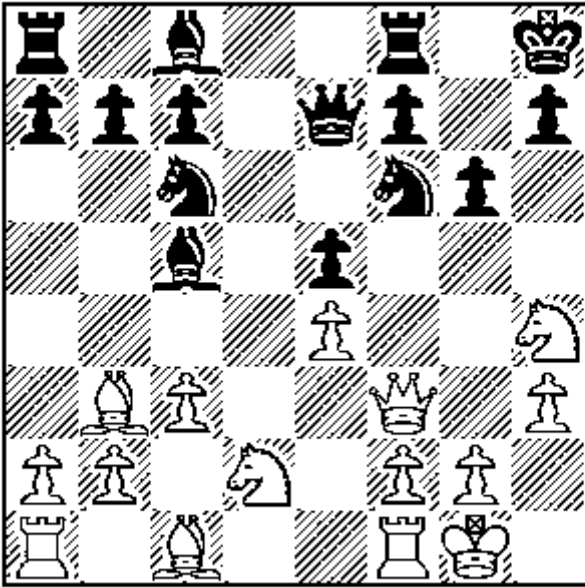


This set-up was played in a similar position in E.Alekseev-M.Carlsen, Lausanne 2004, where Black was completely fine. It leads to a rich middlegame with good chances to outplay the opponent.

### 10 ... Qe7 11 Nh4

White wants to put a knight on f5, but this idea is easily parried.

### 11 ... g6 12 Qf3 Kh8!?

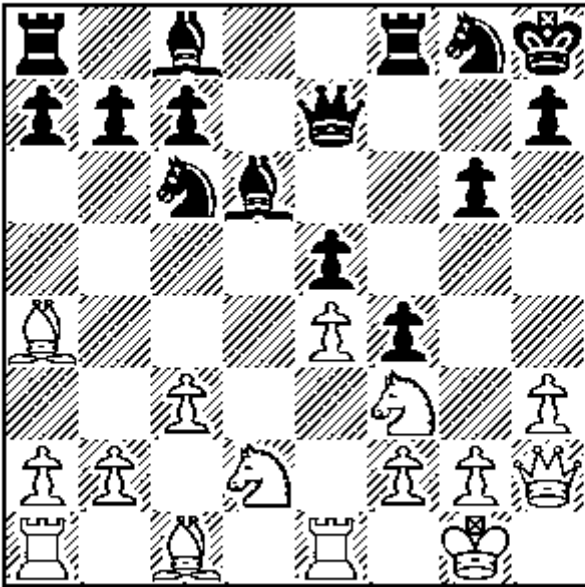


Romanishin in a nutshell. He has a very creative style and there's a very creative idea behind this move.

**13 Ba4 Ng8! 14 Qg3 f5**

And there we have it. Reaching a symmetrical structure doesn't mean we have to play boring, manoeuvring chess for 100 moves. Romanishin lunges forward with his f-pawn and creates a strong initiative on the kingside.

**15 Nh3 Bb6 16 Re1 f4 17 Qh2**



A clear sign that something has gone wrong for White.

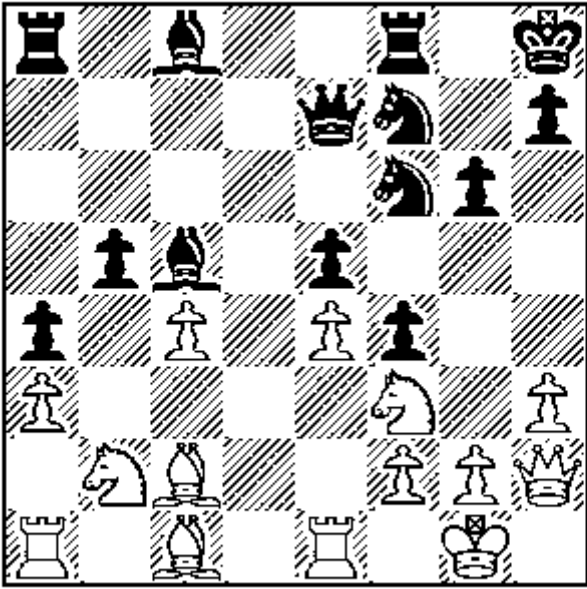
**17 ... Nd8 18 b4?!**

Yes, quite. White is facing an uphill task here, but weakening the structure on the queenside isn't the solution.

**18 ... a5! 19 Bb3 Nf6 20 Nc4 a4 21 Bc2 b5 22 Nb2**

It's obvious that White has put his own pieces in a twist and that Black is clearly better here.

**22 ... Nf7 23 a3 c5! 24 bxc5 Bxc5 25 c4?!**



After this miscalculation, White's cause can no longer be saved. It is, however, understandable that he cracks under the pressure.

**25 ... bxc4 26 Nxa4 Rxa4! 27 Bxa4 Qa7**

Romanishin doesn't miss a chance like that.

**28 Re2 Qxa4**

Black has two minor pieces for a rook and a huge position to boot.

**29 Bb2 c3! 30 Bxc3 Qc4**

Another tactical shot. They just keep coming when White's pieces are horribly placed.

**31 Rc2 Qxe4**

Black had an even quicker victory with 31 ... Bxf2+ 32 Kxf2 Qd3!, but we can't expect Romanishin to play with computer-like accuracy the entire game.

**32 Rac1 Bxa3 33 Bb2 Bxb2 34 Rxc8 Rxc8 0-1**

White decided to resign. Note the silly queen on h2, who has been stuck there the entire game.

Game 7

**Y.Kryvoruchko-M.Kravtsiv**

Beijing (rapid) 2008

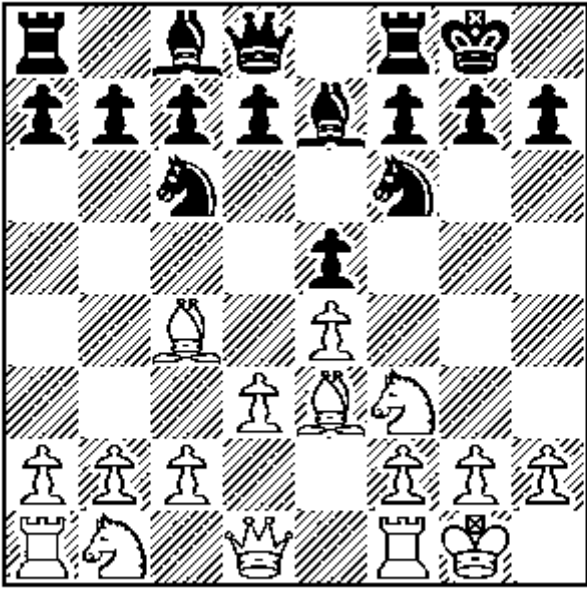
**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 d3 Be7 5 0-0**

For practical purposes, I fiddled with the move order. The game actually went 5 c3 0-0 (5 ... d5!? is another option which probably transposes) 6 0-0 and we have transposed.

**5 ... 0-0 6 c3**

In my database, this move has been played almost 2,000 times, yet I don't think it's that good. White is obviously not worse, but I also think he can't fight for a serious theoretical advantage by allowing a quick ... d7-d5. This has already been discussed in the theoretical introduction. Before I show some concrete variations, let's look at some minor alternatives:

a) 6 Be3 is a type of move I often see in practice by club players.

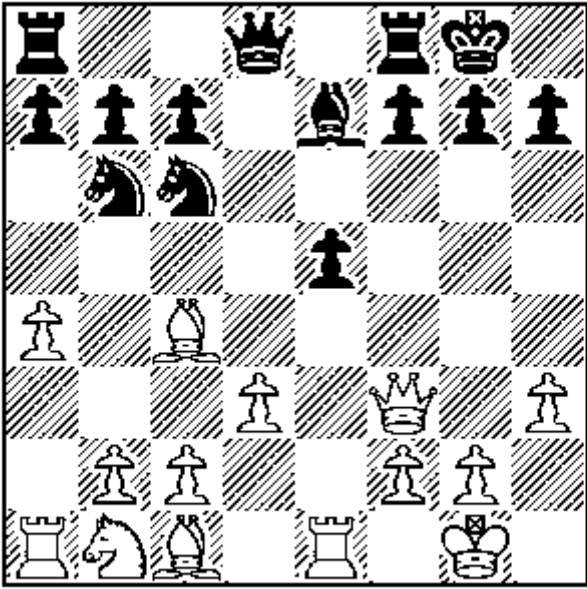


However, it walks straight into 6 ... d5!

b) 6 h3 is useful against ... d5 breaks because Black can't play the ... Bg4 pin. I'd prefer 6 ... d6 for now, with a very normal position. Indeed, after 7 a3 (7 a4 Be6 is similar and harmless as well; Black will simply play ... Qd7 and enjoy a normal, balanced game – see the game Barua-Ganguly for a discussion of a similar position) 7 ... Be6 8 Re1 Qd7 Black should be satisfied with his solid position. If comparing to Barua-Ganguly where this type of position was discussed, 9 Nc3 is now very well met by 9 ... Nd4! which forces the exchange of a few minor pieces.

c) 6 Nbd2 is a no-nonsense move which continues rapid development. White hasn't lost time with his development and so opening up the position with ... d5 is probably premature. Instead, 6 ... d6 7 c3 (7 Bb3 Na5 8 Ba4 c5 9 c3 was the course of the excellent game B.Socko-M.Bartel, Warsaw 2012, where Black found 9 ... Rb8! which is a more useful move than ... a6; Black later won a great game) 7 ... Na5 is likely to transpose to our next game after 8 Bb5 a6 9 Ba4 c5! 10 Re1 as White's 10th move alternatives doesn't look terribly challenging.

d) 6 a4!? tries to gain space on the queenside while not committing to anything in centre. Interestingly, this is a pet variation of GM Bologan, who has himself supplied an effective antidote against it: 6 ... d5! (surprisingly rare in practice, but logical since a2-a4 doesn't challenge the black centre) 7 exd5 Nxd5 8 Re1 (just like Bologan mentions, 8 h3 stops ... Bg4, but it leaves time for Black to consolidate his centre with 8 ... Kh8 followed by ... f6) 8 ... Bg4 9 h3 Bxf3! 10 Qxf3 Nb6.



This is a very concrete problem behind 6 a4 – the bishop can't drop back to a2 because a4 would be en prise. This cute idea can help you remember how to face 6 a4. After 11 Nd2 Nxc4 12 Nxc4 f6 Black has successfully managed to consolidate his centre.

### 6 ... d5

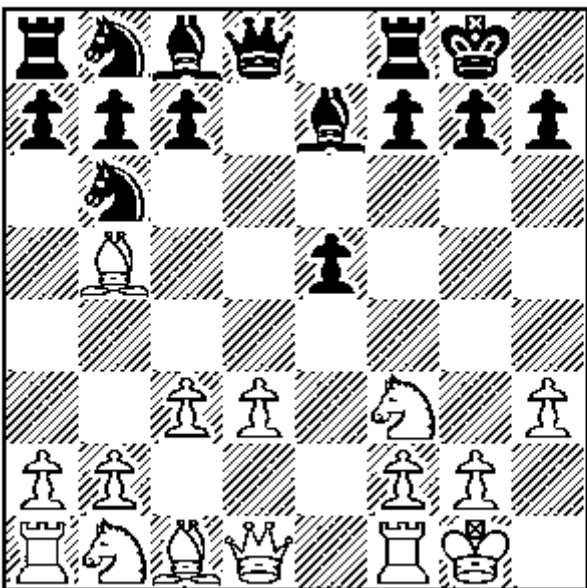
The principled reaction against the move c2-c3. White has difficulties taking active measures against Black's e-pawn when d3 is such a big weakness.

### 7 exd5 Nxd5

White usually has two ways to play against the ... d5 break. Either he goes for the immediate Re1 and challenges the pawn on e5, or he plays h2-h3 and prevents ... Bg4 first. The immediate Re1 is often the most critical approach, but it's also the most risky if Black decides to sacrifice this pawn (like we saw in Game 5).

### 8 Re1

8 h3 was dealt with in a brilliant way in J.Gunnarsson-M.Adams, Kallithea 2008: 8 ... Nb6 9 Bb5 Nb8!!.



A fantastic move by Adams. The e5-pawn is untouchable and the bishop is left in confusion on b5. After 10 d4 (10 Nxe5? Qd5 loses a piece) 10 ... e4 11 Nfd2 c6 12 Be2 f5 Black already

had a stable advantage and Adams later won this game.

**8 ... Bg4 9 h3 Bh5 10 Nbd2**

10 g4 is always a critical test, but with White's pawn on d3 it shouldn't be surprising that he is the one in danger after 10 ... Bg6 11 Nxe5 Nxe5 12 Rxe5 Nb6!

**10 ... Nb6 11 Bb5 f6!**

Black has managed to consolidate his centre and enjoys a very pleasant position.

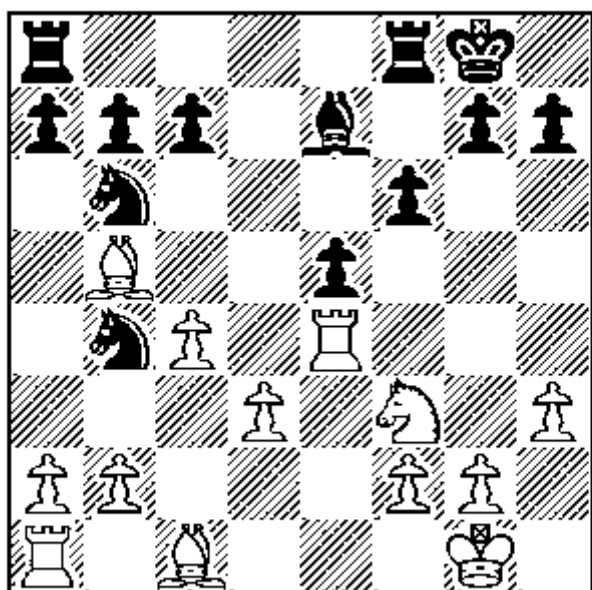
**12 Ne4 Qd5**

Forcing a decision from the b5-bishop while intending to put pressure on the d3-pawn.

**13 Qb3 Bf7 14 Qxd5 Bxd5 15 c4?!**

A mistake, but in a rapid game they are unavoidable. White could have kept an equal game with 15 d4.

**15 ... Bxe4 16 Rxe4 Nb4!**



Now we see the problem. Suddenly White has to deal with the d3-pawn while his light-squared bishop is suffocating, similarly to the Gunnarsson-Adams game mentioned above.

**17 d4**

The best try.

**17 ... c5!**

Very accurate play from Kravtsiv. The bishop continues to suffer on b5. Kryvoruchko wanted to free his bishop with 17 ... a6 18 c5!, although even here Black can count on a stable advantage after 18 ... axb5 19 cxb6 c5!.

**18 dxc5**

A better try, albeit still desperate, is 18 Bd2 when Black can win a pawn with 18 ... cxd4 19 Nxd4 Nd3!.

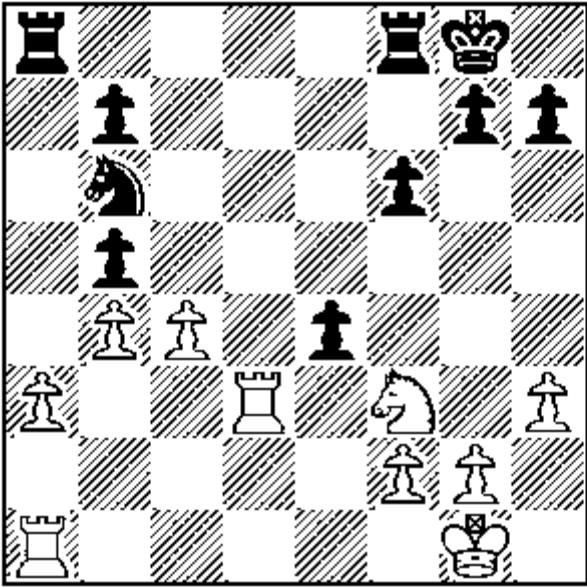
**18 ... Bxc5 19 a3 Nd3 20 Be3 a6**

And there we have it. Who would have thought that this bishop would cause White such problems?

**21 b4**

White can still try to break free with 21 Ne1, but after 21 ... Bxe3 22 Nxd3 Bd4 23 c5! axb5 24 cxb6 Rfc8 the endgame is horrible for him.

**21 ... Bxe3 22 Rxe3 axb5 23 Rxd3 e4!**



A final fork that ends White's misery. Kryvoruchko, now an established 2700-player, decided to keep going for a few moves, but even for a rapid game this is completely over.

**24 Rd6 Nxc4 25 Rd5 exf3 26 Rxb5 Rf7 27 a4 fxg2 28 a5 Rd7 29 Rc1 Ne5 30 Kxg2 Kf7 31 Rc2 Re8 32 Rb6 Re6 33 Rxe6 Kxe6 34 b5 Rd5 35 b6 Rxa5 36 Rc7 Nd7 37 Rxb7 Rb5 0-1**

Game 8

**L.Yudasin-E.Vladimirov**

Tilburg 1994

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 d3 Be7 5 0-0 0-0 6 Re1!**

The most challenging 6th move in my opinion. White takes his time to prevent the ... d5 break.

**6 ... d6 7 c3!?**

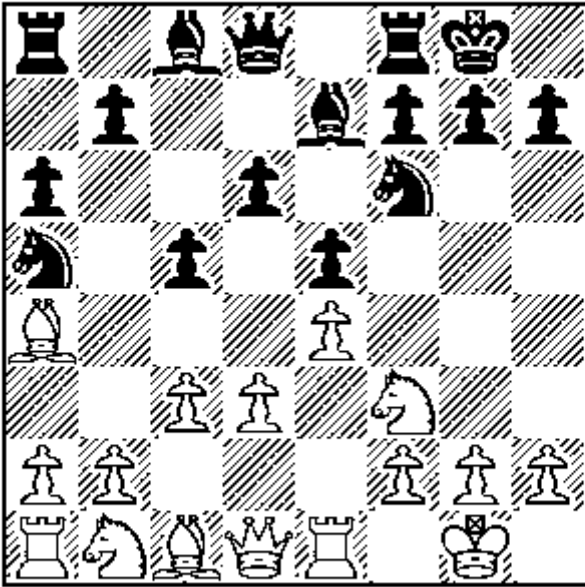
Now that White has prevented ... d5, this move is critical. The bishop can slip down to c2 if necessary and the central structure is flexible.

However, 7 a4 is the biggest challenge if you ask me, and this will be analysed in Games 9-11.

**7 ... Na5!**

The continuation I like best. I'm not a huge fan of 7 ... Be6 because of 8 Bxe6 fxe6 9 Qb3! when Black is slightly too passive for my taste.

**8 Bb5 a6 9 Ba4 c5!**



I learned this idea many years ago, but I can't remember where I first read about it. Compared to the Ruy Lopez, Black doesn't have to play the move ... b5. It can just as well be saved for later and I even think the bishop would be better off on c2 than on a4.

### 10 Nbd2

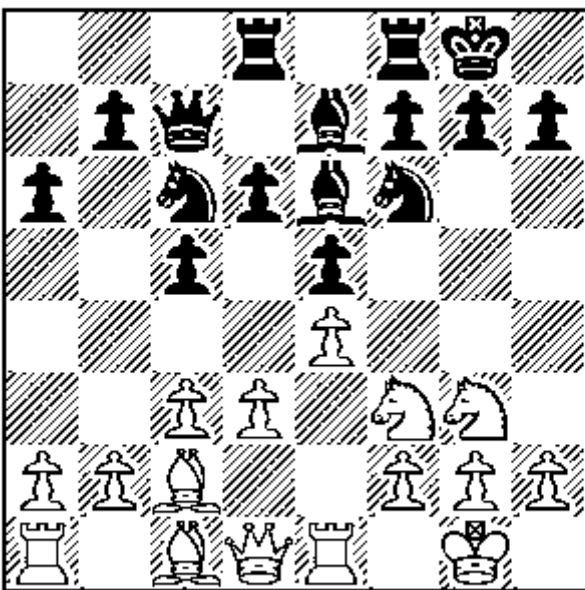
In 2008, Yudasin played 10 d4, but we have simply reached a main line Chigorin Ruy Lopez where Black has gained time and White has omitted h2-h3. After 10 ... b5 11 Bc2 cxd4 12 cxd4 Qc7 Black is ready to play ... Bg4 and after 13 h3 White has a much worse version of the Chigorin.

### 10 ... Qc7 11 Nf1 Be6

I won't exaggerate Black's chances, because this is merely an interesting middlegame with balanced chances. The better player usually wins this type of position.

### 12 h3

12 Ng3 is the most common continuation which should be met with 12 ... Rad8 13 Bc2 Nc6!



The knight has done its job on a5 and now Black focuses on the ... d5 break. If further preparation is necessary, Black can play ... h6, ... Rfe8 and ... Bf8 to provide the e5-pawn with extra protection. We have a rich middlegame where I like Black's chances.

## 12 ... Rad8 13. Bg5 h6

A common idea in the Open Games. White is forced to make a choice over whether he should retreat the bishop or capture on f6.

## 14 Bh4

14 Bxf6 Bxf6 15 Ne3 is a common plan in many similar positions, but here it doesn't make a lot of sense because White doesn't have good control over the d5-square. Black can continue 15 ... b5 16 Bc2 Qb7! followed by taking the initiative on the queenside with ... b4, which looks like a good idea. Indeed, I like Black's bishop-pair.

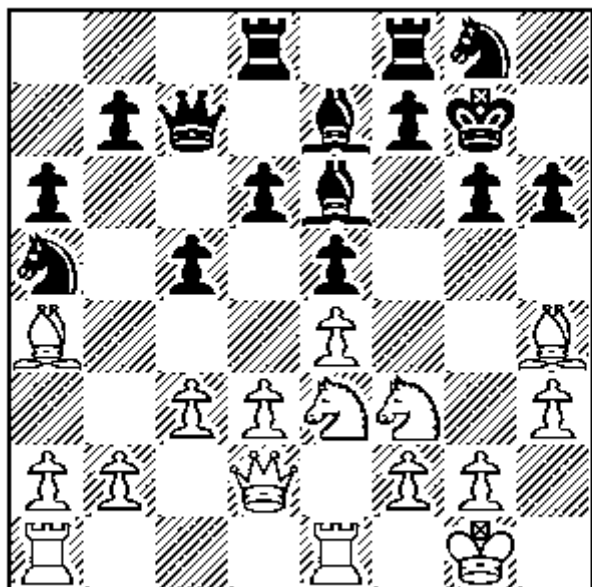
## 14 ... g6

We saw a similar idea in Game 2. Black gains some space on the kingside and hems in White's minor pieces.

14 ... Nh5 is an interesting alternative: 15 Bxe7 Qxe7 16 Nxe5 (a typical finesse against ... Nh5 lunges, but here the d3-pawn lacks protection) 16 ... dxe5 17 Qxh5 Rxd3 18 Qxe5 Nc4 19 Qh5 Nxb2 and Black is very comfortable.

## 15 d4!?

White tries to open up the position. He could also go for normal development with 15 Qd2 Kg7 16 Ne3 when we have a complicated middlegame ahead. Now I like 16 ... Ng8!?



This will be followed by ... f5 with a nice initiative.

## 15 ... Nh5!?

Black is happy with the closed centre, seeing that he's closer to establishing a knight on f4 than White is on f5.

## 16 Bxe7 Qxe7 17 b4!

Yudasin doesn't sit and watch while Black tries to establish his knight on h5. Creating counterplay on the queenside and in the centre must be the correct idea.

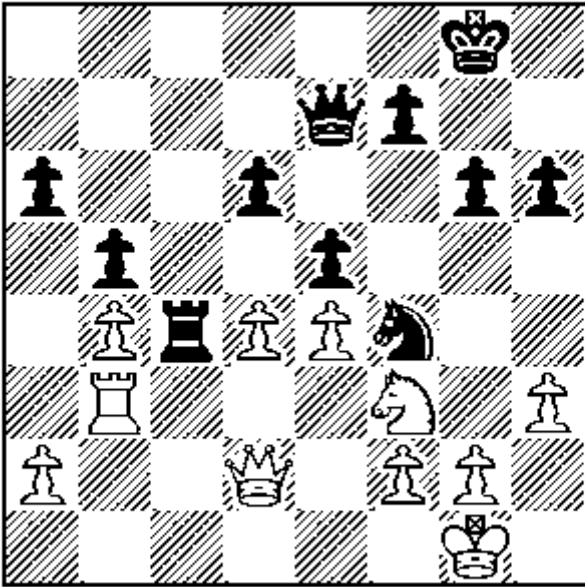
## 17 ... Nc4 18 Bb3

18 bxc5 dxc5 19 d5 Bc8 is a strategical dream for Black's knights, but still perhaps White should have gone for this.

## 18 ... cxd4 19 cxd4 Rc8!

Black is in charge on both sides of the board.

20 Rc1 b5 21 Ne3 Nf4 22 Rc2 Nxe3 23 Rxe3 Rxc2 24 Qxc2 Rc8 25 Qd2 Bxb3 26 Rxb3 Rc4



Black has managed to establish a clear advantage. All of his pieces are superior to their white counterparts. Yudasin, a strong 2600-player, cracks under the pressure.

**27 Ra3? Rxd4!!**

A really nice sacrifice.

**28 Qe3**

28 Nxd4 Qg5 is the tactical point, when White can't prevent both ... Qxg2 mate and ... Nxh3 picking up the white queen. This tactical motif is certainly one to remember.

**28 ... Rxb4 29 Rxa6 Qc7 30 Qd2 Qc4 31 Qe1 Nd3 32 Qd1 Rb2 33 Kh2 Qxe4 34 Rxd6 Qf4+ 35 Kg1 Nxf2 0-1**

A very nice display from Vladimirov.

Game 9

**G.Oparin-A.Khruschiov**

Moscow 2010

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 d3 Be7 5 0-0 0-0 6 Re1 d6 7 a4**

White's best try for an advantage, if you ask me. He creates a bind on the light squares and prevents Black from seizing too much space on the queenside.

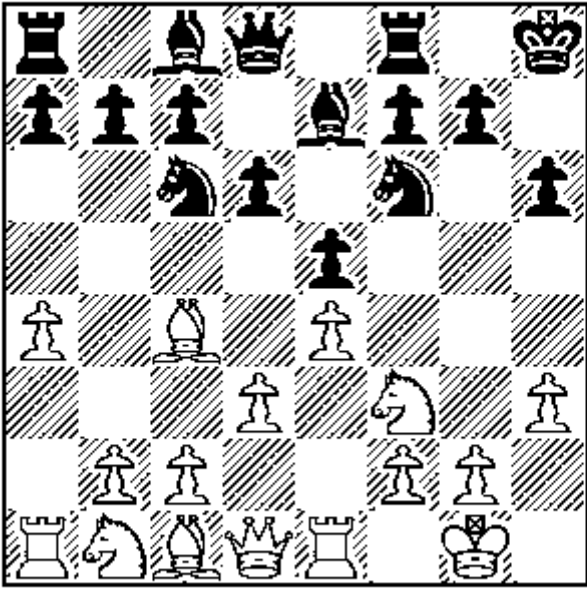
**7 ... Kh8!?**

My recommendation, after plenty of thought. This is a semi-waiting move, waiting for White to declare his intentions. If White plays c3 or too slowly, Black can play ... Ng8 and ... f5, which looks slightly artificial but is certainly effective, while if White puts his knight on c3, ready to jump to d5, Black should switch or at least delay this plan in favour of natural development.

**8 Nc3**

This move is an effective antidote against the ... Ng8 and ... f5 idea, so now we should switch plans. Instead:

a) 8 h3 was recently tried by GM Fedorchuk, and it's a sneaky try. After long consideration, I came to the conclusion that Black should play another semi-waiting move, 8 ... h6!.



Now White lacks useful waiting moves (whereas if Black goes 8 ... Ng8, White is ready to play 9 Nc3 f5 10 Nd5 Bf6 11 b4 with an advantage, although even here Black has decent practical chances against an unprepared opponent):

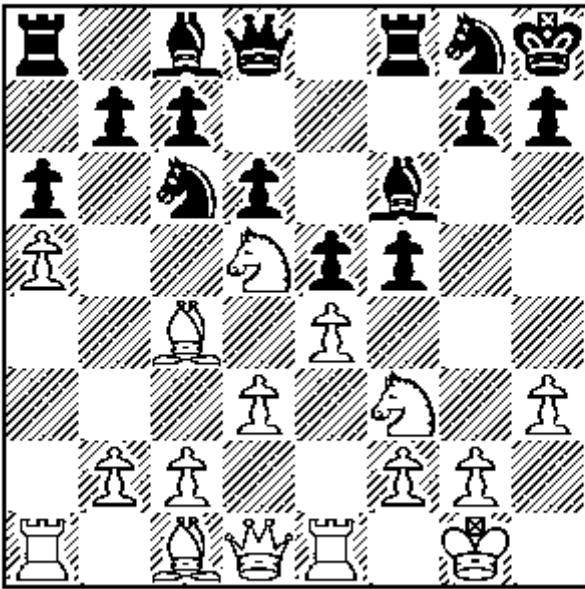
a1) 9 Nc3 should be met with 9 ... Na5! 10 Ba2 c5 when White would much rather have his pawn on c3 than his knight.

a2) 9 c3 Nh7! followed by ... f5 and ... Ng5 leaves Black very active on the kingside. This knight manoeuvre from f6 to h7 and then g5 is quite typical for this variation because a trade of minor pieces generally favours Black, although he has aggressive intentions as well.

b) Including 8 a5 a6 without playing c2-c3 is interesting as well and it changes certain details:

b1) 9 Nc3 doesn't change things much compared to 8 Nc3. Black can still play 9 ... Bg4 10 h3 Bh5 when 11 g4? is again a bad mistake because of 11 ... Nxf4. Instead, the more prudent 11 Be3 can be met in many different ways. One I like is 11 ... Nb4 12 Bb3 c5 13 Na4 Bxf3 14 Qxf3 Nd7 followed by ... Bg5.

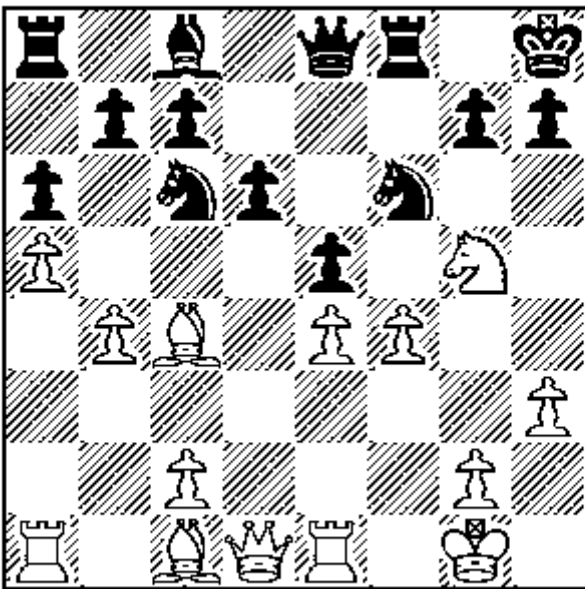
b2) 9 h3 tries to improve on Fedorchuk's 8 h3, but the inclusion of a5 and ... a6 gives Black another opportunity: 9 ... Ng8! (9 ... h6 10 Nc3 would actually be slightly annoying now that ... Na5 isn't an option) 10 Nc3 f5 11 Nd5 Bf6.



This position is favourable for White if a5 and ... a6 isn't included, because White finds it much easier to claim space on the queenside. As it is, Black seems to be able to create good counterplay:

b21) 12 exf5 Bxf5 13 c3 Qd7 14 d4 e4 is equal.

b22) 12 b4 is the critical move when a5 and ... a6 haven't been inserted, but one important big difference here is that after 12 ... fxe4 13 dxe4 Nce7 Black can meet 14 Nxf6 Nxf6 15 Ng5 Qe8 16 f4 with the strong 16 ... Nc6!.



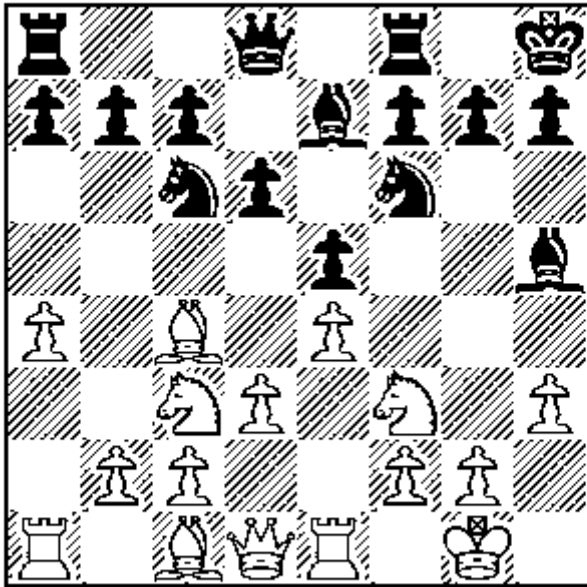
Without a5 and ... a6 inserted this would be met with a quick b4-b5. A very concrete difference, but an important one.

b23) 12 c3 can be met in similar fashion: 12 ... fxe4 13 dxe4 Nce7 14 Nxf6 Nxf6 15 Ng5 Qe8 16 f4!? (16 Qb3 h6 17 Ne6 Bxe6 18 Bxe6 Ng6 followed by ... Nh4 and ... Qg6 is fine for Black) 16 ... h6! (16 ... Nc6 isn't as good because the b4-pawn isn't hanging and 17 f5 followed by Ne6 is simply good for White) 17 Nf3 Qh5 and Black has good kingside counterplay.

Returning to 8 Nc3:

**8 ... Bg4!**

An annoying pin.

**10 g4?**

This simply loses.

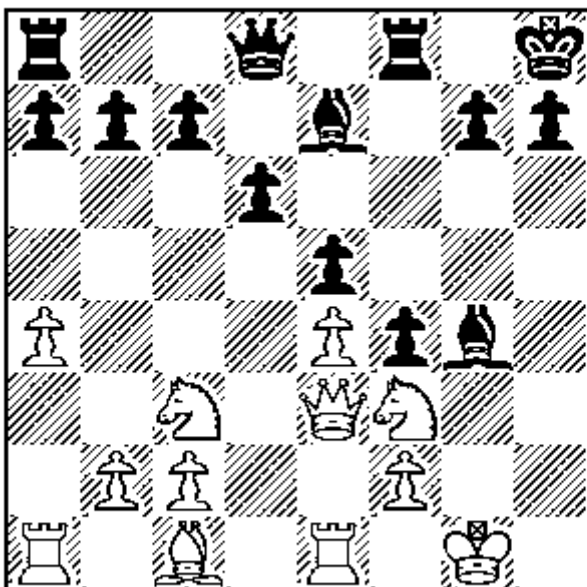
White should prevent ... Nd4 with 10 Be3 when Black can go for either 10 ... Nd4 11 Bxd4 exd4 12 Nb5 c5 13 c3 dxc3 14 Nxc3 Bxf3 15 Qxf3 Nd7 with equal chances or 10 ... Nb4 11 Bb3 a5.

**10 ... Nxg4!**

A surprising strike that works well. The pin will be deadly with ... Nd4 and ... f5 on their way.

**11 hxg4 Bxg4 12 d4**

The best try. 12 Be3 prevents ... Nd4, but 12 ... f5! is just terrible for White, who can already resign.

**12 ... Nxd4 13 Be2 Nxe2+ 14 Qxe2 f5! 15 Qe3 f4!?**

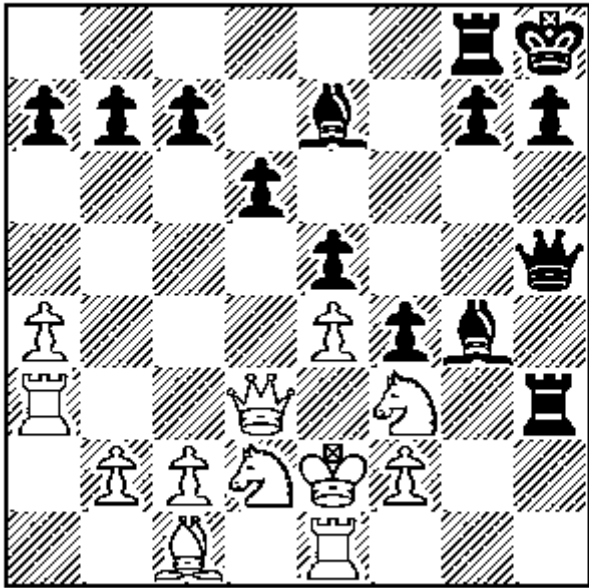
An interesting move. Black is not interested in regaining his material immediately, as he sees that an immediate kingside attack will succeed against White's unprotected king. 15 ... fxe4?! 16

Nh2 is still terrible for White, but it would invite him back into the game.

**16 Qd3 Rf6 17 Kf1 Rh6 18 Nb1**

Creative defending in a tough position from the young Russian prodigy. White can protect the vital f3-knight via Nbd2 and Ra3.

**18 ... Rh3 19 Nbd2 Qe8 20 Ra3 Qh5 21 Ke2 Rg8!?**



White is certainly stuck in jam and there's very little he can do about Black's g-pawn rushing down the board.

**22 Rg1 g5 23 Qc4 c6 24 Rb3 Bc8 25 Rc3 g4 26 Ne1 Rh2 27 Kd1 Rxf2 28 b4 g3+ 29 Ndf3 Bg4 30 Qb3 Qh2 31 Qf7 Rxf3 32 Rxf3 Qxg1 0-1**

In our next game we see the complications that arise when White plays c3 and d4, without including a5 and ... a6. Again, I've tried to highlight the important differences between including a5 and ... a6, and not doing so.

Game 10

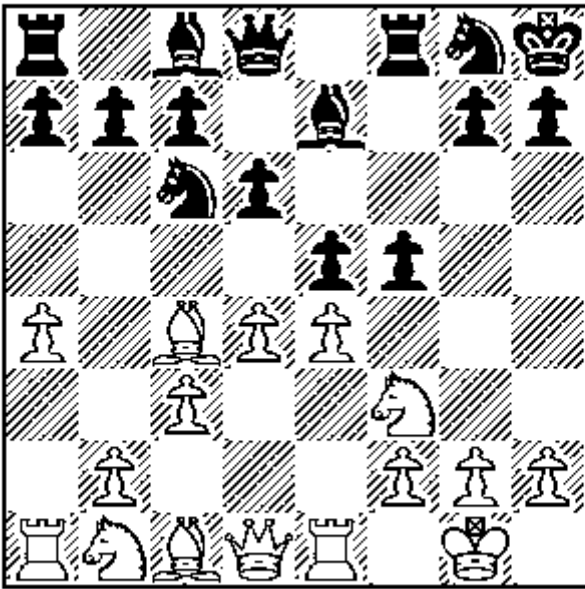
**S.Fedorchuk-A.Giri**

German League 2012

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 d3 Be7 5 0-0 0-0 6 Re1 d6 7 a4 Kh8**

Apparently Giri trusts the 7 ... Kh8 variation enough to play it himself, while Fedorchuk doesn't want to insert a5 and ... a6 and so immediately expands in the centre.

**8 c3 Ng8 9 d4 f5**



Not even 10 moves have been played and we already have quite a messy position on the board. At first I didn't really believe in Black's slightly artificial position, but chess can be very concrete and White certainly has no easy way to prove that Black's set-up is over-optimistic.

**10 dxe5**

Otherwise:

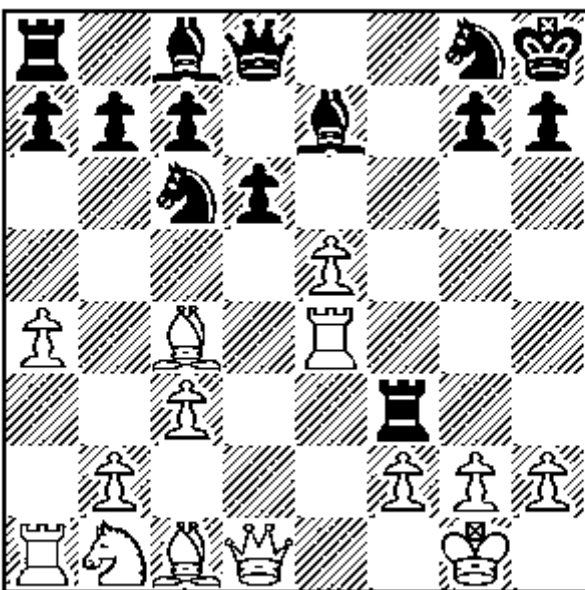
a) 10 exf5 d5 followed by ... e4 is very pleasant for Black.

b) 10 d5 Nb8 doesn't put any pressure on the black centre. Black is comfortable here and can develop a rapid kingside attack.

**10 ... fxe4 11 Rxe4**

One important tactical resource that makes the entire variation playable is 11 exd6? Bxd6 12 Rxe4?? Bxh2+! which wouldn't work if White had a knight on c3 instead of a pawn.

**11 ... Rxf3!**



A very strong exchange sacrifice which is important for Black's dynamic prospects in this variation.

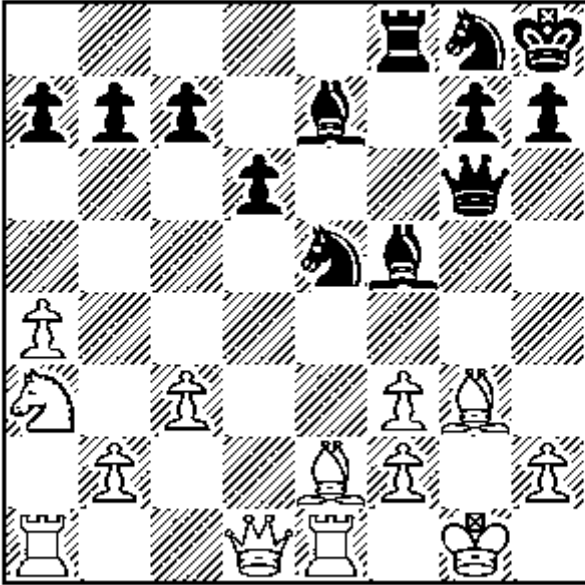
**12 gxf3**

Forced, as 12 Qxf3? d5 loses material for White. We now reach an important position where

Black has to make a choice. Should he play the immediate ... Nxe5 or should he go ... Bf5 first? The short answer is that if White hasn't included a5 and ... a6, Black should capture on e5 immediately. However, if White has included a5 and ... a6, Black should insert ... Bf5 first. This might seem strange, but there are very concrete reasons behind it as you will soon encounter.

### 12 ... Nxe5!

12 ... Bf5 is, of course, playable, but is probably slightly inaccurate. One reason is shown in the variation 13 Re1 Nxe5 14 Be2 Qe8 15 Bf4 Qg6+ 16 Bg3 Rf8 when White can go 17 Na3.

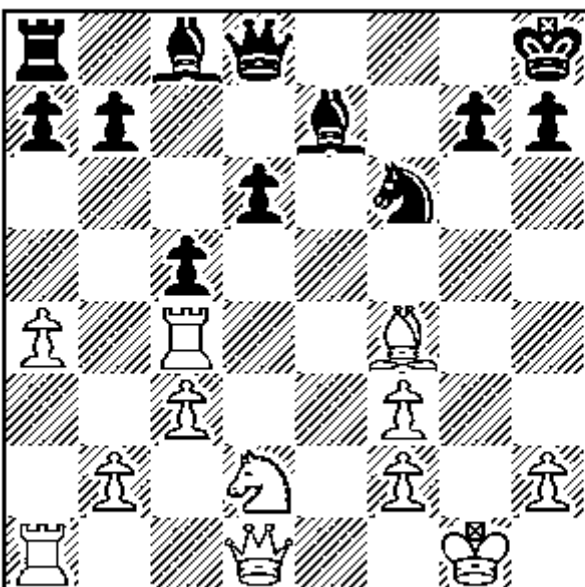


This is slightly disturbing because Nb5 is always an issue and this set-up with Re1 and Be2 is possible if Black inserts ... Bf5 first. However, if a5 and ... a6 have been inserted, the position would be fine for Black because he doesn't have to worry about Nb5 – see our next game.

### 13 Rxe5

Not very ambitious, but it leads to a safe draw. More ambitious are:

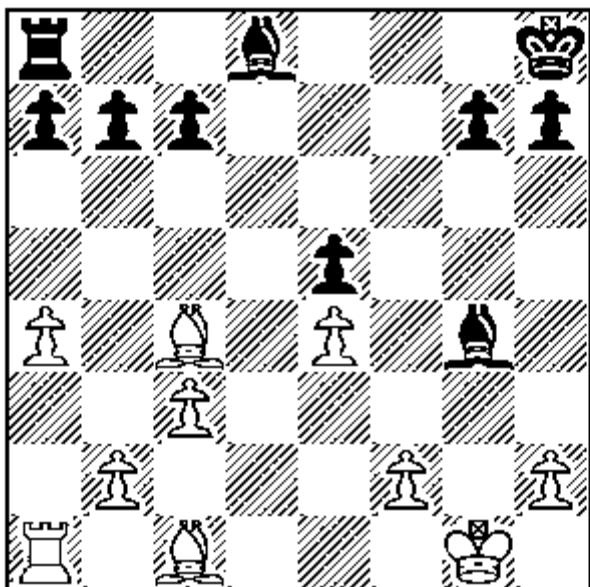
a) 13 Bf4 is an important, logical move that needs consideration. Black continues 13 ... Nxc4 14 Rxc4 Nf6 15 Nd2 c5!, which is a cute move, threatening to trap the rook on c4.



If a5 and ... a6 had been included, the rook would be safe on a4, but now Black is at least equal.

b) 13 Na3 loses no time, but Black has many paths to satisfactory compensation: for example, 13 ... Nxc4 14 Nxc4 Qe8 followed by ... Qf7 or 14 ... Bd7 and then ... Bc6.

**13 ... dxe5 14 Qxd8 Bxd8 15 Nd2 Nf6 16 Ne4 Nxe4 17 fxe4 Bg4**



The endgame is absolutely equal. White has nothing. I realize this isn't the most fun position ever, but as Black there are bound to be some theoretical lines that end in drawish positions.

**18 Kg2 Bh4 19 f3 Bh5 20 Be3 Rd8 21 b4 h6 ½-½**

Game 11

**H.Hamdouchi-Y.Gozzoli**

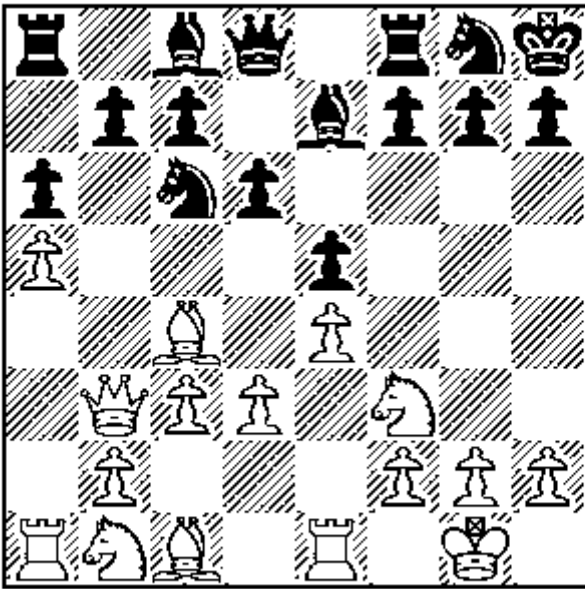
French Team Championship 2007

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 d3 Be7 5 0-0 0-0 6 Re1 d6 7 a4 Kh8 8 a5 a6**

Some sources recommend 8 ... Rb8 instead, but I don't like this because after 9 c3 Ng8 10 d4 f5 11 d5! the knight can't retreat to b8.

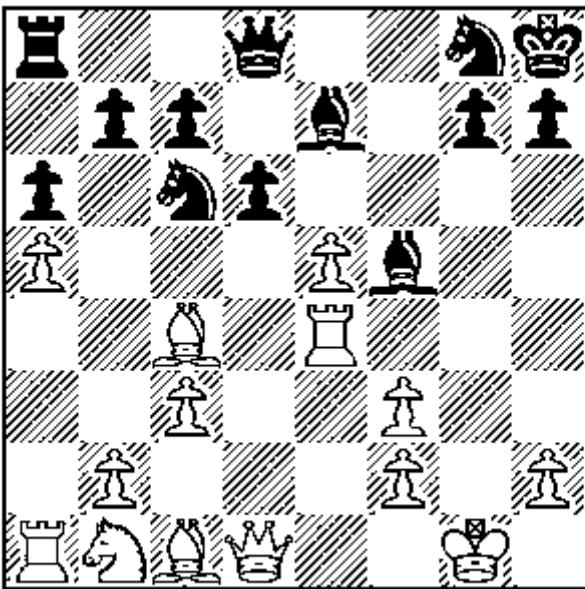
**9 c3 Ng8 10 d4**

10 Qb3!? tries to nail Black's bishop to c8 where it has to protect b7, but it doesn't stop Black from playing with his other pieces.



Indeed, Black can break out with 10 ... f5 11 exf5 Rxf5!. The top game V.Tkachiev-L.Fressinet, Cap d' Agde (rapid) 2002, continued 12 Nbd2 Nf6 13 Be6 (Houdini recommends the strange 13 Qd1, to give the c4-bishop a retreat square, but it's hard to believe Black would be worse after 13 ... d5 14 Bb3 Bc5 15 Bc2 Ba7 16 h3 Ng8!) 13 ... Bxe6 14 Qxe6 Qd7 15 Qxd7 Nxd7 when it's clear that Black has no problems at all.

**10 ... f5 11 dxe5 fxe4 12 Rxe4 Rxf3! 13 gxf3 Bf5!**



This time, we will insert ... Bf5. The problem behind 13 ... Nxe5 is that after 14 Bf4! Nxc4 15 Rxc4 Nf6 16 Nd2 c5 Black isn't really threatening to trap White's rook on c4 because there's a square for it on a4.

**14 Re1**

Alternatively:

a) 14 Rf4 hasn't been tried yet, probably because Black equalizes on the spot with 14 ... dxe5! 15 Qxd8 Rxd8 16 Rxf5 Rd1+ when the bind on the first rank is annoying and the f5-rook isn't well placed either.

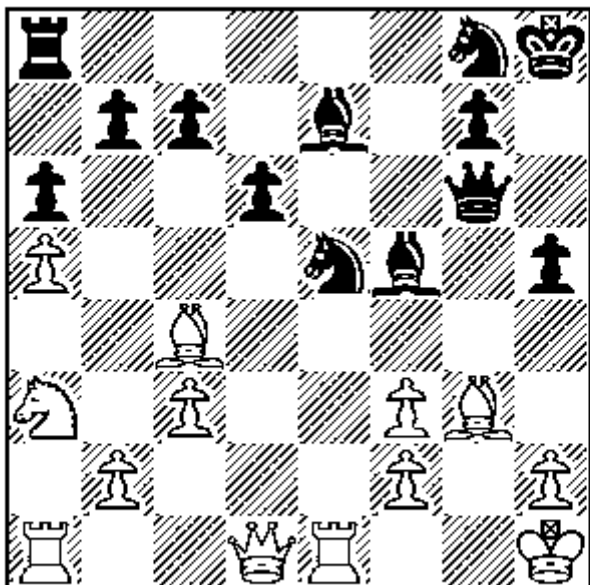
b) 14 e6 was dealt with efficiently in the all-GM encounter K.Maslak-J.Radulski, Olomouc

2005: 14 ... Qe8! 15 Kh1 Qg6 16 Nd2 Bxe4 (16 ... Ne5!?) 17 fxe4 Rf8 with a very pleasant position for Black. Radulski went on to score a nice win.

**14 ... Nxe5 15 Be2**

A comfortable, but slightly passive set-up.

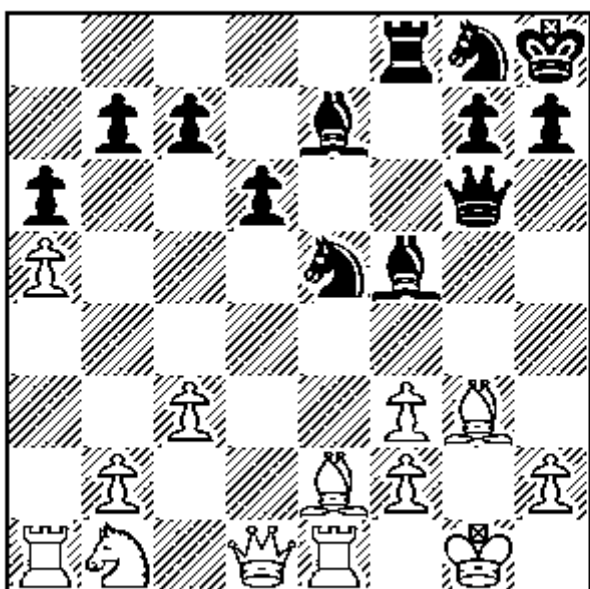
Instead, 15 Na3 doesn't waste any time, but Black can sooner or later pick up the bishop-pair which should give him lasting compensation: 15 ... Qe8 16 Bf4 Qg6+ 17 Bg3 h5! 18 Kh1.



Now 18 ... Nxc4! 19 Nxc4 h4 20 Bf4 Rf8 produces a very dangerous attack.

**15 ... Qe8 16 Kh1**

White's usual try for an advantage is 16 Bf4 Qg6+ 17 Bg3 Rf8.



However, Black seems to obtain good compensation by picking up the bishop-pair:

a) 18 f4 Nd3! 19 Bxd3 Bxd3 is fine for Black.

b) 18 Qd5 h5! 19 Kh1 Nd3 and White has to give up the bishop-pair.

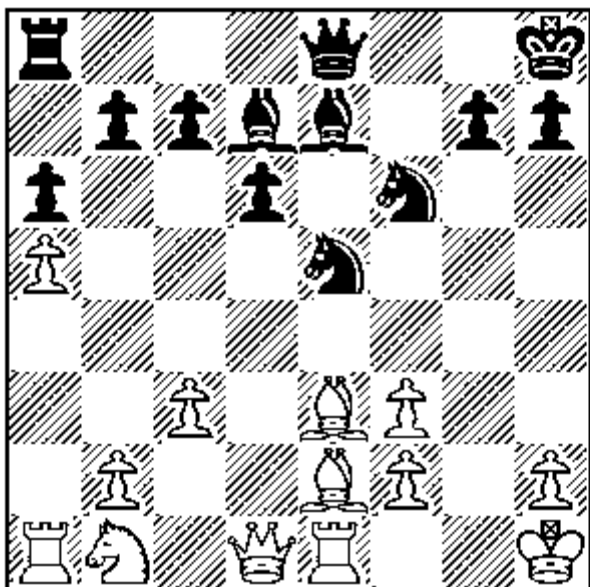
c) 18 Na3! h5 19 Kh1 Nd3! and White should again give up the bishop-pair because 20 Rg1 Qh7 21 h4 g5! is very dangerous for him.

**16 ... Nf6 17 Be3**

17 Bf4 would now allow 17 ... Nh5! with good positional compensation.

**17 ... c6?!**

Not the best and I much prefer 17 ... Bd7.



Black brings the bishop to a dangerous diagonal.

**18 Rg1 Qf7 19 Nd2 d5 20 Nf1 Rf8 21 Ng3 Bc8**

Even if White has consolidated his position and Black has played the inaccurate 17 ... c6, it's still difficult for White to make progress.

**22 Bd4 Bd6 23 b4 Ng6 24 Qd2 Nf4 25 Rae1 Nh3 26 Rg2 Nf4 27 Rgg1 Nh3 28 Rg2 Nf4**  
1/2-1/2

## Conclusion

This was a long but important chapter. There are quite a few variations where Black can play a quick ... d5, open up the centre and have an active game. As a rule of thumb, ... d5 works when White has gone c2-c3 or played slowly in the opening. This explains why 6 Re1 has become the most popular continuation lately, which prevents ... d5 for some time to come.

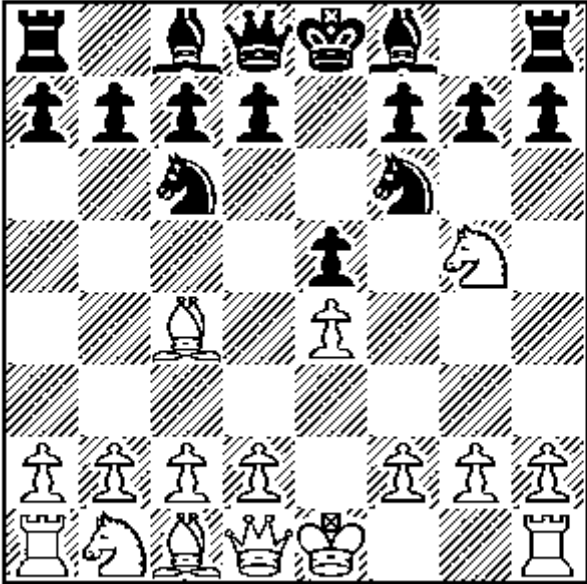
Black needs to display some patience to handle certain variations after 6 Re1, but if he knows what he's doing, he's not going to experience problems.

6 Re1 d6 7 a4 is the theoretically most challenging variation, where I've recommended the dynamic 7 ... Kh8. I predict a rise in the popularity of this variation because while Black still has to play accurately to equalize theoretically, his dynamic, attacking possibilities are very attractive.

# Chapter Two

## The Fun Two Knights

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 Ng5



In this chapter, we will cover the interesting 4 Ng5, which definitely leads to some unusual positions. In the main line, Black sacrifices a pawn for quick development and a long-term initiative which I'm very happy to do. While demonstrating the compensation, I've tried to point out the key ideas together with the latest state of theory and some new ideas of my own.

### Theoretical Introduction

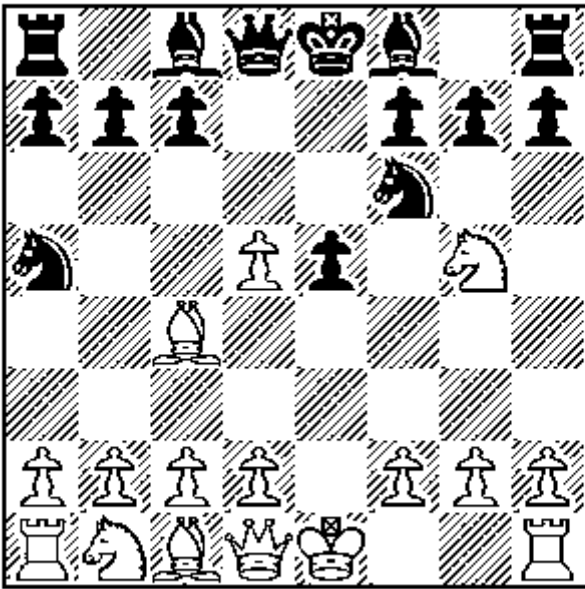
1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 Ng5

This is White's most ambitious continuation, immediately attacking the weak f7-pawn and welcoming a tactical mess.

4 ... d5

The fascinating Traxler Counter-Attack, 4 ... Bc5, never seems to go away and it's certainly fun to analyse. Even though Black will probably keep finding ideas to make this variation playable, I don't believe he would do well against a booked-up opponent. However, it could be worth a shot in a practical game, as most white players only know that the right move is supposed to be 5 Bxf7+! Ke7 and then they soon start playing on their own. Instead, 5 Nxf7?! Bxf2+! has been worked out to a draw.

5 exd5 Na5



There was a time when I thought 5 ... Nxd5 might be playable. Computers have added a completely new take on this variation and White needs to play extremely actively to prove his advantage. Besides, there's always the age-long discussion of whether White should play 6 Nxf7 or 6 d4.

Instead, 5 ... Nd4 was a favourite of mine when I played in kids tournaments. I was hoping for a very nice trap: 6 d6? Qxd6! 7 Nxf7 Qc6 8 Nxf8 Qxg2! 9 Rf1 Qe4+ 10 Be2 Nf3#. However, 6 c3! is better when Black struggles to equalize.

At this point, after the accurate 5 ... Na5, we have our first division.

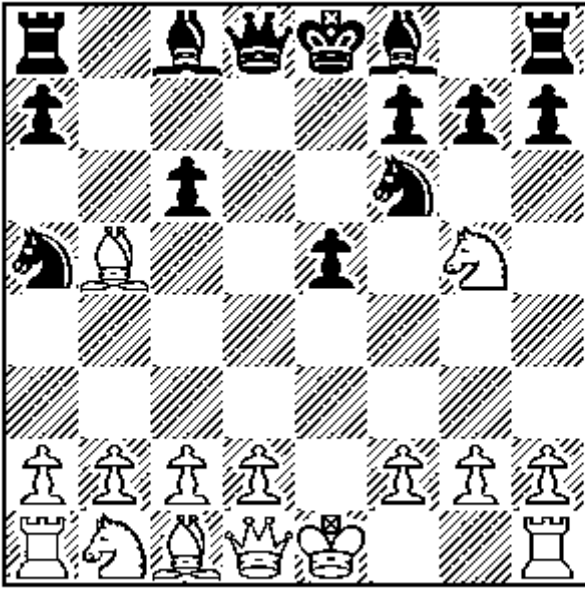
### 6 Bb5+

Clearly White's main move, but first we have to examine Morphy's 6 d3 h6 7 Nf3 e4. Here we will consider Bronstein's fascinating sacrifice 8 dxe4?! Nxc4 9 Qd4 which doesn't work out tactically, but is fascinating nonetheless. See Game 13 for more information. Probably better is 8 Qe2, although Black has proved that his position is pretty good after 8 ... Nxc4 9 dxc4 Bc5, as we'll see first in Game 12.

### 6 ... c6

I also became very interested in the move 6 ... Bd7!?, which I've now analysed in depth. Since there are lots of ideas yet to be discovered in this line, I decided to include it in Game 14, but still recommend 6 ... c6 as my main recommendation.

### 7 dxc6 bxc6



At this point, White has a big choice.

### 8 Bd3

The big discovery of the last few years. White doesn't care about aesthetics, rather he wants to hold Black down in the centre while he organizes some kind of development. This continuation is quite dangerous for both players. Instead:

a) 8 Ba4? is an awkward square for the bishop and will be dealt with in Game 15.

b) 8 Be2 h6 9 Nh3 has experienced a bit of a revival lately. The big problem for White is that the knight will have trouble re-entering the game. Game 16 shows how to deal with this variation.

c) In Game 17 we will cover the classical continuation 8 Be2 h6 9 Nf3, which has been under a cloud lately. That's partly due to the discovery of 8 Bd3, but also because Black found the strong resource 9 ... e4 10 Ne5 Bc5! when he is doing really well.

d) In Game 18 we start covering 8 Qf3, when Black has the lovely move 8 ... Rb8!. The rook turns out to play an important role in developing Black's initiative. This is especially true if White plays 9 Bxc6+ Nxc6 10 Qxc6+ Nd7, as in Game 19. The rook will quickly join in the attack via b6.

### 8 ... Nd5!

There was a sudden burst of popularity for the move 8 ... Ng4, but I'm far from sure it is satisfactory for Black. Instead, I decided on the centralizing 8 ... Nd5, which is covered in Games 20 and 21 along with some analysis of Black's alternatives.

Game 12

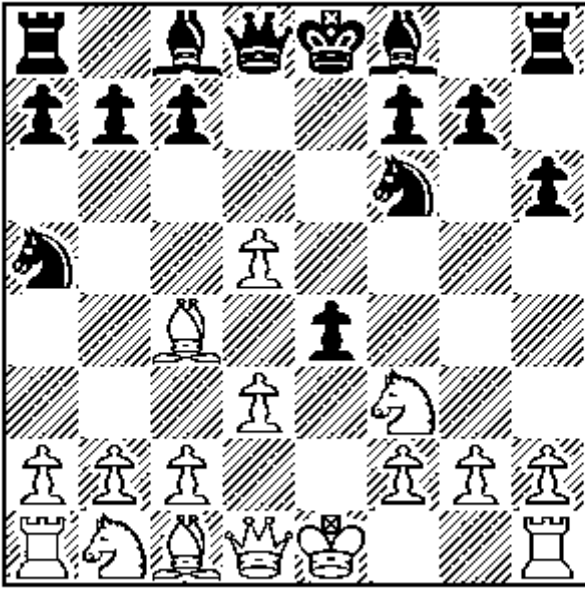
V.Nguyen-C.Debray

Massy 2010

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 Ng5 d5 5 exd5 Na5 6 d3!?

This move stems back to Kieseritzky's match with Andersen in 1851, even though the variation bears the name of Paul Morphy. In fact, Morphy played it several times with the white pieces before switching sides. He probably decided it was easier to defend Black's cause.

6 ... h6 7 Nf3 e4



An immediate hit.

### 8 Qe2!

For the surprisingly common 8 dxe4?!, see the next game. That leaves:

a) 8 Nd4 Bc5 9 Be3 was J.Trapl-J.Smejkal, Prague 1986. Here Black should play the calm 9 ... Nxd5 10 Bxd5 Bxd4! 11 Bxd4 Qxd5 with a slight edge.

b) 8 Nfd2?! leads to an uncomfortable position for White after 8 ... Bg4 9 f3 exf3 10 Nxf3 Nxc4 11 dxc4 Bc5! when Black has rapid development and White hasn't castled yet. This position has been reached twice and Black has won both games pretty quickly.

### 8 ... Nxc4 9 dxc4 Bc5

The most active square for the bishop, simultaneously preventing Nd4. This position is a kind of tabiya for this variation.

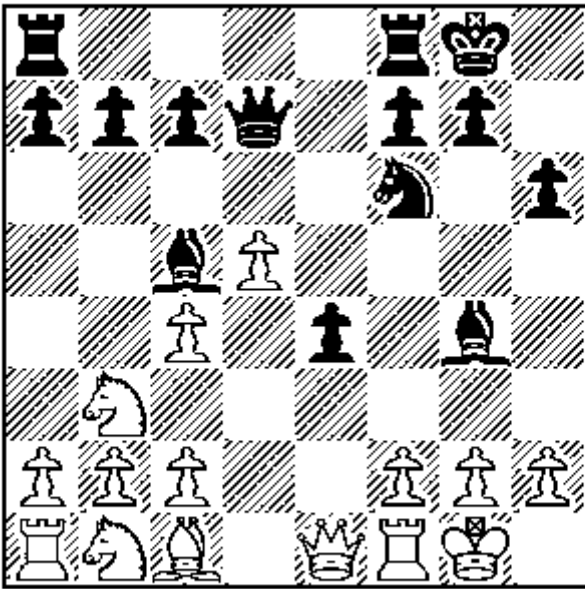
### 10 Nfd2

White retains the possibility of castling long and keeps the f1-square free. This has lately become the main line and should lead to complex middlegames where Black definitely isn't worse.

a) 10 0-0 is actually uncommon, even though it looks very natural. However, after 10 ... 0-0 11 Nfd2 Bg4 White has to go with the slightly inharmonious 12 Qe1 when 12 ... Qd7! is a very strong idea, as pointed out by Bologan:

a1) White should probably plump for 13 Nc3 Rfe8 14 Nb3 when Black can go 14 ... Bd6 or even 14 ... Bf3!?

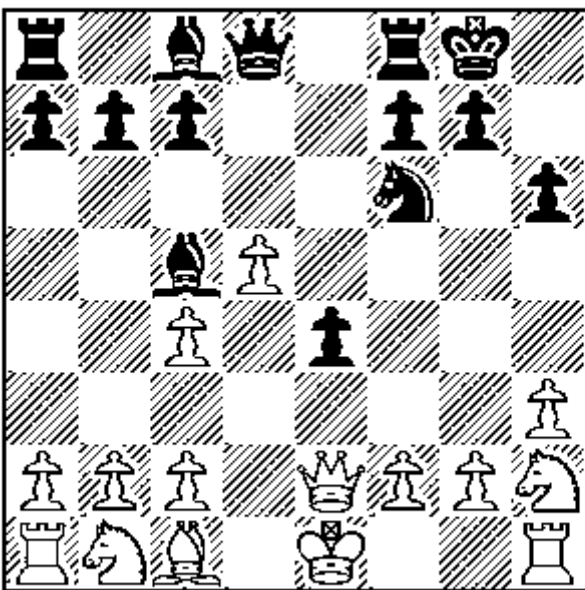
a2) The critical 13 Nb3? was spectacularly refuted in L.Bakos-L.Toth, Hungarian League 2011.



13 ... Bf3!! was a stunning move, after which White is more or less lost. Moreover, 14 Bf4 (14 h3 Qf5 followed by ... Qg6 doesn't save White) 14 ... Qg4 15 Bg3 Nh5 16 Nxc5 Nf4 17 Nxe4 Qh3!! was a splendid final move, after which White resigned.

b) 10 c3 prepares Nd4, as well as b4. Here Bologan makes a strong case for 10 ... b5! which effectively undermines White's centre. Black is already a little better here.

c) 10 h3 0-0 11 Nh2 is the old main line, which isn't very popular nowadays.



Once again, Bologan has found a stunning resource that puts this variation under a cloud: 11 ... c6! 12 dxc6 e3!! Full marks for creativity! White can't open up the e-file, and thus the following variation is forced: 13 Bxe3 Bxe3 14 fxe3 Ne4 15 0-0 Ng3. Black regains the invested material and remains actively placed.

**10 ... 0-0 11 Nb3**

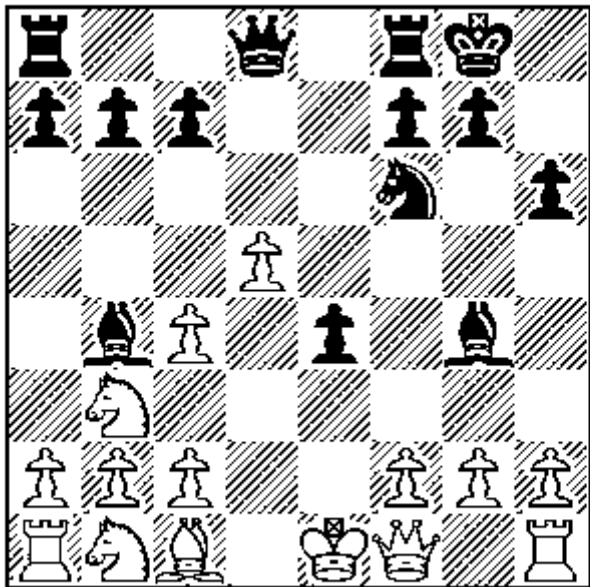
11 0-0 transposes back to 10 0-0, above.

**11 ... Bg4 12 Qf1**

A curious square for the white queen, but Black's bishops are both going to get kicked back quite soon.

Of course, not 12 Qd2? e3! and White loses.

## 12 ... Bb4+!



A very important check and one that prepares the ground for future counterplay. Black provokes c2-c3 which severely weakens the key square, d3. Note that White can't control this square because his light-squared bishop has gone.

### 13 c3

13 Nc3 a5! prepares a quick rush by the a-pawn and Black can also open up the position with ... c6 quickly.

### 13 ... Be7

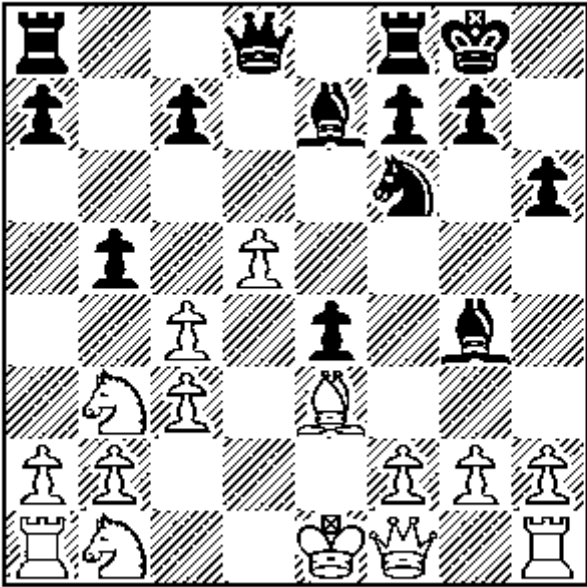
Seeing that Black's counterplay is connected with the move ... b5, this retreat leaves the d-file open.

### 14 Be3

White prepares Nbd2, h3, g4 and 0-0-0 when his pieces would be developed and the pawn consolidated.

The critical variation goes 14 h3 Bh5 15 g4 Bg6 16 Be3 when Black transfers his knight towards White's weaknesses: 16 ... Nd7 17 N1d2 Ne5 18 0-0-0 Nd3+ 19 Kb1 and now it's time for 19 ... b5!. So far, things have been relatively forced. Black has some initiative on the queenside which should offer him an edge: for example, 20 Nd4 bxc4 21 Nc6 Qd7 22 Nxc4 Bf6 23 f4! Qxd5 24 N4e5 Rfe8 and Black should be slightly for choice with his monstrous knight on d3. He can continue with either ... Bxe5 and ... Rab8, or by ... a5 and ... Ra6 to get rid of White's annoying knights. It's a complicated game, but Black is for preference.

### 14 ... b5!?



Debray goes immediately for the centre.

As Bologan mentions, 14 ... Bh5 threatens ... Ng4 when 15 h3 transposes to the complicated 14 h3 variation, above.

**15 h3**

White should probably have preferred 15 Nd4 bxc4 16 Nc6 followed by Qxc4 when his position unravels, although Black shouldn't be worse after 16 ... Qe8! 17 Qxc4 Bd6.

**15 ... bxc4 16 Qxc4**

16 Nd4 could be met with 16 ... Bd7! 17 Qxc4 Qb8 followed by ... Qb7 and ... Bd6 with a nice position. The d5-pawn is difficult to defend.

**16 ... Bh5 17 g4 Bg6 18 N1d2 Nxd5**

Black has regained his pawn and has a comfortable position.

**19 0-0-0 Nxe3 20 fxe3 Bg5?!**

Due to White's opportunity in the game, I think 20 ... c5! is a far superior way for Black to take the initiative. 21 Nxe4 Qc7 provides more than enough compensation, thanks to Black's strong bishop-pair and the coming queenside attack.

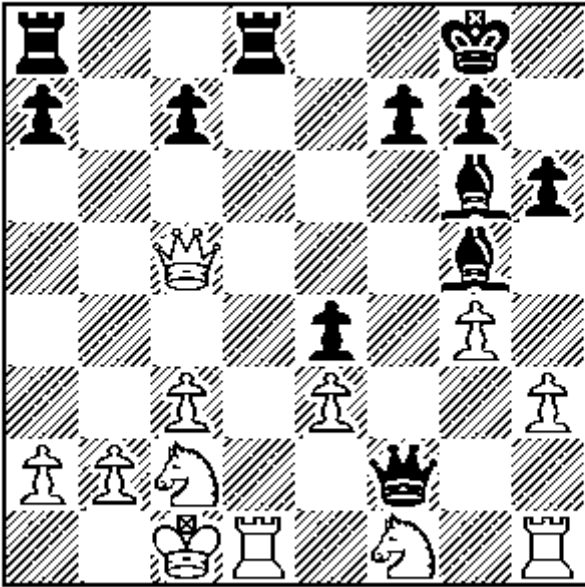
**21 Nf1?!**

Returning the favour. 21 Qc5! is actually slightly annoying for Black to face because h3-h4 and Nd4-f5 will establish a small white advantage.

**21 ... Qf6**

Now White's f1-knight is unharmoniously placed.

**22 Qc5 Rfd8 23 Nd4 Qf2 24 Nc2??**



A horrible blunder in a bad position.

**24 ... Rxd1+ 25 Kxd1 Qf3+ 0-1**

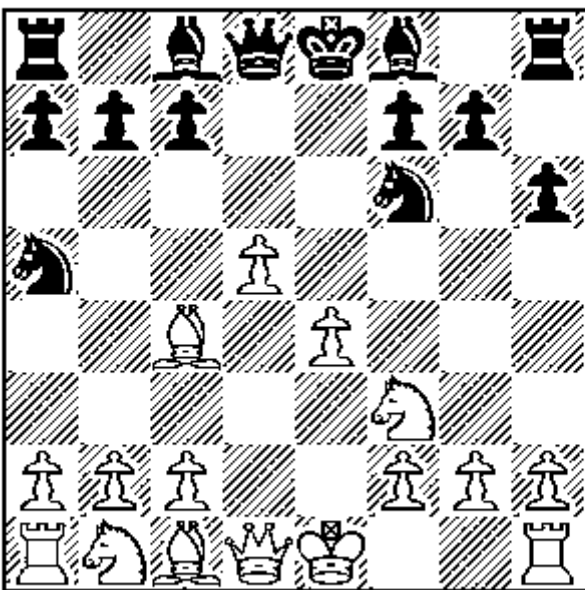
I must admit that I couldn't find a model game for Black against the following variation. Apparently 6 million games in the database isn't enough. Anyway, I've elected to go with the entertaining stem game in which White's gamble actually succeeds. For my suggested improvements, read the notes, especially to Black's 9th and 10th moves.

Game 13

**D.Bronstein-E.Rojahn**

Moscow Olympiad 1956

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 Ng5 d5 5 exd5 Na5 6 d3 h6 7 Nf3 e4 8 dxe4!??**

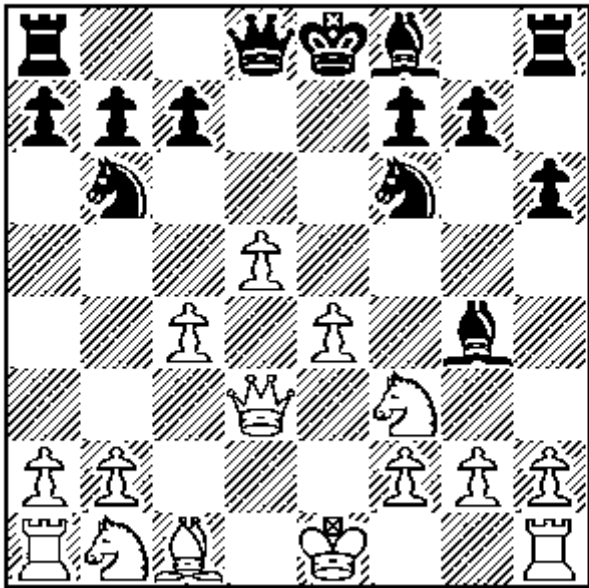


I'm not sure what assessment to give this move. I love the creative idea behind it, but in reality it doesn't work as well as I would like it to. The credit for this idea goes to the creative genius David Bronstein, who successfully applied the piece sacrifice in this very game.

## 8 ... Nxc4 9 Qd4

White has a huge pawn centre that can gain time by attacking Black's knights. It turns out that his compensation is real and Black should really know something about how to react.

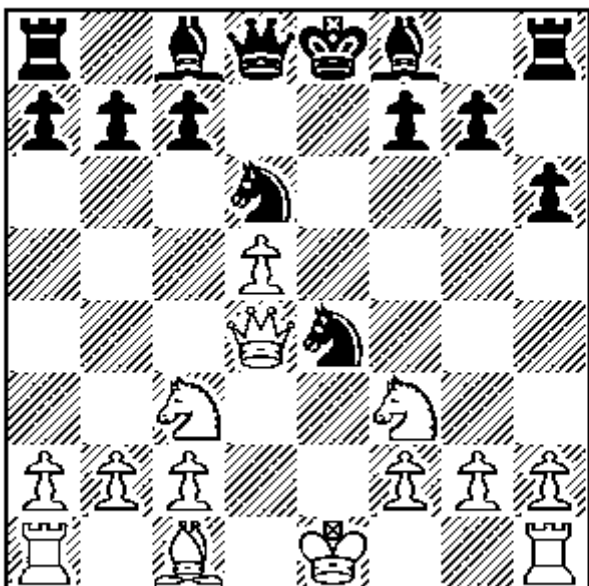
A few players have tried 9 Qd3, perhaps because White's queen is slightly exposed on d4 or maybe just to get Black out of book. After 9 ... Nb6 10 c4 I'd like to take advantage of White's queen placement with 10 ... Bg4!.



With the queen on d4, White would have e4-e5, hitting the bishop on g4. However, now Black can happily exchange off White's f3-knight and establish better control over the dark squares.

## 9 ... Nb6

It wasn't my first intention, but Bologan's recommendation of 9 ... Nd6!? might actually be the strongest response, with the idea of 10 Nc3 (it is, of course, important that 10 e5 can be met with 10 ... Nf5 11 Qa4+ Qd7; 10 0-0 can be met in a similar way with 10 ... Nfxe4 11 Re1 f5 when Black can follow up with ... Qf6, after which his material advantage should prevail) 10 ... Nfxe4!.



Your opponent is unlikely to be aware of this strong near-refutation. Following 11 Nxe4 Qe7 12 0-0 (12 Ne5 Bf5 is also very good for Black) 12 ... Nxe4 13 Re1 f5 14 Nd2 Kd8! (a nice, cool move as the king simply steps right out of the danger zone; Bologan's 14 ... Qc5!? is fine as well) 15 Nxe4 fxe4 16 Rxe4 (or 16 Bf4 Bf5! when Black will unravel his extra piece with ... Qd7 and ... Bd6) 16 ... Qf6 Black will follow up with ... Bd6 when his extra piece has been consolidated.

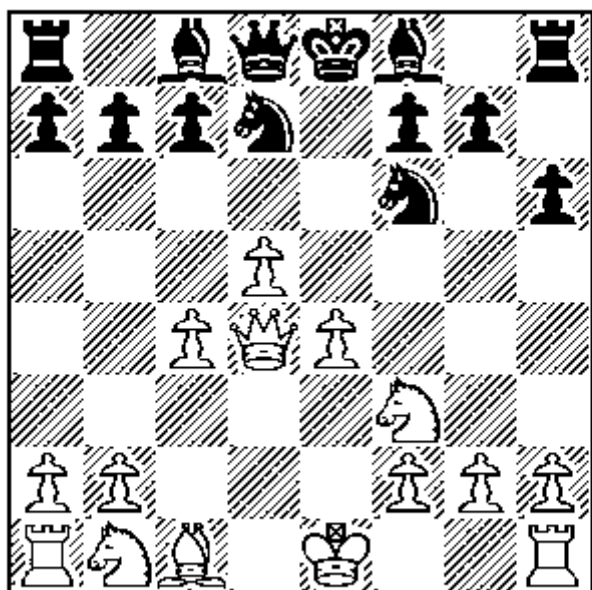
**10 c4?!**

The main continuation, but I dare say it's an error. 10 0-0! is a much better move order, although it has only been tried twice. Black should still be better, of course, but White seems to have decent practical compensation and this is the reason I prefer 9 ... Nd6.

**10 ... c5?!**

A very natural move, but most likely a mistake as well. We will soon notice that it's harder to develop Black's pieces when White's central pawns are free to walk.

10 ... Nbd7! is a strong novelty which so far hasn't been tried in practice.



Black manages to establish good control over the dark squares in the centre: for example, 11 0-0 Bc5 12 Qc3 and then 12 ... 0-0!? or 12 ... Nxe4 13 Qxg7 Qf6. Black's extra piece should be decisive.

**11 Qd3 Bg4 12 Nbd2 Be7**

Now with Black's pawn on c5, White's big pawn centre provides good long-term compensation and Bronstein doesn't have to rush things.

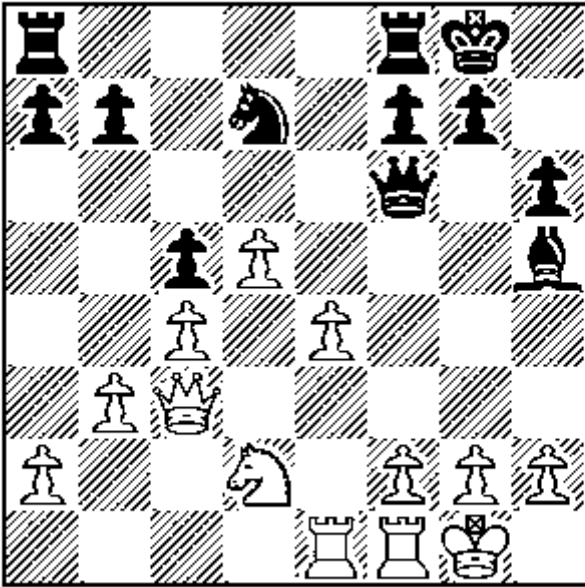
**13 0-0 0-0 14 Ne5 Bh5 15 b3**

The bishop is placed on a dangerous diagonal and White can play a future f2-f4 which would increase his influence in the centre.

**15 ... Nbd7 16 Bb2 Nxe5 17 Bxe5 Nd7 18 Bc3 Bf6 19 Rae1 Bxc3?!**

So far Black has defended fairly well, but this is imprecise. Instead, 19 ... Re8 20 f4 Bg6 applies pressure on the b1-h7 diagonal and if White's queen moves then ... Bd4 becomes possible, with reasonable counterplay. This would certainly have been a better chance.

**20 Qxc3 Qf6?**

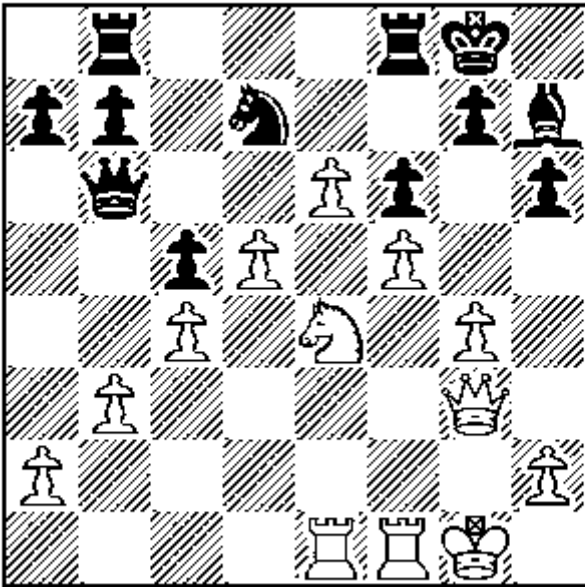


A move difficult to understand. Black provokes White's pawns to move forward even though doing so is clearly to White's advantage.

**21 e5 Qf5 22 f4 Bg6 23 Ne4**

White's initiative is extremely strong and we can see that Black has difficulties making his extra piece felt. Moreover, he is quickly forced into something of a tangle.

**23 ... Rab8 24 Qf3 Bh7 25 g4 Qg6 26 f5 Qb6 27 Qg3 f6 28 e6**



A beautiful position to look at. I don't think any further annotations are necessary. After Black played 10 ... c5, the small mistakes just kept coming because the position wasn't any longer so easy to handle.

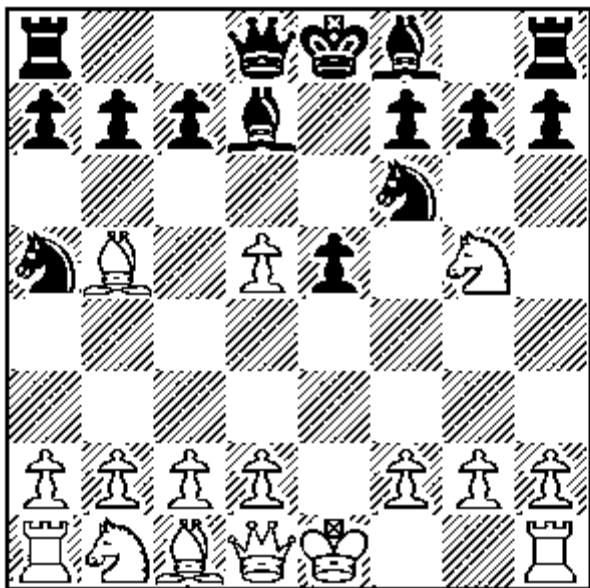
**28 ... Ne5 29 h4 Kh8 30 g5 Rbc8 31 Kh1 Qd8 32 g6 Bxg6 33 fxc6 b5 34 d6 Qb6 35 d7 Nxd7 36 exd7 Rcd8 37 Nxf6 Qc6+ 38 Qg2 1-0**

Game 14

**A.Kovacevic-A.Baryshpolets**

Cappelle-la-Grande 2013

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 Ng5 d5 5 exd5 Na5 6 Bb5+ Bd7



This variation was briefly popular and is generally considered a decent alternative to the more popular 6 ... c6. After analysing this variation heavily, I came to the conclusion that Black is fighting very hard for equality and that White has plenty of interesting options at his disposal. I won't give this variation my main seal of recommendation, but I have included some coverage of the critical variations in case you'd like to analyse it yourself or perhaps use it as a surprise weapon.

My recommendation is 6 ... c6 which will be covered in our next games.

### 7 Qe2

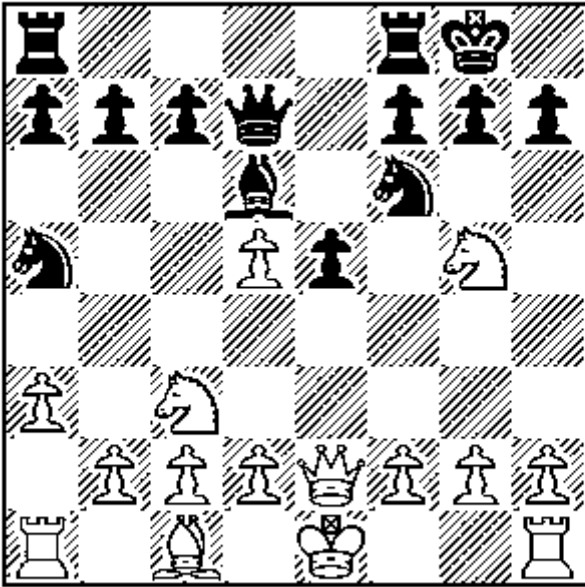
The queen protects b5 while attacking e5 simultaneously. Instead, 7 Bxd7+ Qxd7 is simply considered to be fine for Black.

### 7 ... Be7

Recent trends suggests that this move is the critical continuation.

7 ... Bd6 has historically been the most popular move. However, going to this square interferes with a future ... Qxd5 and now the g5-knight is harder to drive away. Here are some key lines:

a) 8 Nc3 0-0 (8 ... c6!? isn't very common, but it might be Black's best shot; White should go for 9 dxc6 Nxc6 10 Nge4 when Black is active, but White has no significant weaknesses, which is quite a typical scenario in this variation) 9 Bxd7 Qxd7 10 a3!?



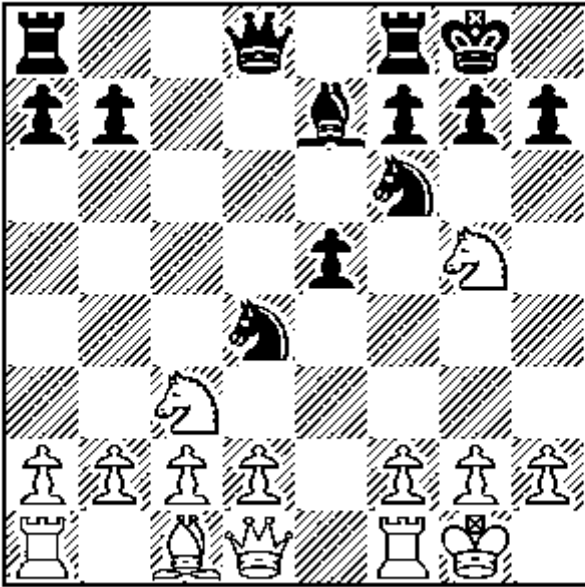
This little pawn move scores almost 75 %! Now ... Bb4 is prevented and b2-b4 is threatened. After 10 ... b6 (Black should perhaps prefer 10 ... Be7!?, pointing at the unprotected knight on g5; after 11 0-0 Nxd5 12 Qxe5 White was still slightly better in I.Saric-M.Pavlovic, Biel 2012) 11 d3 Black has nowhere near sufficient compensation, as in A.Morozevich-I.Sokolov, Sarajevo 1999.

b) 8 Bxd7+ is a good alternative as well. After 8 ... Qxd7 9 Nc3 c6 10 dxc6 Nxc6 11 0-0 0-0 12 d3 Nd4 13 Qd1 Rac8 Black is very active in return for his missing pawn, but a pawn is a pawn and White has no significant weaknesses.

### 8 Bxd7+!?

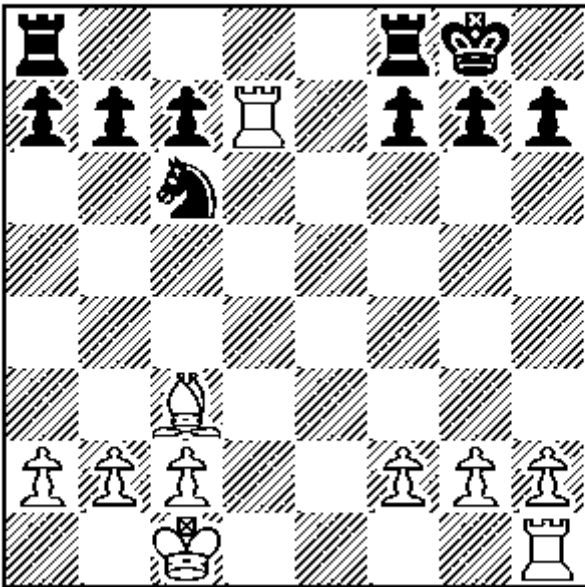
A very unusual move, but one I think deserves serious attention. However, Black's cause isn't easy in the alternative lines either:

a) 8 Nc3 is the main move, when Black should opt for 8 ... Bxb5! (8 ... 0-0 has suffered lately because of the 9 Bxd7 Qxd7 10 0-0 variation) 9 Qxb5+ c6 10 dxc6 Nxc6. Compared to many similar positions where Black goes ... c6 and agrees to playing a pawn down, White has lost plenty of time with his queen, which should justify the pawn sacrifice, as we can see after 11 0-0 (note that with a bishop on d6, 11 Qxb7 Nd4?? would allow 12 Qxf7 mate) 11 ... 0-0 12 Qe2!? Nd4 13 Qd1.



Now there is 13 ... Rc8 14 d3 b5! when the c2-pawn is vulnerable..

b) 8 Nf3!? is rather unusual, but also good. Black's best seems to be 8 ... 0-0! (Black doesn't fully equalize after 8 ... Nxd5 9 Bxd7+ Qxd7 10 Nxe5 Qf5 11 d4) 9 Nxe5 Bxb5 10 Qxb5 Bd6 11 d4 and now 11 ... c5! with a complicated game. Instead, Yandemirov has twice tried 11 ... Bxe5 12 dxe5 Qxd5 13 Qxd5 Nxd5 14 Bd2 Nc4 15 Nc3 Nxc3 16 Bxc3 Nxe5! 17 0-0-0 Nc6 18 Rd7.



On both occasions he managed to draw, but it doesn't look like a lot of fun.

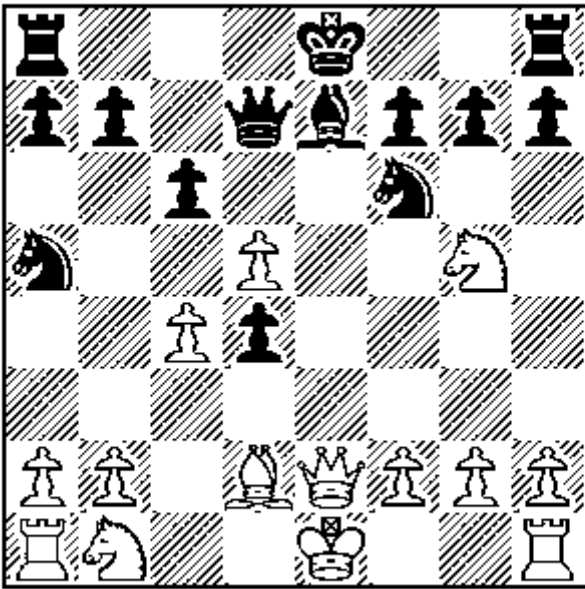
**8 ... Qxd7 9 c4!**

Black has sacrificed a pawn, but he's about to break White's centre down.

**9 ... c6**

White, however, has a brilliant counter-strike.

**10 d4! exd4 11 Bd2**

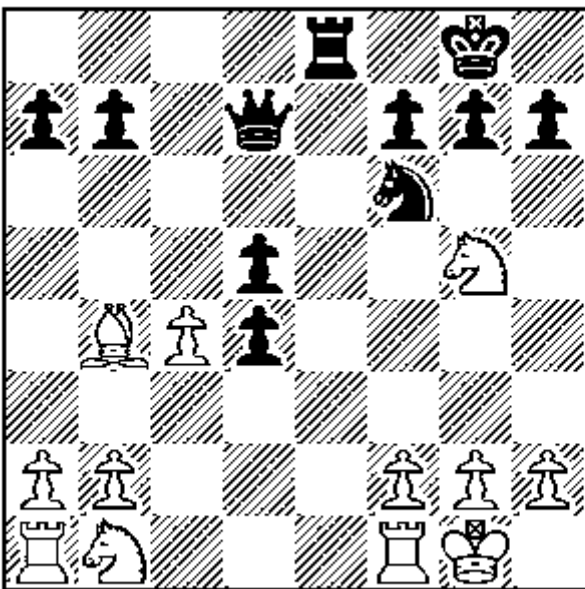


Suddenly, the knight on a5 is loose.

**11 ... b6**

The only move that has been played so far.

However, as Slavisa Brenjo notes, Black's best try to solve his problems is with the shocking 11 ... 0-0!! 12 0-0! (12 Bxa5?! is met with the clever 12 ... Bd8! when both ... Re8 and ... Bxa5+ are threatened, and 13 Qd2?! can be met with 13 ... Re8+ 14 Kf1 cxd5 when White's pieces are just too loose and underdeveloped) 12 ... Rfe8 13 Bxa5!. Now 13 ... Bd8 is just met with 14 Qd2, so Black has to go 13 ... Bb4! 14 Qxe8+ Rxe8 15 Bxb4 cxd5.



After trading brilliant punches, the two sides have reached a very interesting position. White has a material advantage, but Black's position is fully developed and he carries a decent initiative. Black's initiative might do well in practice, but from a theoretical point of view I think White might have a slight edge. He should go 16 c5!, trying to keep the position closed while developing his remaining pieces. We are deep in unexplored territory, so I'll leave the joy of analysing this position further to my readers.

**12 Bxa5 bxa5 13 dxc6 Qxc6 14 0-0**

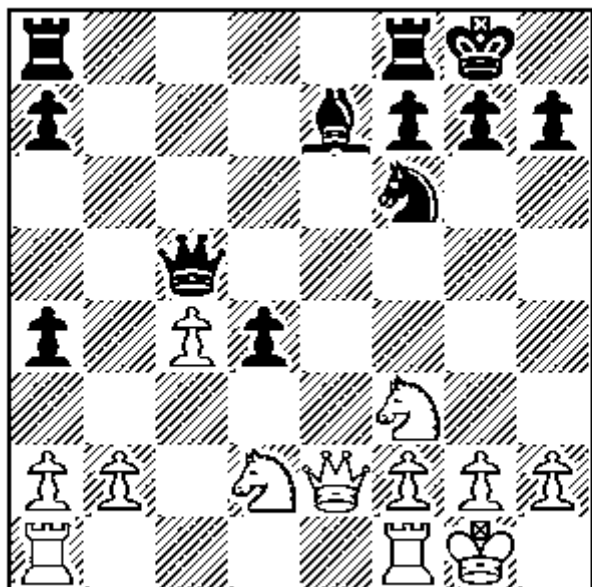
Black has a weak pawn structure and hasn't castled yet. Even though his pieces have active

potential, it's clear that White is slightly better and he can start rounding up the d-pawn.

**14 ... Qc5 15 Nf3 0-0 16 Nbd2**

Black can engage in some counterplay down the b-file and with ... a4, but White has a good blockade on the light squares, and d4 is certainly a weakness and not a strength in this case. Overall, White is still slightly better.

**16 ... a4**



**17 Ne5**

Bringing the knight to d3 where it blockades the d4-pawn and protects b2.

Another set-up is 17 Rfe1 Rfe8 18 Qd3 followed by b2-b3. Black's doubled pawn is exchanged, but White gains pressure down the a-file. White can also follow up with Re5 or Ne4. In view of the game continuation, this might have been preferable.

**17 ... Rfe8 18 Nd3 Qa5 19 Nf3 a3! 20 b3 Bb4 21 Qc2 Bc3 22 Rad1**

Black has played efficiently and it's difficult for White to make progress with the e-file now inaccessible.

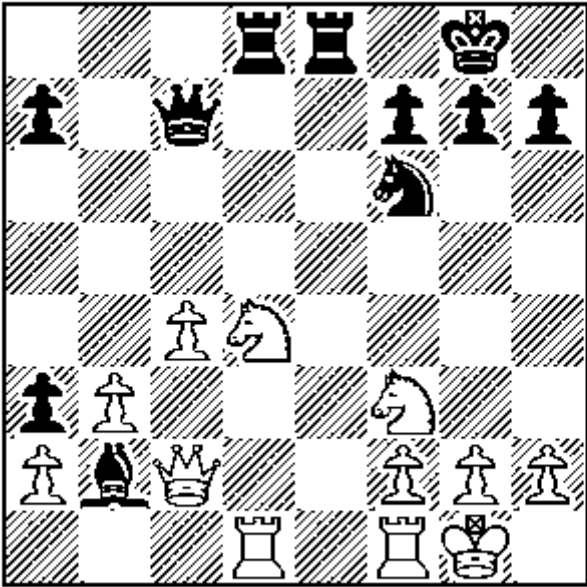
**22 ... Qc7?!**

22 ... Rad8! keeps the bind because 23 Nc1?! Ne4 24 Ne2 Nd2! is bad for White.

**23 Nc1!**

An excellent manoeuvre. The bishop on c3 is kicked away and Black has serious difficulties defending his d4-pawn.

**23 ... Rad8 24 Ne2 Bb2 25 Nexd4**



White is now up a pawn and Black's queenside won't make much resistance.

**25 ... Ne4 26 Nb5 Qe7 27 Rxd8 Qxd8**

27 ... Rxd8 doesn't help because of 28 Nxa7! when White grabs a second pawn.

**28 Re1 f5 29 Nxa7 Nc3 30 Nb5 Rxe1+ 31 Nxe1 Nxa2 32 Nxa3**

White is two pawns up on the queenside. The win is just a technicality.

**32 ... Qe7 33 Nd3 Nb4 34 Qxb2 Nxd3 35 Qd2 Qe4 36 Nb5 f4 37 f3 Qg6 38 Kf1 h6 39 Nc3 Nc5 40 Qd5+ Ne6 41 Ne4 1-0**

Black is robbed of all counterplay.

Game 15

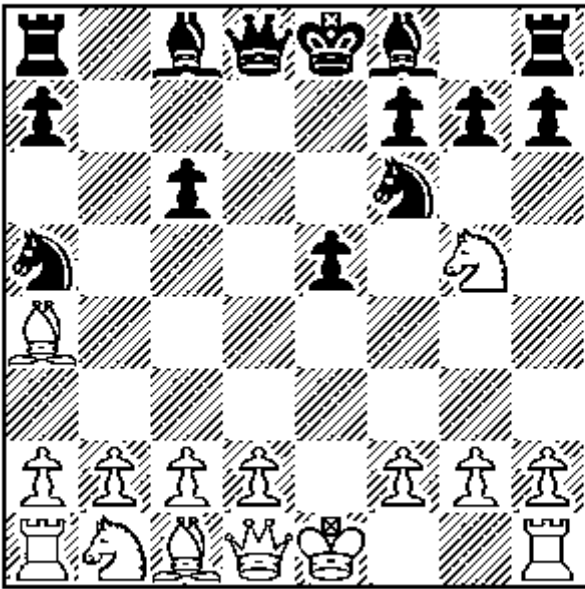
**J.Phanikanth-R.Trenner**

Olomouc 2002

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 Ng5 d5 5 exd5 Na5 6 Bb5+ c6**

Finally we reach the main line, where Black has sacrificed a pawn for the centre and quick development.

**7 dxc6 bxc6 8 Ba4?!**



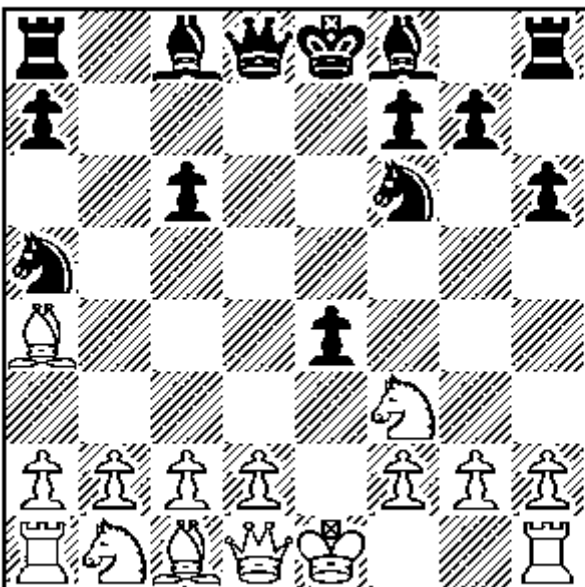
When I was 10, I received a 30-year-old cut-out from a Swedish newspaper that reported on the Swedish Schools Chess Championships. Apart from the results, I remember a fantastic idea that caught my attention and that opening trap is the one covered in this game. Unfortunately, I've never had the chance to play it in a game.

White's many alternatives, such as 8 Qf3, 8 Be2 and 8 Bd3, will be covered in the next few games.

**8 ... h6 9 Nf3**

White can play 9 Nh3, but after 9 ... Bg4! 10 f3 Bxh3 11 gxh3 Bc5 I'm far from envious of his position.

**9 ... e4!**



**10 Ne5**

Alternatively:

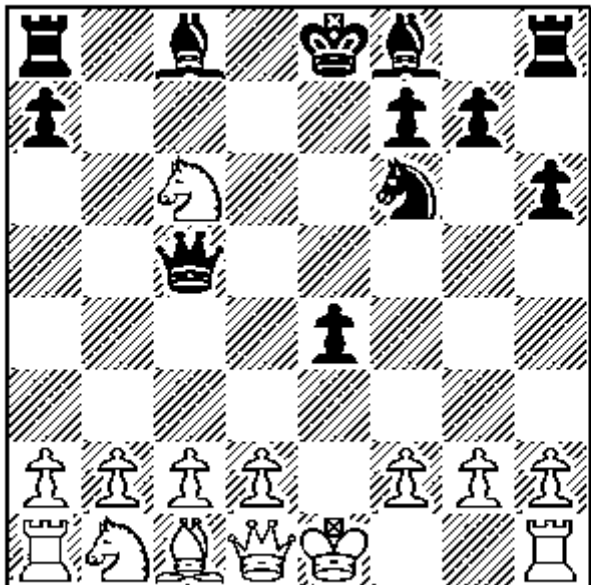
a) 10 Qe2! is White's best bet at surviving. Black should remain active with 10 ... Bc5! 11 d3 (11 0-0 isn't good because the white knight has to move after 11 ... 0-0 and neither square is particularly inviting, seeing that 12 Ne5 Qd4! 13 Bxc6 Qxe5 14 Bxa8 Bg4 is completely winning) 11 ... 0-0 12 dxe4 Nxe4! and Black is clearly better.

b) 10 Ng1 Bc5 and White already has difficulties surviving. Black's initiative should be decisive after 11 d4 exd3! followed by ... Qb6.

**10 ... Qd4!**

The problem behind 8 Ba4. This nasty move forks the bishop on a4 and the knight on e5.

**11 Bxc6+ Nxc6 12 Nxc6 Qc5!**

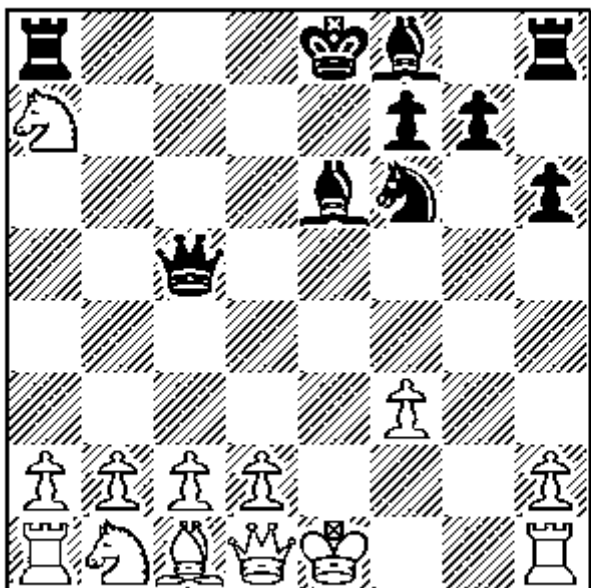


The knight is trapped.

**13 Nxa7**

White takes a third pawn, which sometimes is a fair price for a piece, but Black is just too active here.

**13 ... Bg4!? 14 f3 exf3 15 gxf3 Be6**



This is the beautiful idea that attracted me when I was 10. White's knight is still trapped and his kingside is completely destroyed. Indeed, it was definitely one of my favourite openings traps when I was growing up.

**16 Nc3 Qxa7 17 Qe2 Be7 18 Qb5+**

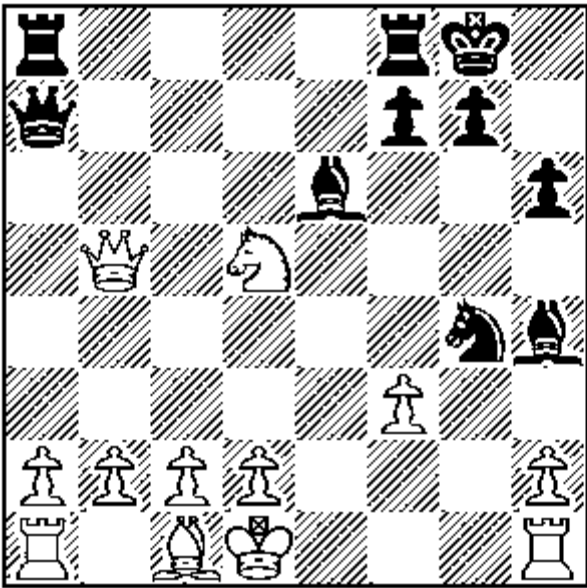
18 Qf2 Bc5 prevents White from castling.

**18 ... Nd7 19 Qc6**

White plays strange queen moves, but his position is already completely wrecked.

**19 ... 0-0 20 Nd5 Bh4+ 21 Kd1 Ne5 22 Qb5 Nxf3**

I would have loved the completely killing 22 ... Ng4!.



That said, Black's choice in the game is more than satisfactory.

**23 Ne3 Rad8 24 d3 Bg5 25 Nc4 Nd4 26 Qb6 Bg4+ 27 Ke1 Qe7+ 28 Kf2 Qe2+ 29 Kg3 0-**

**1**

Game 16

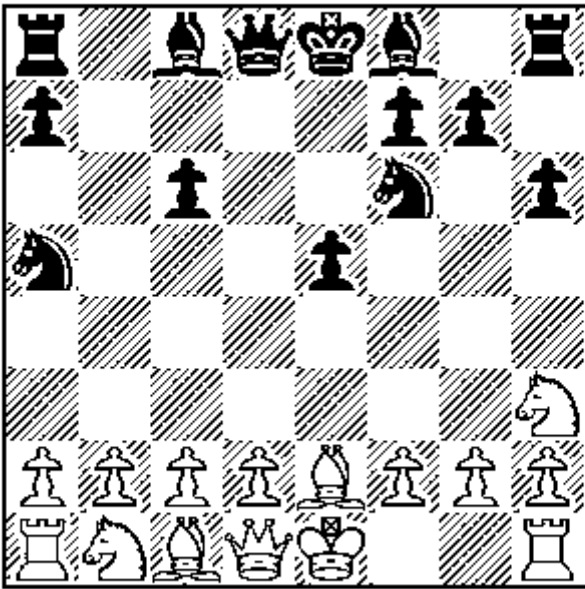
**H.Krueger-W.Krol**

Correspondence 2006

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 Ng5 d5 5 exd5 Na5 6 Bb5+ c6 7 dxc6 bxc6 8 Be2**

This is the classical main line, which was popular until White found some new ideas after 8 Qf3 and especially 8 Bd3. Basically, the bishop is just placed on a square where it hopefully won't interrupt White's development too much. I imagine this line is still very popular at club level, so I'd definitely recommend the reader investing some time to study it.

**8 ... h6 9 Nh3!?**



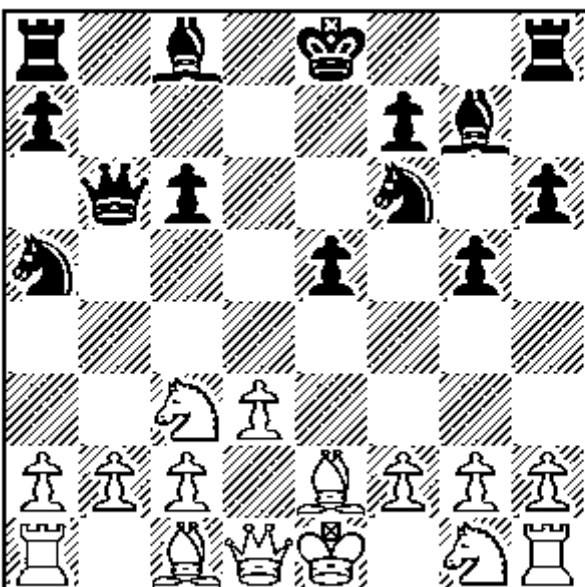
This is the pet move of GM Bartosz Socko. Black won't gain any more time kicking around the white knight, but at the same time the knight is badly placed on h3 and it won't be easy to get it back into the game. This makes sure that Black has decent, lasting compensation. With that said, Black still needs to display accuracy in this variation, and a fair amount of patience and belief can help too. Black should develop his pieces to active squares and not worry too much about being a pawn down. White is the one who has to solve the problem of the h3-knight.

### 9 ... Bc5!

The most active square for the bishop and any eventual b2-b4 threats aren't too dangerous because Black happily plays ... Nb7 to redirect the knight.

The point of the entire variation is that 9 ... Bxh3 10 gxh3 is nothing to worry about as White. He has the bishop-pair and Black isn't going to mate White anytime soon. I do think that this is quite playable for Black as well, but why trade a living bishop for a dead knight?

I used to think 9 ... g5 was the key move for Black and it was employed by an extremely young Magnus Carlsen. However, it looks like White can play 10 Nc3 Bg7 11 d3 Qb6 12 Ng1!, as in B.Socko-E.Bacrot, Antwerp 2009.



White has the better position. The knight is redirected to f3, the bishop on g7 isn't ideally placed, and Bacrot's 12 ... g4 was simply met with 13 h3!.

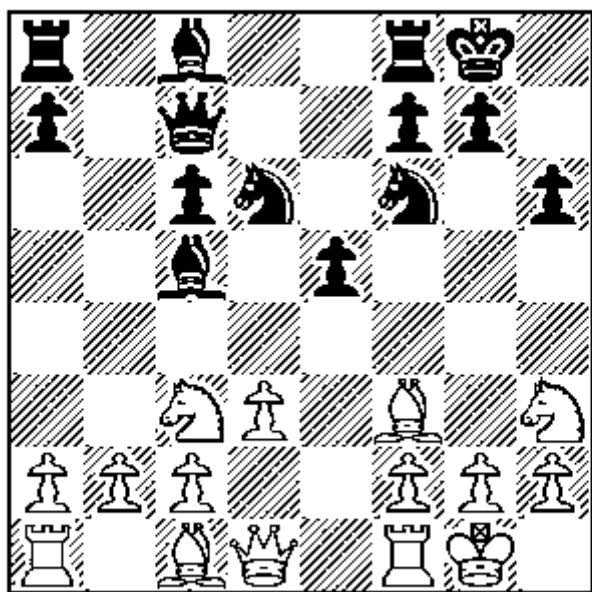
### 10 d3

10 0-0 doesn't change anything because White has to play d2-d3 to develop anyway. After 10 ... 0-0 11 d3 we have transposed to the game.

### 10 ... 0-0 11 0-0

This natural move gives Black an additional option.

I would prefer the far less popular 11 Nc3!, developing my pieces before castling. This is where Black needs to be patient and simply put his pieces on natural squares. With the knight on h3, Black will always have compensation. With 11 ... Nb7! the worst placed piece is improved, while Black maintains flexibility with his other pieces. One typical variation goes 12 Bf3 Qc7 13 0-0 (13 Ng1 is still met with 13 ... Qb6!) 13 ... Nd6.



Although White has somewhat managed to develop, the knight on h3 remains stuck. He should perhaps try to get it out with 14 Kh1, but this looks very artificial and Black gets a very good position after, say, 14 ... Re8 15 Ng1 e4!.

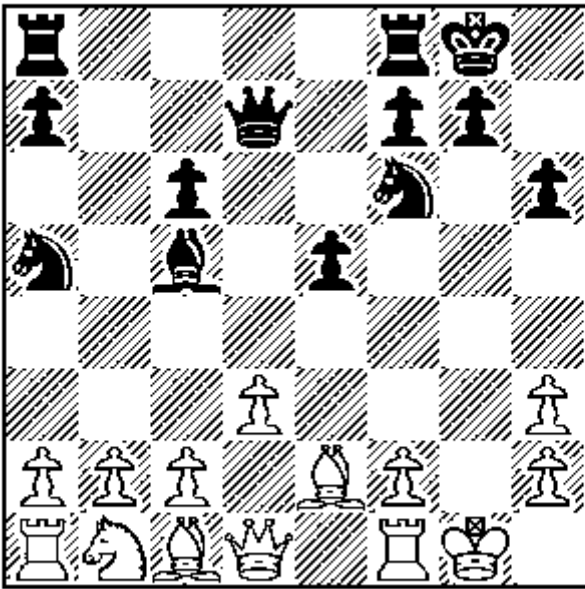
Note too that compared to the 9 ... g5 line, 11 Ng1? doesn't work because of 11 ... Qb6 when White doesn't have the resources to defend f2.

### 11 ... Bxh3!?

Taking advantage of White's early castling.

For those of you who only want a simple solution (there's nothing wrong with that!), we can, of course, go 11 ... Nb7! with a similar position to the one we looked at after 11 Nc3. Black follows up with ... Nd6 and ... Re8 (and ... Qc7 if necessary to protect c6). This would probably be my preferred set-up and has been heavily analysed by Bologan. However, I don't think Black needs to know much more than this desired set-up, other than the possible ... e5-e4 break.

### 12 gxh3 Qd7



Black eyes the damaged pawn structure on the kingside.

### 13 Bg4

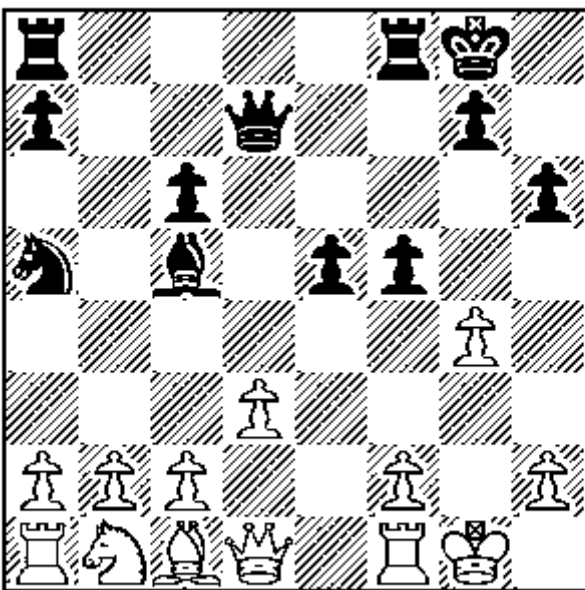
Protecting h3 with 13 Kg2 is one way to go, but it feels like Black gets fantastic compensation with 13 ... Nb7 followed by either ... Nd6 or ... Nd5 and ... f5.

I think White's best bet might be the slightly strange looking 13 Bf3! when 13 ... Qxh3 14 Bg2 is quite disturbing for Black. The kingside isn't nearly as weak as it seemed to be and White has the bishop-pair. Still, Black's activity should be enough to keep the balance after 14 ... Qe6.

### 13 ... Nxg4 14 hxg4

14 Qxg4 is probably more challenging, but with 14 ... f5! Black includes his rook in the attack on the kingside. After, for instance, 15 Qg2 Rf6 16 Kh1 Nb7 17 Nc3 Nd6 Black has fair chances, with good positional compensation and certain prospects on the kingside.

### 14 ... f5!



A double-edged move, but Black needs to create some counterplay against the white kingside. The downside is that the e4-square is weakened, and this would be a great square for a white knight.

## 15 Nd2

If White plays 15 gxf5, Black could try 15 ... Qxf5 16 Qe2 e4!? with the idea of 17 dxe4 Qg6+ 18 Kh1 Rxf2! 19 Rxf2 Bxf2 20 Qxf2 Qxe4+ and Black has a draw by perpetual check.

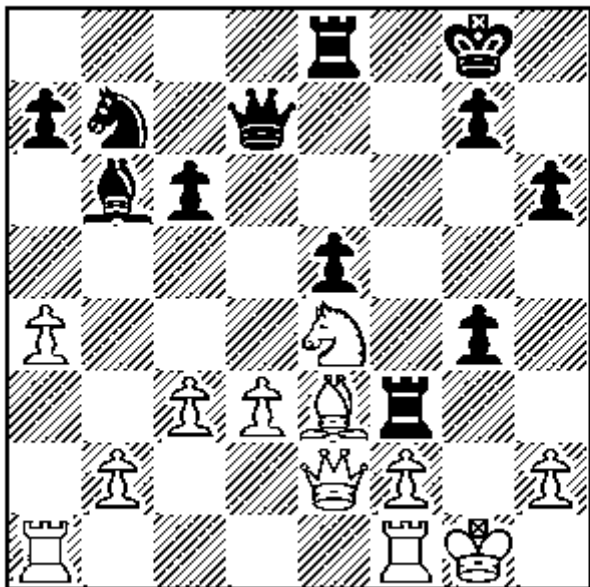
## 15 ... fxg4

I like the move 15 ... e4!, to avoid having to fight against a strong white knight on e4. The point is that 16 dxe4 fxg4! is a much better version for Black. The pressure down the f-file is daunting. Here White should try 16 gxf5 when 16 ... exd3 17 Ne4 Qxf5 18 cxd3 Bd4 is about equal.

## 16 Qe2 Rae8 17 Ne4 Nb7!

Black should aim to redirect his knight towards the centre.

## 18 Be3 Bd4 19 c3 Bb6 20 a4 Rf3



## 21 b4

White could have tried the surprising 21 Bxh6, but it looks like Black keeps the balance after 21 ... Qxd3 22 Qxd3 Rxd3 23 Bg5 Nc5. The point is, of course, that 21 ... gxh6? 22 Qxf3! gxf3 23 Nf6+ wins material for White.

## 21 ... Nd6 22 Bxb6 axb6 23 a5 bxa5 24 bxa5 Nxe4

I would prefer the more chaotic 24 ... Nf5!? when the knight reaches h4 and various tactical motifs appear.

## 25 Qxe4 ½-½

Here the players agreed to a draw, which seems to be the most likely outcome, but in a practical game Black is the one who might come under pressure.

## Game 17

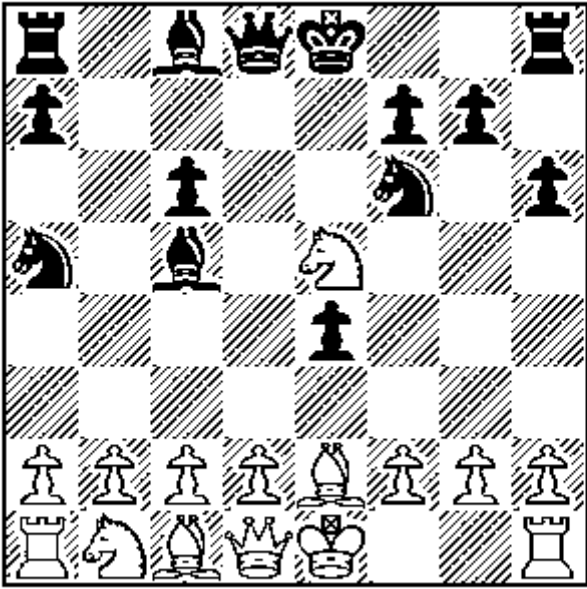
**M.Boeken-V.Lebedev**

Correspondence 2011

## 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 Ng5 d5 5 exd5 Na5 6 Bb5+ c6 7 dxc6 bxc6 8 Be2 h6 9 Nf3

The classical continuation. The knight remains centralized, but Black gets to kick it around a bit. This was usually the variation I faced as Black until people discovered the 8 Bd3 line.

## 9 ... e4 10 Ne5 Bc5!



A strong refinement, compared to the previous main move, 10 ... Bd6. The big idea is that after 10 ... Bd6 11 d4 exd3 12 Nxd3 Qc7, White can play 13 b3! when Black has to reckon with Bc1-b2xf6. I do think Black can still keep the balance, but forcing c2-c3 out of White looks like an improvement for Black. Another option after 10 ... Bd6 is the interesting 11 f4!? which wouldn't be on the cards with a bishop on c5.

### 11 c3

More or less necessary.

### 11 ... 0-0!

This is a strong move order that I haven't seen mentioned anywhere before. Let's look at why I think it is Black's best move order:

a) The most popular move is 11 ... Bd6, which is very similar to the 10 ... Bd6 main line, albeit with c2-c3 inserted. This is by no means bad for Black, but I wish to avoid the positions arising after 12 f4! exf3 13 Nxf3 0-0 14 0-0 when White can follow up with d2-d4 and Black has to play very accurately to prove his compensation.

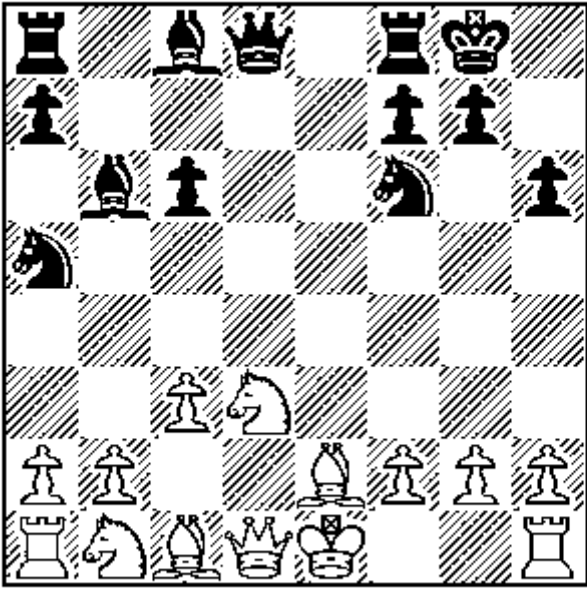
b) The second most popular move, and the one recommend by Bologan, is 11 ... Qc7, which forces 12 d4 exd3 13 Nxd3 Bd6 and this is the same position that we reach in our main line, but with both sides not yet having castled. Here White has several alternatives to going short, like, for instance 14 Nd2, which was tried by Georgiev recently. These alternatives shouldn't be troubling for Black, but why give White more options?

### 12 0-0!

Quite shockingly, this precise and refined move order has only been played once by two untitled players. Others have preferred:

a) We're not bothered by 12 b4 because Black can play 12 ... Bd6 or even 12 ... Qd5.

b) It might look like White should play 12 d4 exd3 13 Nxd3, but instead of committing the queen to c7, we have alternatives, with 13 ... Bb6! a very strong idea.

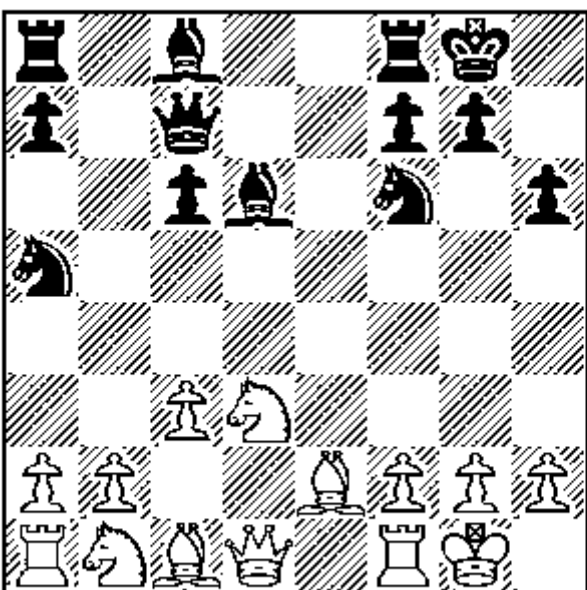


The bishop would be well placed on d6 too, but this way Black obtains maximum pressure along the d-file. After 14 0-0 Re8! Black is already threatening to win material with ... Ba6 or ... Bf5, and White is simply in big trouble. In M.Mueller-A.Lisanti, Griesheim 2003, after 15 b4 Nc4 16 Nf4 Ba6 (16 ... Qxd1 17 Bxd1 Ba6 looks even more convincing) 17 Qb3 White missed a stunning resource: 17 ... Rxe2!! 18 Nxe2 Ng4 and his coordination was destroyed. There are all sorts of tactics in the air, such as 19 Bf4 Nxf2 20 Rxf2 Bxf2+ 21 Kxf2 Qh4+ 22 Bg3 Qe4! and Black wins because of White's inability to develop himself.

**12 ... Qc7**

We avoid the 12 ... Bd6 move order because that way White gains the annoying possibility of 13 f4!.

**13 d4 exd3 14 Nxd3 Bd6**



This is an important position. Black's compensation consists of his quick development and White's clumsy pieces. The knight on d3 has jumped all over the board and it's still no good. Black will continue with moves like ... Bf5, ... Rad8, ... Rfe8 and ... c5, with a very strong initiative in the centre.

**15 g3**

15 h3 isn't nearly as effective. When Black engages in tactical motifs along the d-file, he will have the opportunity of playing ... Bh2+ instead of just going ... Bxg3. This is a clear improvement for Black. For example, 15 ... Bf5 16 Nd2 Rad8 17 b4 and now Black can go 17 ... Bxd3! 18 Bxd3 Bh2+ with a clear advantage.

### 15 ... Bf5

There's nothing special about this. Black develops his pieces to active squares, while White just tries to get his pieces off the rear ranks.

### 16 Nd2

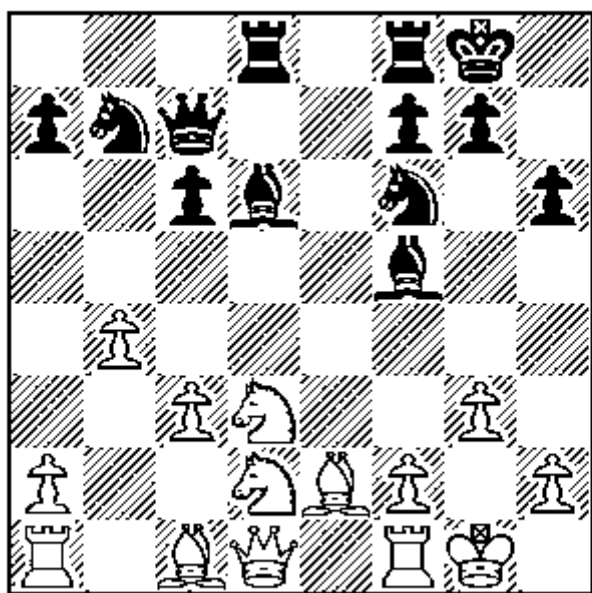
White decides to prevent ... Nc4 before playing the necessary b2-b4 to develop his queenside. Instead:

a) 16 Be3 develops the bishop, but also exposes it. After 16 ... Rfe8 17 Nd2 Black can go 17 ... Nd5!? with a complex position or 17 ... Bxg3 18 hxg3 Rxe3 19 fxe3 Qxg3+ 20 Kh1 when we at least have a perpetual check, but probably no more than that.

b) 16 Bf4 doesn't solve anything either, because 16 ... Rad8 17 Bxd6 Rxd6 leaves White in a bind he can't get out of.

c) White does actually develop his queenside with 16 b4 Nc4 17 Nd2 Nxd2 18 Bxd2, but after 18 ... a5 Black's positional compensation is more than sufficient. Black will follow up with ... Rfd8 and ... Ne4, with huge pressure.

### 16 ... Rad8 17 b4 Nb7!



Keeping it simple. Black is going to break with ... c5 and destroy White's pawn structure on the queenside. Bologan likes 17 ... Rfe8!? and attaches an exclamation mark to the move. Although I agree that it's a cute idea, I don't think it's theoretically better than our logical main line. The idea is that 18 bxa5 can be met with 18 ... Qe7 when Black regains the piece. The position after 19 Nb4 Bxb4 20 cxb4 Qxe2 21 Qxe2 Rxe2 22 Nb3 is complex but probably about equal.

### 18 Nc4

White could also bring his knight to d4 with 18 Nf3, but after 18 ... c5 19 bxc5 Nxc5 20 Nd4 Bh3 21 Re1 Nce4 Black regains his sacrificed pawn with active and well-placed pieces. However, to be fair, White should be able to draw this with accurate play.

### 18 ... Rfe8 19 Be3 Nd5

Black could also go for the immediate 19 ... c5 when White's centre and queenside come

under pressure.

**20 Bd2 c5 21 Rc1!**

White finds the only way to keep the balance, but then again, this is a high-level correspondence game.

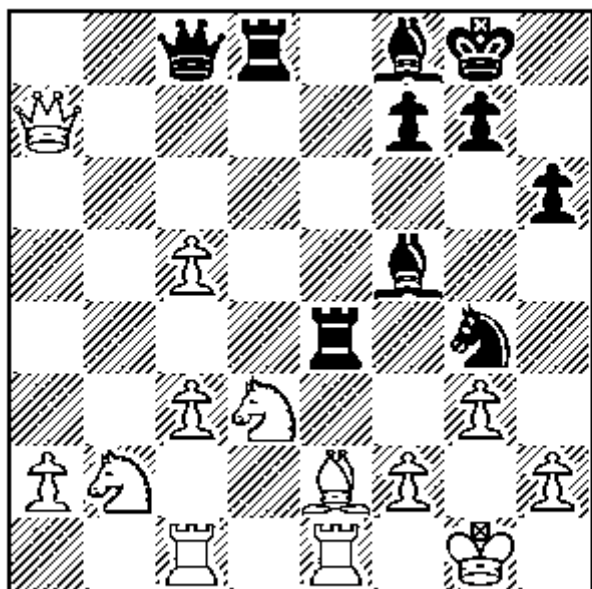
**21 ... Nf6 22 Re1 Bf8**

Maximizing the pressure along the central files.

**23 Ncb2 Qd7 24 Be3 Ng4 25 Bxc5 Nxc5 26 bxc5 Qc8**

With Black's pressure mounting, White has to liquidate to try and save the draw.

**27 Qa4 Re4 28 Qxa7**



Black is now three pawns down, but his grip on the position is very strong. White can't consolidate his material advantage.

**28 ... Rd7 29 Qa5 Rxe2! 30 Rxe2 Bxd3 31 Nxd3 Rxd3 32 c6 Rd6 33 c7 Rc6 34 Qa4 Rxc7 35 Re8 Qf5 36 Qf4 ½-½**

At this point this ridiculously well-played correspondence game ended in a shared point. The players probably analysed it down to a draw, but in a practical game I wouldn't mind playing on with the black pieces.

Game 18

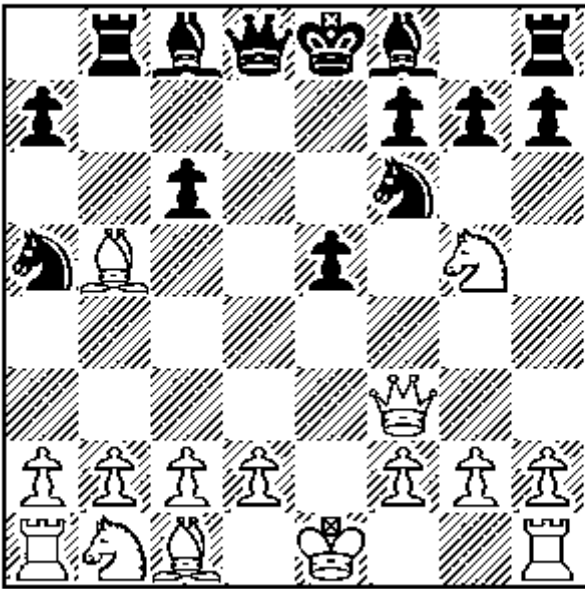
**A.Pridorozhni-P.Ponkratov**

Khanty-Mansiysk 2014

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 Ng5 d5 5 exd5 Na5 6 Bb5+ c6 7 dxc6 bxc6 8 Qf3!?**

This variation was popularized by van der Wiel in the 80's. White develops his queen, while simultaneously pinning the c6-pawn.

**8 ... Rb8!**



The rook moves out of the pin and now White really does have to move his b5-bishop. In this game we will take a look at those lines where White doesn't capture on c6. We'll save those complications for the next game.

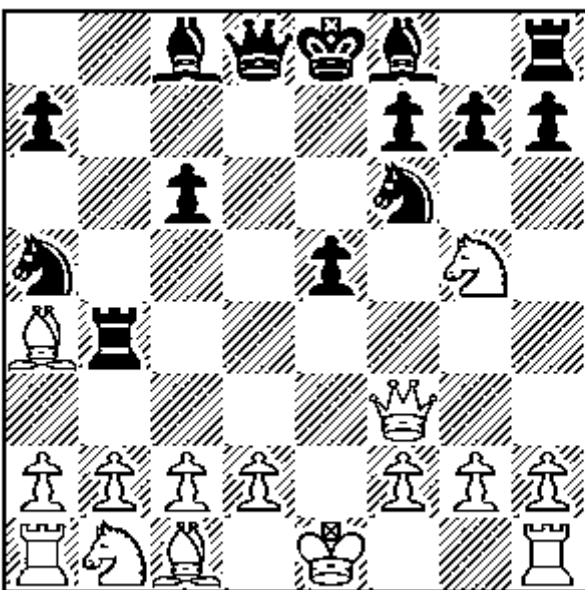
8 ... Be7!/? has also been popular lately and I see nothing wrong with this move either, but I really enjoy the positions after 8 ... Rb8 and think White even has to work very hard to equalize. Besides, I feel that 8 ... Rb8 carries some very nice and creative ideas.

### 9 Bd3

Clearly the most popular retreat, taking control of the e4-square. Others:

a) 9 Be2 doesn't challenge Black in any way. After 9 ... Be7 10 Nc3 0-0 11 d3 Black can play 11 ... Ng4! when he is ready to go ... f5 and the knight on g5 isn't very stable.

b) 9 Ba4 is the only move that scores a respectable result for White, but Black has a very creative response in 9 ... Rb4!.



This idea is a common motif behind the move 8 ... Rb8. The rook can shift along the fourth rank to disturb White's coordination. Following 10 Nc3 h6 11 Nh3 I like the untried 11 ... Rd4! when the rook is centralized(!), and it's not so easy for White to get rid of. White should perhaps go 12 0-0 Bd6 13 d3 0-0 and with ... Bg4 in the air, Black looks a little better. Karpov would

have been proud of this rook.

### 9 ... Bd6!

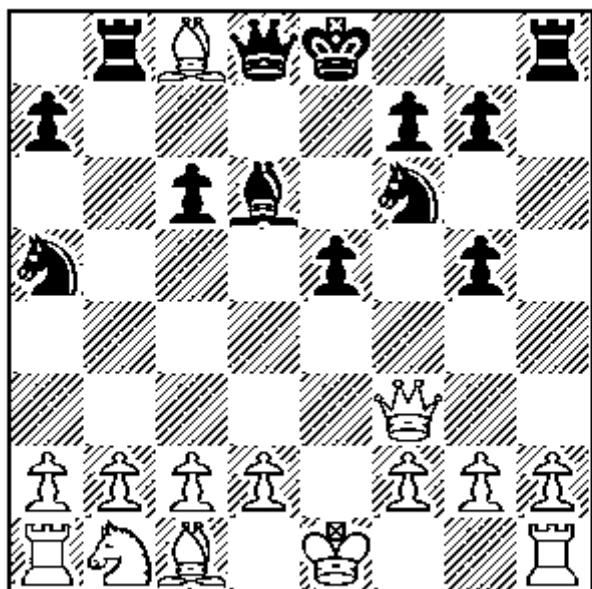
The latest practical games show that this slightly unusual move is the course of the future.

### 10 Nc3

The main move, but let's have a look at a few alternatives:

a) 10 Ne4 is nothing to be bothered by. Black just goes 10 ... Nxe4 11 Bxe4 0-0 followed by ... f5 with a strong initiative.

b) 10 Bf5!? is an interesting attempt to trade off a light-squared piece. That would make White's development easier, but it also takes more time. Black should go 10 ... h6 11 Bxc8 hxg5!.



The open h-file provides Black with even more dynamic opportunities and he obtains a strong initiative after 12 Bf5 g6 13 Bd3 g4 14 Qe2 Kf8 15 Nc3 c5 16 Bb5 e4.

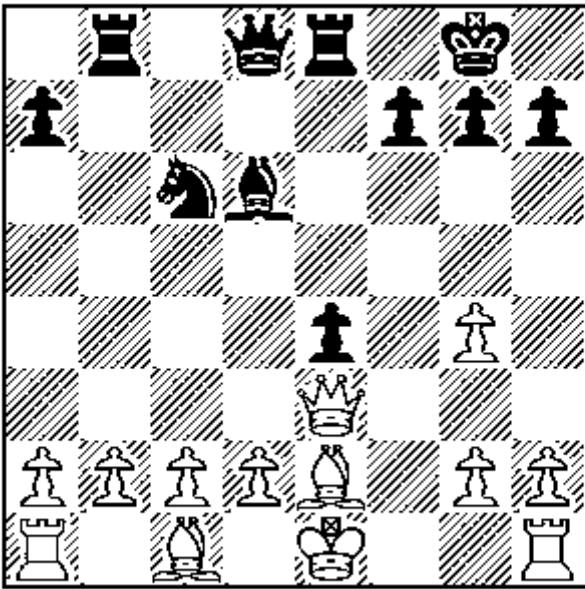
c) 10 h3!? was played by my old team mate Helge Wademark. It's a sensible move that eliminates all ... Bg4 threats. Black should respond with the accurate 10 ... 0-0 11 Nc3 Bc7! which is clever prophylaxis. Black prepares ... e4 breaks should the white king stay in the centre, while against 12 0-0 we go 12 ... h6 13 Nge4 Nd5! followed by ... f5 and the bishop is already tucked into safety on c7.

### 10 ... Bg4!

Now White has to choose where to put his queen. All the available squares have their problems.

### 11 Qe3

White's main try has been 11 Qg3, which looks like a blunder due to 11 ... e4, but he can go 12 Qe3! when tactics save him, temporarily at least. The problem is that White's development is very slow and after 12 ... 0-0 13 Ngxe4 Re8! 14 f3 (14 h3 Bf5 15 f3 Nd5 looks terrible for White) 14 ... Nd5 15 Nxd5 cxd5 16 fxg4 dxe4 17 Be2 Nc6 White has two extra pawns, but his pieces aren't playing.



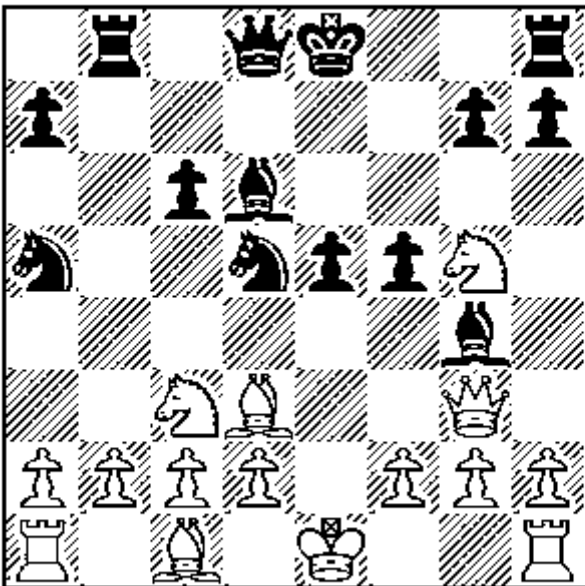
All of Black's pieces are active and, frankly, White should count himself lucky if he survives the next 10 moves.

**11 ... Nd5 12 Qg3!?**

A very nice idea. The g5-knight can be taken, but doing so would put Black's queen in an awkward pin. Unfortunately, these ideas rarely work out well for the side offering the bait.

12 Nxd5 cxd5 is obviously not a solution, though, as Black's compensation is overwhelming.

**12 ... f5!**

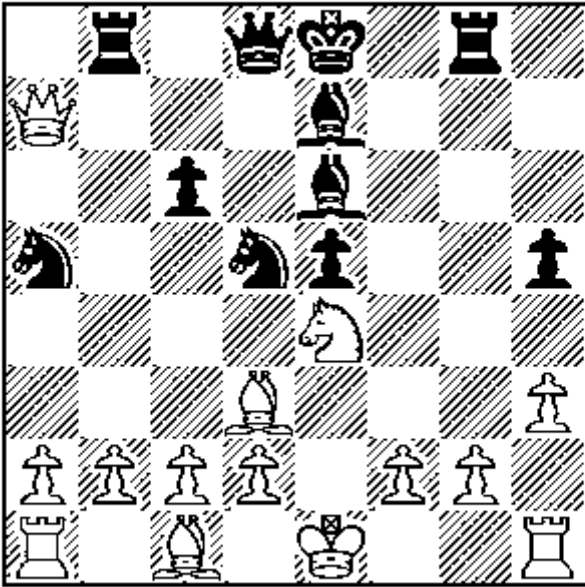


A move any Two Knights player should enjoy. Now the g5-knight really is threatened, as well as ... e4.

**13 Ne6?!**

Under heavy pressure, White commits an understandable mistake.

White's best try is 13 Nge4! which hasn't yet been played in practice. 13 ... fxe4 14 Nxe4 might look like a desperate piece sacrifice, but White will win the g7-pawn, with some compensation. It does look like Black can get a sizeable advantage here as well, but the game is far from over: for instance, 14 ... h5! 15 h3 Be6 16 Qxg7 Rg8 and now 17 Qxa7? fails to 17 ... Be7!.



Surprisingly the white queen is completely cut off. Here White ought to prefer 17 Nxd6+ Qxd6 18 Qxa7, but after 18 ... Nb7 Black's pieces start coming alive and the extra piece will soon be felt.

**13 ... Qd7 14 Nxf7+ Qxf7 15 Bxf5**

This is the tactical idea White was relying on, but he's not going to get his piece back. However, 15 h3 can be met with 15 ... Qe7! when the threat of ... e4 is quite serious.

**15 ... Rg8! 16 Ne4 Be7**

Maybe Black should have preferred 16 ... Nb7! when his advantage is clear.

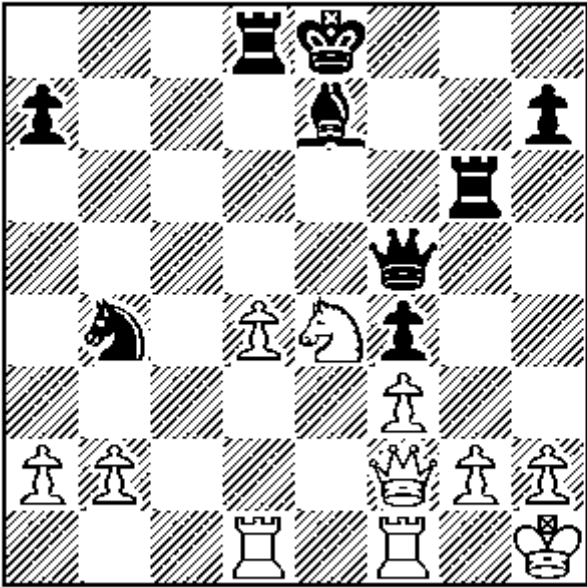
**17 Bxf4 Qxf4 18 f3!**

This idea provides White with some counterplay. Black shouldn't exchange queens as then the h7-pawn would be extremely weak and Black's extra piece should really make itself felt in the middlegame.

**18 ... Qe6! 19 Qf2 c5 20 d3 Nc6 21 0-0 Rg6 22 c3 Qf5 23 Kh1 Nf4 24 Bxf4 exf4**

White is clearly in trouble, especially since Black has some initiative in the centre and on the kingside.

**25 Rad1 Rd8 26 d4 cxd4 27 cxd4 Nb4!**



The black knight would be splendidly placed on d5, where it looks towards e3. This can't be allowed by White, who tries to complicate matters.

**28 d5! Nxd5 29 Qxa7 Kf8 30 Rf2 Rc8 31 Qa5 Ne3 32 Qxf5+ Nxf5**

We have reached a complex endgame where White has three pawns for the piece, but Black is still the one with all the chances. White's pawns on the kingside are severely restricted and the pawns on the queenside are far from dangerous yet.

**33 a3 Bd8!**

Redirecting the bishop to a dangerous diagonal.

**34 b4 Bb6 35 Ra2 Rc4 36 Nd2??**

A terrible blunder. Because we're close to move 40, it's very possible that White was in bad time trouble.

**36 ... Ng3+! 0-1**

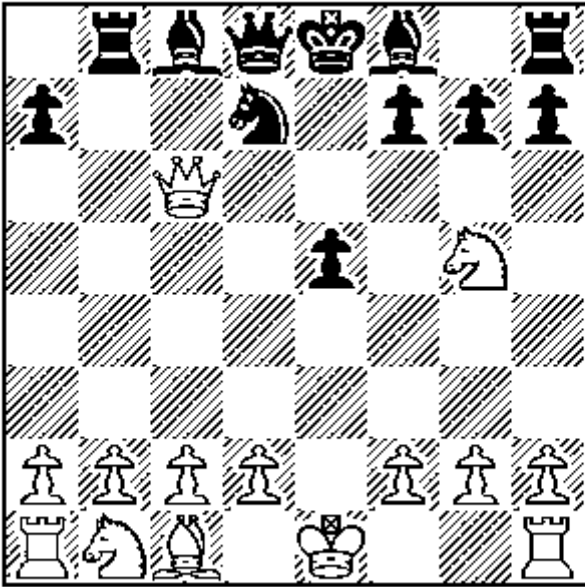
A neat finish.

Game 19

**K.Pagel-V.Varjus**

Correspondence 1977

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 Ng5 d5 5 exd5 Na5 6 Bb5+ c6 7 dxc6 bxc6 8 Qf3 Rb8 9 Bxc6+ Nxc6 10 Qxc6+ Nd7**



The key position for this line. Black has sacrificed two pawns, but in return he has very free development and lots of open lines for his bishops and rooks. First things first, what is White going to do about his knight on g5?

Note that 10 ... Bd7?! isn't very good because of 11 Qc4! when Black has to defend f7 and this can only be done in an awkward fashion.

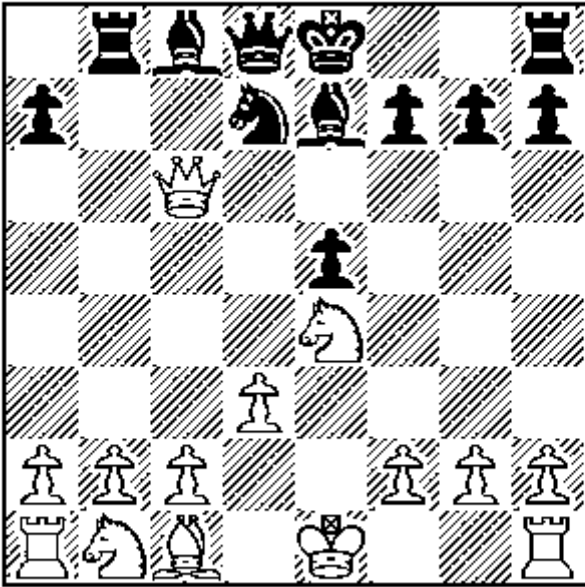
### 11 Nf3

This position was tried extensively in the correspondence world back in 2007. Not surprisingly, White scored miserably and I think the statistics would be even worse for White in over-the-board games.

Historically, 11 d3 has been the main move, but it scores terribly too after 11 ... Be7! when the knight has to move anyway:

a) 12 Nf3 is similar to the main line, but White argues that Black's bishop could have been better placed on c5. While that might be true, Black still has excellent, rapid development after 12 ... 0-0 13 Qe4 (surprisingly 13 0-0 loses to 13 ... Nc5! when the queen on c6 is trapped in the middle of the board; beautiful chess) 13 ... f5 14 Qe2 e4! when 15 dxe4 fxe4 16 Qxe4? loses to 16 ... Bb4+! with a crushing attack.

b) 12 Ne4 allows Black to utilize one of the beautiful ideas behind 8 ... Rb8.



After 12 ... Rb6! 13 Qa4 f5 14 Ng3 0-0 Black's initiative is very dangerous. The rook on b6 will play a key role in the upcoming attack.

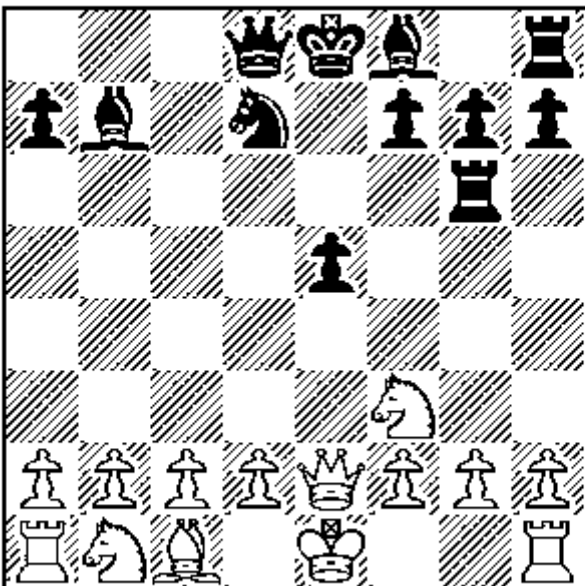
**11 ... Rb6!**

A common idea. The rook is activated along the sixth rank and Black gains more time to develop his initiative.

**12 Qe4**

12 Qa4 only encourages us to sacrifice more pawns. If we've already sacrificed two pawns, a third one won't matter: 12 ... Rb4! 13 Qxa7 Bc5 14 Qa8 0-0 and I'd like to see anyone withstand Black's attack. Even the materialistic engines think that White is fighting for his life.

**12 ... Bb7 13 Qe2 Rg6!**



The rook shifts to the kingside where chances of a successful attack are strong. White is now more or less forced to give up the g2-pawn.

**14 0-0??**

Except that White fails to see why.

Instead, 14 Nc3 Rxc2 (14... Bb4!?, as in I.Mathe-I.Taras, correspondence 2007, is viable too) 15 Nxe5 (15 d3 Be7 16 Be3 0-0 17 0-0-0 Qa8! is a very nice battery along the h1-a8

diagonal; Black is at least slightly better) 15 ... Nxe5 16 Qxe5+ Be7 17 Qb5+ Qd7 appears to be the best that White can do in this variation, but here Black is not the one fighting for equality.

Likewise, 14 d3 Rxc2 15 Be3 Qa5+ 16 Nbd2 Rg6 leaves Black with some initiative for the pawn.

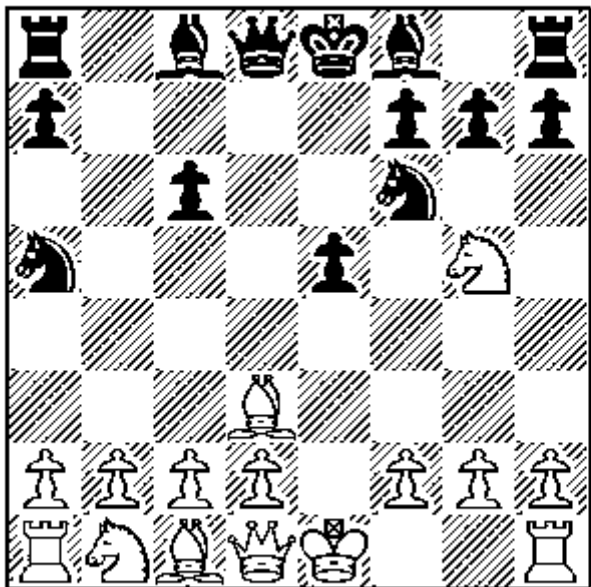
**14 ... Rxc2+!! 15 Kxc2 Qg5+ 16 Kh3 Qf5+ 17 Kg3 Qf4+ 0-1**

Game 20

**A.Vovk-S.Halkias**

Metz 2014

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 Ng5 d5 5 exd5 Na5 6 Bb5+ c6 7 dxc6 bxc6 8 Bd3!**



A few years ago, when I first learnt about this move, I didn't take it very seriously. After a while, I realized that it's not that bad, and it was only when the work of this book began that I realized how difficult Black's position can become. But how can that be? After all, the bishop appears to do nothing but harm White's own development.

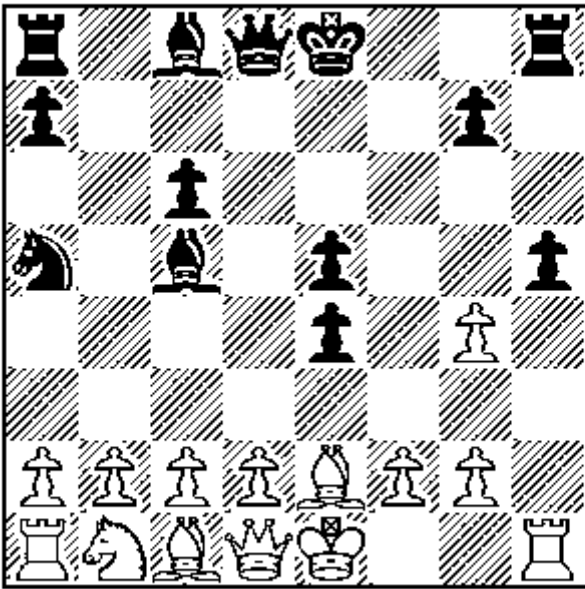
However, Black's initiative cannot really develop as quickly as against White's other variations. White can put his knight on both e4 and f3 without getting pushed away immediately, and the spare time White gains from this can be used for his own development.

**8 ... Nd5!**

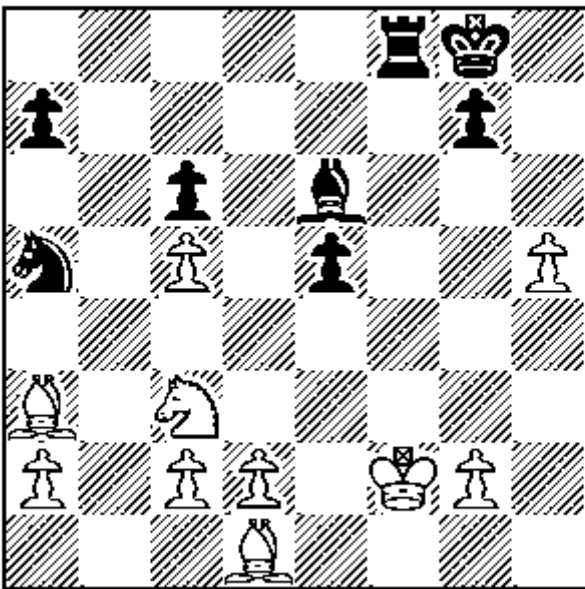
Now White's knight is forced to make a decision, and meanwhile Black prepares both ... f5 and ... Nf4. Black also has:

a) Ivan Sokolov has tried 8 ... h6 9 Ne4 Nd5 twice, but never with good results. White seems to hold some advantage here.

b) I used to think 8 ... Ng4!? was the solution, because I found the convincing game D.Stellwagen-E.L'Ami, Maastricht 2008. When it turned out that Bologan recommended this in his book, I checked it closer and realized that Black has some serious problems to solve after 9 Ne4 (9 Nh3!? is interesting as well) 9 ... f5 10 Be2! h5! 11 h3 fxe4 12 hxg4 Bc5.



Here 13 b4! (a nice idea; 13 Nc3 is another problem, because after 13 ... Qd4 14 0-0 0-0 15 Qe1 hxg4 16 d3 exd3 17 Bxd3 Rxf2 18 Qxf2 Qxf2+ 19 Rxf2 g3 20 Ne4 gxf2+ 21 Kf1 we reach an endgame where Black has very few winning chances) 13 ... Qd4! (White is better after 13 ... Bxb4 14 Nc3 too) 14 bxc5 0-0 15 0-0 Qxa1 16 Nc3 e3! is the idea that Black has relied on, but these extremely complicated variations have their problems too. Now 17 gxh5 exf2+ 18 Rxf2 Rxf2 19 Kxf2 Be6 20 Ba3 Qxd1 21 Bxd1 Rf8+ reaches a key position for the entire 8 ... Ng4 variation.



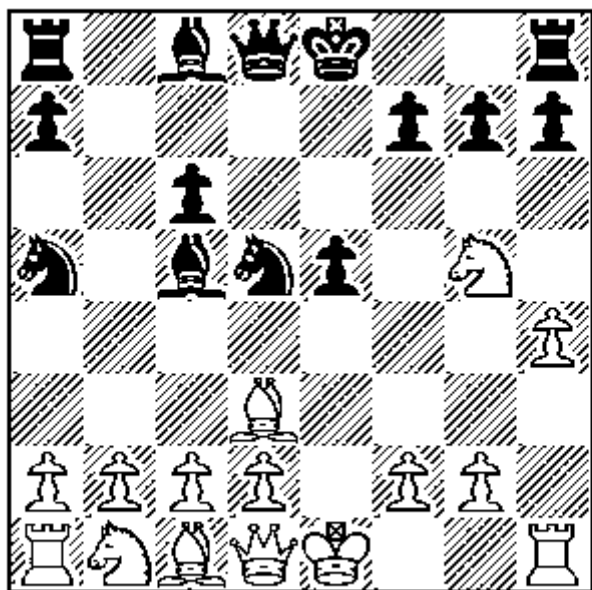
Objectively, Black should perhaps equalize gradually, but I think it's clear that Black is not the one enjoying himself.

### 9 h4!?

A strange resource. White doesn't want to let his g5-knight be kicked without getting anything in return (like Black weakening the light squares with ... h6). Bologan mentioned that this move was the reason that he didn't want to recommend 8 ... Nd5, but that sounds strange to me. I think 9 Nf3 is much more difficult to face, as we'll see in the next game, although 9 h4 certainly shouldn't be underestimated. Alexandra Kosteniuk has played this move twice, albeit not successfully.

Another move is 9 Ne4, but when the knight has already moved away from f6, Black just goes 9 ... f5! when White has to lose further time with his knight: 10 Ng3 (10 Nec3 Bd6 11 Nxd5 cxd5 12 Bb5+ Bd7 13 Bxd7+ Qxd7 gives Black excellent compensation with his strong pawn centre) 10 ... g6! 11 0-0 Bg7 12 Re1 0-0 13 Bf1 c5 and once again, Black's activity and space advantage is definitely sufficient compensation for a mere pawn. White has barely developed a piece.

**9 ... Bc5!**



Why not? The bishop is placed actively and White has to find some concrete ideas to challenge Black's concept. Black should be fine after 9 ... Nf4 10 Bf1 h6 too, but I like the creative positions that arise in the main game.

**10 Qf3!**

Creating a very subtle threat. White also applies more pressure on the light squares.

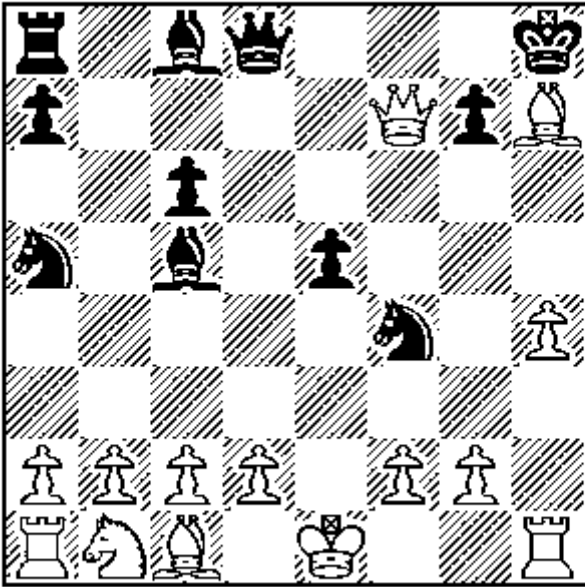
**10 ... f5!**

Normal moves like 10 ... Qe7 don't really do the trick because of 11 Nc3 h6 12 Nge4 Bd4 13 Ng3! when White has stabilized himself on the light squares.

**11 Bxf5**

11 Nc3 0-0 12 Nxd5 Qxd5! is pleasant for Black. Indeed, his pawn centre causes some issues for White.

**11 ... 0-0! 12 Bxh7+ Kh8 13 Nf7+ Rxf7 14 Qxf7 Nf4!**



A wonderful idea. The knight on f4 is extremely strong and to survive the coming attack, White has to trade queens.

**15 Qg8+!**

Best, as 15 Be4? Be6! traps the white queen, while 15 Bf5? Bxf5 16 Qxf5 Qd5! lands White in big trouble in any case; g2 is loose and the coming ... Rf8 should spell the end.

**15 ... Qxg8 16 Bxg8 Kxg8**

This is the end of a complicated tactical sequence. Materially speaking, White has a rook and three pawns for two pieces, which should be more than enough. However, in this case, Black can't complain because he has the bishop-pair, active pieces and open lines, while White hasn't even a single piece developed.

**17 g3**

White might do better without weakening the light squares, but 17 Rh2!? can be met with 17 ... Ne6! 18 Nc3 (after 18 c3 we can just return with 18 ... Nf4! when there's a wonderful square beckoning on d3) 18 ... Nd4 19 Kd1 Bf5 20 d3 and now the terrific idea 20 ... e4! which opens up the position.

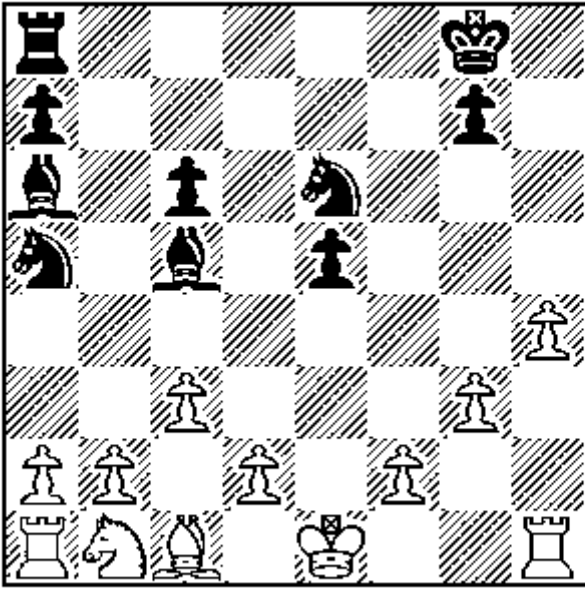
Instead, 17 d3!? returns the g2-pawn for the sake of development, but after 17 ... Nxe2+ 18 Kf1 Nf4 White only has two extra pawns, while Black still has the bishop-pair and a strong initiative.

**17 ... Ne6!**

The threat of ... Nd4 is very strong and there's only one solution.

Another possibility is 17 ... Nh3 18 Rf1 Ba6 and now some wild complications arise after 19 d3 e4.

**18 c3! Ba6!!**



A wonderful, creative idea by Sulskis. I can't rule out that this was all home preparation, but that's some preparation if so.

The calmer continuation is 18 ... Bb6 19 b4 Nc4 20 d3 Nd6 when Black should be fine as well.

**19 b4 Rf8!**

Black's pieces coordinate wonderfully.

**20 Rh2**

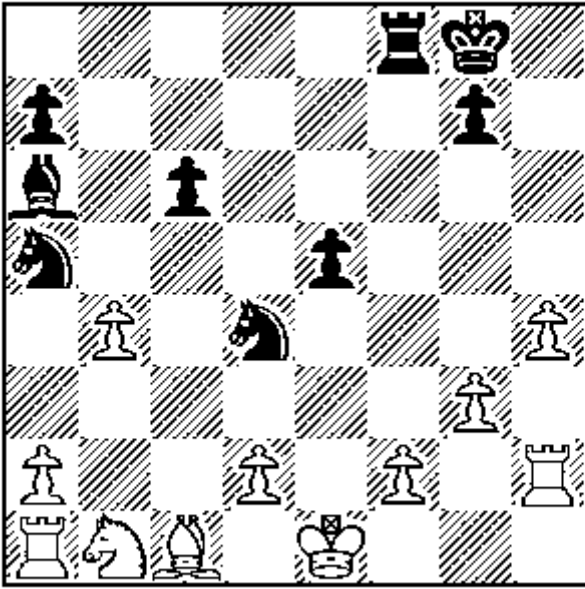
Critical is, of course, 20 bxc5 Nxc5, but then White has to defend himself against ... Nd3, which isn't very easy: for example, 21 Rg1 (if 21 Ba3 Nd3+) 21 ... Nd3+ 22 Kd1 Nxf2+ 23 Ke1 and now 23 ... Nh3 24 Rh1 c5! with an ongoing attack.

Likewise, 20 f3 Rxf3 21 bxa5 Bd3! followed by ... Bf2 and ... Bxg3 looks very dangerous for White.

**20 ... Bxb4!?**

The wild stuff just keeps coming. There was nothing wrong with 20 ... Nb7 21 bxc5 Nbxc5 either. After 22 d4 Nd3+ 23 Kd2 Nxf2 24 dxe5 Rd8+ 25 Ke1 Nd3+ 26 Kd1 Nf2+ the game seems to end in a draw, although there are chances for both players to deviate.

**21 cxb4 Nd4!**



**22 bxa5!?**

A very practical solution. White grabs material and walks down a more forcing path.

After 22 Rh1 we can see the amazing 22 ... Nab3! 23 axb3 Nc2+ 24 Kd1 Nxa1 when the a1-knight returns via b3 to the game. However, 25 Bb2 Nxb3 26 Kc2 Nd4+ 27 Bxd4 exd4 28 f4 leads to an endgame where Black is probably the one under slight pressure. As such, it is possible that 20 ... Nb7 is more accurate.

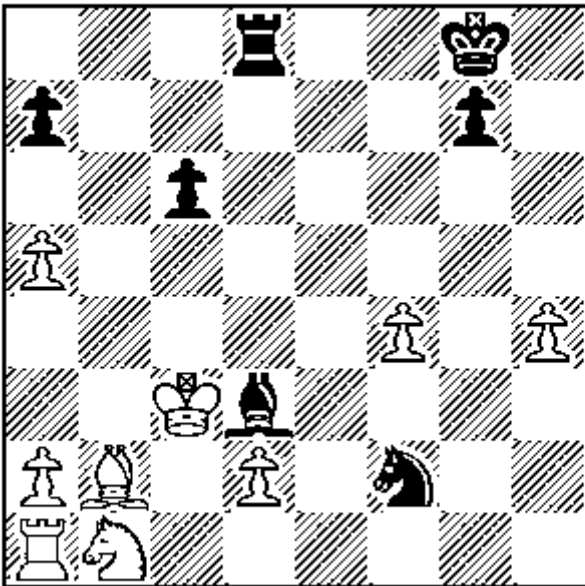
**22 ... Nf3+ 23 Kd1 Nxb2 24 Bb2**

Maybe White should have gone 24 Ba3, forcing a rook to f2 instead of a knight. After 24 ... Rxf2 25 Bc5! Rf7 26 Kc2 Rd7 the game should be about equal.

**24 ... Ng4! 25 f4?**

After defending well against some amazing ideas, White starts to trip up. He should have run with his king towards the kingside immediately: 25 Kc2 Rxf2 26 Kb3 Rf3+ 27 Nc3 Rxc3 28 Re1 and White should be able to draw, although the position remains complicated.

**25 ... exf4 26 gxf4 Nf2+ 27 Kc2 Bd3+ 28 Kc3 Rd8!**



There's an amazing harmony to Black's attack, even if there are only a few pieces left

participating in it.

### 29 Ba3?

The final and decisive mistake.

White could have tried 29 Kb4! with the idea of 29 ... Ne4 30 Be5! when he saves himself. Instead, 29 ... Rb8+ 30 Kc3 Bf5 31 Na3 Ne4+ 32 Kc2 Nc5+ 33 d3! Nxd3 leaves Black much better, but White can fight on.

### 29 ... Nd1+ 30 Kb3

30 Kb4 Bxb1 wins comfortably.

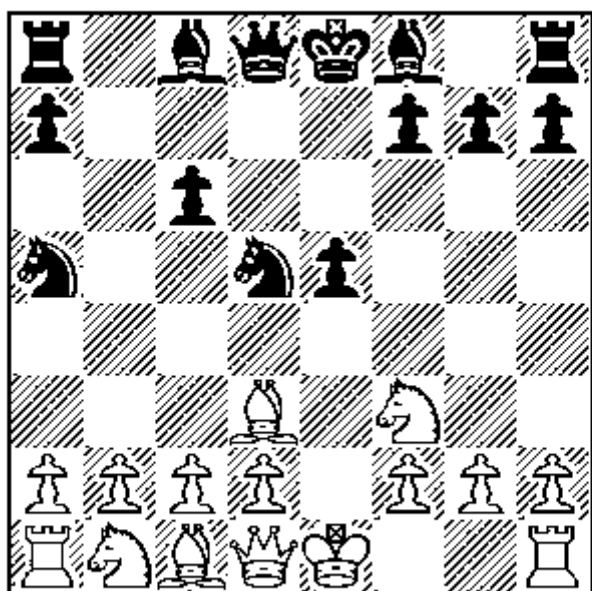
### 30 ... Rb8+ 31 Bb4 c5 0-1

Game 21

**I.Popov-M.Ragger**

Tromsø World Cup 2013

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 Ng5 d5 5 exd5 Na5 6 Bb5+ c6 7 dxc6 bxc6 8 Bd3 Nd5 9 Nf3



This is the most critical continuation in my view. The knight isn't bothered by ... e4 breaks for now. The downside is White's delayed development, but if White is allowed to play 0-0, Re1 and Nc3, he will slowly be able to consolidate his extra pawn.

### 9 ... Bd6!

The best move order. Black simply develops his bishop, prepares to castle and defends the e5-pawn.

Another big line is 9 ... Nf4 which could transpose to our main game after 10 0-0 Bd6. However, White can play the strong 10 Bf1! when it turns out that maybe the knight on f4 isn't that well placed after all.

### 10 0-0

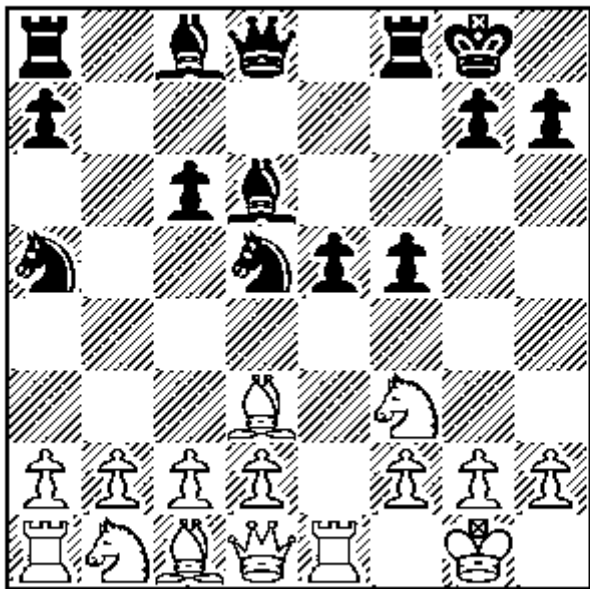
White can't really delay castling with 10 Nc3 0-0, because 11 Be2 is just met with 11 ... f5 with a strong initiative. It's very common in this variation that Black's compensation lies in his strong pawn centre, with the question being whether White can undermine it or not.

### 10 ... Nf4!

Now that Bf1 is no longer a resource to be bothered by, Black jumps into f4, threatening to

capture on d3 to destroy White's pawn structure and obtain the bishop-pair.

My first idea was to recommend 10 ... 0-0 11 Re1 f5!?, which is a stunning resource I found mentioned in an excellent opening article by GM Vadim Zviaginsev.

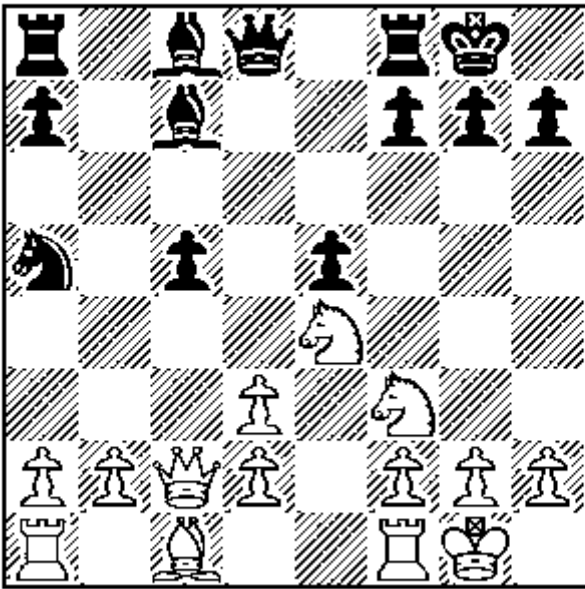


He considers this variation to be dangerous for White and with good practical chances for Black, which I totally agree with. The reason I didn't want to recommend this variation is purely theoretical, because I can't find a completely convincing route to equality if White plays optimal chess: 12 Nxe5 Qf6 13 Nf3 g5! (Black's idea is to blow White away on the kingside) 14 g3 g4 (it might look more natural to blow the f-file open with 14 ... f4, but if White finds 15 Nc3! fxe3 16 hxe3 Nxc3 17 dxc3 Bg4 18 Bxg5 Qxf3 19 Qxf3 Bxf3 20 Re6 then he has the superior harmony and safer king; it's difficult to make Black's extra piece felt, even if White's pawns aren't dangerous yet) 15 Nh4 f4 16 Kh1 fxe3 17 fxe3 Nf4!? and now my suggested improvement is 18 Nc3! (Zviaginsev only looks at 18 Rf1) 18 ... Nxd3 19 cxd3 c5. Here White has a choice of variations to make Black's life a living hell if White is well enough prepared: 20 d4 Qxd4 21 d3 c4 22 Be3 or 20 Ne4 Qd4 21 b4!?

### 11 Re1

The most direct move, and the most popular one.

Another popular option is to begin with 11 Nc3. Due to simplicity I recommend 11 ... Nxd3 12 cxd3 0-0 when White can transpose to our main game with 13 Re1. With this move order White gets the extra option of playing 13 Ne4!? when Black has to play accurately: 13 ... Bc7! (very accurate as now d3 is under attack; 13 ... c5 14 b3 followed by Ba3 is uncomfortable for Black whose structure is as weak as White's) 14 Qc2 c5!.



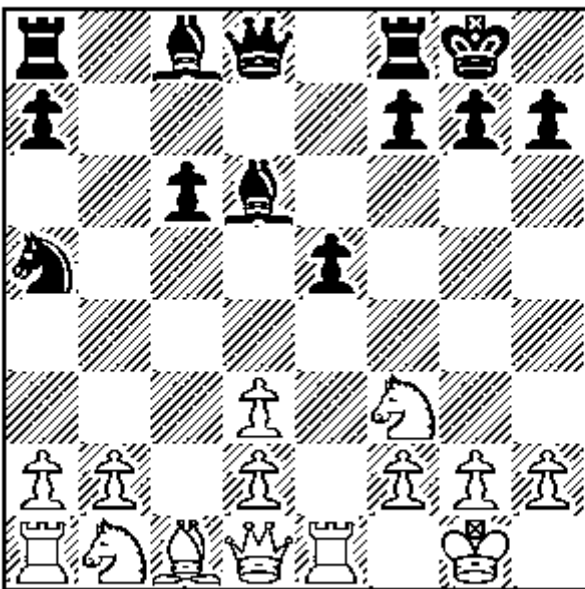
A wonderful strategical idea. It turns out that the pawn on c6 is more of a liability than a strength, so Black sacrifices the pawn for more activity and harmony (14 ... Ba6 would be met by 15 Nc5 when White has a solid blockade):

a) 15 Qxc5 Ba6 16 Re1 Bxd3 17 b3 when Black has ‘only’ sacrificed a pawn. His strong bishop-pair and activity provide sufficient compensation. This was the top correspondence game D.Olofsson-H.Repp, correspondence 2011, which ended in a draw.

b) 15 b3 prepares Ba3 and slowly picking up the c5-pawn. However, 15 ... Bg4 followed by ... Bxf3 gives Black great compensation with a potential attack on the kingside.

c) 15 Nxc5 Bg4 is similar. White can’t prevent an ugly kingside structure from arising.

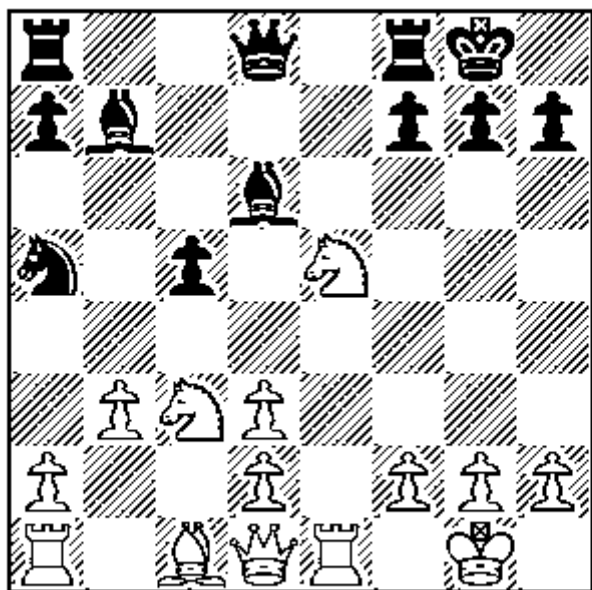
**11 ... Nxd3 12 cxd3 0-0**



### 13 Nc3

Critical is, of course, 13 Nxe5 when Black is down two pawns. However, White’s central pawn structure isn’t impressive and Black has much the better development and a nice bishop-pair: 13 ... c5! (the most popular continuation is 13 ... Re8 14 d4 c5, but I’m not too keen on playing Black’s position after 15 d3 cxd4 16 Nf3 Rxe1+ 17 Qxe1 Bf5 18 Nxd4 Bxd3, as in P.Negi-G.Sargissian, Copenhagen 2009; White has the fun side of a probable draw) 14 Nc3 (if

White now goes 14 d4 cxd4 15 d3, we don't have to agree to a trade of heavy pieces along the e-file; instead, we can go 15 ... Qc7 with decent compensation) 14 ... Bb7 15 b3.



This was all played in A.Smith-F.Urkedal, Norwegian Championship, Oslo 2011, and here Black had 15 ... Re8 16 Nc4 Rxe1+ 17 Qxe1 Nxc4 18 dxc4 Bxh2+! 19 Kxh2 Qh4+ 20 Kg1 Bxg2 21 Kxg2 Qg4+ with perpetual check.

Instead, 13 b3 is a normal idea, but Black has enough time to set-up an effective bind with 13 ... c5 14 Ba3 f6 (or 14 ... Nc6!? 15 Nc3 Bg4 16 h3 Bh5 when Black seems to have enough counterplay with ... f5 and ... Nd4) 15 Nc3 Ba6 16 Ne4 Bxd3 17 Nxc5 Bxc5 18 Bxc5 Rf7. Black's central grip seems to give him sufficient compensation.

### 13 ... Re8

Keep in mind that this position can arise from an 11 Nc3 move order as well. Black has defended e5 and will try to put pressure on White's weakness on d3, while White will try to develop and establish some pressure against Black's pawns.

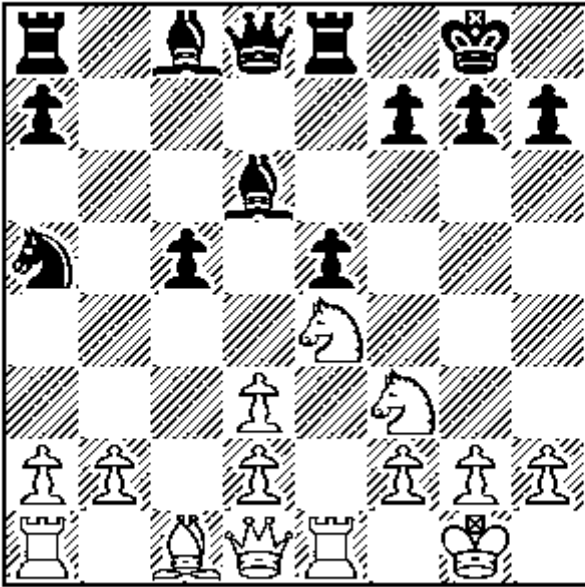
### 14 Ne4

Again, there are alternatives:

a) 14 b3 looks natural, but 14 ... Ba6! 15 d4 exd4 16 Rxe8+ Qxe8 17 Nxd4 c5 18 Nf5 Bf8 gives Black sufficient compensation for his pawn. He has an excellent bishop-pair, development and open lines, so might well develop an initiative.

b) Nigel Short tried 14 h3 in a blitz game against none other than Garry Kasparov in 2011. It didn't work out very well though. After 14 ... c5 15 b3 Ba6 16 Ba3 Bxd3 Kasparov was already for preference and went on to win.

### 14 ... c5!



Perhaps a slight surprise. The pawn on c5 is obviously a strategic target, but at the same time Black activates his forces and gives his a5-knight an important square on c6.

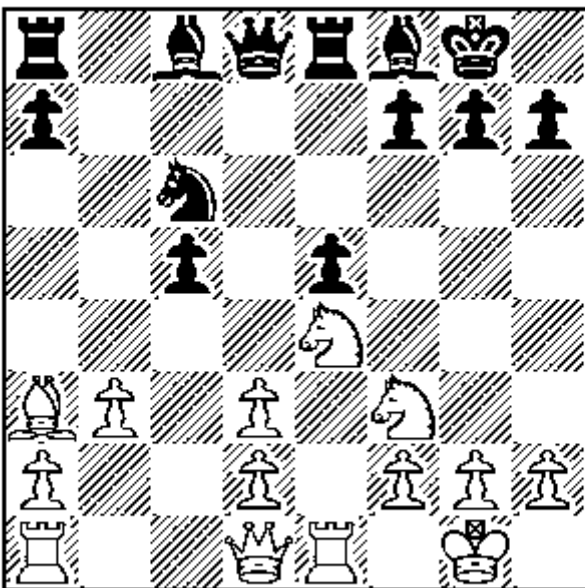
**15 b3**

15 Nfg5!?! is a surprising suggestion by the engine that hasn't been tried yet. Following 15 ... h6 16 Nxf7! Kxf7 17 Qh5+ (this is White's grand idea, namely that the king can't return to g8 because White would take on d6 when e8 is unprotected; instead, White might be tempted into playing 17 Qf3+? Kg8 18 Nxd6 Qxd6 19 Qxa8, but after 19 ... Nc6! his queen is stuck in the corner) 17 ... Kf8 18 Re3 Bb7 19 Rf3+ Kg8 20 Nf6+ Kf8 21 Ne4+ Kg8 the game seems to end in a draw.

**15 ... Nc6**

The knight is redirected to b4 where it puts heavy pressure on d3 and defends c5 indirectly.

**16 Ba3 Bf8!**



Very accurate. Black can't immediately play 16 ... Nb4 because of 17 Bxb4 cxb4 18 d4! when White breaks free and his material advantage begins to tell. Black must maximize his pressure along the d-file first.

**17 Bxc5?!**

A miscalculation by the Russian GM. Instead:

a) 17 d4 Nxd4 18 Nxd4 cxd4 19 Bxf8 Rxf8 looks about equal.

b) The most challenging move is 17 Rc1! Nb4 18 Bxb4 cxb4 19 Ng3!, as played by Tatev Abrahamyan in 2014. Here I think Black should play the simple 19 ... Qxd3 20 Nxe5 Qd5 21 d4 Bb7 when the pair of bishops provides sufficient compensation. White has very few chances of realizing the extra pawn and ... a5-a4 is on the cards. Moreover, I certainly think that Black can fight for the full point here.

**17 ... f5! 18 Neg5?**

18 Bxf8? loses material after 18 ... fxe4 when both f8 and f3 are under attack, but White could have maintained reasonable chances with 19 Bxg7!, when White has some chances of counterplay against Black's weaker king.

**18 ... Bxc5 19 Qc2 Qd5 20 Rac1**

This is probably what White was counting on. Black can't defend both pieces on the c-file, but there's a nice tactical trick in the position.

**20 ... Bxf2+! 21 Kxf2 Nb4**

Black wins heavy material. The threats of ... Nxc2 and ... Nxd3 aren't possible to defend against.

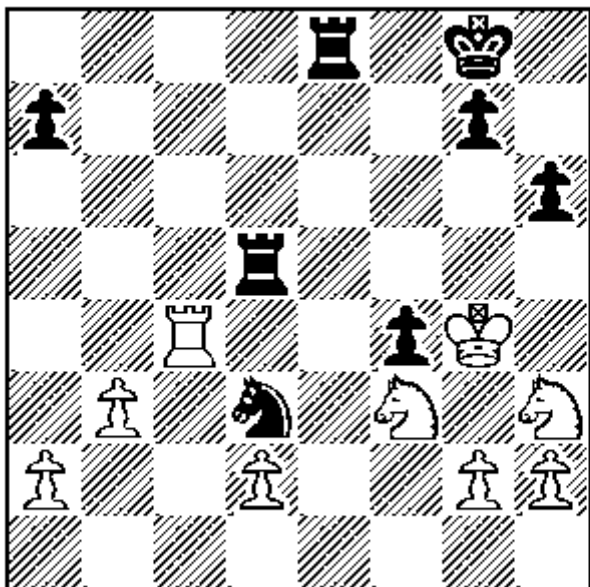
**22 Rxe5!**

The best try.

**22 ... Rxe5 23 Qxc8+ Re8 24 Qc4 Nxd3+ 25 Kg3 f4+**

It was perhaps easier to go 25 ... Qxc4 26 Rxc4 h6 27 Nh3 g5! when Black has everything under control. White's knights can't really co-operate to do anything useful.

**26 Kg4 Rad8 27 Qxd5+ Rxd5 28 Rc4 h6 29 Nh3**



Black has reached a technically winning endgame, in which White fought on for a long time. I could go into detail with this interesting endgame, but I don't think it's very relevant to the theme of this book, so I'll leave the rest of the game unannotated in case the reader would like to see how the game concluded.

**29 ... Re2 30 Nxf4 Nxf4 31 Kxf4 Rxc2 32 Rc7 Rd8 33 Rxa7 Rf8+ 34 Ke3 Re8+ 35 Kd3 Rf2 36 Nd4 Rxb2 37 a4 Rd8 38 Kc3 Rc8+ 39 Kb4 Rxd2 40 Nf5 Rb8+ 41 Kc3 Rg2 42 b4 Rg5 43 Ne7+ Kh7 44 b5 h5 45 Nc6 Rf8 46 Kb4 Rf4+ 47 Ka5 h4 48 Rd7 h3 49 Rd1 Rgg4 50 Kb6 Rxa4 51 Rh1 Rh4 52 Kc7 Rac4 53 Kd7 Rh6 54 Ne5 Rc5 55 Nf7 Rb6 56 Rxb3+ Kg8 57 Nd8**

**Rd5+ 58 Ke7 Re5+ 59 Kd7 Rxb5 60 Nc6 Rbd5+ 61 Kc7 Re6 62 Rc3 Rf5 63 Kd7 Rff6 64 Ne7+ Kf7 65 Nc8 Re1 66 Nd6+ Kg8 67 Rd3 Ra1 68 Nc8 Raa6 69 Re3 Rf7+ 70 Ke8 Ra8 0-1**

## **Conclusion**

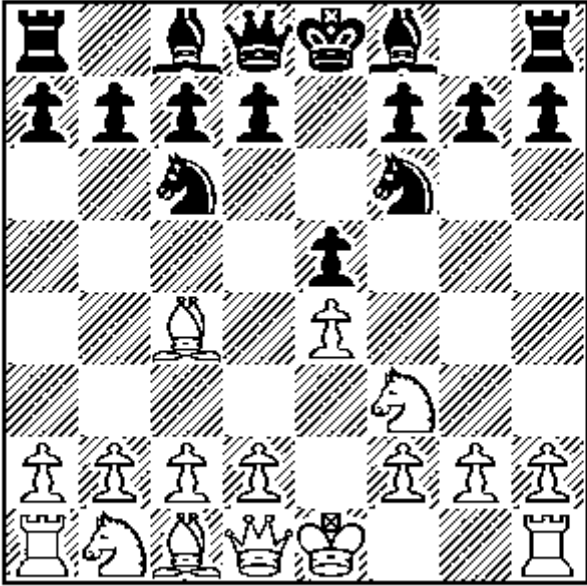
What we have seen in this chapter is a big tactical mess, but in my eyes Black is the one who has the most fun. Morphy's old move 6 d3 has faded away and as my analysis shows, White doesn't have an easy time after either Bronstein's 8 dxe4 or the more sober 8 Qe2. Against 6 Bb5+ I have included some very interesting analysis on 6 ... Bd7, but my main recommendation is clearly 6 ... c6.

Amongst White's alternatives on move 8 in the main line, only 8 Bd3 seems to be theoretically challenging for Black, but this cuts both ways. If White doesn't know his theory, he could quickly find himself in huge trouble. I feel quite confident that my analysis holds up, even though on several occasions we sacrifice more than just one pawn.

# Chapter Three

## The Remaining Two Knights

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6



This chapter covers all the alternatives White could consider after 3 Bc4 Nf6, from strange moves that are difficult to understand, to respectable variations such as the Scotch Gambit. They are played from time to time by strong players, but most importantly they are very popular at club level.

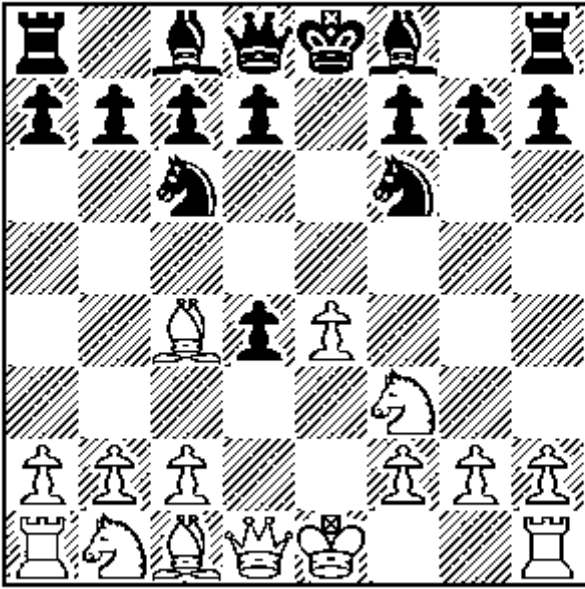
### Theoretical Introduction

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 d4

We start off by covering an old pet move of Jonny Hector, 4 Qe2, which has the idea of breaking with d2-d4 in one go. It's not that bad, but Black gets a good position with sensible play. This is covered in Game 22.

4 0-0?! has been played over 2,000 times in my database, yet it's quite a serious mistake. Black actually gets away with snapping a pawn off with 4 ... Nxe4 5 Re1 d5! when White is in grave trouble. See why in Game 23.

4 ... exd4



## 5 e5

The Scotch Gambit, which is quite respectable and has been played by very strong players, although nowadays, it's mostly popular at club level.

5 0-0 is probably the move I face most often, but I'm not sure if the variation has an official name. We counter with 5 ... Nxe4 6 Re1 d5 7 Bxd5 Qxd5 8 Nc3 Qh5! and I have already had the opportunity to play my new idea 9 Nxe4 Be6 10 Bg5 Bd6 11 Nxd6+ cxd6 12 Bf4 Qd5 13 c3 Qf5! several times with great results. This is covered in Game 24.

We also have the slightly tricky 5 Ng5 covered in Game 25.

Against the Scotch Gambit, my recommendation is the rare but promising:

## 5 ... Ng4!?

Read why in the section on the Scotch Gambit, below, where I also discuss why I chose this unusual move instead of the more well-known 5 ... d5.

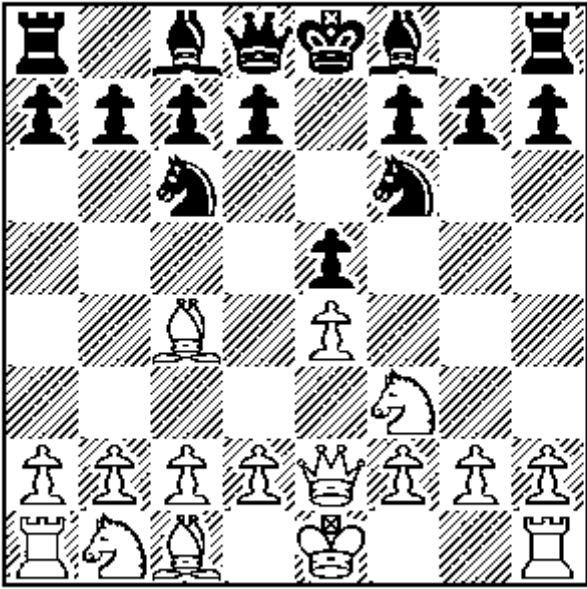
## Game 22

**U.Bierbach-M.Knezevic**

Moscow 1991

## 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 Qe2!?

This is a pet move of the creative Swedish GM Jonny Hector. It has its points, but theoretically it's not very challenging. If White plays a quick d2-d3, we get a Quiet Two Knight's Italian with the queen committed early to e2 which isn't really challenging. That's why this game is going to cover those lines where White goes d2-d4 in one go.



#### 4 ... Be7

In analogy with our repertoire in the Quiet Two Knights, I want my bishop on e7.

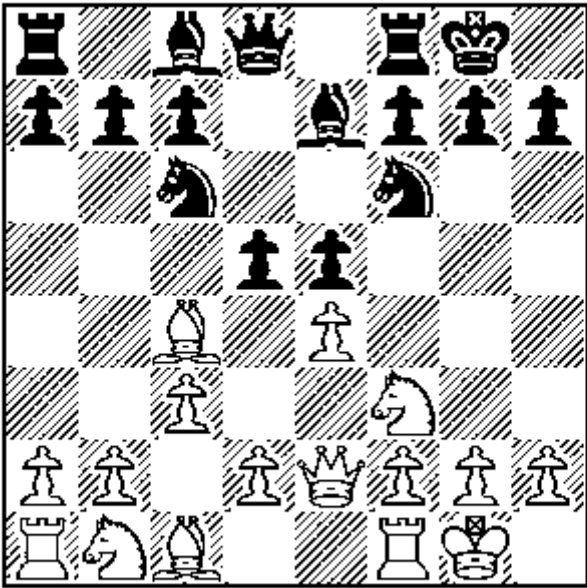
#### 5 0-0

Jonny Hector usually plays 5 d4!? which is tricky, but harmless if Black responds with the accurate 5 ... d5!:

a) The first time Hector met this, he played 6 Bb5 when Black should have countered with 6 ... 0-0! because 7 Bxc6 bxc6 8 Nxe5 c5 provides Black with excellent compensation, with his quick development and central pressure.

b) 6 dxe5 Nxe4 7 0-0 was the later J.Hector-M.Breutigam, Nuremberg 2012, and now Black could have picked up the bishop-pair with the clever 7 ... Na5! 8 Bd3 Nc5.

#### 5 ... 0-0 6 c3 d5!



Similar to when White plays c2-c3 in the Quiet Two Knights, this works well now. Black sacrifices the pawn on e5 for quick development and a potential kingside attack in the spirit of the Marshall Attack.

Black can also go 6 ... d6, but after 7 d4 we have a kind of Worrall Attack from the Ruy Lopez where White looks comfortable.

### 7 exd5 Nxd5 8 d3

A clear sign that 6 ... d5 was correct. Black was able to play ... d5 unpunished and can look forward to a nice middlegame with good chances.

It's not a surprise that 8 Nxe5? doesn't work out well for White, especially with the queen exposed on e2: 8 ... Nf4! 9 Qe4 Nxe5 10 Qxf4 (10 Qxe5 Bd6 is already losing for White) 10 ... Bd6 11 h3 was played in J.Gheng-E.Schunk, German League 2000, and now 11 ... Ng6! 12 Qd4 Nf4 followed by ... Bxh3 leaves White set to fall victim to a miniature.

### 8 ... Bg4

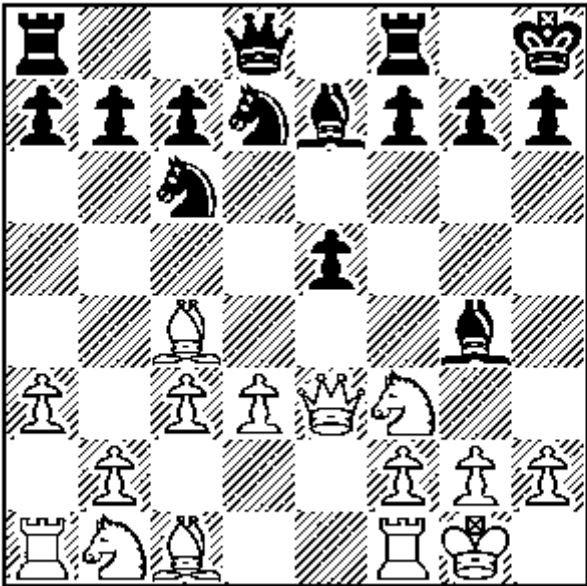
Another reasonable idea is to simply go 8 ... Bf6 followed by ... Bf5, ... Na5 and ... Re8, with central pressure.

### 9 a3

This is obviously not a challenge for Black.

Some players have actually ventured 9 h3 Bh5 10 g4 Bg6 11 Nxe5 Nxe5 12 Qxe5, but after 12 ... Nb6 and ... Bd6 White's kingside looks weakened beyond salvation.

### 9 ... Kh8 10 Qe4 Nf6 11 Qe3 Nd7!?



One of many interesting ideas. Black's last few moves show that he's eager to involve the f-pawn in the attack, and for some reason White decides to provoke it.

### 12 h3 Bh5 13 g4 Bg6 14 b4 Bd6 15 Nbd2 f5

Black has got exactly what he wanted and I'm not really sure what White thought would happen.

### 16 Be6 fxc4 17 hxc4 Qe7 18 Bxd7 Qxd7 19 Nh2 e4! 20 Nxe4 Bxe4 21 dxe4 Bxh2+ 22 Kxh2 Ne5 0-1

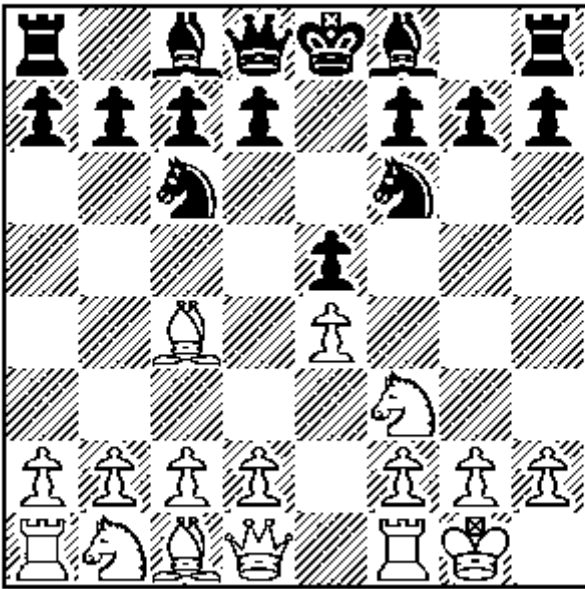
At this point, White had had enough and decided to call it a day. With the white king so weak, I can't blame him.

Game 23

**Y.Jokmin-A.Moman**

Correspondence 2009

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 0-0?!



This popular move looks logical, but in fact it's a mistake. I must admit that at first I thought this move order was but a transposition to Game 24, and it took me quite some time to realize that it is nothing but an inferior move. But how can that be? In the Berlin Ruy Lopez with the bishop on b5, this is the clear main move. The reason is simply connected to the move ... d7-d5 which is now very strong.

#### **4 ... Nxe4!**

We shouldn't treat the game as a Quiet Two Knight's; I'd like to avoid 4 ... Be7 5 d4!.

#### **5 Re1**

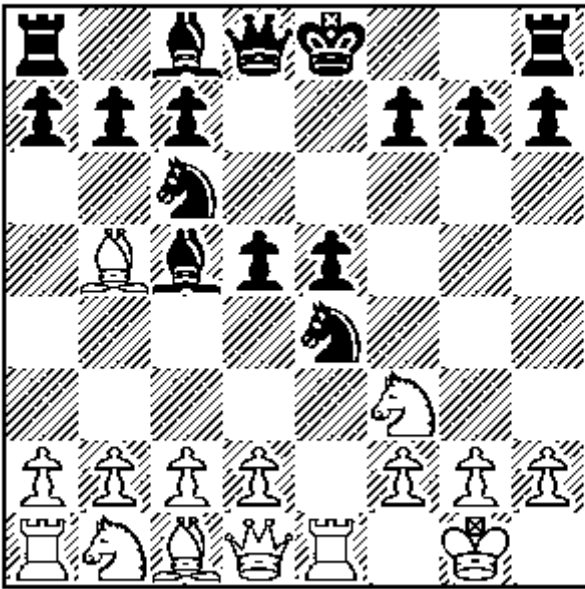
Very popular at club level, but in fact, White is already clearly worse!

a) I think White should play 5 Nc3 which transposes to Game 45.

b) 5 d4 is the attempt to transpose to Game 24, and I have to admit that I've used this inferior move order myself in a few blitz games. However, after 5 ... d5! (this is a rather obvious possibility; 5 ... exd4 would transpose to Game 24, but we can do better than that) 6 Bb5 exd4 7 Nxd4 Bd7 Black is up a clean pawn. White can hope to mix things up with his open e-file and Illescas Cordoba tried 8 Re1 Be7 9 c4! when Black shouldn't be greedy and should play 9 ... 0-0! 10 cxd5 Nxd4 11 Bxd7 Qxd7 12 Rxe4 Nb5. Black has a very comfortable positional advantage. The pawn on d5 is doomed to fall.

c) 5 Qe2 is less popular than 5 Re1, but at least it doesn't weaken the f2-square. Still, after 5 ... d5 6 Bb5 Bd6! (6 ... Bg4 is more popular, but the text move looks better) 7 d3 Nf6 8 Nxe5 0-0! (the key move for Black; once again, he is able to sacrifice a pawn, at least temporarily, and obtain excellent compensation) 9 Bxc6 (9 Nxc6 bxc6 10 Bxc6 Bxh2+! gets the pawn back with strong pressure) 9 ... bxc6 10 Nxc6 Qd7 11 Nd4 c5 12 Nf3 Re8 Black will follow up with ... Bb7 and ... d4, with fantastic compensation. Few players could withstand such an attack.

#### **5 ... d5 6 Bb5 Bc5**



In the 50 games in my database that reached this position, White scored just 11½ points. Indeed, he may very well already be lost.

**7 d4**

7 Re2?! defends f2, but Black crashes through anyway: 7 ... Nxf2! 8 Rxf2 Bxf2+ 9 Kxf2 e4 with a crushing attack.

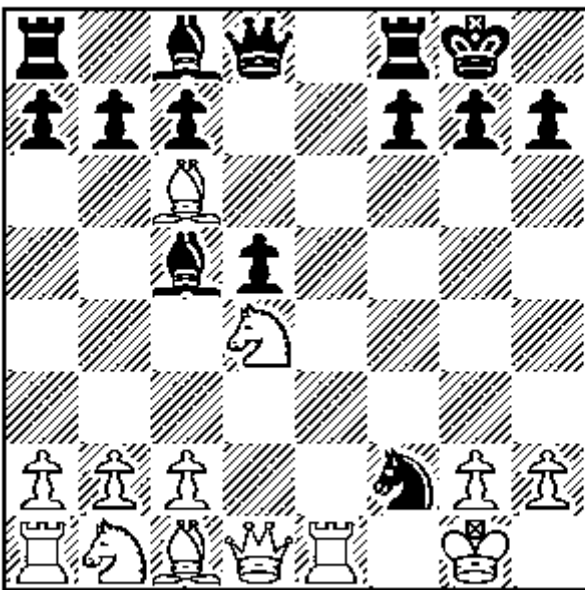
**7 ... exd4 8 Nxd4**

If 8 Nbd2 then 8 ... 0-0! 9 Nxe4 dxe4 10 Rxe4 Qd5 when Black is a clear pawn up.

**8 ... 0-0 9 Bxc6**

M.Kryuk-A.Popov, Raduzhny 2009, varied with 9 Nxc6 Bxf2+ 10 Kh1 Qh4 11 Rxe4 dxe4 12 Ne5 Bg3 13 Qg1 Bxe5 and White resigned. Very clean and convincing indeed.

**9 ... Nxf2!**



This shocking strike ends White's hopes of survival. Most players let this possibility slip and after 9 ... bxc6?! 10 Be3 Black is just a pawn up.

**10 Kxf2**

A correspondence game from back in 1951 went 10 Qd2 Ne4 11 Qd3 Qh4 12 g3 Nxc3 13 Bxd5 Bxd4+ 14 Be3 Nf5 15 Nc3 Nxe3 16 Rxe3 Qg5+ 17 Kh1 Qxe3 0-1, R.Moore-R.Newlander.

**10 ... Qf6+**

White is helpless against all the threats.

**11 Qf3**

11 Ke3 bxc6 followed by ... Re8 should soon lead to mate.

**11 ... Bxd4+ 12 Kf1 bxc6 13 Qxf6 Ba6+ 14 Re2 gxf6 15 Nd2 Rae8 16 c4 dxc4 17 Nf3 Rxe2 18 Kxe2 c3+ 19 Kd1 cxb2 0-1**

Who would have thought that the innocent-looking 4 0-0 could lead to such disaster?

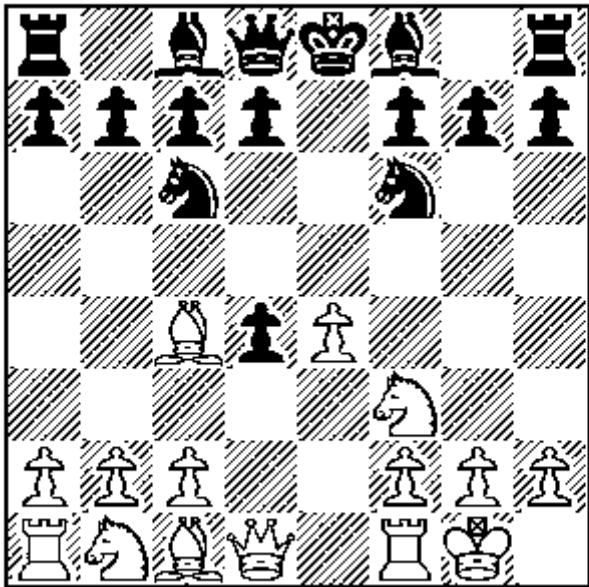
The following game is a very important one, because it covers a variation that's quite popular at club level.

Game 24

**M.Mareckova-J.Jarvenpaa**

Brno 2013

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 d4 exd4 5 0-0!?**



I've tried this variation myself on various occasions, although only in blitz games as White. Black's position can quickly become critical if he doesn't know what he's doing, but if Black is familiar with the nuances, he has every chance of scoring well.

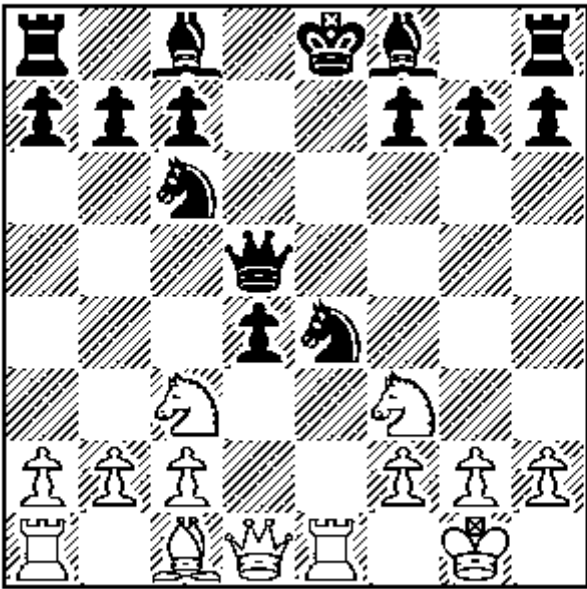
**5 ... Nxe4!**

There are many similar positions where it's extremely dangerous to take such a pawn, but in this case Black isn't really in danger of losing a piece.

**6 Re1 d5 7 Bxd5!**

7 Nc3?! is the Canal Gambit, which GM Pavel Blatny has tried a few times. Not very surprisingly, it's more spectacular than good. A simple response is 7 ... dxc3! (7 ... dxc4 8 Rxe4+ gives White decent chances of equality as both d4 and c4 might drop) 8 Bxd5 Be6 9 Bxe4 Qxd1 10 Rxd1 cxb2 11 Bxb2 f6!, as in P.Blalny-J.Smejkal, Prague 1986. Black is up a pawn and will look forward to consolidating. White is too slow to find any meaningful compensation, as Smejkal showed in the game: 12 Bc3 Bd7! 13 Rab1 0-0-0 and Black had everything protected.

**7 ... Qxd5 8 Nc3**



The tactical point behind White's play. Both the e4-knight and the d4-pawn are pinned, and thus White regains the invested material.

### 8 ... Qh5!?

My favourite square for the queen, but to be fair Black has many options that all assure him of equality:

a) The main line these days seems to be 8 ... Qa5, but after 9 Nxe4 Be6 10 Neg5 0-0-0 11 Nxe6 fxe6 12 Rxe6 Bd6 13 Bg5 Rde8 14 Qe2 Kd7 15 Rxe8 Rxe8 16 Qd3 we reach a position where I don't like the black pawn on d4. Black may very well be equal, but White looks the more comfortable to me.

b) 8 ... Qd8 is another popular variation, but I don't like it because of 9 Rxe4+! Be7 10 Nxd4 f5 and now White has many dangerous tries, like 11 Rf4, 11 Bh6!? or even 11 Rxe7+!? with very unclear positions where Black needs to play accurately.

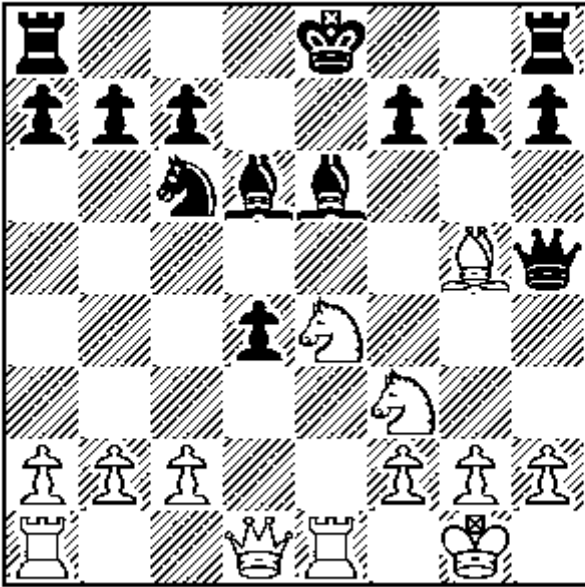
c) That's why I suggest as an improvement, 8 ... Qd7!. After 9 Rxe4+ Be7 10 Nxd4 f5 it turns out that the queen is better placed on d7 than d8. For example, 11 Bh6? doesn't work because after 11 ... fxe4 12 Bxg7 Rf8 13 Qh5+ Rf7 14 Rd1 Black has 14 ... Qg4!. White should probably prefer 9 Nxe4 Be7 10 Bg5 0-0 11 Bxe7 Qxe7 12 Nxd4 Bd7 and in this position Black has a slightly better minor piece (bishop versus knight in an open position), which should give him a very slight advantage, but due to the symmetrical structure it might be difficult to play for a win. Still, Black can be absolutely satisfied with his position.

### 9 Nxe4 Be6 10 Bg5!

White effectively prevents Black from castling long, and sets a nasty trap.

10 Neg5?! looks natural, but after 10 ... 0-0-0 11 Nxe6 fxe6 12 Rxe6 Bd6 Black has a very active game with potential on the kingside and in the centre.

### 10 ... Bd6!



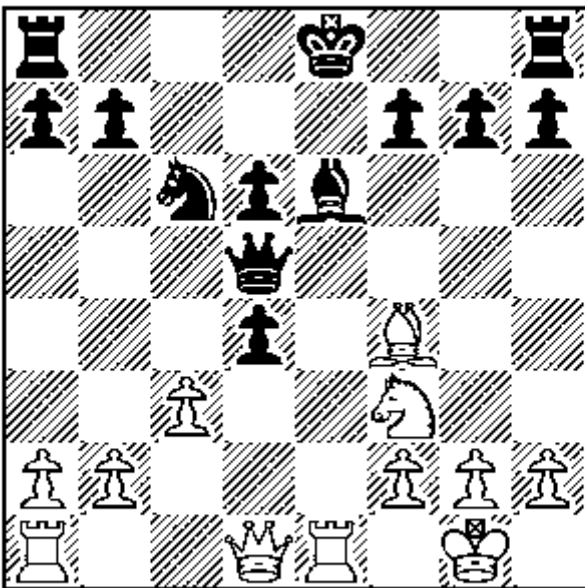
An important move to remember. I first saw this move in 2008, when a good friend of mine pointed out that it was recommended in Nigel Davies's book *Play 1 e4 e5!*.

The most natural move by far is 10 ... h6. However, this runs into the surprising 11 Bf6! when, suddenly, it's not so easy for Black to develop his pieces. After looking at this position a while, I can safely say that this is something to avoid as Black.

**11 Nxd6+**

The nice idea, mentioned by Davies, is meeting 11 Bf6?! with the surprising 11 ... Bxh2+!, a tactical solution to Black's problems. After 12 Nxh2 Qxd1 13 Raxd1 gxf6 14 Nxf6+ Kf8 Black is up a pawn and doesn't experience any problems whatsoever.

**11 ... cxd6 12 Bf4 Qd5 13 c3**



I've had this position on the board many times, and in general I've had good results as Black. I've also faced 13 c4?! Qxc4 14 Bxd6 Qd5 when Black gets to castle and enjoy his extra central pawn.

**13 ... Qf5!**

The best move in my opinion. Black loses a tempo to provoke c2-c3, but as it turns out, this

move might be to Black's advantage should the d-file open quickly. Alternatives are:

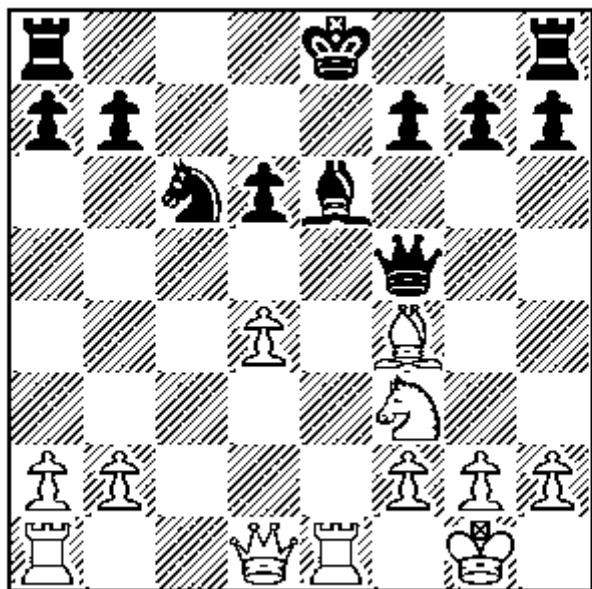
a) The move I've played the most is 13 ... 0-0, after which 14 Nxd4 Nxd4 15 Qxd4 Qxd4 16 cxd4 d5 was seen in J.Hector-N.Grandelius, Lund 2010. This looks like a position where most grandmasters would agree to a draw pretty quickly, but somehow Hector managed to squeeze and squeeze until the young Swedish GM lost his way. Still, the position should just be a draw and I wouldn't have a problem recommending this if it just wasn't so boring.

b) After knowing about this game, and searching for a more entertaining option, I came across the move 13 ... Kd7, recommended by Nigel Davies and played by none other than Jonny Hector himself as Black. The king would be superbly placed in the centre for an endgame and Black wouldn't have to play ... d5, a square he'd much rather use for a piece. I'd love this idea to work, but Black simply looks worse after 14 Ng5 Rad8 15 Ne4 with a dangerous initiative for White.

c) Finally, I discovered 13 ... Rc8!? which is a very tricky move order. Most white players go for 14 Nxd4?! Nxd4 15 Qxd4 Qxd4 16 cxd4, but here we see Black's idea: 16 ... Kd7! and Black has a very comfortable ending with the king in the centre and the d5-square free to use for a bishop or even the king. Unfortunately, if White continues with 14 b3, which I think only has been played in correspondence games so far, Black seems to have nothing better than 14 ... 0-0 15 Nxd4 Nxd4 16 Qxd4 Qxd4 17 cxd4 d5. This gives Black a slightly improved version of the Hector-Grandelius endgame mentioned above, but as it's still extremely difficult to imagine another result than a draw, I'm reluctant to recommend it.

#### 14 cxd4

After 14 Bxd6 0-0-0 15 Bg3 we can go 15 ... dxc3 when White doesn't appear to have enough compensation for the pawn: for example, 16 Qa4 cxb2 17 Rab1 Qa5! 18 Qf4 Rd3 and Black looks slightly better.



#### 14 ... 0-0-0!?

This is the fighting variation. Black keeps the d-pawns on the board, which makes the position slightly unbalanced. The king can walk to a8 where it will be safely placed and more importantly, Black can use the d5-square for his pieces.

Another decent option is 14 ... Qxf4!? 15 d5 0-0, but I didn't want to recommend this as my main recommendation due to 16 dxe6 fxe6 17 Rxe6 Ne5 18 Rxd6 Nxf3+ 19 gxf3 Qxf3 20 Qxf3 Rxf3. Black has a minimal advantage, but let's face it: this should just be a draw.

#### 15 Bg3 h5!?

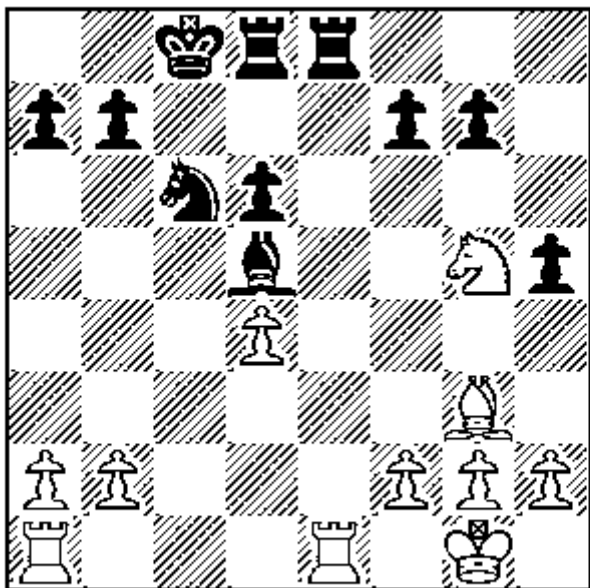
Black displays some early aggression, and it's not so easy for White to cope with. Black can follow up with ... Bd5, ... g5 and ... h4 to begin a dangerous kingside attack.

Black could also just begin with 15 ... Kb8 and 16 ... Ka8 before initiating complications, but as the game shows, the king would be quite useful close to the centre if White decided to trade queens.

### 16 Qd2?!

Definitely not the right idea. The endgames are good for Black. However, it's not so clear what White should do. Probably White should engage in some active play himself with 16 Re3 Bd5 17 b4! when admittedly he has some counterplay, although I still like Black's chances.

### 16 ... Bd5 17 Qg5 Qxg5 18 Nxc5 Rhe8



It might not look like much, but the central structure is hugely favourable for Black and Jarvenpaa shows why throughout the remainder of game. Especially having the d5-square available for the pieces is a huge asset.

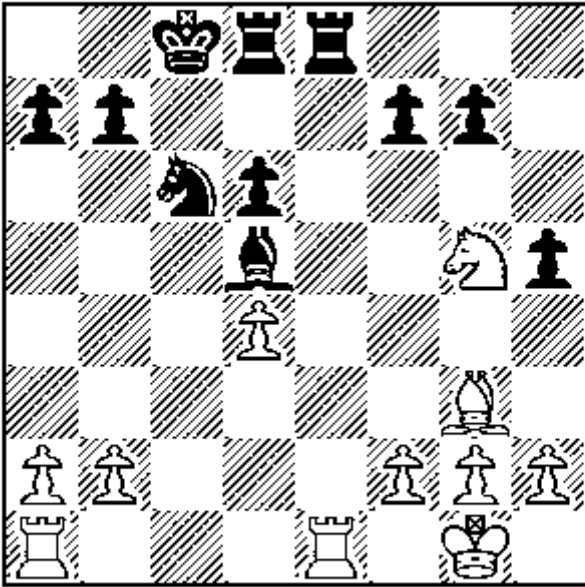
### 19 f3 Kc7 20 a3 f6 21 Nh3 g5!

White's minor pieces are severely hemmed in, and Black will begin his focus on the centre.

### 22 Bf2 Na5 23 Rxe8 Rxe8 24 Re1 Rc8 25 Rc1+ Nc6 26 Be3 Kd7 27 Kf2 Re8 28 Re1 Ne7 29 Bd2 Rc8 30 Rc1 Rxc1 31 Bxc1 Nf5 32 Be3

Black has traded the rooks, which might look like it eases White's defence, but his minor pieces are still much superior to White's and the king can enter the weak light squares on the queenside. White is far from being able to easily cover those squares.

### 32 ... Kc6 33 g4 Ng7 34 Ng1 Kb5 35 Ne2 hxg4 36 fxg4 Kc4 37 Bd2 b6 38 Ke3 a5 39 Ng3 Be6 40 h3 d5!



This might look like a strange decision, but it's all about making White's pieces useless. White's knight is deprived of the e4-square and Black can look forward to strengthening his positions on both flanks.

**41 Kf3 Kd3 42 Bc3 Bd7?!**

I think this was the appropriate moment for playing 42 ... Ne8! followed by ... Nd6 when the knight can reach b5, e4 or c4 when White's defences crack. I see no reasonable defence against this plan.

**43 Kf2 f5 44 Kf3**

White could have gained some counterplay with 44 Nh5 Ne8 45 h4! gxh4 46 g5 when the g-pawn provides White with some drawing chances.

**44 ... f4 45 Ne2 Ne6 46 h4 Ba4! 47 Nc1+ Kc4 48 hxg5 Bd1+ 49 Kg2 0-1**

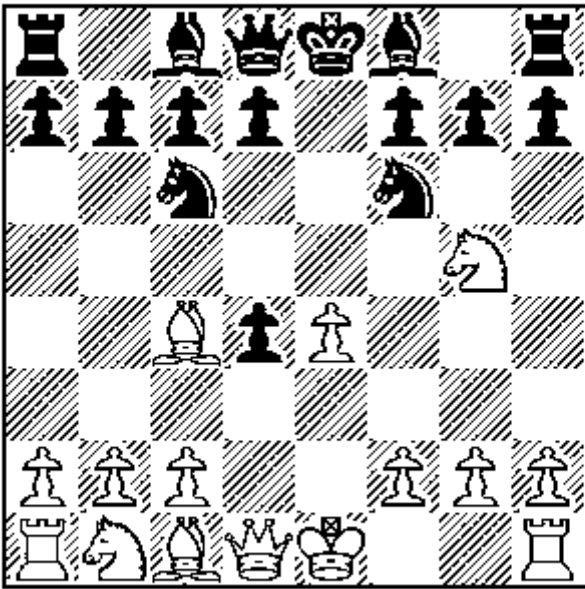
It looks a bit early to resign the game, although White is technically lost. Perhaps White lost on time.

Game 25

**K.Amann-E.Janosi**

Correspondence 2008

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 d4 exd4 5 Ng5!?**

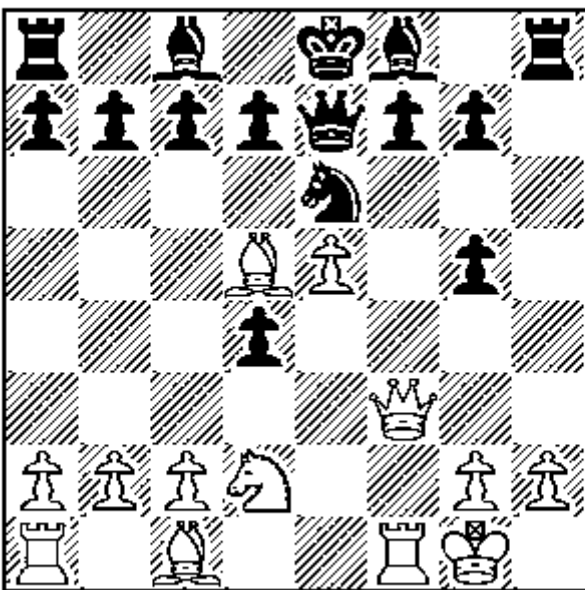


It never occurred to me that this move was quite playable for White before I started working on this book. In fact, it's a speciality of the Dutch GM Daan Brandenburg, who has employed it regularly against strong opposition with good results.

**5 ... d5!**

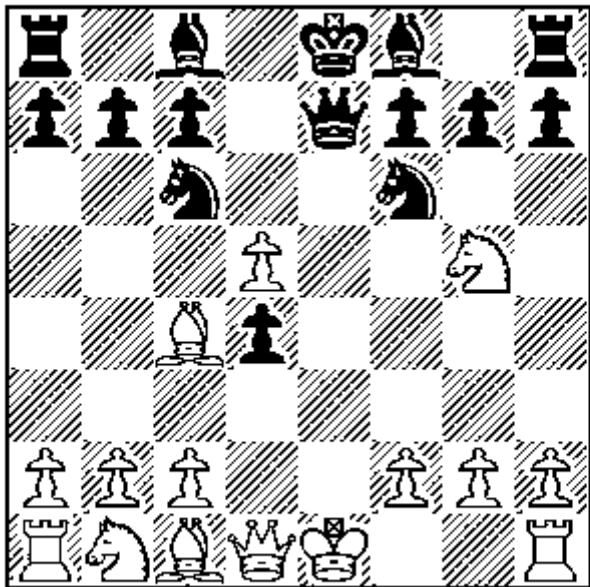
My preferred method of dealing with this variation. Black punishes White's arrogant knight jump by striking in the centre.

From a purely theoretical point of view, it should be noted that 5 ... Ne5 might even be better. After 6 Bb3 h6 7 f4 hxg5 8 fxe5 Nxe4 we have a crazy position on the board, and although Black is probably better, there's total chaos which is probably what White wanted. 9 Bd5 is what Brandenburg plays here (White has also tried 9 Qxd4 and the surprising 9 Bxf7+!?), when play can go 9 ... Nc5 10 0-0 Ne6 11 Qf3 Qe7 12 Nd2.



Here Black's best seems to be 12 ... Nf4! 13 Bxb7 g4! 14 Qe4 Qh4 15 Rxf4 Qxh2+ 16 Kf2 Bxb7 17 Qxb7 Qxf4+ 18 Nf3 Qf5 19 Qxa8+ Ke7 20 Bg5+ f6 21 exf6+ Kf7 and my engine says that Black is slightly better. Mind-blowing stuff and certainly fun to analyse, but I'll leave that to the reader. I'm more than satisfied with the slight edge in the endgame we get in our main line, and I can't really recommend something I cannot fully grasp myself.

## 6 exd5 Qe7+!



This is the main point behind 5 ... d5. This check interrupts White's development and he has to choose whether to give away the d5-pawn or greedily take the d4-pawn.

The tactical idea that every white player dreams of playing is 6 ... Nxd5? 7 0-0 Be7 8 Nxf7! with which Morphy used to amuse himself in the 19th Century. Definitely something to watch out for.

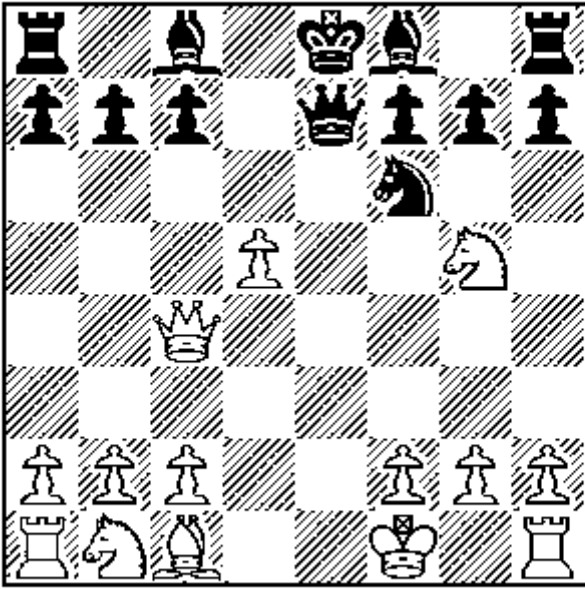
### 7 Kf1

The main line:

a) 7 Qe2 isn't very inspiring for White after 7 ... Nb4 8 Na3 Nfxd5 when Black just seems to be a pawn up for nothing.

b) 7 Be2 Nxd5 8 0-0 is a slightly more sensible way to sacrifice the d5-pawn as the black queen could become a target along the e-file, but Black retains the advantage with 8 ... h6 9 Nf3 Bg4!, which prepares castling queenside. The game G.Murawski-F.Barglowski, Ustron 2004, continued 10 c4 Nb6 11 Nxd4 Bxe2 12 Nxe2 Rd8 13 Nd2, at which point Black played the creative 13 ... Kd7!? and won a one-sided game, and I think Black can improve his play even further with 13 ... Nxc4.

### 7 ... Ne5 8 Qxd4 Nxc4 9 Qxc4



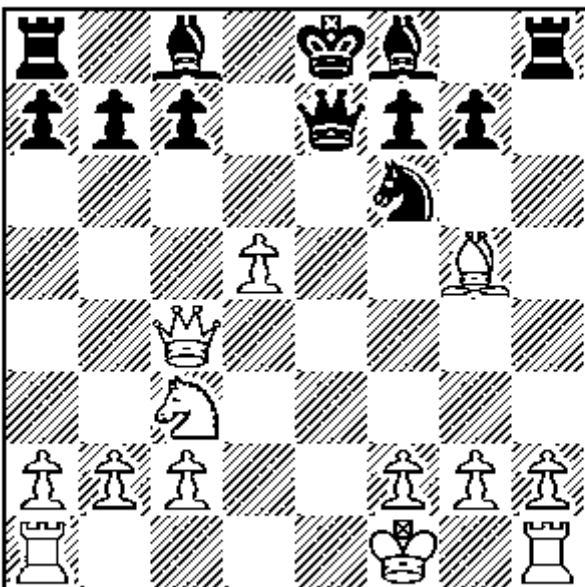
At this point Black is down a pawn, but he has excellent compensation. Apart from the weak d5-pawn, White's king has lost the right to castle and Black has a strong bishop-pair in an open position.

**9 ... h6!**

The most common move order is 9 ... Qc5, but I think this is inexact due to 10 Qxc5 Bxc5 11 Nc3 when White's g5-knight can return to e4, giving him good chances to equalize. This is no longer an option if Black kicks the knight back to f3 immediately.

**10 Nf3**

While reading through Bologan's book, I came across the stunning 10 Nc3!? hxg5 11 Bxg5.



This certainly looks more tempting than the main line. However, Black can neutralize White's initiative in many ways. The one I like best is 11 ... Qb4!?, which is a decent square for the queen, taking away many squares from the white queen and thus hindering White's attack:

- a) Should White play 12 Re1+ we go 12 ... Kd8 and we develop naturally with ... Bd7 and ... Be7, slowly unravelling our extra piece.
- b) 12 Qxc7 Be7 sees White having grabbed a third pawn, but none of them are particularly

dangerous and the piece is definitely worth more in this case. Indeed, after 13 Re1 Kf8 followed by ... Bf5, Black's extra piece should soon begin to tell.

### 10 ... Qc5!

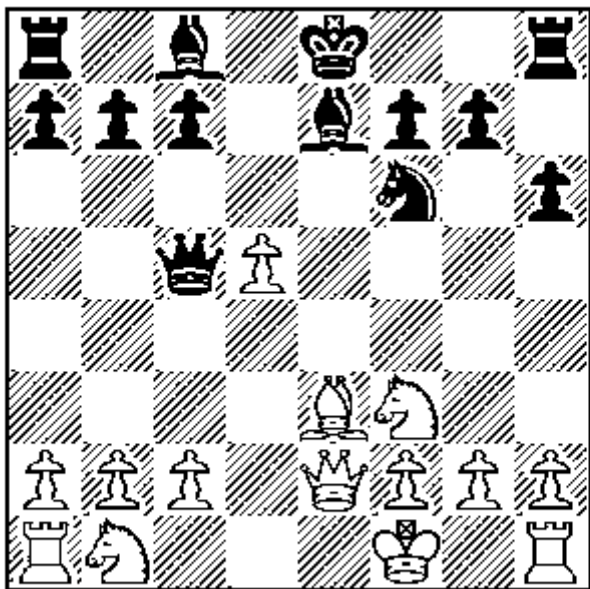
A key idea for Black in this variation. The only badly-placed black piece was the queen and so it is traded for White's only active piece. Apart from this, the d5-pawn and the f2-pawn will require White's attention.

If Black were to develop normally with, say, 10 ... Bg4 11 Nc3 0-0-0, White can simply go 12 Be3 and it's not so easy for Black to develop his initiative further while White catches up in development.

### 11 Qe2+

If White would play 11 Qxc5 Bxc5, Black's development is very smooth: 12 Nc3 (12 c4 Bf5 13 Ke2 0-0-0 followed by ... Rhe8+ and ... Ne4 looks crushing) 12 ... Bf5 would at least regain the pawn on c2, but Black should probably aim for ... 0-0-0 and ... Nxd5 when the two bishops assure him of some advantage.

### 11 ... Be7 12 Be3



This idea would be brilliant, if it wasn't for the fact that it doesn't solve White's problems. White temporarily gives up his extra pawn to catch up in development, but he has a tactical idea of how to regain it.

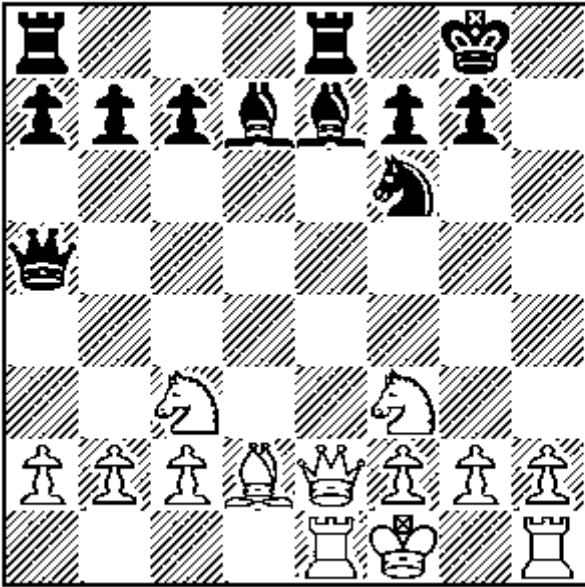
### 12 ... Qxd5 13 Nc3 Qa5 14 Re1 0-0! 15 Bxh6

And this was White's idea all along. White has got rid of his weak extra pawn on d5 and traded it for the pawn on h6, but let's face it, White can't really go pawn grabbing on h6 with bad development, a king on f1 and facing the bishop-pair.

### 15 ... Re8 16 Bd2

Houdini wants to play 16 Qb5 Qxb5+ 17 Nxb5, but it's quite clear to me that after 17 ... gxh6 18 Nxc7 Be6 19 Nxa8 Rxa8 Black has excellent winning chances as his minor pieces are so well placed and as the h1-rook hasn't joined the game yet.

### 16 ... Bd7



Black's bishops are ready to control the board.

**17 Qc4 b5 18 Qb3 b4 19 Ne5 Qa6+ 20 Kg1 Be6 21 Qa4 Qd6 22 Nb1**

I suspect White was starting to regret his pawn grabbing around now.

**22 ... a5 23 c3 Bf5 24 Qb3 Bf8!**

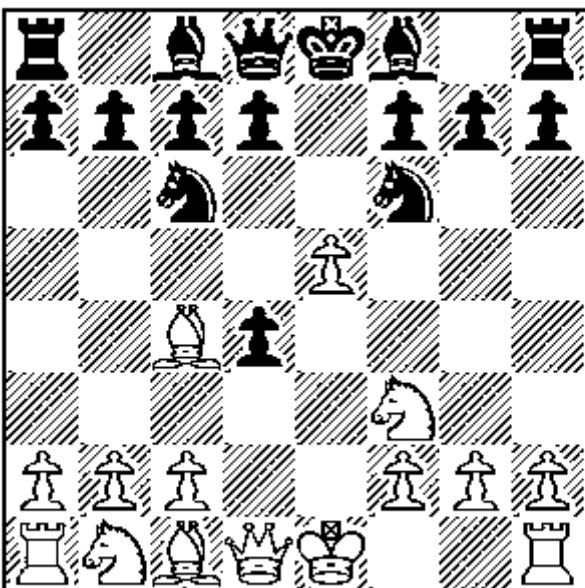
An ice-cold reaction, but then again this was a correspondence game. Of course, Black has many ways to crush White's position.

**25 Qxf7+ Kh7 26 Bf4 Bxb1 27 Rxb1 Rxe5 28 Bxe5 Qxe5 29 Qc4 Bc5 30 g3 Qf5 31 Rf1 Ne4 0-1**

### The Scotch Gambit

We have now arrived at the Scotch Gambit, which arises after the opening moves:

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 d4 exd4 5 e5!**



This variation has been played a lot by Evgeny Sveshnikov and lately dynamic grandmasters such as Gawain Jones have used it at a high level. But it's especially popular at club level and it's been recommended in a repertoire book by Roman Dzindzichashvili, Lev Alburt and Eugene Perelshteyn. Lately, even GM Niclas Huschenbeth has recommended it as a surprise weapon in a

video on the Chess24 website.

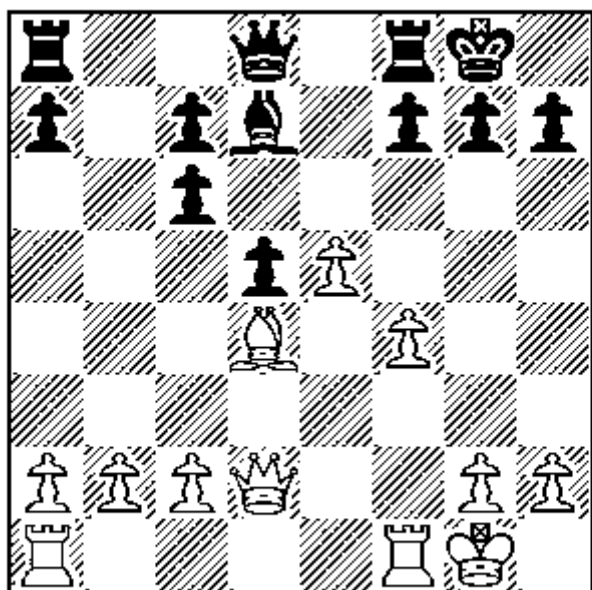
The first few moves in the main line are well known:

**5 ... d5 6 Bb5 Ne4 7 Nxd4**

At this point Black can choose between 7 ... Bd7 and 7 ... Bc5. I'm not going to delve deeply into which move is the more accurate and why, because this is not going to be my main recommendation. Sure, Black is equal, but I don't really fancy the type of positions that arise.

It's easy for White to play his moves, and Black must be cautious not to fall for any traps, strategical or tactical. My good friend IM Jonathan Westerberg has played this line as White very successfully, and I'm amazed at how easy it's for Black to find himself in a bad position right out of the opening. Here's one example from the game J.Westerberg-K.Janzekovic, Maribor 2012:

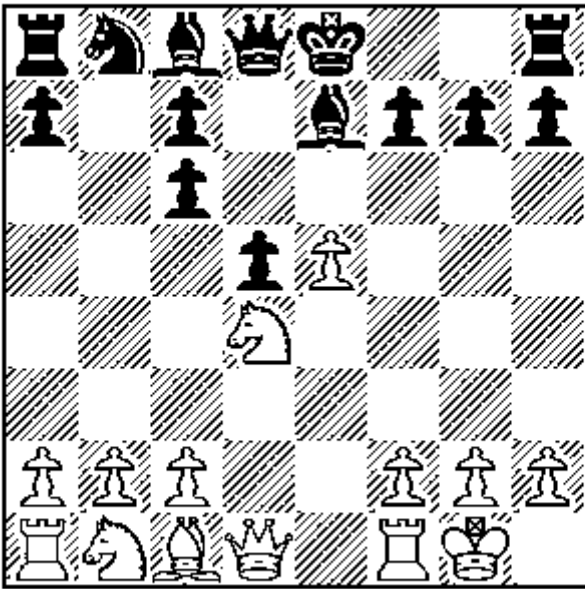
**7 ... Bd7 8 Bxc6 bxc6 9 0-0 Bc5 10 f3 Ng5 11 f4 Ne4 12 Be3 0-0 13 Nd2 Nxd2 14 Qxd2 Bxd4 15 Bxd4**



This was played in the first round of the World Youth Chess Championship of 2012, and I witnessed the game live. Jonathan convincingly squeezed his opponent on both sides of the board until he finally cracked. Actually, as I write these exact words, Jonathan is playing a very similar position in a rapid tournament being broadcast live, with the difference being a white knight on c5 instead of a bishop on d4.

After getting crushed a few times by Jonathan in this variation, I realized that I should seek a different kind of game. Browsing through the database I came across the following idea in an old game by Ivan Sokolov:

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 d4 exd4 5 e5 d5 6 Bb5 Nd7! 7 0-0 Be7 8 Bxc6 bxc6 9 Nxd4 Nb8!**

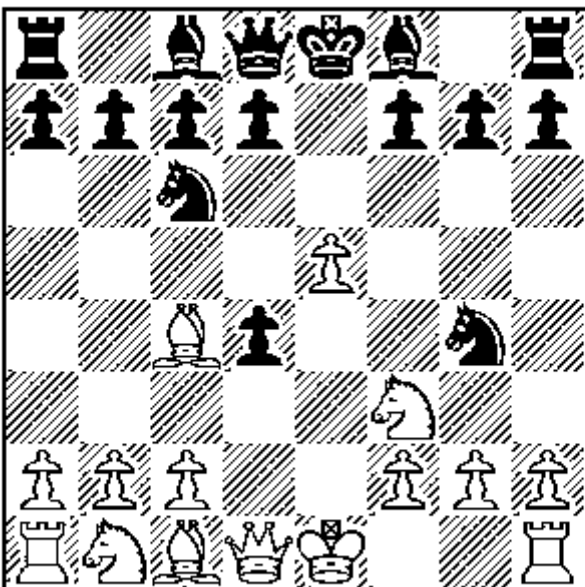


I really liked the beautiful concept of playing ... Ng8-f6-d7-b8, followed by pushing ... c5 and developing naturally from there on. Although this variation proved to be creative and viable, I realized that after 10 Nc3 0-0 11 Qf3! Black has no easy way of unravelling. Black is probably fine, but again I just don't fancy the positions that tend to arise.

### My Proposed Solution

While working on this book, I realized that I had to deal with this variation once and for all. I had to find a variation where Black gets his fair share of the chances, while still leading to interesting positions where White can go wrong just as easily as Black. Eventually, I settled on:

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 d4 exd4 5 e5 Ng4!?**



This rare line is my recommendation against the Scotch Gambit. Black intends to play against White's thorn on e5, and undermine it with either ... d6 or ... f6. Before examining the main lines, it's important to point out that 5 ... Ng4 carries a trap.

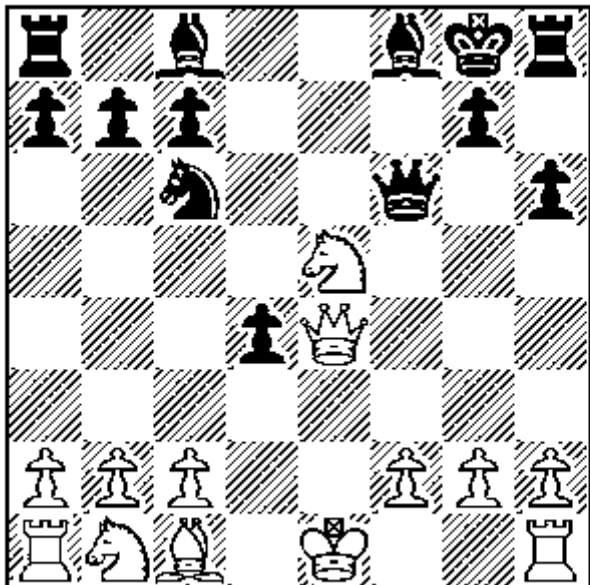
**6 Bxf7+?**

If White is unfamiliar with our knight jump, he might look for an immediate refutation and play this move which is actually a bad mistake.

6 ... Kxf7 7 Ng5+ Kg8 8 Qxg4 h6! 9 Nf3 d6

It turns out that Black's king is completely safe and that White isn't really set to defend his centre.

10 Qe4 dxe5 11 Nxe5 Qf6



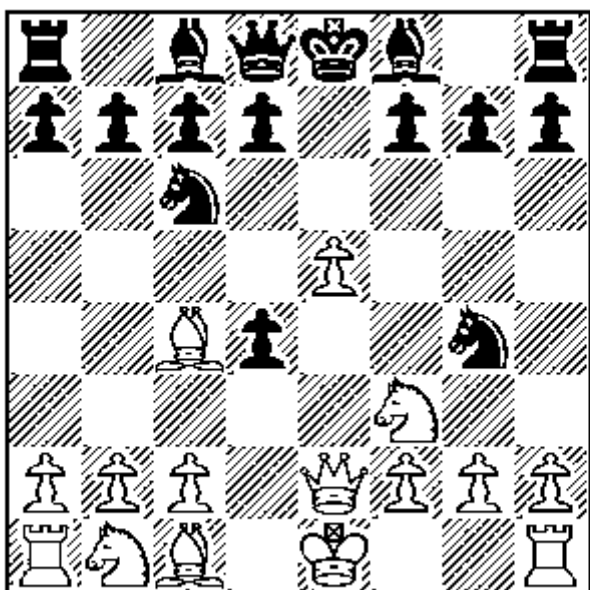
This will be followed by ... Bf5. Black's development is really quick and he also has a very strong bishop-pair. Meanwhile, his king is completely safe.

Game 26

H.Leks-D.Daulyte

Wroclaw 2010

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 d4 exd4 5 e5 Ng4 6 Qe2



Some surprisingly strong players have played this, but the resulting positions look all but inspiring for White in my view. This line was also the recommendation for White in Chess Openings for White, Explained by Albur, Dzindzichashvili and Perelshteyn.

However, treating the position like a Budapest Gambit doesn't really work out because after 6 Bf4 d6 7 exd6 Bxd6 8 Qe2+ Kf8 9 Bxd6+ Qxd6 Black is simply up a pawn. The king on f8 isn't exposed at all and Black has excellent development, with ... Bf5 and ... Re8 on the cards.

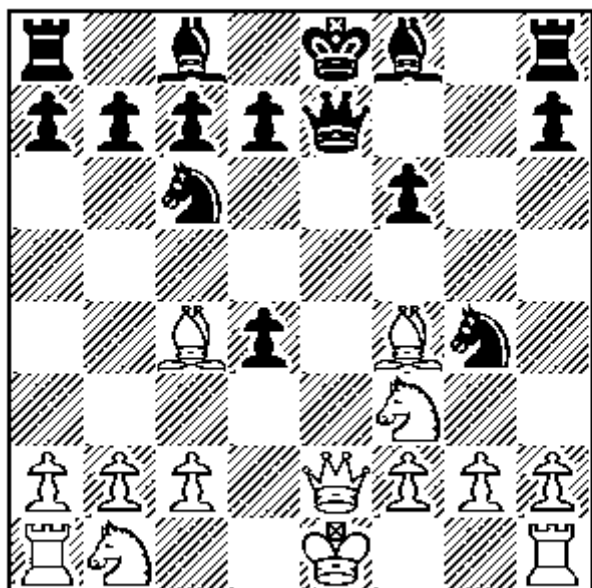
### 6 ... Qe7 7 Bf4 f6!

Black cracks open White's centre. White's idea is to regain the d4-pawn and try to claim a small edge with well-placed pieces in the centre, but Black is going to make White fight for that pawn.

There's absolutely nothing wrong with 7 ... d6 either. After 8 exd6 I believe Black should play 8 ... cxd6!, insisting that White should be the one to take on e7: 9 Na3 a6! (it's not so easy for White to get the a3-knight into the game) 10 Rd1 Qxe2+ 11 Bxe2 d5! and the knight is cut off on the rim. Black is absolutely fine here. Instead, the most common move is 8 ... Qxe2+, but after 9 Bxe2 Bxd6 10 Bxd6 cxd6 11 Na3! White might just have a tiny pull. The pawn on d4 won't be possible to hold and d6 will be weak.

### 8 exf6 Nxf6

My preference, but not the only move. Indeed, 8 ... gxf6 is unsurprisingly a speciality of Jonny Hector.



It might look strange, but Black wants to establish the e5-square for his knight. This variation is fine for Black, although after 9 0-0 Qxe2 10 Bxe2 Nge5 11 Nbd2 followed by Nb3, the position looks equal.

### 9 Nbd2

White is trying to recapture his d4-pawn by all means possible. This he'll usually do with Nb3, 0-0-0 and perhaps also Bb5. In the long run, this is a pawn Black can't hold on to, but we can try to obtain other advantages while White recovers the pawn.

After 9 Bxc7, the bishop actually gets out after 9 ... d6 10 Bb5 Kf7 11 Bxc6 bxc6 12 Qxe7+ Bxe7, but Black's position is clearly superior here. Black's central pawns limit White's minor pieces and 13 Nxd4?! lands White in even more difficulties after 13 ... Nd5 14 Ba5 Bf6 followed by ... Re8 with a dangerous initiative.

### 9 ... d5!

White scores horribly after this move.

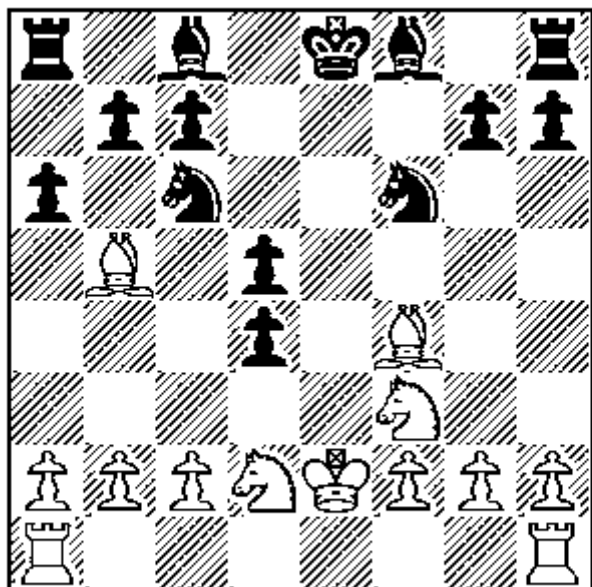
In practice it's more common to play 9 ... d6 10 Nb3 Bg4, but after 11 Qxe7+ Bxe7 12 Nbx4 Nxd4 13 Nxd4 d5 it looks pretty equal. Of course, this isn't worse for Black, but I want to fight

for an advantage.

### 10 Bb5 Qxe2+ 11 Kxe2

This is the key position for this variation. At first glance White looks set to recapture his sacrificed pawn and equalize. True, both c7 and d4 are en prise, but Black can create another asset.

### 11 ... a6!



A lovely move.

### 12 Bxc6+

12 Bd3 has been seen as well, but I like the untried 12 ... Bd6! 13 Bxd6 cxd6 when White doesn't get his pawn back after all. The tripled d-pawns look comical, but they control a lot of squares: 14 h3 (14 Nb3?! Bg4 was Black's point) 14 ... 0-0 15 Nb3 Nh5! (there's a weak square on f4) 16 Nbx d4 (16 g3 is taking things a bit too far: 16 ... Bd7 17 Nbx d4 Nxd4+ 18 Nxd4 Rae8+ and White can't protect his kingside) 16 ... Nf4+ 17 Kf1 Bd7. After lots of work White has managed to regain his pawn and leave Black with ugly pawns on the d-file, but Black's activity is way more important. He can follow up with ... Ne5 or ... Nxd3 when he's slightly better. Also notice how difficult it is for White to unravel his kingside.

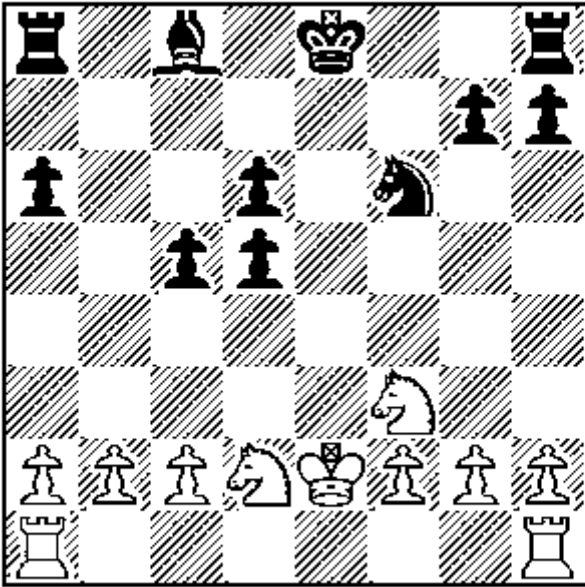
### 12 ... bxc6

Black's structure looks comical, but no matter which pawn White captures, Black will be left with a strong pawn centre that will annoy White's minor pieces for a long time to come.

### 13 Nxd4

Instead, 13 Bxc7 c5 14 Rae1 Bf5 15 Kd1+ Kd7 16 Bg3 Bd6 17 Bxd6 Kxd6 was the course of the game L.Hansen-J.Andersen, correspondence 2010. Black is obviously better and went on to win.

### 13 ... c5 14 N4f3 Bd6 15 Bxd6 cxd6



White is clearly struggling. Black's central pawns are very strong and White's knights don't really have anything useful to do.

**16 Rhe1 Bf5 17 Rac1 Kd7 18 Nh4 Rhe8+ 19 Kf1 Rxe1+ 20 Kxe1 Be6 21 f4**

White is desperate for a plan, but it's difficult to suggest anything else. As we will soon see, though, this lunge just weakens White's position further.

**21 ... Rb8 22 b3 d4 23 c3 dxc3 24 Rxc3**

White has managed to get rid of the doubled pawns, but Black's pressure remains. White still has difficulties finding a decent plan.

**24 ... Re8 25 Kf1 Nd5 26 Rf3 Nb4?!**

This looks very natural, but it might be slightly inaccurate. Now White has some chances for counterplay, whereas after 26 ... Bg4 27 Rg3 g6! White's counterplay is hard to find.

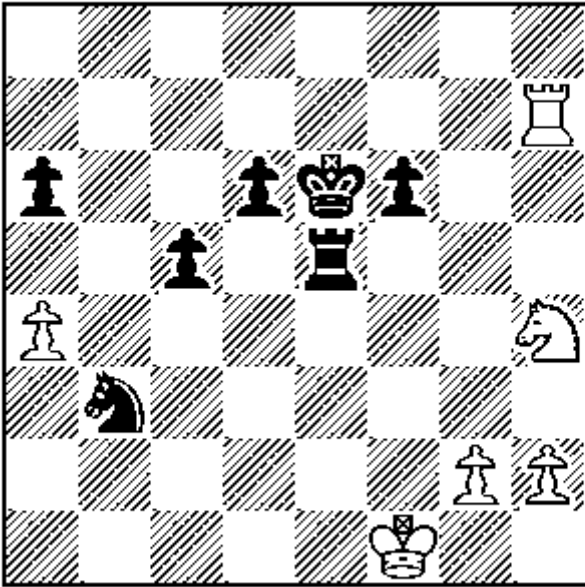
**27 f5 Bd5 28 Rg3 Re7 29 a4?!**

White should have tried to activate her pieces with 29 f6! gxf6 30 Nf5, but Black is still much better here, even if after 30 ... Re5 31 Rg7+ Ke6 32 g4 she doesn't have ... Ne3 resource as in the game.

**29 ... Nc2 30 f6 gxf6 31 Nf5 Re5 32 Rg7+ Ke6 33 Nh4**

**33 g4 Ne3+!** is what Black was relying on.

**33 ... Nd4 34 Rxh7 Bxb3 35 Nxb3 Nxb3**



Black's strategical advantage has translated itself into an extra pawn, and the central pawns are much more dangerous than the h-pawn.

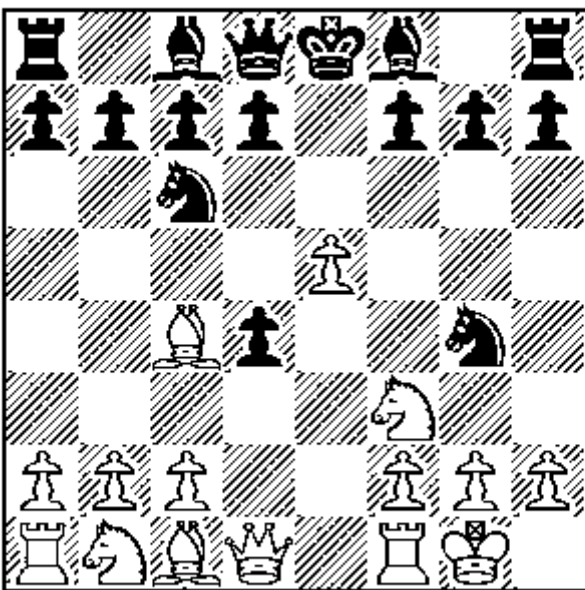
**36 Ng6 Rf5+ 37 Ke1 d5 38 g4 Rf3 39 h4 d4 40 Nf8+ Kd5 41 h5 d3 42 h6 Kc4 43 Rd7 Rh3 44 h7 Rh1+ 45 Kf2 Nd4 46 Ke3 Rh3+ 47 Kd2 Rh2+ 48 Kd1 Kc3 49 Re7 Nf3 0-1**

A very convincing game that more than defangs the 6 Qe2 variation.

## 6 0-0

In this book, I'm going to propose quite a few novel ideas. Some of them are so novel, it's difficult to find a suitable game with which to showcase them. The 6 0-0 variation is one of those cases and so instead of annotating a full game, the following variations are solely based on my analysis.

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4 Nf6 4 d4 exd4 5 e5 Ng4 6 0-0**



This is rightly considered to be the most challenging move. White develops quickly.

## 6 ... Be7!

Not the most popular move, but probably the best:

a) 6 ... Bc5 has been played a lot, but 7 Bf4 is slightly problematic. Black would like to play ... d6 against an early Bf4, but in this case his own bishop has already been committed to c5, which is likely to result in a loss of time.

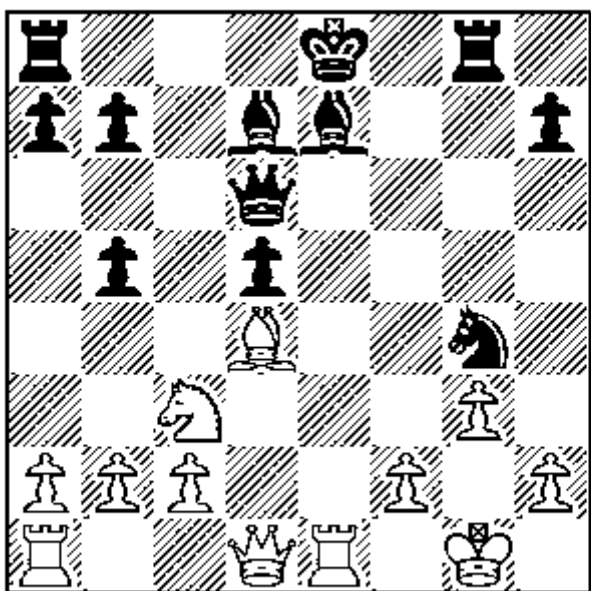
b) The immediate 6 ... d6 has been played quite a bit too, but I don't really trust Black's position after 7 exd6 Bxd6 8 Re1+ Kf8 9 Nbd2 Nge5 10 Nxe5 Nxe5 11 Bb3. Here 7 ... Qxd6 isn't much better, because of 8 Re1+ Be7 9 b3! when White will play Ba3, exchange bishops, recapture on d4 and enjoy a slightly better endgame.

### 7 Re1

If you read my comments on 6 ... Bc5 above, 7 Bf4 might look like the best move because ... d6 isn't very attractive anymore. Although I found this move very challenging to analyse, I do believe that Black can be happy with his position:

a) 7 ... f6! is the only move to keep the game close to understandable and now:

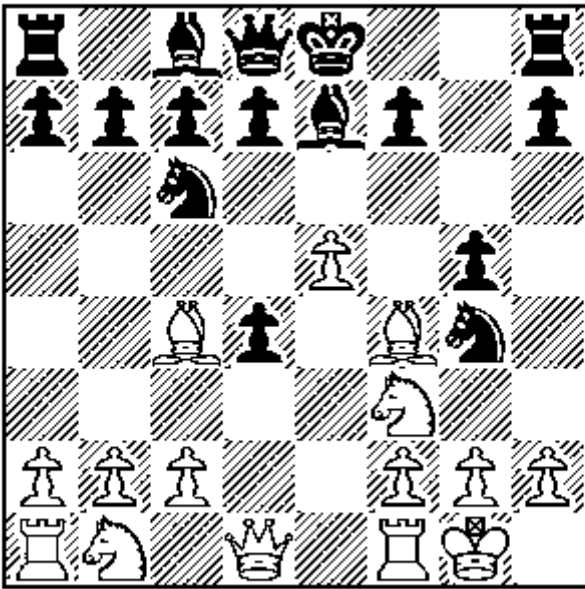
a1) The crazy move 8 Re1! is probably the biggest challenge for Black, but it looks like Black is fine after the complications: 8 ... fxe5 9 Nxe5 Nxe5 10 Bxe5 d5 and now White should probably venture the interesting piece sacrifice 11 Bxg7! Rg8 12 Bb5+ c6 13 Bxd4 Qd6! 14 g3 cxb5 15 Nc3 Bd7.



White has the advantage of a safer king, but Black has good development and especially an extra piece. White should probably take a second pawn with 16 Qe2 Kf7 (preparing ... Bf6) 17 Nxb5 Bxb5 18 Qxb5 b6, but Black can consolidate with ... Rg6 and ... Bf6 when his extra piece counts for more than the two pawns.

a2) White could also play 8 exf6, but after 8 ... Nxf6 9 Nxd4 Nxd4 10 Qxd4 d5 Black is going to castle and enjoy a solid position where the open f-file could provide decent chances of a kingside attack.

b) 7 ... g5! leads to completely mental positions.

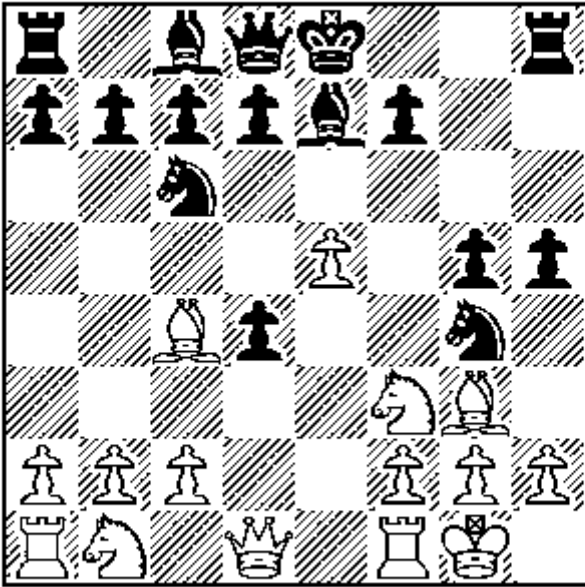


I have to confess this position is way too crazy for me to understand and the following analysis is barely scratching the surface of a mountain of complexity. It's mostly just computer analysis and if you wish to play 7 ... g5, you'd probably have to work on these lines yourself:

b1) 8 Nxc5 d5! (8 ... Bxc5 9 Qxc4 d5 10 Qxc5 Qxc5 11 Bxc5 dxc4 is complex, but I don't like the way Black's king is stuck in the middle) 9 exd6 (9 e6 doesn't work out well because of 9 ... Bxc5 10 Qxc4 Bxe6 11 Qxc5 Qxc5 12 Bxc5 dxc4 and Black is up a pawn) 9 ... Bxc5 10 Qe2+ Kf8 11 dxc7 Qf6 12 Bg3 h5! 13 Nd2 Bxd2 14 Qxd2 h4 15 Bf4 Nge5 followed by ... h3 when Black appears to be able to consolidate and retain some advantage. It's still quite unclear though.

b2) 8 Bc1 tries to argue that ... g5 is so weakening, it's worth spending two tempi to see it. This is not a terrible idea, but I still think Black can fight for some real advantage with 8 ... d6 9 exd6 (or 9 e6!? Bxe6 10 Bxe6 fxe6 11 Nxd4 Nxd4 12 Qxc4 Bf6 and Black is a pawn up; true, Black is weak on the kingside, but it's not so easy for White to obtain anything concrete from this and Black could even try to push ... h5 himself) 9 ... Qxd6 10 b3 0-0 11 Ba3 Qf6 12 Bxe7 Qxe7 followed by ... Nge5. The move ... g5 looks ugly, but once again it's difficult for White to take advantage of it. Black might emerge with the better minor piece if he trades for the c4-bishop and that should more than offset the slight ... g5 weakness.

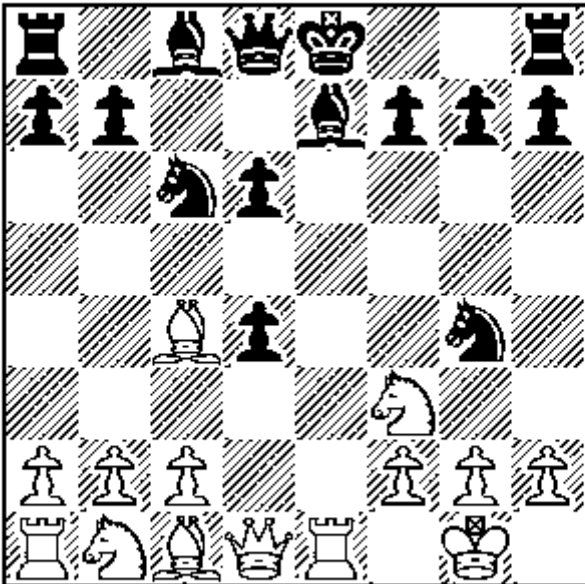
b3) 8 Bg3! is the most challenging move, and probably the craziest move as well. Black has to continue along the principled path, so goes 8 ... h5!.



Now 9 Bd5! (White realizes the importance of preventing ... d5; 9 h3 h4 10 hxg4 hxg3 11 fxg3 is a funny-looking pawn structure, which eventually should be good for Black though) 9 ... Nb4! (and Black realizes the importance of playing ... d5; like I said, the position is very difficult to grasp) 10 Bb3 h4 11 Bxh4 (or 11 Nxh4 gxh4 12 Qxg4 d5 13 Qg7 Rh5! and the position remains immensely complex, although Black is totally fine according to my engine) 11 ... gxh4 12 Qxd4 Nh6 13 Nc3 is supposed to end in a draw according to the engines, but this is the reason I'd rather recommend 7 ... f6. The position is simply too crazy and difficult to play for my taste.

Returning to 7 Re1:

**7 ... d6 8 exd6 cxd6!**



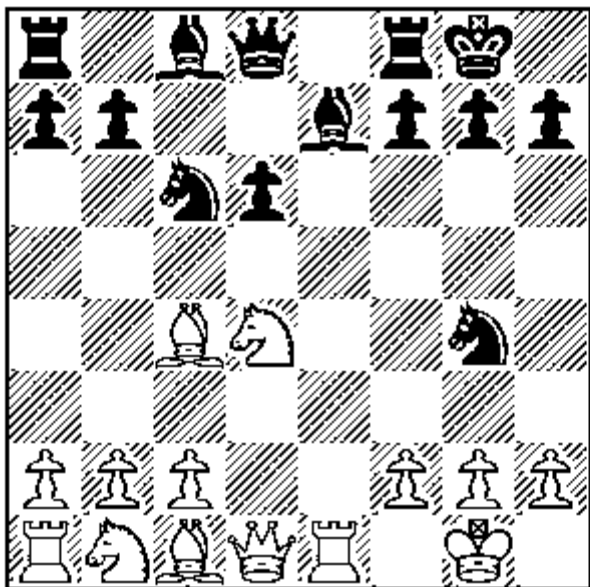
This is the novel idea that has barely been played before. It's been seen twice according to my database, and never by a strong player. Neither have I found it mentioned in any books or analysis, so for once I can credit this idea to myself (or at least my computer).

How do we explain such a move? It looks like Black simply weakens his own structure by giving himself an isolated d-pawn, so why does it work? It's important to realize that this is not a typical position with an isolated pawn. For now, the pawn is on d6 and not d5, which increases Black's control of the dark squares in the centre. What's more, the knight on g4 might look stupid,

but it provides Black with excellent chances of counterplay.

Instead, 8 ... Qxd6 has been played quite a bit, but White looks slightly better after the typical 9 b3 0-0 10 Ba3 Qd8 11 Bxe7 Nxe7 12 Qxd4.

**9 Nxd4 0-0**



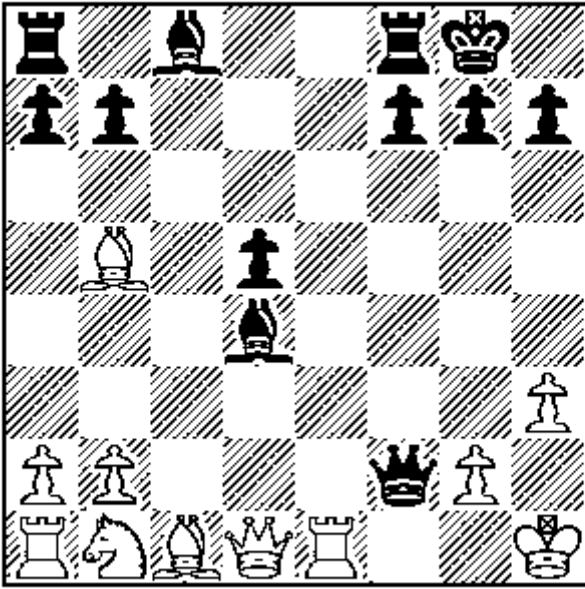
Now, how should White try to develop?

**10 Nc3**

The most natural move in my opinion, but it allows a surprising resource. Alternatively:

a) 10 c3 tries to add support to the knight on d4, but 10 ... Bh4! 11 g3 Bf6 followed by perhaps ... Nge5 or ... Qb6 is comfortable for Black. It's not so easy for White to make use of his c1-bishop.

b) 10 h3 tries to kick away the knight from g4, but doing so not so easy: 10 ... d5! 11 Bf1 Nxf2! (a typical strike in this variation; the same sacrifice works if the white bishop had gone to b3) 12 Kxf2 Bc5 13 c3 (13 Be3? Nxd4 14 Bxd4 Qh4+! regains the piece on d4 with interest) 13 ... Nxd4 14 cxd4 Qh4+ 15 Kg1 Bxd4+ 16 Kh1 (Black can't complain after 16 Be3 Bxb2 17 Nd2 Bxa1 18 Qxa1 Bf5 as he has three pawns and a rook for the two minor pieces; true, the minor pieces are quite good, but three pawns is a lot) 16 ... Qf2! 17 Bb5.



Now Black has the wonderful 17 ... Bg4! 18 Qd2 Qg3! which is a beautiful concept, and if 19 Qxd4 Qxe1+ 20 Qg1 Qxg1+ 21 Kxg1 Bf5. Were White properly developed, his advantage would be indisputable, but in this case Black's development is much quicker and the d-pawn can advance to d3 where it limits the activity of White's pieces. Black certainly isn't worse.

### 10 ... Bh4!

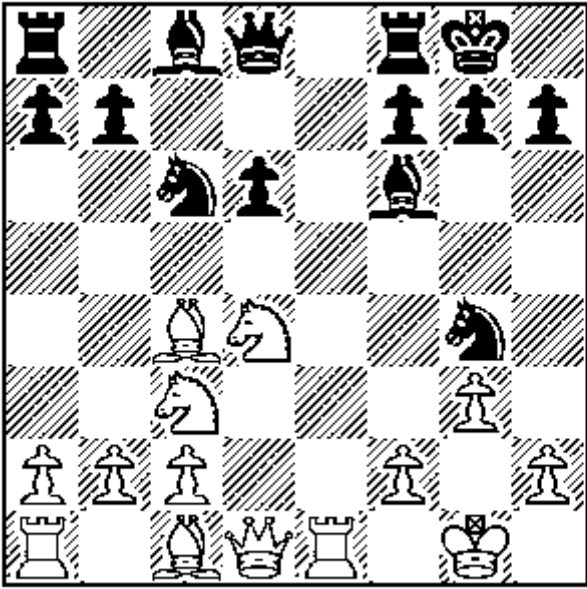
Inflicting a weakness in White's camp before enjoying the dark squares in the centre.

At this point, Black even has the very interesting 10 ... d5!? as an alternative. It might look ridiculous, but it turns out that Black gets a healthy initiative for the sake of a pawn:

a) 11 Nxd5?! Bc5 is awkward for White: 12 Be3! (12 c3?! runs into 12 ... Qh4!) and now I like the immediate 12 ... Nxe3! (12 ... Nce5!? looks like a good alternative as well) 13 fxe3 Ne5 14 Bb3 a5! when Black can follow up with ... g5 and ... Ra6-g6 with an ongoing initiative on the kingside. White can't really claim to be better after giving away his e3-bishop and getting his pawn to e3. Indeed, Black has excellent compensation with his bishop-pair and thanks to White's weaknesses.

b) 11 Bxd5 Bc5 12 Be3 and now Black can weaken White's kingside with 12 ... Qc7 13 g3 Nxe3 14 fxe3 Ne5 15 Bg2 Bg4 16 Nd5 Qd6 and we have yet another typical position for this line. Black has good, strong pieces and open files for his rook. Black has lots of ideas, like ...Rad8, ... Rfe8, ... h5-h4, ... Bh3 and even ... Nc4 in some cases. Black should have very decent compensation, but, still, a pawn is a pawn and the main line looks like a more clear-cut equalizer than this risky approach.

### 11 g3 Bf6



Now White needs to do something about his knight on d4:

a) 12 Nf3 is a solid and calm approach. Black continues with 12 ... Qb6 13 Ne4 Be7 and White doesn't have a simple way of developing. Black's queen on b6 puts pressure on both f2 and b2. White could try 14 Bb3, but 14 ... a5 15 a4 Be6 keeps up annoying pressure on White's queenside.

b) There is also 12 Nb3 when Black can try another strategical idea: 12 ... Bxc3!? 13 bxc3 Nge5 14 Be2 Re8 and he can follow up with ... Bh3, ... d5 and ... Nc4. White's position is filled with weaknesses and the black d-pawn, which should be a weakness, isn't felt at all.

c) 12 Ndb5 allows the fantastic 12 ... Nxf2! 13 Kxf2 a6 when the knight on b5 surprisingly runs out of good squares: 14 Na3 (14 Nxd6?! is, of course, met by 14 ... Bd4+ when Black picks up the knight on d6 and White's king is very weak) 14 ... b5 15 Bd5 and now Black regains his piece immediately with 15 ... b4! since 16 Bxc6 is met with 16 ... Qb6+.

## Conclusion

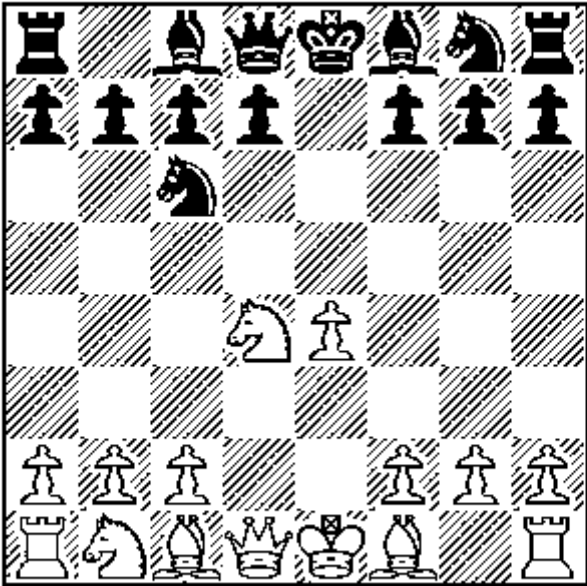
This chapter has been a potpourri of smaller and larger variations. White has quite a few slightly tricky variations, such as 4 Qe2 and 4 d4 exd4 5 Ng5, but if Black knows what he's doing, he can count on a very good game. However, the frequently played 4 0-0 ?! is nothing but a mistake which Black should punish brutally.

The line 4 d4 exd4 5 0-0 is extremely popular in practice, and I tried long and hard to find a variation where Black can play for a win. As such, I'm very happy with my discovery of the rare 13 ... Qf5 which introduces double-edged play into the position. Finally, we have the Scotch Gambit where the relatively unknown 5 ... Ng4 looks completely viable, especially due to the idea of 6 0-0 Be7 7 Re1 d6 8 exd6 cxd6!.

# Chapter Four

## The Scotch Game

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 exd4 4 Nxd4



The Scotch Game is considered by many to be White's most dangerous opening against 1 e4 e5 after the Ruy Lopez. It was popularized by none other than Garry Kasparov in the 1990's and during recent years it has been championed by many elite players, such as Magnus Carlsen, Fabiano Caruana, Ian Nepomniachtchi, Yu Yangyi and Parimarjan Negi.

The positions that arise are very interesting and the main structure in my suggested main line is very unique for the Scotch Game. This leads to an entirely new range of strategic and tactical ideas, where it is helpful to have some understanding of the position. With that said, Black's entire concept is based on challenging White in the centre and in my view Black can do this successfully.

### Theoretical Introduction

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 exd4 4 Nxd4

Before getting into the meat of this chapter, do note that 4 Bc4 Nf6 would take play back into the Scotch Gambit, as we just considered, while 4 c3 dxc3 5 Nxc3 will be seen via a 2 d4 move order in Game 63 of Chapter Ten. Finally, the rare 4 Bb5 will be considered in the opening game of Chapter Eleven.

#### 4 ... Nf6

This is my suggestion, immediately attacking the pawn on e4.

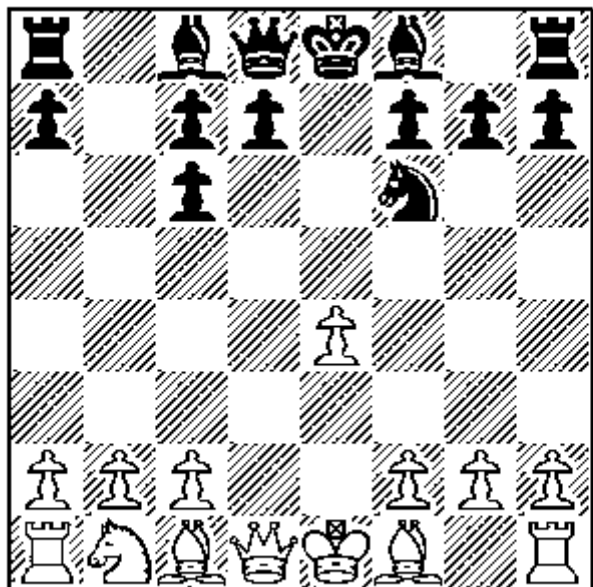
At first, I was tempted to recommend the interesting 4 ... Bb4+!? 5 c3 Bc5, trying to prove that including c2-c3 disrupts White's harmony. I remember that I watched the fascinating game J.Ruiz-S.Vaibhav, Durban 2014, where Black launched the amazing 6 Be3 Bb6 7 Nf5 g6 8 Bxb6 axb6 9 Ne3 Nf6 10 f3 0-0 11 c4 and now 11 ... d5!. However, when I got over my initial fascination, I analysed 4 ... Bb4+ in depth and came to the conclusion that White is probably just better.

Another option is 4 ... Bc5, but White can play 5 Nxc6, 5 Nb3 and most importantly, 5 Be3 where it might be difficult for Black to create any winning chances if White plays for a draw.

### 5 Nxc6

White can also play 5 Nc3 which transposes to the next chapter on the Scotch Four Knights.

### 5 ... bxc6



### 6 e5

Clearly the main line, although White has always tried to find some alternatives:

a) 6 Bd3 is not unusual amongst club players, which is understandable because White gets an equal position without having to remember a lot of theory, but neither is it a challenge for Black. This is covered in Game 27.

b) A very new idea is 6 Qe2, which has already gained the trust of elite players like Hikaru Nakamura and Francisco Vallejo Pons. However, I believe I have an aggressive antidote against this idea, as we'll see before turning our attention to 6 e5.

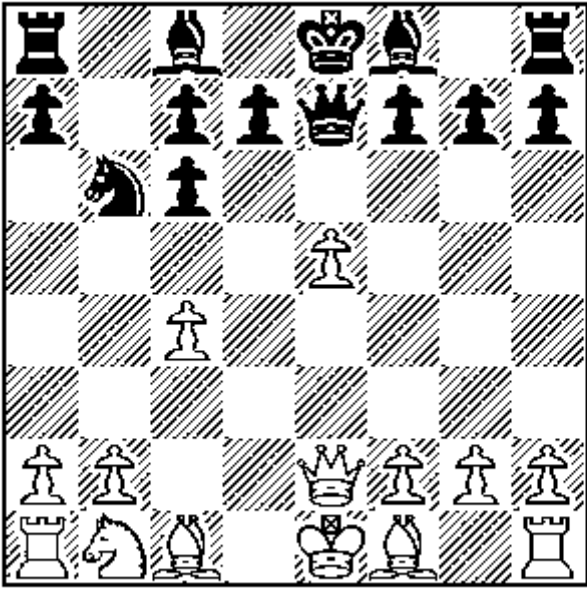
### 6 ... Qe2 7 Qe2 Nd5 8 c4

8 Nd2 is a move that comes and goes. It has never reached main-line status, but it has been regularly employed by Scotch experts Nepomniachtchi and Rublevsky. Recently, the American star Wesley So defeated Levon Aronian with this variation. I do, however, think that Black gets good chances in a complicated position after 8 ... g6 9 c4 Nf4!, as in Game 28.

### 8 ... Nb6

My recommendation. Now White has to choose how to develop his pieces.

I have played 8 ... Ba6 quite a bit myself, but I don't think Black has any good alternatives to entering the famous ending after 9 b3 g6 10 g3 Bg7 11 Bb2 0-0 12 Bg2 Rae8 13 0-0 Bxe5 14 Qxe5 Qxe5 15 Bxe5 Rxe5 16 cxd5 Bxf1 17 Kxf1 cxd5 when I think White can draw comfortably if that's his goal.



### 9 Nc3

The most common continuation, as well as the most natural square for the knight. This is a favourite of Nepomniachtchi and Caruana. Others:

a) The immediate 9 b3 invites the disturbing 9 ... a5! as in Game 29.

b) The Chinese talent Yu Yangyi and the Scotch expert Alexandre Danin have preferred 9 Nd2, but I think Black can get good play with 9 ... Qe6 10 b3 a5! trying to soften up White's queenside. This is covered in Game 30.

### 9 ... Qe6!

Black wants to develop with ... Bb4 and put pressure on White's centre as quickly as possible.

### 10 Qe4

Black's most precise continuation now is ...

### 10 ... g6!

... leaving White wondering whether the bishop on f8 will go to g7 or b4.

The immediate 10 ... Bb4 11 Bd2 is comfortable for White.

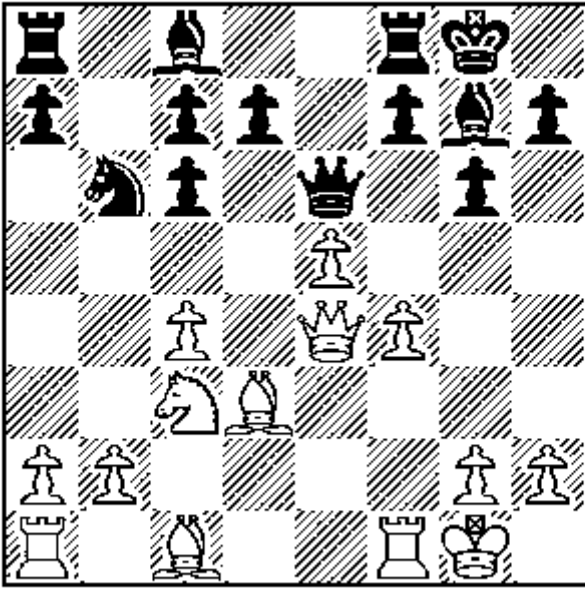
### 11 Bd3

If White shows his hand with 11 Bf4, we can play 11 ... Bb4! when White has nothing better than 12 Bd2 which is analysed in Game 31.

### 11 ... Bg7!

11 ... Bb4 12 Bd2 is still comfortable for White, who hasn't been forced to play f2-f4.

### 12 f4 0-0 13 0-0



At this point I give two recommendations:

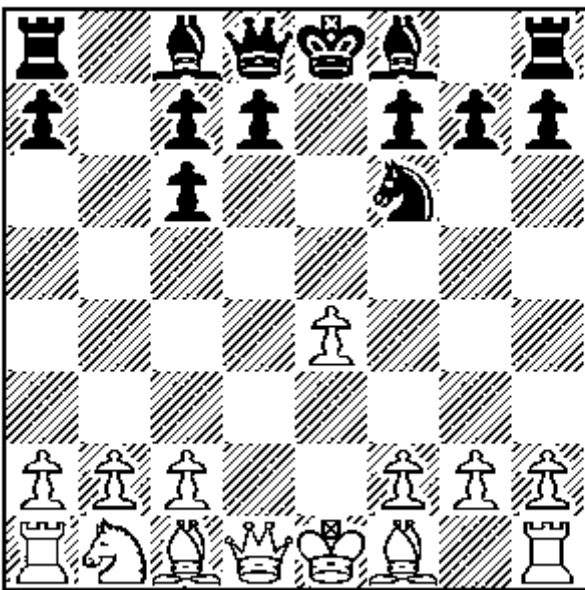
- a) 13 ... d6!? seems like a clean equalizer, but Black might have to agree to a draw by repetition.
- b) If Black is out to win, he could play 13 ... Ba6 14 b3 f5! which I have played myself successfully. This is covered in Game 32.

Game 27

**Z.Plenkovic-M.Bosicic**

Sibenik 2012

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 exd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nxc6 bxc6**



**6 Bd3**

This is not in any way a theoretical challenge for Black, but it's popular at club level because it's a simple way of just getting a playable position from the opening.

6 Nd2!? is an interesting idea of Tartakower's which is used quite often by strong players. In

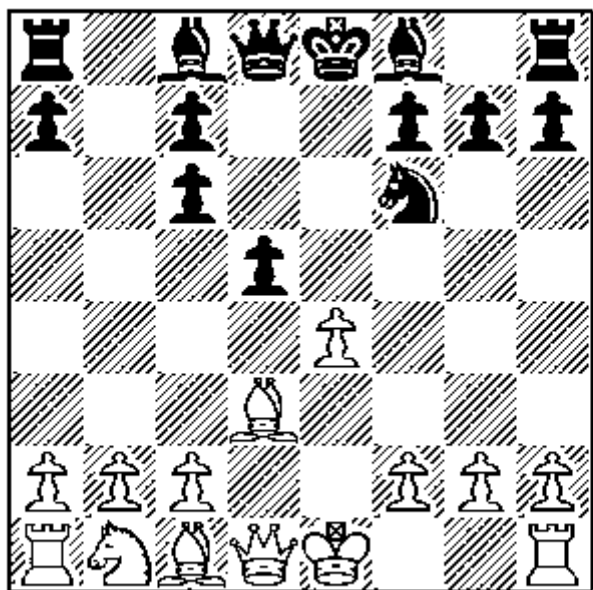
comparison to 6 Bd3, White wants to meet 6 ... d5 7 exd5 cxd5 with 8 Bb5+!, claiming that trading the light-squared bishops would increase White's chances of achieving an advantage. I think White is far from claiming any advantage here, but he has scored well in practice and I don't see why we should let White get what he wants.

Indeed, I propose meeting 6 Nd2 with Bc5!, which kind of takes the sting out of 6 Nd2. Now:

a) 7 Bd3 doesn't make a lot of sense if White wanted to play Tartakower's idea with Bb5+. Black can go 7 ... 0-0 8 0-0 d5 and the entire Bb5 idea has been avoided.

b) After 7 e5 Qe7 8 Qe2 Nd5 compared to the main line Scotch, Black's queen on e7 doesn't obstruct his development anymore, whereas White's queen on e2 is still badly placed. White should probably improve the queen's position with 9 Qe4, but Black can get a good position in many ways, such as with 9 ... d6 or 9 ... 0-0 10 Bd3 f5.

**6 ... d5!**



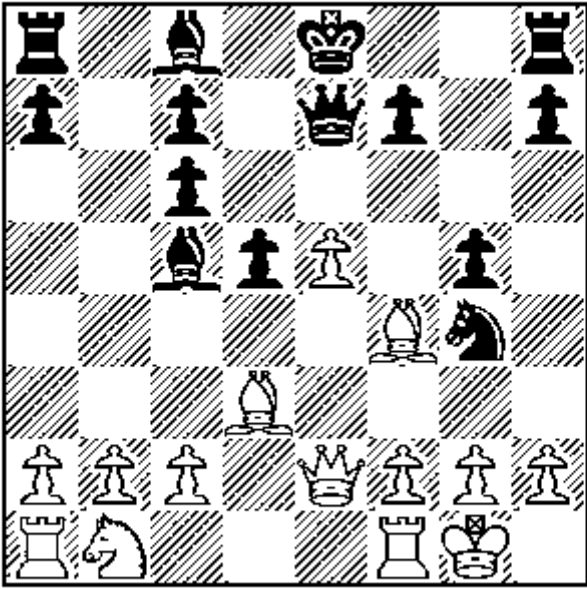
As you will have noticed throughout the book, I like staking a claim in the centre whenever it's appropriate.

It's also completely fine for Black to play 6 ... d6 7 0-0 g6, which might appeal to some people.

**7 exd5**

Alternatively:

a) In 2012 I played in the Riga Open and I was paired with a young Latvian junior rated about 2000. He surprised me with the move 7 e5, which I hadn't seen before, but after a few minutes I came up with the continuation 7 ... Ng4 8 0-0 Bc5 9 Qe2 Qe7 10 Bf4 and now 10 ... g5!.



After this, I held a comfortable advantage throughout the rest of the game. Interestingly, in the blitz tournament right after the prize ceremony I was paired with the same opponent and with the same colours, and we repeated our tournament game for about the first 20 moves! Luckily for me, he didn't have an amazing novelty prepared and I won once again.

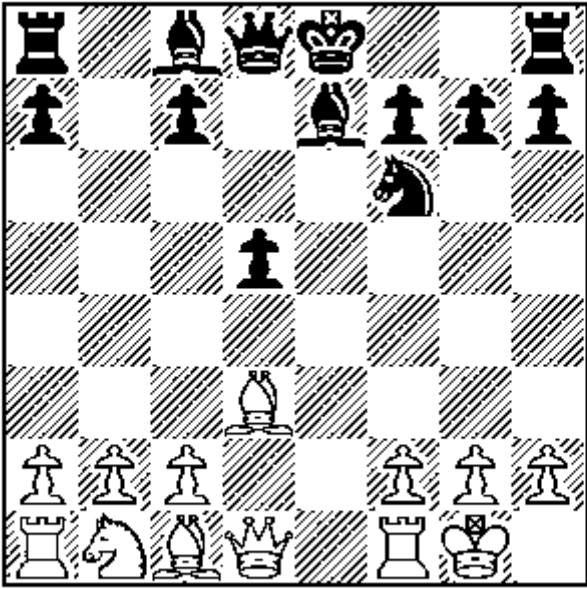
b) I played 7 Nd2 myself during the spring of 2014 with the white pieces, but I have to admit it was just bad over-the-board inspiration. I didn't get anything close to an advantage out of the opening. Black could just develop naturally with 7 ... Bc5 8 0-0 0-0, at which point White should probably try to equalize with 9 c4 when 9 ... Re8 is just very comfortable for Black.

c) 7 Qe2 was an old speciality of Blackburne's, but it doesn't impress. I like the simple 7 ... Be7 when 8 e5 Nd7 9 0-0 0-0 is fine for Black; ... Nc5 is about to be played when Black gets the pair of bishops.

**7 ... cxd5 8 0-0**

As Bologan mentions, 8 Bb5+ is a popular way of trading pieces, trying to steer the game towards a draw. In my experience this is a strategy doomed to fail, yet people continue to compromise their position to exchange pieces. After simple moves like 8 ... Bd7 9 Bxd7+ Qxd7 10 0-0 Be7 Black has a comfortable position and perhaps even a tiny advantage.

**8 ... Be7**



A key position for this line. White has tried many different moves in this position, all of which I won't consider, but the general concept is that Black is fine if he plays natural moves and puts his pieces on natural squares.

### **9 c4**

The only strategy that has worked okay for White in practice. He tries to undermine Black's central pawns and create weaknesses.

9 Nc3 leads to a Scotch Four Knights, but with the black bishop on e7 rather than on b4. Seeing that ... Be7 is a good move that is usually played anyway, Black has just gained time. After 9 ... 0-0 10 Bg5 Be6 11 Qf3 h6 12 Bxf6 Bxf6 13 Na4 Rb8 14 Rab1 Qd6 Black was already clearly better in E.Sevillano-M.Krasenkow, Dhaka 1995.

### **9 ... d4!**

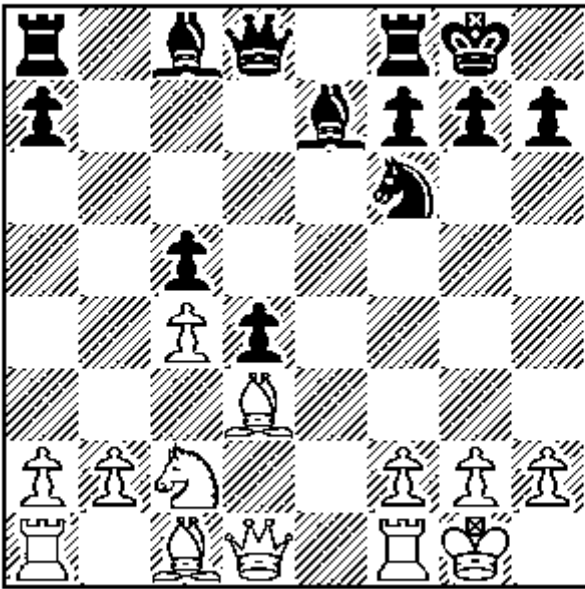
Strategically committal according to Bologan, but I don't really see how White is supposed to claim anything. Black's position looks completely sound and although the pawn advance is double-edged, I have nothing against a double-edged position with good winning chances.

Bologan prefers 9 ... 0-0 which is also completely fine.

### **10 Na3**

White could attempt to trade this knight with 10 Nd2 0-0 11 Ne4 too, but 11 ... Nxe4 12 Bxe4 Rb8 isn't really something to worry about. White is most likely equal, but definitely not more than that.

### **10 ... 0-0 11 Nc2 c5**

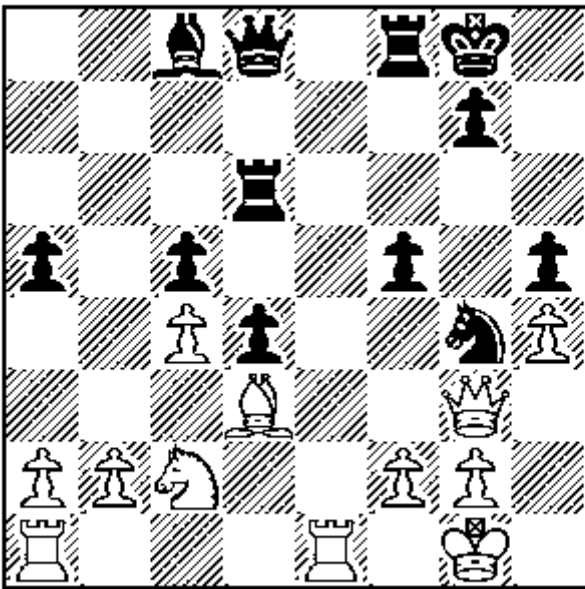


We have a kind of reversed Benoni structure. White has managed to trade a pair of knights, but is not even close to claiming an advantage.

**12 Bf4**

Perhaps 12 b4 is a better try. Following 12 ... Re8 13 bxc5 Bxc5 14 Re1 White has a healthy blockade, but Black's position is still active and the d4-pawn isn't really weak.

**12 ... a5 13 Qf3 Ra6 14 Rfe1 Bd6 15 Be5 Ng4 16 Bxd6 Rxd6 17 Qg3 h5 18 h4? f5!**



Visually an ugly move, but White is suffocating on the kingside. The rook manoeuvre along the sixth rank was very neat and the knight on c2 isn't doing anything at all. In short, White is already lost.

**19 Qf4 Qxh4 20 Re2**

20 Qxd6 Qxf2+ 21 Kh1 Bb7 brings Black great dividends.

**20 ... Rh6 21 Rae1 g5 22 Qg3 Qxg3 23 fxxg3 Bd7**

White has managed to prevent a mating attack, but at the cost of two pawns. The rest of the game isn't very interesting, so I'll leave it unannotated.

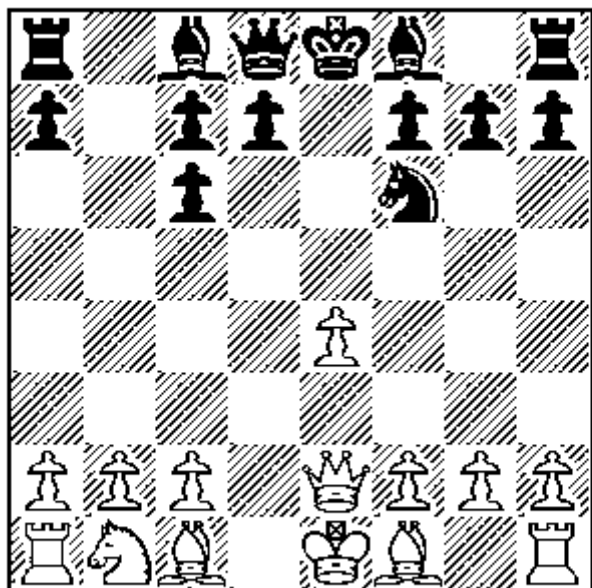
**24 b3 Rb6 25 Re7 Rf7 26 R7e2 Kg7 27 Re7 Kf6 28 R7e2 Re6 29 Rf1 Rxe2 30 Bxe2 Re7**

31 Bxg4 hxg4 32 Ne1 Re3 33 Kf2 f4 34 gxf4 gxf4 35 Rh1 Bf5 36 Rh8 d3 37 Rd8 Ke5 0-1

## 6 Qe2!?

Next, we once again reach a very fresh variation that has exploded in popularity recently. Since my recommended variation hasn't been played a lot, I've again decided just to publish my analysis instead of an entire game.

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 exd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nxc6 bxc6 6 Qe2!?



The creative Russian GM Konstantin Chernyshov tried this move back in 1997 without any success and it was only when Hikaru Nakamura played it against Vladimir Kramnik at the London Chess Classic of 2012 that people took it seriously. It didn't take long until grandmasters around the world analysed it and started applying it in their own games.

Francisco Vallejo Pons was one of them and played 6 Qe2 twice, scoring 1½ out of 2. What's more, he recommended this variation in a video series for the Chess24 website. As a premium member I watched the video, even though it's in Spanish, and I have to say it's an interesting idea. Unfortunately, not even Paco Vallejo managed to convince me that Black would have any trouble, and eventually I found an effective antidote.

Before we continue, 6 Qd4 deserves a mention. Black should respond with the somewhat surprising 6 ... Bd6! which has only been played once, in a correspondence game. However, the move was also mentioned by Bologan. The bishop is safely placed here and Black will follow up with ... 0-0, ... Qe7, and then perhaps ... Bc5 or even ... Ng4 with an attack if possible: for example, 7 Bd3 0-0 8 0-0 Qe7 9 Nd2 and now I like 9 ... Ng4 10 Nf3 c5 with nice control of the dark squares.

## 6 ... Bb4+!

This is a tricky move. Black wants White to include c2-c3 which will deny the knight on b1 a good square. If White wants to push c4 later, no time will be lost anyway.

If Black wants to transpose to the main lines, 6 ... Qe7! is an option, but 7 Nc3 keeps the game in uninvestigated realms.

## 7 c3

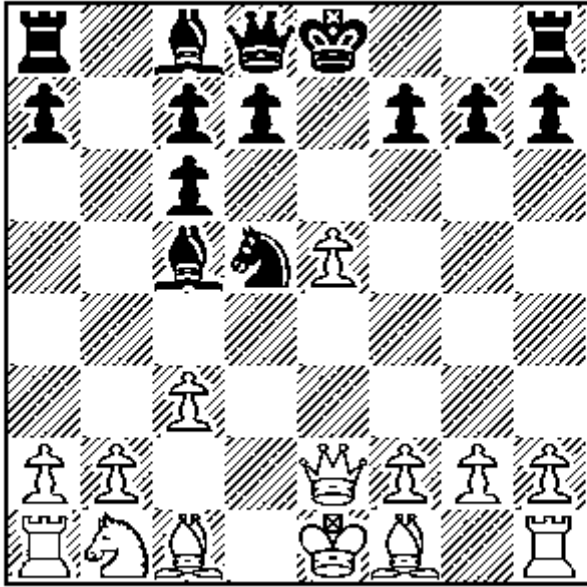
7 Bd2 let's Black off the hook too easily. After simple moves such as 7 ... Bxd2+ 8 Nxd2 0-0

followed by ... d5, it's completely unclear what the queen is doing on e2.

**7 ... Bc5 8 e5**

The only way to cause Black trouble, and to justify the move 6 Qe2.

**8 ... Nd5**



At this point, White has to combine development with bothering Black with Qg4, but he can choose to include c3-c4 first.

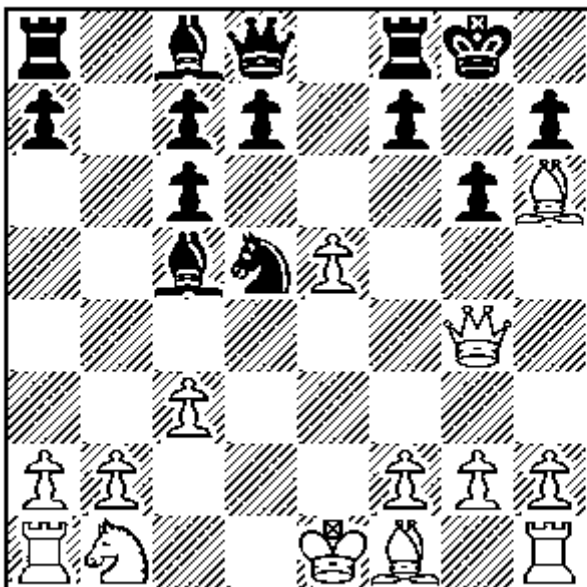
**9 Qg4**

This is the move Vallejo recommended in his video series. There's also:

a) 9 Nd2 0-0 10 Ne4 Bb6 is no problem at all. Black will put pressure on the e5-pawn and White's queen on e2 will start to look silly.

b) 9 c4!? Nb6 10 Qg4 is quite interesting. Black can continue with the aggressive 10 ... 0-0 11 Bh6 g6 12 Bxf8 Qxf8 which looks like a healthy exchange sacrifice. Another option is the calmer 10 ... g6 11 Bg5 d5 12 Qh4 Be7 13 Bxe7 Qxe7 14 Qxe7+ Kxe7 and Black has a comfortable ending where he can fight for an advantage.

**9 ... 0-0! 10 Bh6 g6**



A very decent exchange sacrifice. Objectively there might be even better variations against 6

Qe2, but this looks completely viable and Black has full compensation if you ask me. And who doesn't like taking the initiative straight out of White's hands?

**11 Bxf8 Bxf8**

Black intends to break the centre open with ... d6 and ... Bg7.

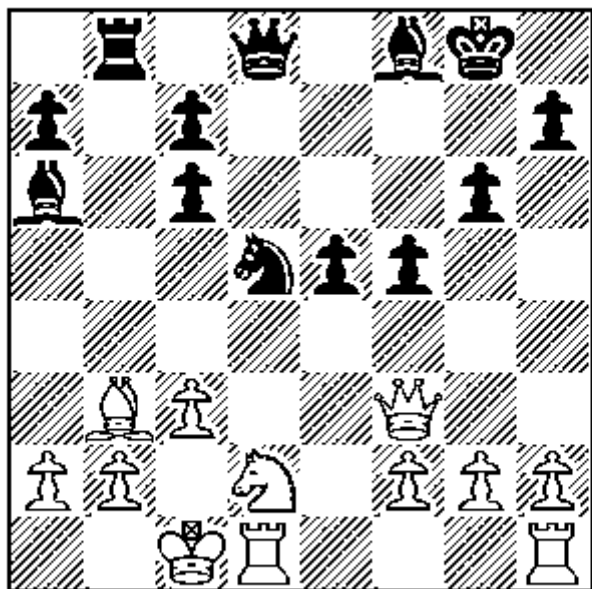
**12 Bc4**

12 Nd2 Rb8 13 Nb3 d6 just looks completely fine too.

**12 ... d6 13 Qf3 Rb8 14 Bb3 dxe5 15 Nd2**

15 0-0 Nf4 is very promising for Black, who has an ongoing attack on the kingside.

**15 ... Ba6 16 0-0-0 f5**



This will be followed by ... e4 with a very strong initiative.

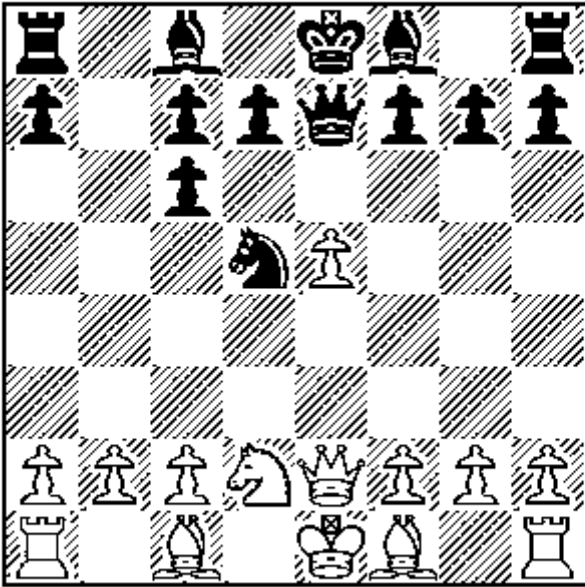
Game 28

**M.Chigaev-P.Smirnov**

Kemerovo 2013

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 exd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nxc6 bxc6 6 e5 Qe7 7 Qe2 Nd5 8 Nd2!?**

This subtle move has never been considered a huge challenge for Black, but it has definitely experienced a revival lately. White develops his knight to a flexible square and avoids the move c2-c4 for now. He won't be able to get along without c2-c4 forever (Black's knight is very well placed on d5), but different move orders can throw Black off his usual repertoire.



Before continuing, I should mention too:

a) 8 g3 has been tried by Gawain Jones, but we don't have to worry about transpositions because g3 isn't really the way for White to develop against ... Nb6 lines. Here 8 ... g6 9 Bg2 Bg7 10 0-0 0-0 11 Re1 Re8 followed by ... f6 breaks up the white centre.

b) 8 h4!? is not the refutation of 1 ... e5, but it's a creative idea at least. The original idea of van der Wiel was to enable the rook lift Rh1-h3 where the rook can play a role along the third rank, while ... g6 is discouraged. Black has many moves, but the easiest seems to be 8 ... f6 9 c4 Ba6 when the move h2-h4 doesn't make a lot of sense. Van der Wiel once tried 10 Rh3?! fxe5 11 Ra3 against Timman, but after 11 ... Nb4! 12 Nc3 Qxh4 13 g3 Qf6 White's position is just horrible.

### 8 ... g6

No need for strange, subtle moves. Simple moves often get the job done. Black wants to finish his development with ... Bg7 and ... 0-0 before breaking in the centre.

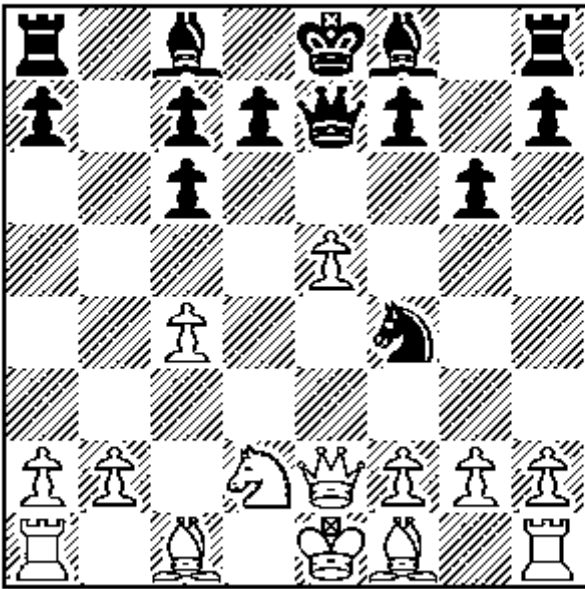
### 9 c4

Van der Wiel, one of the greatest Scotch experts in the world, seems to prefer 9 Nf3 Bg7 10 c4 and this move order avoids the line I recommend against 9 c4. However, the simple 10 ... Nb6 seems to solve Black's problems easily enough. 11 Bg5 Qb4+ 12 Qd2 was the course of J. Van der Wiel-A. Savina, Antwerp 2011, where White got nowhere at all. Black will break ... d6 after castling and enjoy a comfortable endgame where she might very well be better.

Instead, 9 Ne4 Bg7 10 c4 is met with the clever 10 ... f5! when White once again struggles to equalize.

### 9 ... Nf4!

For some reason, almost all grandmasters prefer 9 ... Ba6 or 9 ... Nb6, transposing to other variations. With the text move, Black exploits White's move order to the fullest. The position remains fairly complex, but White has to play accurately to obtain counterplay.



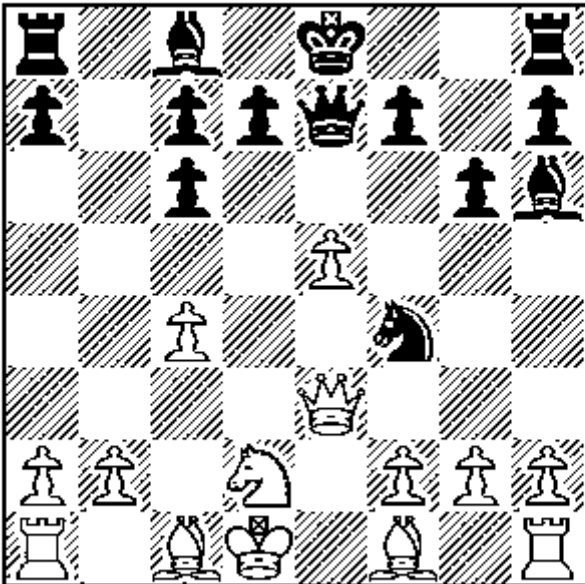
### 10 Qe3

The queen has to protect the e5-pawn. 10 Qe4 is also possible, but 10 ... Ne6 followed by ... Bg7 and eventually breaking up the white centre is just bad for White. Black's knight on e6 is very harmoniously placed.

### 10 ... Bh6

10 ... Ne6!? would probably be my choice if I wanted to retain a normal-looking position since the main line is crazy. This position looks pretty equal, but again Black can be happy with his knight on e6.

### 11 Kd1!



White's chances are connected to this strange move. From a purely concrete point of view, it avoids ... Nxg2+ and now Black can't move his f4-knight without dropping the bishop on h6. Indeed, White argues that Black's loose bishop on h6 will cause him problems.

### 11 ... 0-0!

A very cool move which works tactically.

### 12 h4!

This looks like a shot in the dark, but it's definitely White's best try. It's important to realize

that White not only wants to play h4-h5, but moves such as g2-g3 or even g2-g4-g5 are on the cards.

12 g3 can be met with 12 ... Nh3! 13 Qxh6 Nxf2+ and Black wins material.

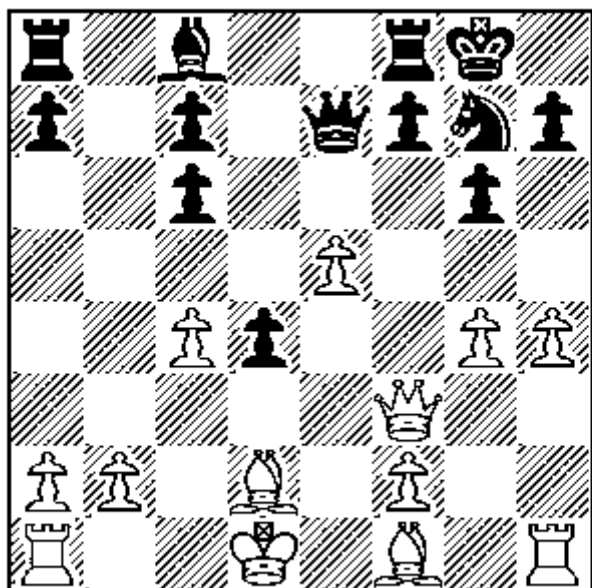
**12 ... d5**

Not very surprisingly, a flank attack is well met by a central break. It's extremely difficult to believe in White's position with a king on d1, a queen on e3 and h4 inserted, but this logic has to be transformed into concrete moves.

**13 h5?!**

Brutal and straightforward, but probably more crazy than good.

White should definitely prefer 13 g3! when the position remains pretty unclear: 13 ... d4 14 Qf3 Nh5 15 g4 Bxd2 16 Bxd2 Ng7.



This was D.Howell-Y.Kryvoruchko, Warsaw (rapid) 2011, when the engine likes Black, although I have to admit that the position is highly unclear and difficult for both players to handle.

**13 ... d4?!**

The immediate 13 ... g5! looks even stronger. White has no obvious way of opening up the kingside which means his own king will be in big trouble sooner or later.

**14 Qg3 g5 15 Nf3 Kh8**

Perhaps Black was relying on 15 ... Ne6 and only now noticed that White could play 16 Nxf5! followed by f2-f4.

**16 Bxf4 gxf4 17 Qh4 f6 18 exf6?!**

18 Bd3, preventing Black's next, looks better. Black can't do anything about exf6 anyway.

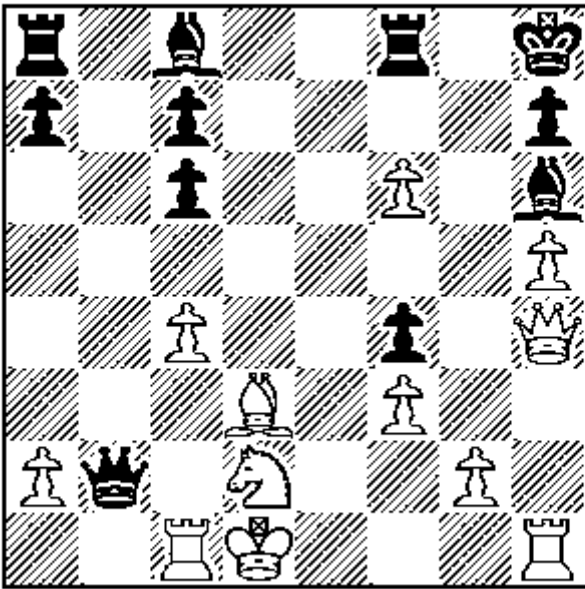
**18 ... Qe4! 19 Nd2 Qf5 20 f3 d3**

Black has successfully halted White's development for now. To finish developing White needs to get rid of the d3-pawn, which in turn will open up the gateway to his own king.

**21 Rc1 Qe5?**

Black appears to underestimate the power of the d3-pawn. It looks like Black gets everything he wants (an attack on White's king), but there was no reason to release the tension this early. If Black had taken things slowly and played 21 ... Rb8 22 b3 Be6 White's position would soon have crumbled: 23 Rc3 Qa5 24 Rxd3 Qxa2 just loses for White and 23 Ne4 d2 24 Rc2 Rbd8 followed by ... Qe5 looks deadly as well.

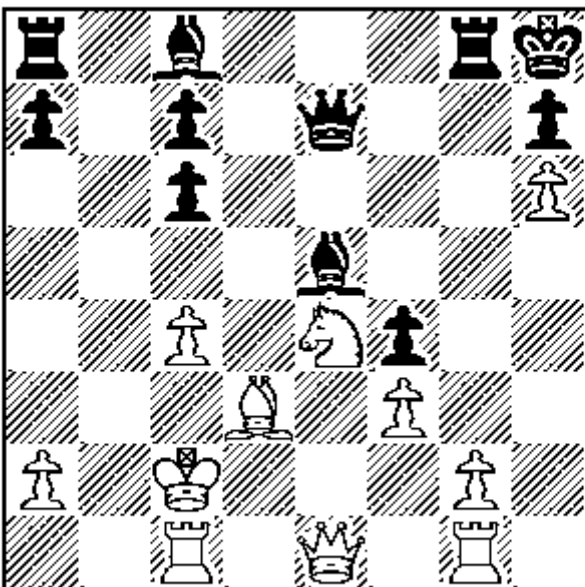
**22 Bxd3 Qxb2**



### 23 Qe1

After 23 Re1! suddenly Black is walking a thin line. White threatens Re7 and the only move to keep a decent position is 23 ... Qd4 when White has the stunning resource 24 Bg6!! (the only decent square for the bishop along the b1-h7 diagonal; 24 Bb1 Rd8 25 Rc2 is obviously not an ideal arrangement) 24 ... Rd8 25 Rc2 Rb8 26 Re7 Rb1+ 27 Ke2 hxg6 28 hxg6 Qd3+ 29 Kf2 Qd4+ 30 Ke2 and the game ends in a draw. This is obviously correct play according to the engine, but over the board it's difficult to imagine anything other than mutual mistakes from both sides.

23 ... Qxf6 24 Ne4 Qe7 25 Kc2 Rg8 26 Rg1 Bg7 27 h6 Be5



The position has finally calmed down a bit, and it's clear that Black's dark-squared bishop makes all the difference. White will never get to Black's king and White's own king on c2 will soon come under attack.

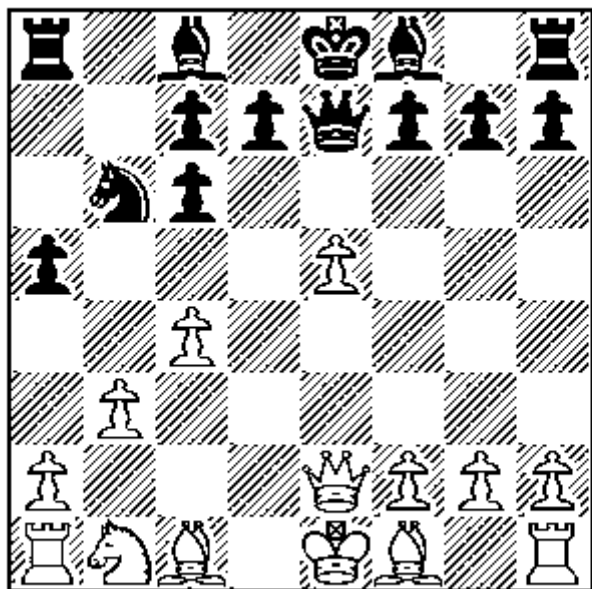
28 Nc3 Bd7 29 Qe4 Rae8 30 Rcd1 Rg6! 31 Qe2 Qa3 32 Qd2 Rd6 33 Rge1 Bf5 34 Rxe5 Rxe5 35 Qxf4 Re2+! 36 Nxe2 Bxd3+ 37 Rxd3 Qxd3+ 38 Kc1 Qd1+ 0-1

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 exd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nxc6 bxc6 6 e5 Qe7 7 Qe2 Nd5 8 c4 Nb6 9 b3**

A flexible move. The knight on b1 could go to c3 or d2 depending on circumstances. However, I don't think 9 b3 is a big challenge for Black and I'd like to take advantage of it by immediately attacking the newly created target on the queenside.

Instead, 9 f4 is well met by 9 ... d5!, while 9 g3 is a common development scheme in the 8 ... Ba6 line, but in this variation Black can develop smoothly and never worry about any kind of Scotch endgame: 9 ... g6 10 b3 (or 10 Bg2 Bg7 11 0-0 0-0 12 f4 f6 and White's centre crumbles) 10 ... Bg7 11 Bb2 0-0 12 Bg2 Re8. If Black had played 8 ... Ba6 instead of 8 ... Nb6, there would now follow 13 0-0 Bxe5 14 Bxe5 Qxe5 15 Qxe5 Rxe5 16 cxd5 Bxf1 17 Kxf1 cxd5 with a famous endgame. White doesn't have this resource in this position and 13 f4 f6 is simply not what he is looking for.

**9 ... a5!**



It's as simple as that. Black intends to push ... a4 and create strong pressure on the queenside. Black may then open up the a-file, push ... a3, or just put more pressure on b3 as in the game.

**10 Bb2**

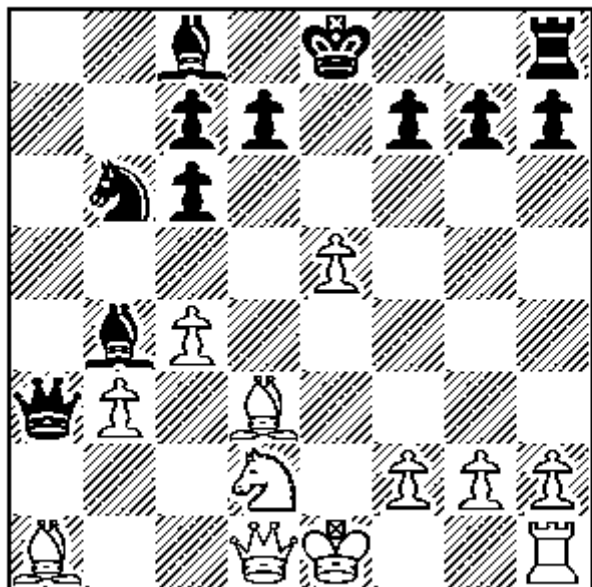
10 Ba3 Qe6 11 g3 was preferred in I.Nepomniachtchi-E.Bacrot, Beijing (rapid) 2014, but this looks like over-the-board inspiration. Black must be better after 11 ... Bb4+! 12 Bxb4 axb4 seeing that the pressure along the a-file is difficult to get rid of. Here 11 Bxf8 Rxf8 12 Nd2 is probably better, but Black maintains some pressure with 12 ... a4!

**10 ... a4 11 Qe3**

Duda was perhaps inspired by a game of Nepomniachtchi from 2011, but I wouldn't be surprised if this move goes out of practical use after this game. Erdos splendidly takes advantage of White's slow development. The alternatives don't give White much anyway, though:

a) 11 Nd2 is quite popular, but Black is definitely fine after 11 ... axb3 12 axb3 Rxa1+ 13 Bxa1 Qa3 14 Qd1. A strange position has arisen. It would seem like Black's pressure should give him a very good position, but it's easy to overestimate Black's prospects. If White manages

to develop normally and castle, Black might easily drift into a cramped position with little counterplay. Black's most popular reaction is 14 ... Bb4! 15 Bd3.



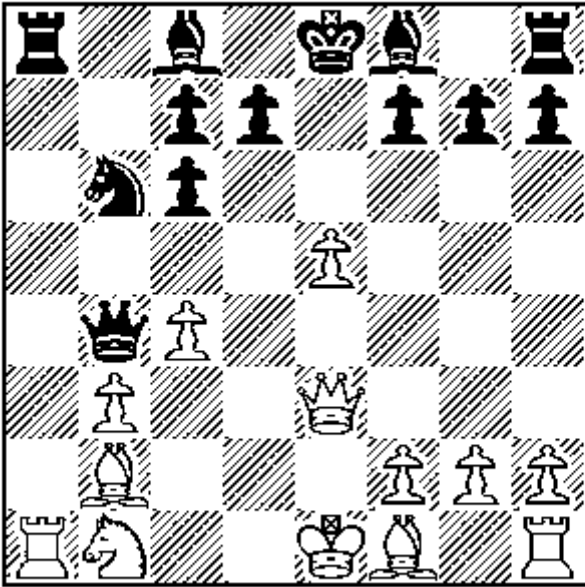
Now the most common continuation is 15 ... Qa5 which prevents White from castling. White usually tries 16 Ke2 when Black seems to be doing fine, but I'd like to recommend the lesser played choice, 15 ... Qa2!?. This move hasn't been played much, but it's quite interesting. If White now plays Qc2 at some point, Black can safely trade queens and enjoy a pleasant endgame. This move also gets the approval of Bologan. White might try:

a1) 16 Ke2 0-0 17 Qc2 Qxc2 18 Bxc2 d5! and Black can't really complain. White can't be too happy with his king on e2 and I don't really think he is close to claiming any kind of edge here.

a2) 16 Bd4!?. is a sneaky manoeuvre, getting the bishop to e3 to defend d2 before castling. However, Black can play 16 ... 0-0 17 Be3 Qa5! and White can't really protect e5 in an efficient manner. Following 18 0-0 (18 f4?! d5 is much better for Black, and White can't even castle because of 19 0-0? d4!) 18 ... Qxe5 19 Nf3 Qe7 White has some compensation for the sacrificed pawn, but it's far from enough for an advantage. Black's position remains solid and White needs to play very accurately to retain his compensation.

b) 11 Qd2!?. is a novelty suggested by my computer. It does clear the way for his bishop on f1 while preventing ... Qb4+. The problem for White is that Black seems to be fine with natural development: 11 ... g6 12 Be2 Bg7 13 f4 0-0 14 0-0 and now 14 ... f6! when White can't maintain his centre.

**11 ... axb3 12 axb3 Qb4+**



### 13 Nd2?

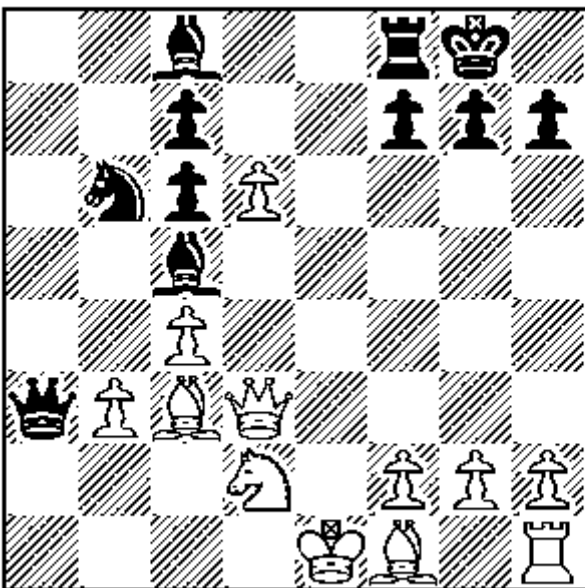
Here's where White's problems really begin.

It was necessary to play the cold-blooded 13 Kd1! which is far from an uncommon idea in the Scotch. White wants to put his king on c2 and if Black can't do anything active, his pieces can quickly become badly placed. For example, the knight on b6 doesn't do much useful work. As such, let's redirect it! After 13 ... Rxa1 14 Bxa1 Na4! 15 Kc2 Nc5 16 Nd2 Qa5 Black's clever regrouping has provided good counterplay and the dull knight on b6 is now working at full power. It might go to b4 via a6, or to e6 followed by ... Bc5 and ... Nd4+. This looks like an unclear game where Black shouldn't be worse.

### 13 ... Rxa1+ 14 Bxa1 Qa3!

Black's queen infiltrates White's camp before White can complete development.

### 15 Bc3 Bc5 16 Qd3 d5! 17 exd6 0-0!



Very strong and powerful chess by Erdos. White is far behind in development and Black should thus open the game as quickly as possible.

### 18 Kd1 cxd6 19 Qg3 f6 20 Bd3 d5 21 Bc2 dxc4

White has been completely overrun by Black's development in the opening. However, the

position doesn't win itself and somehow Duda managed to wriggle out of this jam to draw the game.

### 22 Qh4

22 bxc4 Rd8 is terrible for White. There are tactics like ... Bg4+ or ... Bxf2 in the air.

### 22 ... g6 23 Nxc4 Nxc4?

Black finally slips, which is understandable since the position is highly complicated and playing the exact computer moves every time is next to impossible.

23 ... Qa2! doesn't agree to any trades. Black threatens to go ... Nd5 with a winning attack and 24 Nxb6 is met by the strong 24 ... Rd8+! 25 Bd2 Qa1+ 26 Ke2 Ba6+ when Black picks up the rook on h1 with a completely winning position.

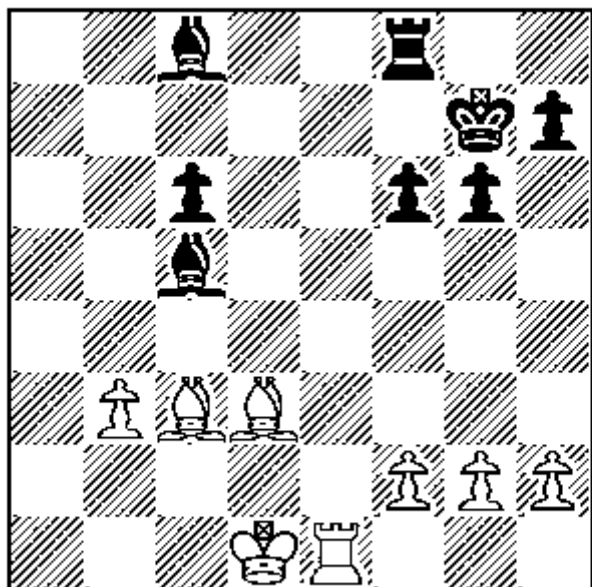
### 24 Qxc4+ Kg7 25 Bd3?!

Now Black gets another chance. Instead, 25 Qa4! forces a queen exchange when Black's advantage quickly diminishes.

### 25 ... Bd6?!

25 ... Rd8! works according to the computer, which doesn't have nerves: 26 Bxf6+ Kxf6 27 Qh4+ g5 28 Qh6+ Ke7 29 Qxg5+ Kd7 30 Qg7+ Be7 and Black's king reaches a safe haven.

### 26 Re1 Qc5 27 Qxc5 Bxc5



The complications have ended and we have an endgame which looks about equal. The game went on for a while, but it's not very relevant to our theoretical coverage.

28 f3 Bd7 29 g4 g5 30 Re4 Re8 31 Rc4 Be7 32 Ra4 Be6 33 Kc2 Bd5 34 Be4 Bxe4+ 35 Rxe4 Kf7 36 f4 gxf4 37 Rxf4 Ke6 38 h3 Rg8 39 Rc4 Kd7 40 Rf4 Ke6 41 Rc4 Kd7 42 Bd2 Rb8 43 Ra4 Rb5 44 Ra7+ Kd6 45 Bf4+ Ke6 46 Rc7 Rc5+ 47 Kd3 Rd5+ 48 Ke4 Rc5 49 Bd2 Re5+ 50 Kf3 Rd5 51 Ke2 c5 52 Bh6 f5 53 Rc6+ Kd7 54 Rb6 fxg4 55 hxg4 c4 56 bxc4 Rd4 57 Rb7+ Ke6 58 c5 Bxc5 59 Rg7 Bf8 60 Rxh7 Bxh6 61 Rxh6+ Kf7 62 Kf3 Kg7 63 Ra6 Rb4 64 Kg3 Rb3+ 65 Kh4 Rb5 66 g5 Rb1 67 g6 Rh1+ 68 Kg5 Rg1+ 69 Kf4 Rxc6 70 Rxc6+ Kxc6 1/2-1/2

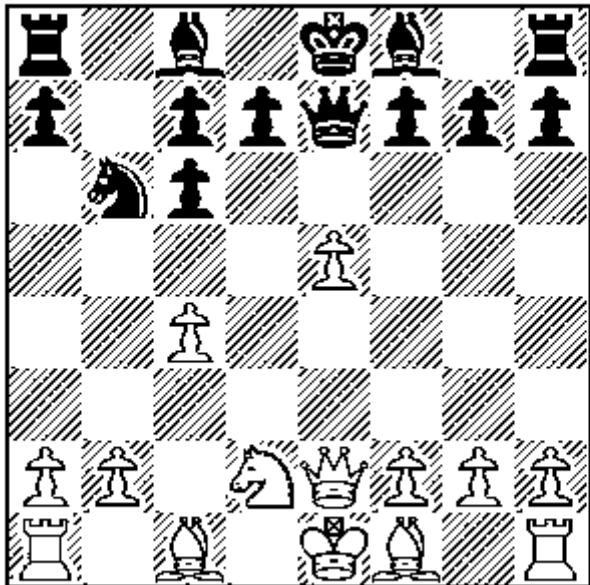
Game 30

E.Andreev-J.Nilsen

Prague 2015

This game was played in the seventh round of the 2015 Prague Open, where I too participated and managed to score my second IM norm. I made a quick draw that day and was thus able to witness the following game live, although at the point it was played I was not aware of its theoretical importance.

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 exd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nxc6 bxc6 6 e5 Qe7 7 Qe2 Nd5 8 c4 Nb6 9 Nd2**



It has become quite popular for white players to put the knight on d2 instead of c3 in the Scotch. However, as always, moves come and go, and Black will always be fine. White's general plan is to wait for Black to commit himself, and only then proceed with g3, b3 or any other development scheme.

### **9 ... Qe6**

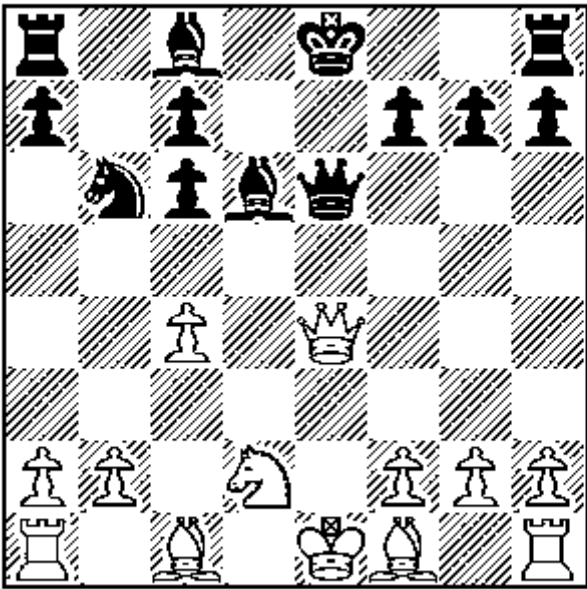
I like this move. It clears the way for the bishop to develop (often to b4), and puts some pressure on the c4-pawn, while still not committing to anything in particular. Please note that I've tinkered a bit with the move order in this game. Nilsen actually played 9 ... a5, which transposes to the game, but gives White other options.

### **10 b3**

Otherwise:

a) 10 g3 Bb4 prevents Bg2 as the pawn on c4 would drop, and after 11 a3 Bxd2+ 12 Bxd2 0-0 it is still difficult for White to develop without giving away the c4-pawn.

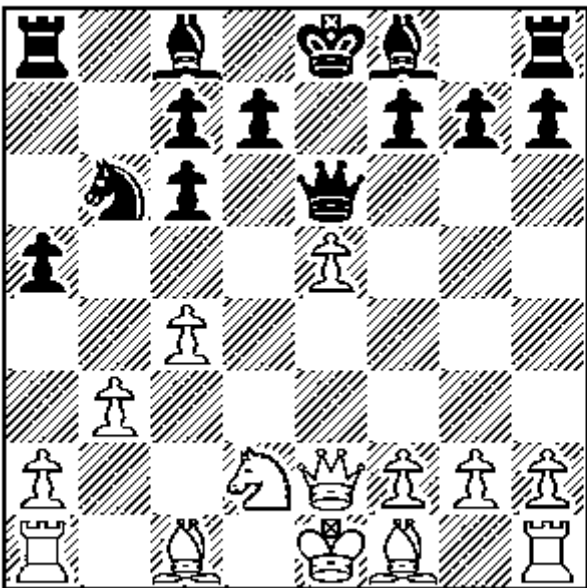
b) Against 10 Qe4, I propose a novel idea: 10 ... d5 11 exd6 Bxd6!.



In general, I don't like recommending this type of move as Black's position might look fine now, but his split structure will cause problems later in the game. However, in this case, I believe White is the one who has to fight for equality since Black's pieces are very active and White's pieces have a hard time finding pleasant squares.

Let's make a few natural moves for White to see how it all works out: 12 Bd3 f5! 13 Qe2 0-0 14 0-0 Qxe2 15 Bxe2 Bb7. Black can now put his rooks in the centre, play ... c5 to let his bishops work beautifully and then redirect his knight from b6 towards the centre. It's not clear how White should continue: for example, if 16 b3 Rfe8 17 Bd3 g6 18 Bb2 Rad8 and it's obvious that White is struggling, 16 Bf3 invites 16 ... Nd7! followed by ... Ne5, and 16 Nb3!? Rfe8 17 Bd3 c5 18 Be3 Be4! looks about equal.

**10 ... a5!**



Just as against 9 b3, I like to push the a-pawn immediately to loosen up White's queenside.

**11 Bb2**

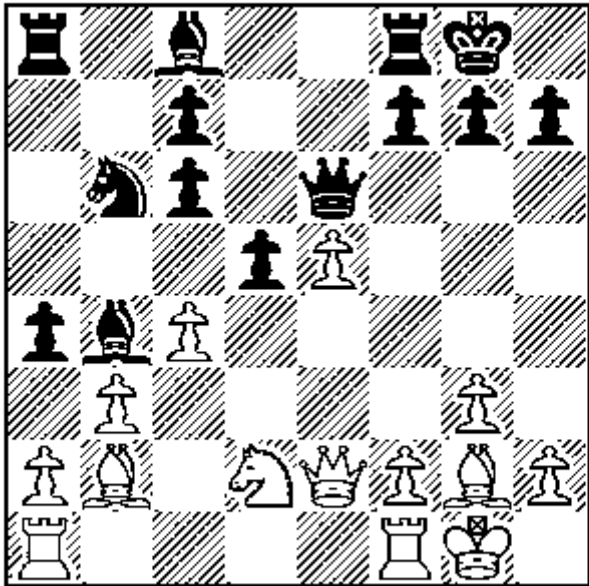
It's surprising how many players have allowed 11 a4 Bb4. Sure, the knight on b6 is slightly out of play for now, but the weakness of the b4-square is permanent.

**11 ... a4 12 g3**

Not the most common move, but it's clearly the most critical move.

12 Qe3 Bb4 13 Bd3 has been tried quite a bit and most significantly it was played by the young Scotch expert Yu Yangyi. Nonetheless, after 13 ... d6 14 0-0-0 I believe White would really be struggling if Black finds the surprising 14 ... d5!. Yes, Black has 'lost' a tempo, but White's king is now committed to the queenside where it won't be too comfortable. White could try 15 f4, but Black has 15 ... axb3 16 axb3 Qe7! with ideas like ... Ba3, ... Bg4 or even ... f5, trying to slow White down on the kingside.

**12 ... Bb4 13 Bg2 0-0 14 0-0 d5!**



The position is quite interesting. Both players have managed to develop and castle, and Black must try to create some counterplay in the centre. The game and my analysis show that he'll be able to do just that, but I'm sure there's nothing wrong with White's position either.

**15 Nf3**

I also considered:

a) 15 Rfc1 axb3 16 axb3 Rxa1 17 Rxa1 Qg6! 18 Rc1 Bg4! 19 f3 Be6 looks totally fine for Black.

b) 15 f4 Qg6 16 Nf3 Rd8 keeps the light squares under control since 17 Nh4 fails to 17 ... Bc5+ 18 Kh1 Bg4!.

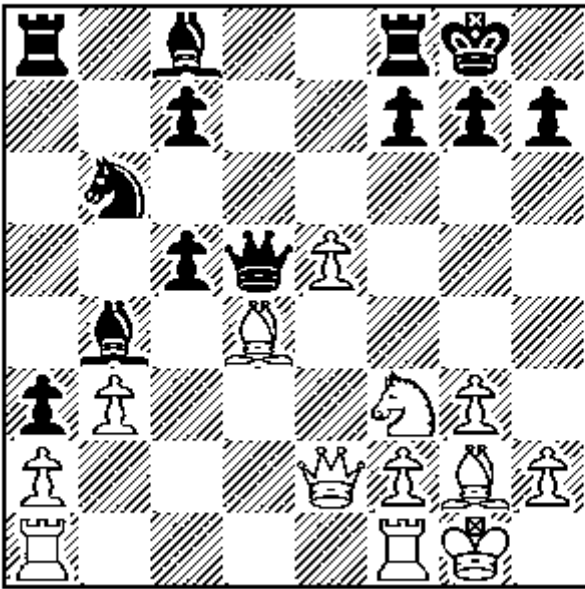
**15 ... a3!**

A very forcing move. Black doesn't have to play this, but it looks like a clean equalizer.

**16 Bd4 c5 17 cxd5**

17 Be3?! Ba6 is just bad for White.

**17 ... Qxd5**



We have a complex position where both White and Black easily can go wrong. Objectively, the position is about equal.

Black would have liked to recapture with the knight, but 17 ... Nxd5? 18 Ng5! is awkward.

**18 Rfd1?!**

White, an experienced grandmaster, isn't able to keep up with the complications (or perhaps long theoretical preparations). He should have preferred:

a) 18 Qe3!? is a peculiar sacrifice. After some complications, we reach an endgame: 18 ... cxd4 19 Nxd4 Qc5 20 Rfc1 Nd5 21 Rxc5 Nxe3 22 Bxa8 Bxc5 23 fxe3 Rd8 24 Rc1 Bxd4 25 exd4 Bg4! and Black isn't worse. He will pick up the d4-pawn and can put pressure on the a2-pawn with ... Rd2.

b) Another resource can be seen after 18 Be3 Ba6 19 Qc2 Bd3 and now White has the splendid 20 Ne1! Bxc2 21 Bxd5 Nxd5 22 Nxc2. The endgame reached is objectively probably a draw, but there's still play left in the position.

**18 ... Ba6 19 Qe3 Rad8**

Now we see that the rook is awkwardly placed on d1.

**20 e6!**

A good practical try, although Black should still maintain an advantage.

**20 ... fxe6 21 Ne5 Qd6 22 Nc6 cxd4 1/2-1/2**

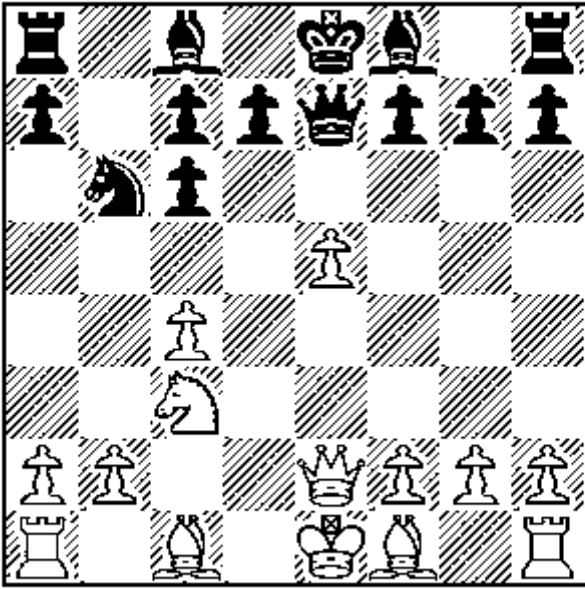
A draw seems rather strange to me, but perhaps Black underestimated his position. Indeed, Black is much better after 23 Rxd4 Nd5 24 Bxd5 exd5 25 Nxd8 Rxd8 26 Rxb4 Qxb4 27 Qe6+ Kh8 28 Qxa6 Qc3!.

Game 31

**J.Lautier-P.Leko**

Cap d'Agde (rapid) 2003

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 exd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nxc6 bxc6 6 e5 Qe7 7 Qe2 Nd5 8 c4 Nb6 9 Nc3**



At last, we arrive at the main line. 9 Nc3 is undoubtedly a very natural move and I predict it's the one you'll face most often in a practical game. White simply develops his knight to a good square without obstructing the c1-bishop.

### 9 ... Qe6

A key move in the Scotch Game. Black puts some pressure on c4, but most importantly he opens up a path for the bishop on f8. It would definitely feel comfortable on b4. The text also prepares moves like ... Ba6 and ... d5, which would liberate Black's position quite a bit.

### 10 Qe4

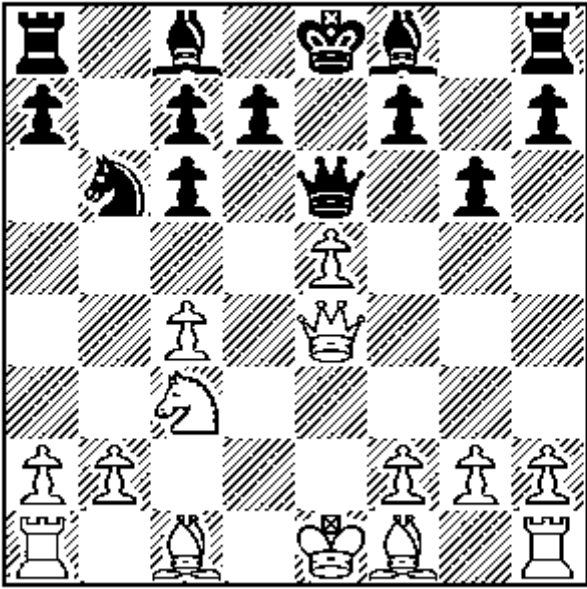
Clearly the most popular move. White sees Black's intentions and does the same thing. White wants to develop his bishop from f1 and castle, while shoring up the c4-pawn and preventing ... d6 for now:

a) 10 b3 can be met with the standard 10 ... a5! 11 Bb2 a4 and Black's position looks very comfortable.

b) 10 Bd2 is an old speciality of van der Wiel that isn't that bad. White prepares to castle long, but Bologan's recommendation takes care of business: 10 ... Ba6 11 b3 Ba3! and Black can follow with ... 0-0 and ... d6, with a good game.

c) 10 f4 has been tried twice by Shabalov, which made me sit up and take note, but Black is definitely fine after 10 ... Bb4 11 Bd2 0-0 12 Qe4 and now Bologan saves the day with 12 ... f5!, rather than Zhrebukh's 12 ... Bxc3.

### 10 ... g6!



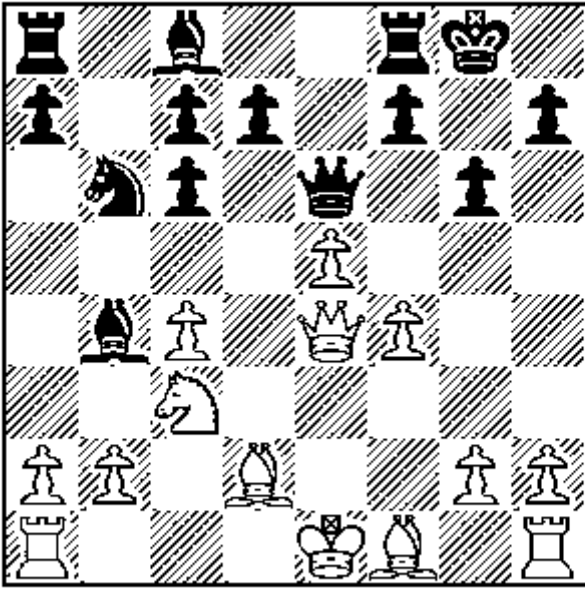
This move was recommended by Mihail Marin in his fantastic work *Beating the Open Games*. It's certainly a recommendation which has stood the test of time. At the time Marin proposed the move it wasn't that popular, but today it's the most common move by far. Black obviously wants to put pressure on e5 with ... Bg7 and ... 0-0, but playing ... g6 doesn't necessarily mean that Black has to go ... Bg7.

Black has experienced some trouble in the line with 10 ... Bb4 11 Bd2 Ba6 12 b3 Bxc3 13 Bxc3 d5. Caruana and Yu Yangyi have played White's position several times with good results, and I want to avoid fighting White's bishop-pair here.

### **11 Bf4**

A tricky move. It develops the bishop while supporting the important e5-pawn, but it definitely feels unnatural to block the f-pawn. However, Black does need to react accurately.

11 f4 is a very sensible alternative. White provides protection for the extremely important e-pawn, which means Black should switch plan: 11 ... Bb4! (note that the move ... g6 is far from useless; for a start, it secures some really important light squares) 12 Bd2 (a strong Israeli GM tried 12 Be3 in T.Nabaty-V.Golod, Haifa 2010, but Black is definitely fine after 12 ... Bxc3+ 13 bxc3 Ba6 14 c5 Nc4 followed by ... f5 at some point, with splendid control of the light squares) 12 ... 0-0.

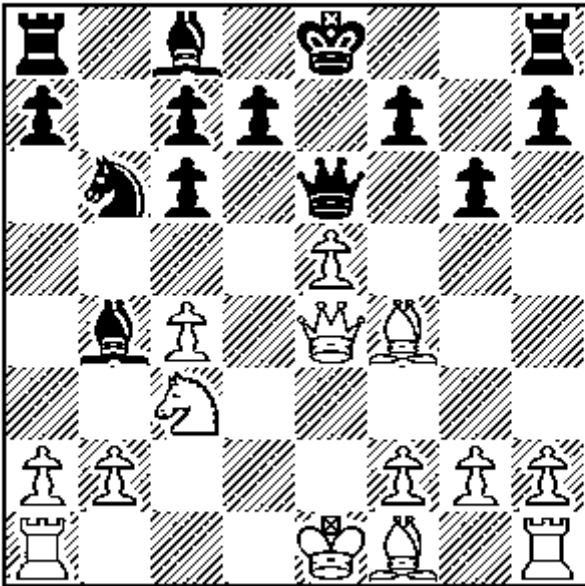


Here:

a) 13 Bd3 Ba6 (the immediate 13 ... f5!? looks interesting as well) 14 b3 f5! 15 Qf3 d6 (Black has successfully broken up White's centre) 16 Qxc6 Rab8 17 0-0-0 Bb7 18 Qb5 a5! 19 Rhe1 Bxg2 20 exd6 Qxd6 and Black's position is clearly superior, since White's queen has got herself in a bit of a mess. Somehow, White managed to win the game anyway, but there's no doubt Black won the opening duel, D.Brandenburg-F.Nijboer, Groningen 2008.

b) Michael Adams faced 13 0-0-0 and his lower-rated opponent escaped with a draw, but Black was much better after 13 ... Rb8 14 b3 d5! in Yunguo Wan-M.Adams, Tromsø 2013.

**11 ... Bb4!**



An important move which discourages White from castling long.

Should Black play routinely with 11 ... Bg7?!, White obtains strong pressure with 12 0-0-0 0-0 13 c5! and the knight on b6 is suffocating.

**12 Bd2**

It is in White's interests to keep his pawn structure intact:

a) White could, of course, ignore matters with 12 Be2 Bxc3+ 13 bxc3 0-0, but I really don't think he's fighting for more than equality after 14 c5 Nd5 15 Bd2 d6!.

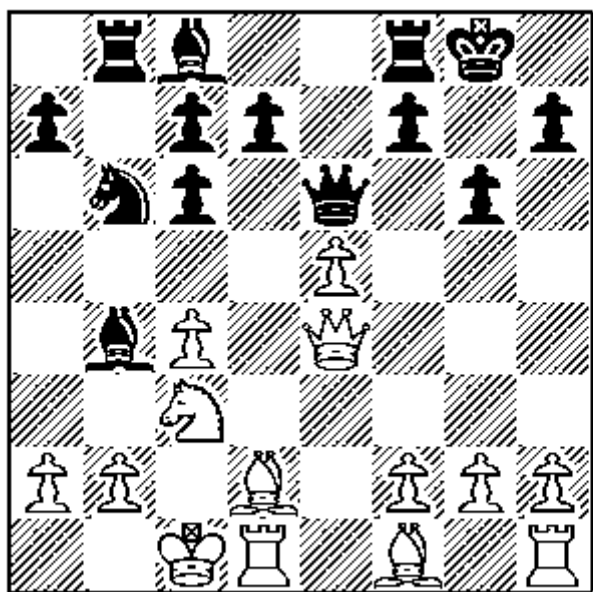
b) 12 Rc1 would be a nice idea if it wasn't for 12 ... Na4!, an idea prevented by the text move.

### 12 ... 0-0 13 0-0-0

White has finally realized his main ambition and castled long. This doesn't come with any guarantee of safety though; White can easily find himself under heavy pressure on the queenside, as we shall see in our main game.

It's not so easy for White to go the other way though, because 13 Be2 Re8 14 f4 f5! followed by ... d6 looks terrible for him as he's far behind in development. It is also important to note that 13 a3 is well met with 13 ... Bxc3 14 Bxc3 Na4!.

### 13 ... Rb8



### 14 h4

Optimistic, according to Postny. It definitely is, but what is White supposed to do if not this? Let's take a look at his difficulties:

a) Postny suggests 14 Bd3, but is this really connected to a decent plan? In any case, Black obtains a great position with the straightforward 14 ... Ba6 (14 ... d5 15 exd6 Qxd6 16 Bf4 is uncomfortable for the black queen) 15 b3 d5 16 exd6 and now the important 16 ... Qf6! which really highlights Black's dangerous initiative.

b) 14 Re1 was suggested in an online article by Slavisa Brenjo, who thinks Black is fine. I think he underestimates Black's position! Indeed, after 14 ... d5! (Brenjo only considers 14 ... Ba6 15 b3 d5 16 exd6 Qxd6, but it makes more sense to keep the bishop on c8; it would be much better on f5 than on a6) 15 exd6 Qxd6 followed by ... Bf5 or ... Be6, Black has a strong initiative. White is still far from completing his own development.

### 14 ... Ba6

14 ... d5! looks interesting as well, but I like Leko's move. It's important to note that 15 exd6? fails because of the intermezzo 15 ... Bxc3!, picking up a piece.

### 15 c5?!

I think it's quite obvious that White's aggressive intentions behind 14 h4 haven't worked. He is already much worse.

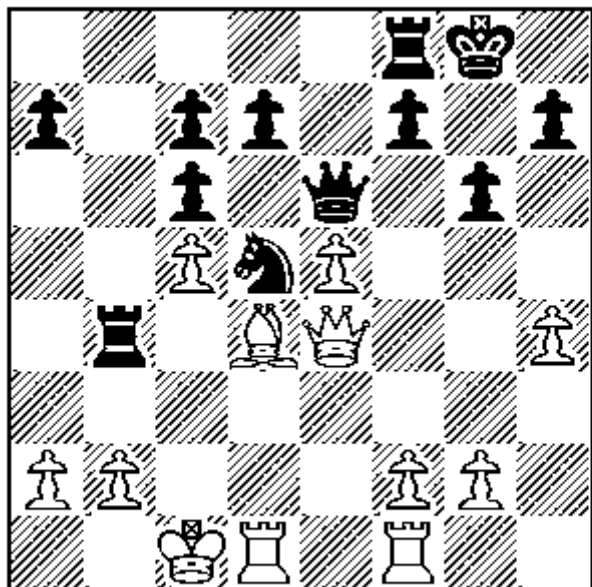
Brenjo suggests 15 b3 as an improvement, but once again I disagree with his opinion that White is fine. After 15 ... d5 16 cxd5 Ba3+ 17 Kb1 cxd5 18 Qc2 Bxf1 19 Rhxfl my analysis shows that Black is much better if he heads down the attacking path: 19 ... c5! 20 f4 c4 and Black

can successfully repel White's attack, whereas his own attack is bound to succeed.

**15 ... Bxc3 16 Bxc3 Nd5! 17 Bd4**

Unfortunately for Lautier, 17 Bxa6? Nxc3 18 bxc3 Qxa2 loses for White. There's a mate on b2 and the bishop on a6 is hanging.

**17 ... Bxf1 18 Rhxf1 Rb4!**



White is obviously struggling to handle Black's initiative. The knight on d5 will never be pushed away and any attempt at a kingside attack is doomed to fail.

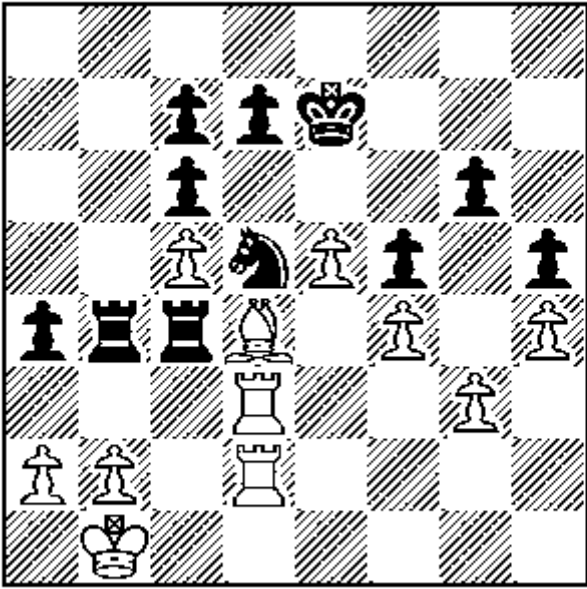
**19 f4 f5?!**

The human response, establishing a light-square bind which is impossible to break down. The stone-cold computer suggests 19 ... Rc4+ 20 Kb1 Rb8 and shows that 21 f5 is nothing to be afraid of. This might be true, but Leko can definitely be forgiven for eliminating any kind of counterplay before continuing with the attack.

**20 Qe2 h5**

Black can never lose this the position, the question is rather if he can break through White's defences on the queenside.

**21 Rf3 Rfb8 22 g3 a5 23 Ra3 R8b5 24 Qc2 Kf7 25 Kb1 Qe8 26 Ka1 Ke6 27 Rd2 Qa8 28 Rd1 Rb8 29 Qe2 a4 30 Qd3 Qb7 31 Qe2 Ra8 32 Rd2 Rb8 33 Rd1 Qb5 34 Qxb5 R8xb5 35 Kb1 Rc4 36 Rd2 Rbb4 37 Rad3 Ke7**



I think it's time to accept that Black is not getting anywhere. However, it's never easy to defend for an entire game and as we shall see, Lautier soon breaks.

**38 Rd1 Rb8 39 Ra3 Ke6 40 Rd2 Ne7 41 Rad3 Rb5 42 Rd1**

Postny thinks this is the mistake that lets Black break through, but I still don't think this is where White breaks. That said, Postny is definitely right about 42 a3! which would make it very difficult for Black to make progress. He can still attempt to play ... d6 at some point, but this is very double-edged and gives White his chances as well.

**42 ... Nd5 43 R1d2?!**

This is definitely a mistake, but I still doubt White is lost.

43 Ra3! prevents ... Nb4 for now, since the a4-pawn would be en prise, and 43 ... Rb7 44 Rd2 still looks tough to break down.

**43 ... Nb4!**

Now the c5-pawn becomes a real headache.

**44 Rf3?**

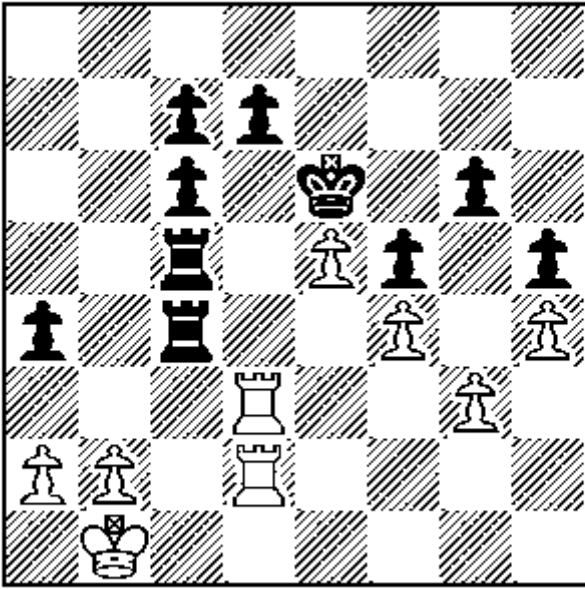
After 44 Ra3 Na6 45 b3 Rcb4 White is collapsing according to Postny, but I don't see what's wrong with 46 Kb2 Nxc5 47 Bxc5 Rxc5 48 Rxa4 Rxa4 49 bxa4, reaching a rook endgame where White shouldn't lose. Instead, 44 ... Nc2! looks like a better try, but surely White should still be able to draw after 45 Rxc2 Rxd4 46 Kc1. Black can definitely keep trying for ages and it's uncomfortable to defend, but I doubt Black is already winning.

**44 ... Na6**

Now the c5-pawn drops for nothing.

**45 Rfd3 Nxc5 46 Bxc5 Rbxc5**

This rook endgame is very interesting and the technique shown by Leko is very instructive, but I'm afraid a discussion lies outside the scope of this book. I still very much recommend you play through the rest of the game, though.



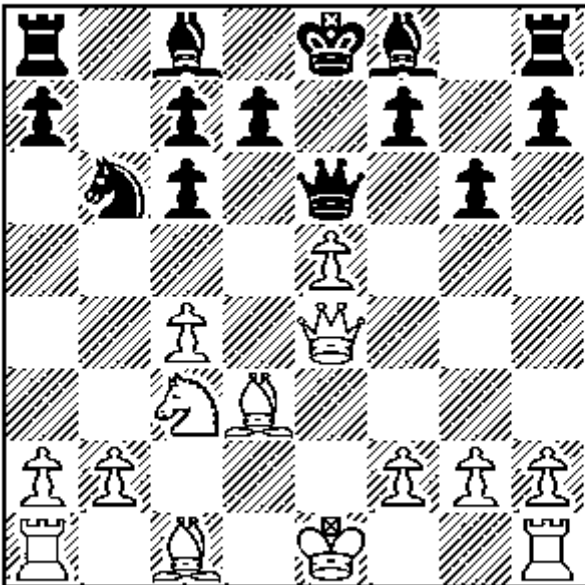
47 b3 axb3 48 axb3 Rc3 49 Rxd7 Rxb3+ 50 Ka2 Rb8 51 R7d3 Rcb5 52 Rc2 c5 53 Ra3 R8b6 54 Ra8 Kd5 55 Ra4 Rb4 56 Ra5 R6b5 57 Ra7 c4 58 Ka1 Rb6 59 Rxc7 Ra4+ 60 Ra2 Rxa2+ 61 Kxa2 Kd4 62 Rd7+ Kc3 63 Rd6 Rb2+ 64 Ka3 Rb8 65 Ka2 Kc2 66 Ka3 c3 67 e6 Ra8+ 68 Kb4 Kb2 69 e7 c2 70 Rd2 Re8 0-1

Game 32

V.Kovalev-A.Beliavsky

Plovdiv 2012

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 exd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nxc6 bxc6 6 e5 Qe7 7 Qe2 Nd5 8 c4 Nb6 9 Nc3 Qe6 10 Qe4 g6 11 Bd3!



Practice has shown that this is the most challenging continuation. White develops a piece and will castle short, while shoring up the e5-pawn with f2-f4.

11 ... Bg7 12 f4

Instead:

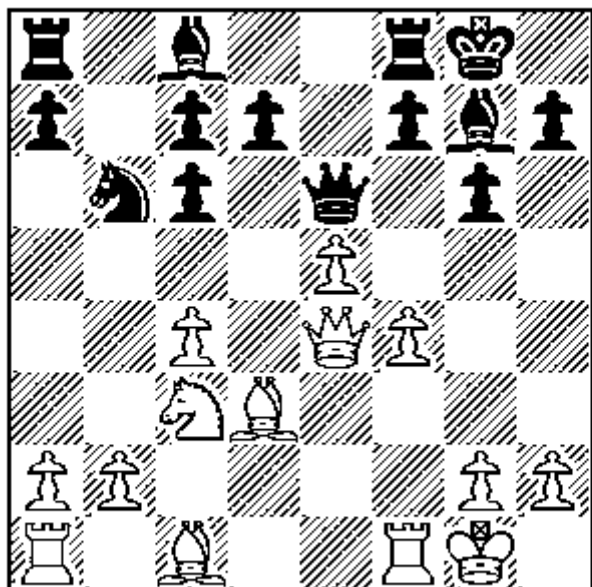
a) 12 0-0 just transposes after 12 ... 0-0 13 f4.

b) 12 Bf4?! puts the bishop on a square White would rather reserve for a pawn. Black can break free with 12 ... 0-0 13 0-0 Ba6! 14 b3 d5 15 cxd5 cxd5 and he already looks to be better.

**12 ... 0-0**

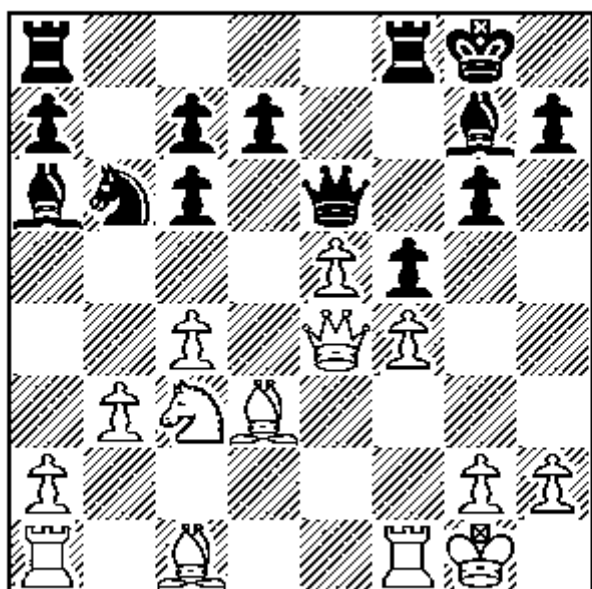
Baramidze recently won a high-level game with 12 ... Ba6 13 b3 d5, but I think Black looks a tiny bit worse after 14 cxd5 cxd5 15 Nxd5 Nxd5 16 Bxa6! Qxa6 17 Qxd5.

**13 0-0**

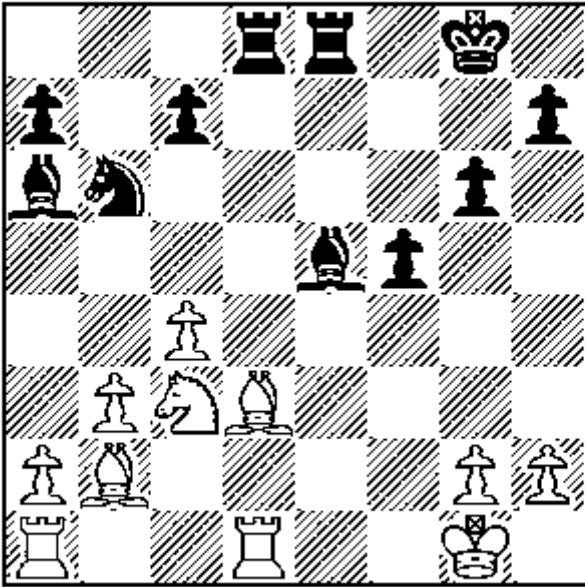


**13 ... d6!**

This looks like a clean equalizer to me, but since White can more or less force a draw after this move, I felt I had to find a decent alternative where Black can fight for a win. Eventually I settled on 13 ... Ba6!? 14 b3 f5!, which looks better than the common 14 ... d5.



After 15 Qf3 (otherwise Black simply breaks with ... d6 and White has no pressure on c6) 15 ... d6! (anyway; it turns out that Black's pressure along the a1-h8 diagonal provides him with excellent counterplay) 16 Qxc6 (16 Ba3 dxe5 17 Bxf8 e4! is just a very good exchange sacrifice for Black) 16 ... Qe8! 17 Qxe8 (17 Nd5 is a cheeky alternative, but Black has the strong counter 17 ... dxe5 18 Qxe8 Rfxe8! 19 Nxc7 e4 with an excellent position) 17 ... Rfxe8 18 Bb2 dxe5 19 fxe5 Rad8 20 Rfd1 Bxe5 the opening phase is well and truly over.



Black has a slightly worse structure, but compensates for it by having much the more active pieces. White still needs to undertake some regrouping until he's completely developed and I'd definitely prefer to play Black. In the only test so far, Black was quick to trade pieces to reach a drawn endgame, but I believe Black can put more pressure on White: 21 Bf1 Kf7! (a fine move, bringing the king closer to the centre while White cannot engage in complete liquidation along the d-file; instead, 21 ... c5 22 Rxd8 Rxd8 23 Rd1 Rxd1 24 Nxd1 Bxb2 25 Nxb2 was the uninspiring course of the game Yu Yangyi-Zhou Jianchao, Xinghua 2013) 22 Rxd8 Rxd8 23 Rd1? and now the important zwischenzug 23 ... Bd4+! 24 Kh1 Bxc3 25 Rxd8 Bxb2 when compared to the same position with the king on g1, 26 c5 is not possible.

#### 14 Qxc6

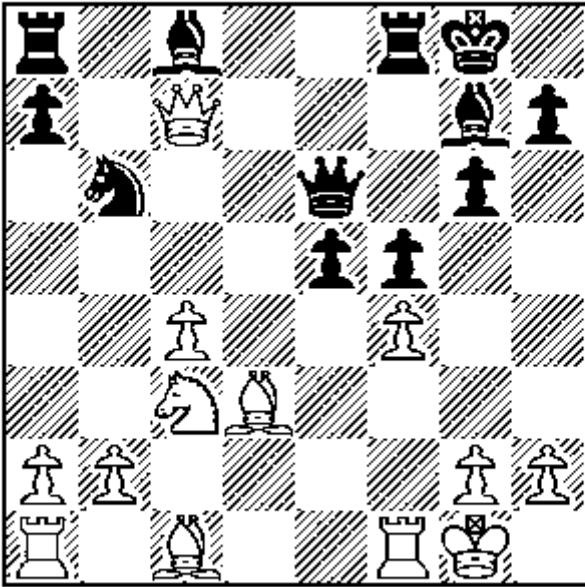
The critical move, but it doesn't get White anywhere.

14 c5 is far from impressive either: 14 ... Nd5 15 exd6 cxd6 16 Nxd5 cxd5 17 Qxe6 Bxe6 18 cxd6 Rfd8 and Black has no problems whatsoever. Van der Weide enjoys this variation for White, but I really don't see why.

#### 14 ... dxe5 15 Qxc7

Ever since our stem game was played, White has tried playing on with 15 Qf3, but Black's position is definitely not worse after 15 ... f5! 16 fxe5 Ba6. In fact, I'd much rather play Black.

#### 15 ... f5!



This move prepares both ... e4 and ... Ba6 without allowing f4-f5. In order not to be worse, White has to play ...

**16 c5**

... but now Black has:

**16 ... Rf7 17 Qd8+ Rf8 18 Qc7 Rf7 19 Qd8+ Rf8 20 Qc7 Rf7 21 Qd8+**

**21 Qd6 Qxd6 22 cxd6** e4 is just worse for White.

**21 ... Rf8 22 Qc7** ½-½

Excellent preparation from Beliavsky, who showed that Black has nothing to fear in these lines.

## Conclusion

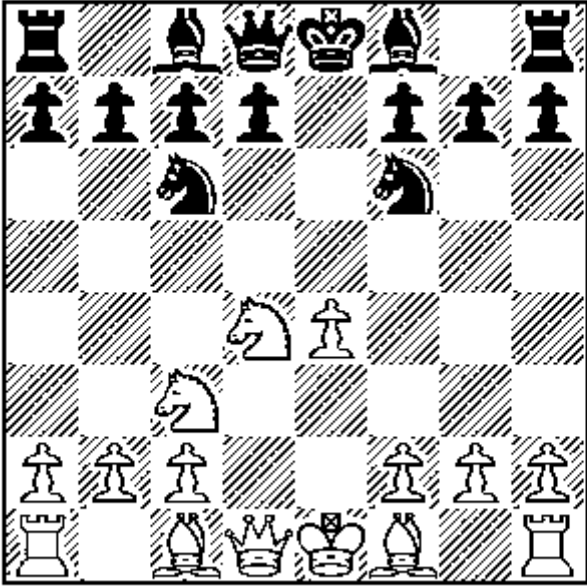
I was far more afraid of the Scotch before I started working on this chapter than I was when I was done with it. After all, it's seen very frequently in grandmaster praxis and White seems to come up with new ideas all the time. If Black understands a few important nuances, such as when to play ... Bb4 against the 9 Nc3 line, we should be doing fine as long as we remember to challenge White's centre.

White has quite a few alternatives early on, but none of them are especially dangerous. It would be wise to remember what to play against 9 Nd2, though, since this is a move that appears more and more frequently. Black seems to be absolutely fine if he reacts actively with 9 ... Qe6 10 b3 a5, which is conveniently the standard reaction to an early b2-b3.

# Chapter Five

## The Scotch Four Knights

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 exd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3



The Scotch Four Knights is a dangerous animal. Its deceptively calm appearance can easily change in a second and you'll end up wondering what went wrong. For a long time it was considered a decent opening in which Black had no theoretical problems whatsoever, but this all changed when Kramnik introduced a new idea. These days, the Scotch Four Knights is still not much of a problem theoretically, but Black needs to play carefully in order not to end up an inferior position strategically. The biggest problem for me was finding a variation where Black could unbalance the game, but eventually I found a nice solution that satisfied me.

### Theoretical Introduction

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4

Of course, 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 d4 exd4 5 Nxd4 is but a common transposition.

3 ... exd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 Bb4

I tried to make 5 ... Bc5 work, but in the end I think Black has some problems to solve after 6 Be3 Bb6 7 Qd2 Ng4 8 Nxc6 bxc6 9 Bd4!.

6 Nxc6 bxc6 7 Bd3 0-0

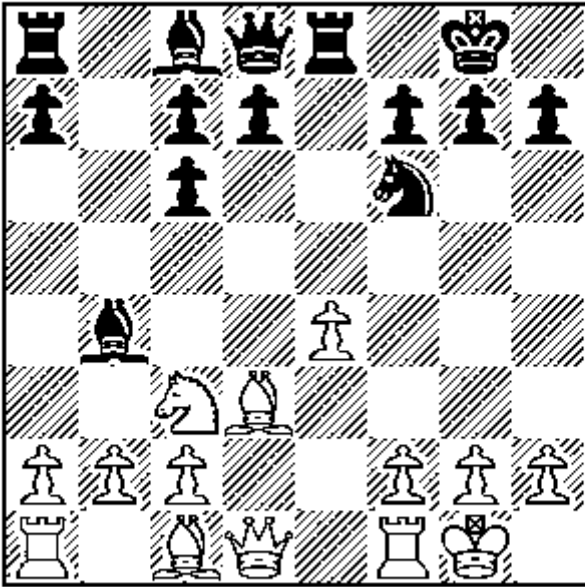
Some prefer to start with 7 ... d5, which almost always leads to the same thing, but for simplicity I just want to avoid giving White extra options such as 8 exd5 cxd5 9 Qe2+, even if theoretically this isn't a problem.

8 0-0

8 Bg5 can safely be met with 8 ... h6 9 Bh4 d5! when White struggles to equalize: 10 e5 Re8! is just good for Black, as is 10 exd5 Re8+.

8 ... d5

8 ... Re8 has been tried by Aronian several times.

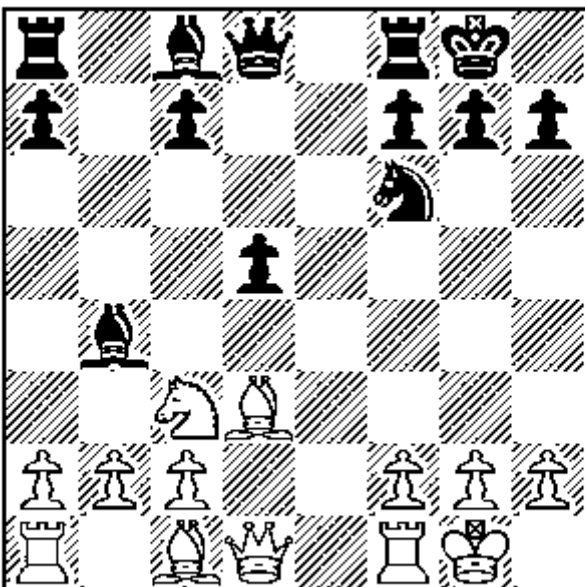


I really tried to make it work for Black, but I still don't know what he is supposed to play against 9 Bg5!. Instead, 9 Qf3 Bd6!, as in A.Naiditsch-L.Aronian, Baden-Baden 2015, is Aronian's creative point and does look quite okay for Black, although it should be said that Aronian failed to create any serious winning chances as it all ended in a fairly solid draw.

**9 exd5**

9 e5 might look tricky, but 9 ... Ng4 followed by ... f6 is just good for Black, who can create a strong attack against the white kingside. Note that 10 h3?! Nxe5 11 Bxh7+ Kxh7 12 Qh5+ Kg8 13 Qxe5 is more pretty than good. In fact, Black just has a brilliant bishop-pair on an open board.

**9 ... cxd5**



This is considered to be the starting point of the Scotch Four Knights. White has a choice:

a) The traditional main line is 10 Bg5, which I still consider to be quite dangerous, but I believe a revitalization of a previously 'refuted' line might create some interesting play. This is covered in Games 34 and 35.

b) Kramnik popularized 10 h3! against Aronian in 2012 and this flexible move has been fashionable ever since. It's not a refutation of 1 e4 e5, but it is an interesting concept that

definitely deserves respect. I have given Black two different approaches with which to fight 10 h3:

b1) The interesting 10 ... Be6 is in the same style as my recommended 10 Bg5 Be6 and looks completely playable here as well.

b2) Another option is Grandelius' idea of being flexible in the centre. Black puts his rooks on e8 and b8, waiting to see where White puts his dark-squared bishop (f4 or g5), and reacting accordingly. This is covered in Games 36 and 37.

c) I witnessed the Israeli GM Tamir Nabaty uncork 10 a3!?! in the 2012 Czech Open. I was very impressed by his technical win against Kravtsov, but theoretically this shouldn't be much of a challenge. It does force a concession from the b4-bishop, but at the same time it spends an entire tempo. After 10 ... Be7 11 Bf4 (typically avoiding the exchange of dark-squared bishops), I think Black should just go ahead and play 11 ... c5! when the move a2-a3 looks quite useless. In some cases it could even be a weakness, especially if Black gets pressure on the undefended b2-pawn.

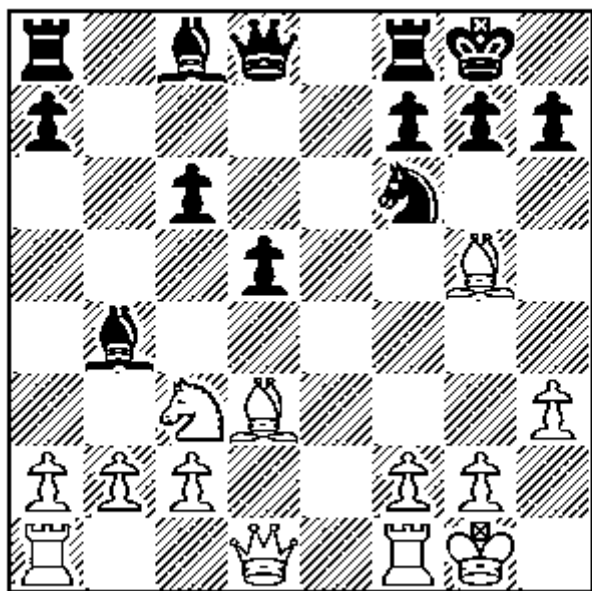
Before we go too deeply into the theory, I would like to show a game between two very strong players where White obtained very comfortable play. It demonstrates the kind of situation I would like to avoid as Black.

### Game 33

**A.Kovchan-T.Meszaros**

Zalakaros 2014

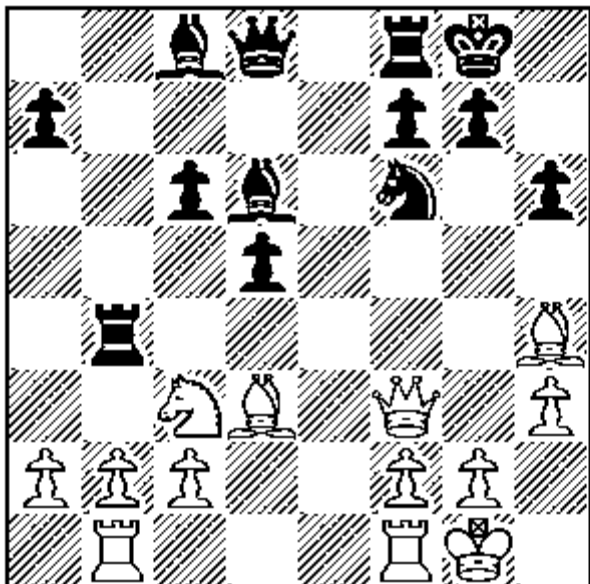
**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 d4 exd4 5 Nxd4 Bb4 6 Nxc6 bxc6 7 Bd3 d5 8 exd5 cxd5 9 0-0 0-0 10 Bg5 c6 11 h3**



A peculiar move order, which was probably meant to throw Black out of book. It's more common to reach the game position through 11 Qf3 Bd6 12 h3.

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

Personally, I would prefer to play 11 ... h6 to put the question to the bishop immediately. If White had played 11 Qf3 instead of 11 h3, Black would have to enter an endgame with the worse pawn structure, but this isn't possible with White's move order. White would probably have to play something like 12 Bh4 when I like Koneru's handling of the position: 12 ... Bd6 13 Qf3 Rb8



This is a common way to activate the queen's rook, especially when White has a bishop on h4. White should probably go for the endgame after 15 Bxf6 Qxf6 16 Qxf6 gxf6, but it's clear that Black isn't worse here. Compared to many similar endgames, White has lost time with Bg5-h4xf6 and Black has already activated her queenside rook. Indeed, after 15 Bg3 Re8 16 b3 Bxg3 17 Qxg3 Rb7 18 Rfe1 Rbe7 19 Rxe7 Qxe7 Black was already in the driver's seat in E.Paetz-H.Koneru, Beijing (blitz) 2014.

### 12 Qf3

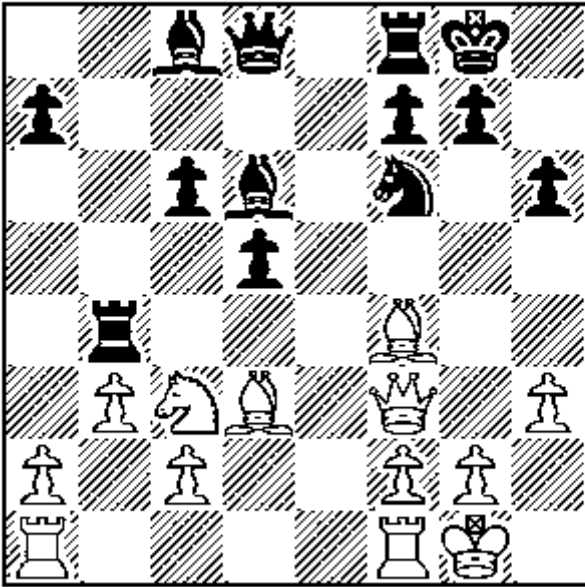
We have transposed into known theory again, although in this chapter I'm going to recommend putting the dark-squared bishop on e7 instead of d6.

### 12 ... Rb8 13 b3 h6 14 Bf4

Probably not objectively the best move, but once again Kovchan is looking for a position where he can outplay his opponent because of his better understanding.

It is possible that Kovchan considers 14 Bxf6 Qxf6 15 Qxf6 gxf6 to be too drawish. This is also the reason I have not recommended this type of endgame for Black in our main line (we avoid it by putting our bishop on e7). White often employs the manoeuvre Nc3-e2-d4-f5 and after ... Bc8xf5 we reach an endgame which is highly drawish.

### 14 ... Rb4

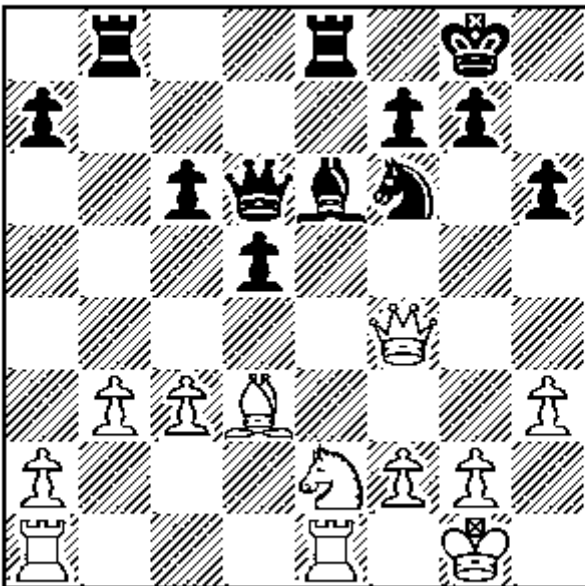


Here we see this manoeuvre again.

**15 Bxd6 Qxd6 16 Rfe1 Be6 17 Ne2 Re8**

Curiously, a year after our stem game was played, Kovchan once again reached this position and faced 17 ... Rbb8 18 Nf4 Rbe8 19 Qg3 Nd7 in A.Kovchan-M.Kazakov, Lutsk (rapid) 2015. Here 20 Re3! followed by doubling on the e-file would have been very strong for White. Another good option would have been 18 Qf4!? Qxf4 19 Nxf4 Bd7 20 c4! when White definitely keeps a nagging edge in the endgame.

**18 c3 Rbb8 19 Qf4!**



Kovchan knows what he's looking for. The endgame isn't terrible for Black, but it's not very comfortable and White can certainly try to realize his edge.

**19 ... Qxf4**

Declining the endgame with 19 ... Qd7 isn't really an option because of 20 Nd4 followed by b3-b4 with a nice blockade on the dark squares. This is a common theme in the Scotch Four Knights and looking at Black's pieces, it's obvious something has gone wrong.

**20 Nxf4 Bd7**

Meszaros realizes the importance of the bishop. It might look tempting to go into something like 20 ... g5 21 Nxe6 fxe6 where Black looks solid and has a nice pawn centre, but the pawns are really just weak. White will double on the e-file, play f2-f3 and then keep up the pressure. A sample line: 22 Re3 Kf7 23 Rae1 Re7 24 f3 Rbe8 25 b4 e5 26 Kf2 h5 27 Bc2 h4 28 c4 d4 29 Ra3 and Black's pawn centre is effectively blockaded, while Black's weaknesses are becoming more and more apparent.

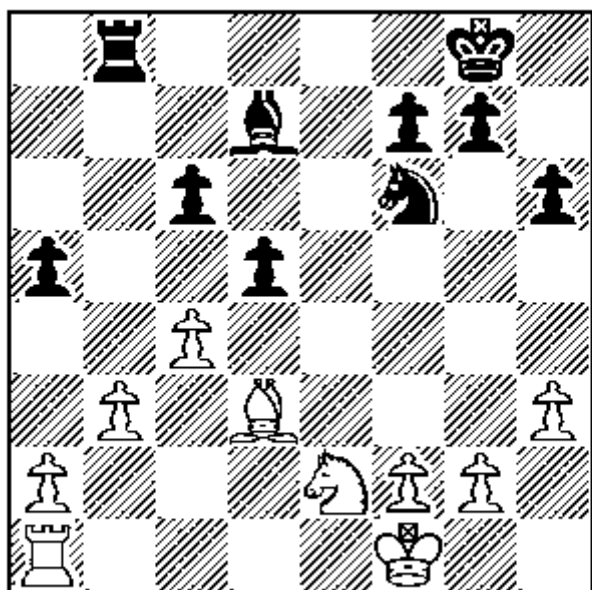
**21 c4!**

Once again, a really disturbing move. At this point it's easy to see that no matter how Black reacts, he'll be left with weak pawns (either on the c-file or the d-file).

**21 ... a5**

Engaging in counterplay on the queenside is a sensible idea, but it doesn't solve Black's problems.

**22 Rxe8+ Rxe8 23 Kf1 Rb8 24 Ne2**



The knight is redirected towards the queenside where it will target Black's weaknesses further.

**24 ... a4?!**

This idea appears natural and very human. Black is slowly but surely getting squeezed, so he engages in counterplay as quickly as possible, but perhaps it was better to just improve Black's pieces. Indeed, after 24 ... Kf8 25 Nc3 Ke7 26 Na4 Kd6 it's not quite clear how White makes progress from here.

**25 bxa4! Rb4 26 cxd5 cxd5 27 a5**

It turns out that Black won't regain this pawn so easily after all.

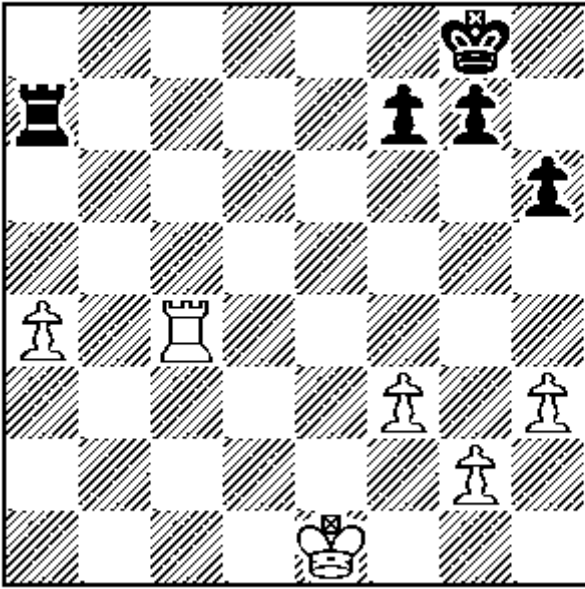
**27 ... Ra4 28 a6 Ra3 29 Nc1 Ne4 30 Nb3 Bc8 31 f3 Nd2+?**

Black finally cracks under the pressure. 31 ... Nd6 and ... Nc4 looks better, when Black should have good chances to hold.

**32 Nxd2 Rxd3 33 a7 Ra3 34 Rc1 Ba6+**

Perhaps Black had been relying on 34 ... Bb7, but 35 Rc7 Rxa7 36 Ke1! is a very beautiful move that puts Black in an awkward bind.

**35 Ke1 Bc4 36 Nxc4 dxc4 37 Rxc4 Rxa7 38 a4**



We've reached a rook endgame where White has four pawns against three, but with a passed a-pawn. Since White's king is so close to the queenside, the win shouldn't be too difficult and in the game Kovchan didn't have any problems realizing his advantage.

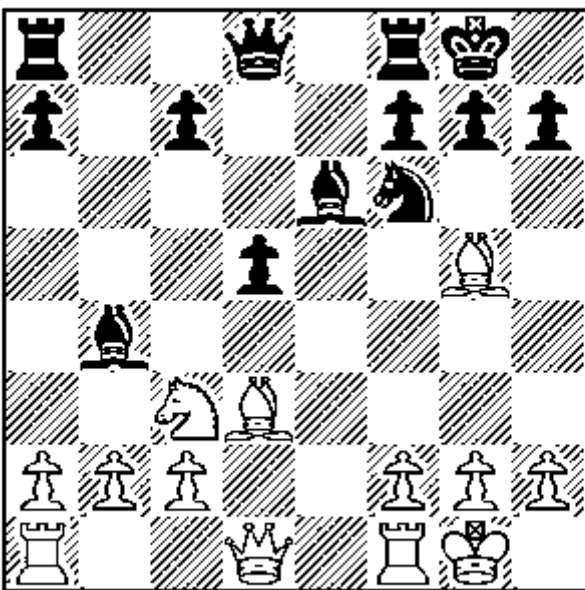
**38 ... g5 39 Kd2 Kg7 40 Kc3 Kg6 41 Kb4 Rb7+ 42 Ka3 Rb1 43 a5 f6 44 Ra4 Ra1+ 45 Kb4 Rb1+ 46 Kc5 Rc1+ 47 Kb5 1-0**

Game 34

**V.Alcazar Jimenez-F.Elsness**

Mallorca 2004

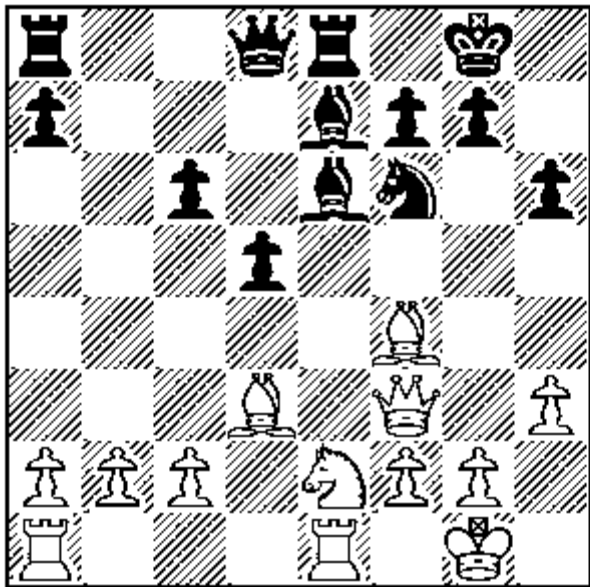
**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 d4 exd4 5 Nxd4 Bb4 6 Nxc6 bxc6 7 Bd3 0-0 8 0-0 d5 9 exd5 cxd5 10 Bg5 Be6!**



In pretty much every single book I've opened, this move was awarded a dubious mark or at least an explanation as to why it's bad.

These days, everyone seems to prefer 10 ... c6 and this was also the move I initially intended to recommend, but after careful examination I decided that Black has to be really careful in order

just to equalize. 11 Qf3 Be7 is the most popular continuation. Black nullifies the pin along the h4-d8 diagonal while improving his worst-placed piece. He can now increase the pressure with ... Rb8 or develop with either ... Re8 or ... Be6 and ... c5. However, I didn't find anything satisfactory for Black after the accurate 12 Rfe1! Re8 (12 ... h6 gives White the opportunity to force a draw with the typical 13 Bxh6! gxh6 14 Qe3 and White picks up h6 with perpetual check) 13 h3 h6 14 Bf4 Be6 15 Ne2.



This was already mentioned as problematic by Mihail Marin back in 2006! Concretely, ... Be6 and ... Re8 don't work well together. Bologan thinks that Black is fine here, but my analysis seems to prove Marin correct: 15 ... Qb6 (perhaps Black should prefer 15 ... c5, but then 16 Bb5! is still uncomfortable) 16 b3 c5 prepares ... c4 with counterplay, according to Bologan, but 17 Rab1! seems to put a dent in the works. It's not so easy to prepare Black's counterplay since 17 ... Qa5 18 c4 followed by Be5 creates a very uncomfortable situation for Black in the centre.

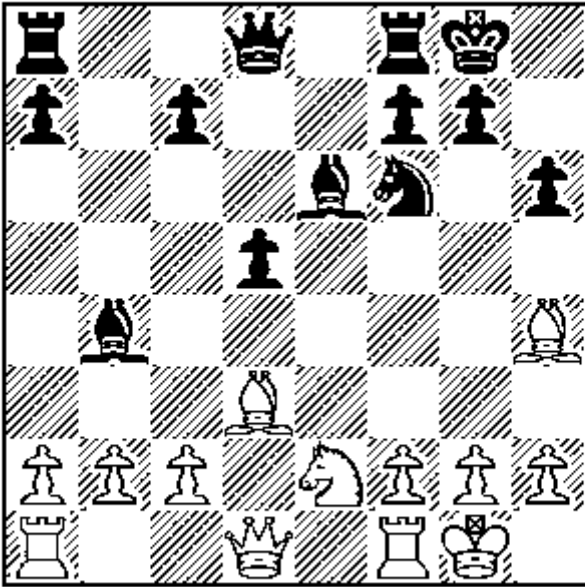
Another option for Black after 10 ... c6 11 Qf3 is 11 ... h6 12 Bxf6 Qxf6 13 Qxf6 gxf6, but while I definitely think Black is fine in this endgame, it might be frustrating to have to play this for a win. For example, 14 Ne2 Bd6 15 Nd4 c5 16 Nf5 Bxf5 17 Bxf5 and a draw is a very likely result.

Perhaps Black's best variation is 10 ... c6 11 Qf3 Bd6, which again I definitely think is fine for Black, although even here accuracy is still required. As such, 10 ... Be6!? will be our move!

### 11 Qf3

White continues in the usual manner, but in this case Black has an improved version of the main line since we can push ... c5 immediately instead of wasting a move on ... c6.

11 Ne2!? is another standard move against an early ... Be6. The knight can go to d4 or even f4 to put pressure on the bishop. Black should flick in 11 ... h6 (in general a good move to include wherever possible) 12 Bh4.



Now I like Smyslov's 12 ... Rb8! (12 ... Bd6!? is fine as well: 13 Nd4 Bd7 14 Bf5 and now 14 ... Be5! when play looks balanced), after which I'd like to preserve my bishop with 13 Nd4 Bd7 14 c3 Bd6 15 b4 Re8 followed by ... c5 with good counterplay.

### 11 ... Be7

A very decent alternative is to enter the well-known endgame with 11 ... h6 12 Bxf6 Qxf6 13 Qxf6 gxf6. We have a typical struggle where I definitely think Black's bishop-pair balances his worse pawn structure, but since this is kind of dull, I won't recommend this to Black.

### 12 Rfe1

Alternatively:

a) 12 Rae1 Rb8 13 Nd1 Re8 followed by ... h6 and ... c5 is just fine for Black.

b) 12 h3 eliminates all ... Bg4 ideas, but I don't like it very much when the bishop is already committed to e6. Indeed, after 12 ... h6 13 Bf4 (13 Bh4 can be met with the standard manoeuvre 13 ... Rb8! 14 b3 Rb4!) 13 ... c5! followed by ... Bd6 Black gets a very comfortable position. It's often desirable for Black to achieve the trade of dark-squared bishops.

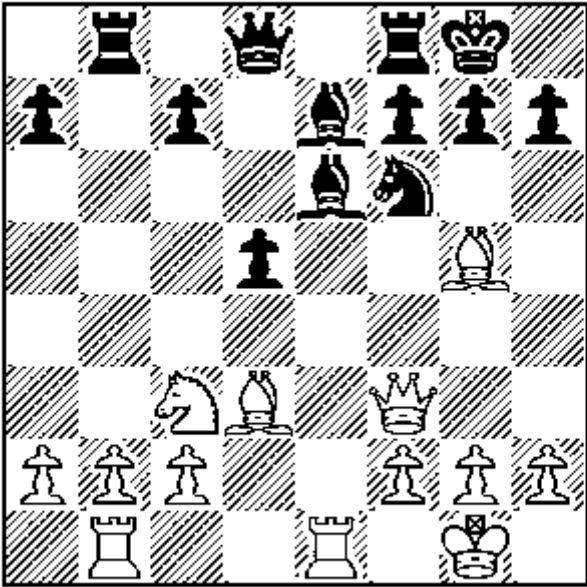
### 12 ... Rb8

A useful move to include.

Black can also play 12 ... h6 here. Although this might be objectively best, the problem is that White can force a draw with the strong 13 Bxh6! gxh6 14 Qg3+ Kh8 15 Rxe6! fxe6 16 Qg6 and Black cannot escape the perpetual check.

### 13 Rab1!

13 b3 might look like a more natural move, but Black can quickly seize the initiative with 13 ... Bb4!, which puts White in an awkward pin, and 14 Bd2 c5! leaves Black in charge.



Now the big question is how to develop without creating weaknesses or playing ... h6 which would allow a forced draw.

### 13 ... c5

Marin thinks that Black should play this, but I'm not so sure:

a) 13 ... Re8 doesn't fit too well with ... Be6 and it's not so clear what Black is trying to achieve. Still, it might be a good waiting move and 14 h3 c5 15 Bf5 Qd7 16 Bxe6 fxe6 doesn't look too bad for Black. Indeed, it looks like an interesting struggle where Black has to prove that his pawn centre isn't weak, but I've got faith in Black's position.

b) 13 ... Qd7 defends e6, but 14 h3 h6 15 Bf4 is still rather annoying for Black. White will follow up with Be5, a3, b4 and establish a bind on the dark squares.

c) 13 ... h6 is still possible, although White still has 14 Bxh6 gxh6 15 Rxe6 fxe6 16 Qg3+ Kh8 17 Qg6 with a draw.

d) 13 ... Rb6!? hasn't been tried yet, but it might be Black's best way to play for a win. The rook defends against all kind of Rxe6 sacrifices and might play an important role along the sixth rank in the future. Following 14 Na4 (14 h3 h6 15 Bf4 Bd6 looks completely fine for Black) 14 ... Rb4! 15 b3 h6 Black is once again completely fine.

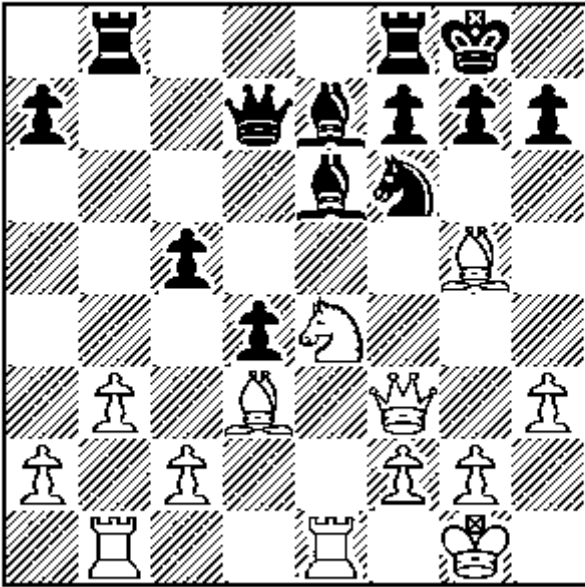
### 14 b3

Now I'm not so thrilled with Black's position. It's not easy to do anything useful with the central pawns.

### 14 ... Qd7

14 ... c4 15 bxc4 Rxb1 16 Rxb1 dxc4 17 Bf5 looks a bit worse for Black too. White is more active and Black's weaknesses are easier to attack.

### 15 h3 d4 16 Ne4



This position is definitely a bit worse for Black. His central pawns have proven to be nothing but weaknesses.

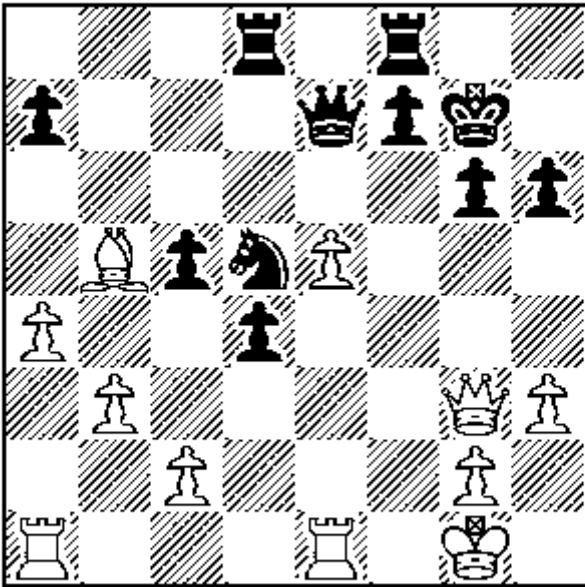
**16 ... Nd5 17 Qh5 g6 18 Qf3**

This looks a bit strange. 18 Qh4 f6 19 Bd2 would have kept some advantage for White.

**18 ... Bxg5 19 Nxg5 Nc3 20 Ra1?!**

White should definitely have played 20 Ne4! to trade Black's knight on c3. I still think White might be a tiny bit better here, whereas in the game Black now takes over the initiative.

**20 ... Bd5 21 Qf4 Rbe8 22 a4 Qb7 23 f3 h6 24 Ne4 Bxe4 25 fxe4 Kg7 26 e5 Qe7 27 Bb5 Nd5 28 Qg3 Rd8**



Black has played really well and White is definitely the one fighting for his life here. The knight will be a monster on e3.

**29 Rad1 Ne3 30 Rd2 Rb8**

30 ... h5! looks more natural, seizing space on the kingside.

**31 c3 Rfd8 32 cxd4 cxd4 33 e6! Qxe6 34 Rxd4 Rxd4 35 Qxb8**

With accurate defence, White has managed to equalize.

**35 ... Qe4 36 Qg3 Rd1 37 Rxd1 Nxd1 38 Qf3?! Qd4+ 39 Kh2 Ne3 40 Kh1 h5 41 Qc6 Nf5**

42 Qc4 Ng3+ 43 Kh2 Qe5 44 Kg1 h4 45 Qc1 Kh7 46 Kf2 Kg7 1-0

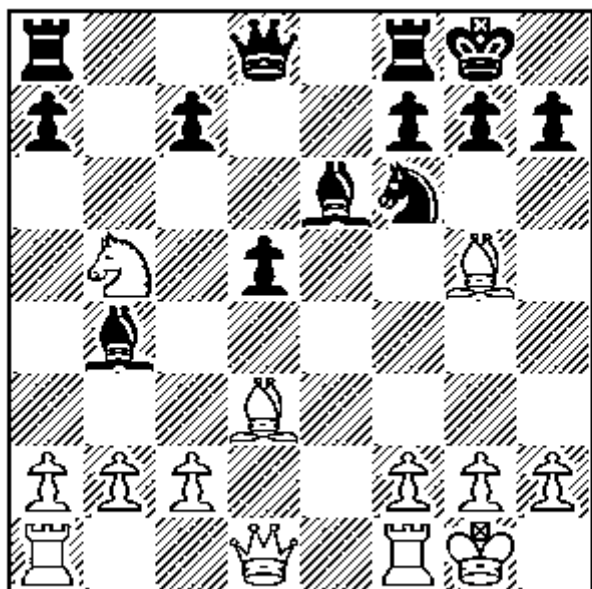
At this point my database says White won, and I'm not sure why. Perhaps Black's flag fell or further moves weren't recorded.

Game 35

**P.Bank-T.Ochsner**

Danish League 1993

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 d4 exd4 5 Nxd4 Bb4 6 Nxc6 bxc6 7 Bd3 0-0 8 0-0 d5 9 exd5 cxd5 10 Bg5 Be6 11 Nb5!?



This has widely been considered a practical 'refutation' of the move 10 ... Be6, but as we shall see, matters are far from clear. Moreover, many club players, who play the Scotch Four Knights for the sake of simplicity and avoiding heaps of opening theory, might not even be aware of this move. The knight is redirected towards a brighter future and leaves the black bishop floating in mid-air on b4, but if White doesn't get to play Nd4 and establish a central bind then he really doesn't have much of an advantage.

**11 ... c5!**

Of course, Black prevents Nd4 while grabbing more space in the centre. The b4-bishop can return to safety via a5.

**12 a3**

The other nudge is possible too, 12 c3 Ba5, and now:

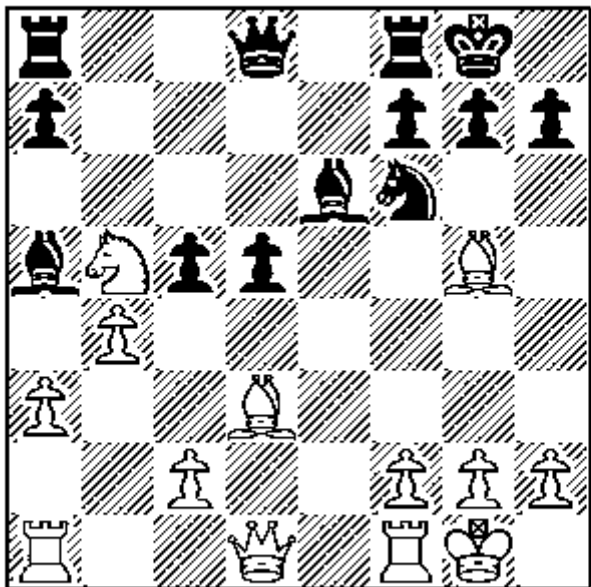
a) 13 b4!? continues in a similar manner as our main game, but without the move a2-a3. Black could accept the pawn with 13 ... cxb4 when 14 Qa4 a6 15 Bxf6 Qxf6 16 Qxa5 axb5 17 Qxb4 Rfc8 looks very equal to me. Black could also play 13 ... a6!? 14 bxa5 axb5 15 Qc2 h6 16 Bxf6 Qxf6 17 Bxb5 Rxa5 18 a4 when he is absolutely fine as well. White's a-pawn is not very likely to cause any trouble, and if White isn't careful, Black could transform it into a weakness, although White should be able to create counterplay against the d5/c5 duo to secure a draw.

b) 13 Qa4!? has been tried quite a few times. The queen would look great on h4 or f4, eyeing the important dark squares, and now Bxf6 is definitely a threat, but with the b5-knight so loose, I can't help but feel this is inaccurate. 13 ... a6! is apparently a novelty, although it looks quite natural:

b1) The natural continuation would be 14 Bxf6 Qxf6 15 Qxa5, but this lands White in hot water after 15 ... axb5 16 Qxb5 and now 16 ... c4! followed by ... Rfb8 when White's entire queenside is under heavy pressure.

b2) 14 Nd6 might be White's best bet, but surely 14 ... Qxd6 15 Bxf6 Bc7 16 Qh4 Qxh2+! 17 Qxh2 Bxh2+ 18 Kxh2 gxf6 must be better for Black who enjoys an extra pawn.

**12 ... Ba5 13 b4!**



Ever since it first appeared, this strong idea managed to put the 10 ... Be6 variation under a cloud, but I think Black is fine if he keeps calm.

**13 ... Bb6!**

Our bishop runs away and lives to fight another day.

The critical continuation is, of course, 13 ... cxb4, but this runs into the brilliant 14 Qe1! when Black's position turns out to be very risky after all. I think that Black might be okay with accurate defence beginning 14 ... h6 15 axb4 Bb6, but it's nothing I'd recommend.

**14 c3**

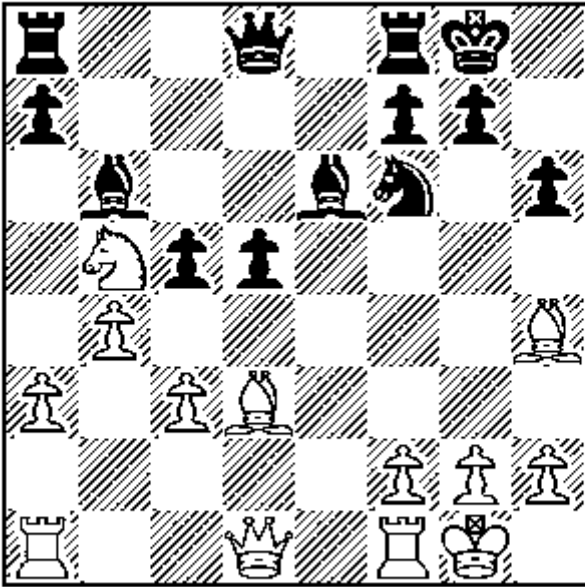
According to Marin, this is the move that causes Black problems because the knight gets to sit on d4. While this is true, I don't think this necessarily means White is better. The pawn on d5 will be isolated and blockaded, all according to the textbooks, but White's queenside structure after bxc5 is no dream either and the d5-pawn is at least well protected.

It has also been popular to immediately release the tension with 14 bxc5 Bxc5, but I think this is an exchange Black doesn't have to worry too much about. A couple of games have continued 15 Qf3 h6 16 Bxf6 Qxf6 17 Qxf6 gxf6 when we have an unbalanced endgame where Black has the worse pawn structure, but he has the bishop-pair and should be fine. 15 c3, with ideas similar to our main game, has also been tried, but here too I think Black is completely fine after 15 ... h6 16 Bh4 Rc8.

**14 ... h6**

In general, it's a good idea to put the question to this bishop as soon as possible.

**15 Bh4**



**15 ... a5?!**

I'm not a huge fan of this move, since White was probably planning to take on c5 anyway.

Instead, 15 ... Rc8!? prepares for the opening of the c-file, but my favourite move is perhaps 15 ... Bd7!? which forces bxc5 since ... c4 is a threat, while also removing the bishop from the gaze of a future Nd4. After 16 bxc5 Bxc5 17 Nd4 Re8 the position looks quite balanced, although I must confess I like the idea of ... Be7 and ... Ne4 for Black.

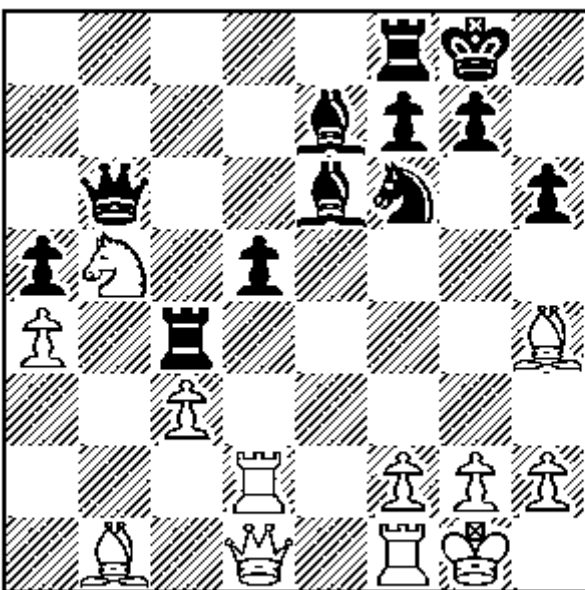
**16 bxc5 Bxc5 17 a4**

The immediate 17 Nd4! looks more to the point, although Black is okay after 17 ... Bd7.

**17 ... Rc8 18 Ra2!?**

A very creative way of increasing the pressure.

**18 ... Be7 19 Rd2 Qb6 20 Bb1 Rc4!**



I always enjoy a good rook lift and this one is not an exception. The advance seems to solve all of Black's problems.

**21 Rd4**

Another possibility is 21 Bxf6 Bxf6 22 Ba2 when 22 ... Bxc3 23 Nxc3 Rxc3 24 Bxd5 Bxd5

25 Rxd5 Rc4 is more or less a draw. Perhaps White wanted more, but it's demanding a lot from his position.

**21 ... Rxd4 22 Nxd4 Bd7 23 Qd3 g6 24 Qe3?!**

White begins to drift.

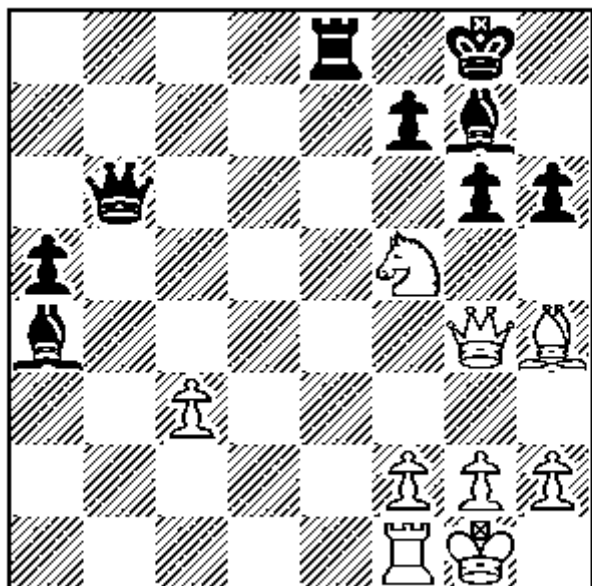
**24 ... Re8 25 Qf3**

Perhaps White now realized that 25 Qxh6? loses a piece to 25 ... Ng4!.

**25 ... Bxa4**

And so Black nets a pawn for little compensation.

**26 Bd3 Ne4 27 Bxe4 dxe4 28 Qxe4 Bf6 29 Qg4 Bg7 30 Nf5?**



I'm not sure if this was an oversight or just a desperate attempt to radically change the position.

**30 ... gxf5 31 Qxa4 Re4! 32 Qd7 Rxf4 33 Qc8+ Kh7 34 Qxf5+ Qg6 35 Qxa5 Qh5 36 Qxh5 Rxf5**

We've ended up in an endgame where Black has an extra piece. It took some time, but eventually Black realized his material advantage and scored the full point.

**37 c4 Bd4 38 g3 Re5 39 Rd1 Bc5 40 Rd2 Re4 41 Rc2 Kg6 42 Kg2 Kf5 43 h3 Ke5 44 Kf3 Rd4 45 Re2+ Kf6 46 Rc2 Kf5 47 Kg2 Ke4 48 Re2+ Kd3 49 Re3+ Kxc4 50 Rf3 Rd7 51 Rf6 Bf8 52 Rf5 Kd3 53 g4 Bg7 54 Kf3 Kd2 55 Kg2 Ke2 56 Rf4 Bd4 57 Re4+ Kd3 58 Rf4 Rc7 59 Rf5 f6 60 Kf1 Ke4 61 Kg2 Rc3 62 h4 Rc5 63 Rf3 h5 64 g5 f5 65 Kg3 Rc3 0-1**

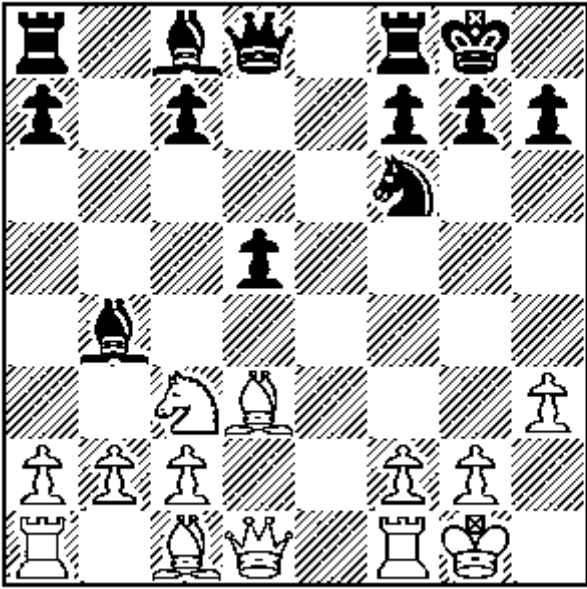
In our next game, we will see Kramnik's new idea which sparked fresh life into the Scotch Four Knights.

Game 36

**J.Sammour Hasbun-G.Kaidanov**

Saint Louis 2013

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 d4 exd4 5 Nxd4 Bb4 6 Nxc6 bxc6 7 Bd3 0-0 8 0-0 d5 9 exd5 cxd5 10 h3!?**



This move was brought into the limelight in 2012 when Kramnik played it against Aronian and achieved a pleasant position. It didn't take long until everyone was playing it, and nowadays it has lost its surprise effect. White stays true to the power of flexibility and in this case it's the bishop on c1 who is the main character. Depending on how Black develops, White may choose to play Bg5 or Bf4.

I don't think 10 h3 is a move that's going to shake the theory of 1 e4 e5 upside down, but Kramnik deserves credit for revitalizing this variation and realizing its potential. It's still widely used as a blitz weapon at the highest level and club players may use it when White is looking for a playable position with little risk. I have even tried it myself with the white pieces, although I got nothing at all out of the opening.

I'm going to recommend two options against this variation, depending on your situation, mood and style.

### 10 ... Be6!?

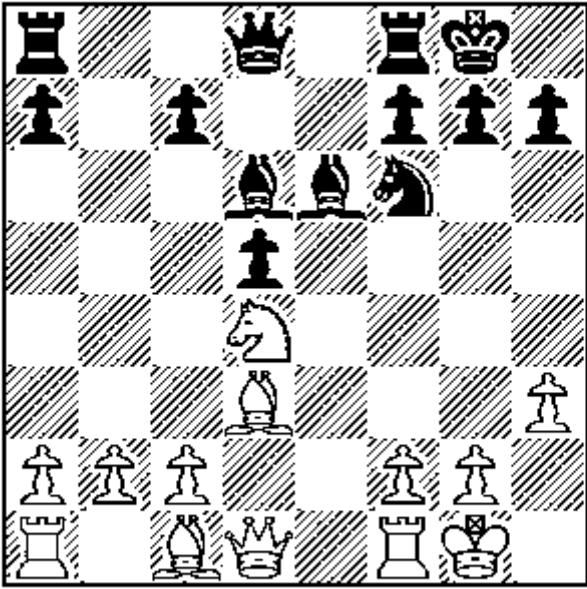
This very interesting move hasn't been too popular, although it's in the same spirit as our main line after 10 Bg5. The bishop develops and defends d5. It turns out that harassing the bishop doesn't give White anything at all. Indeed, White doesn't seem to have anything more than an interesting middlegame position where there's lots of play for both sides.

The most common move is 10 ... c6, but I've never liked it. I want to retain the option of playing ... c5 in one go and here, compared to 10 Bg5, there's even less pressure on d5 for the moment.

The other move I'm going to cover, though, is 10 ... Rb8!? which is another semi-waiting move, waiting for White to declare his intentions.

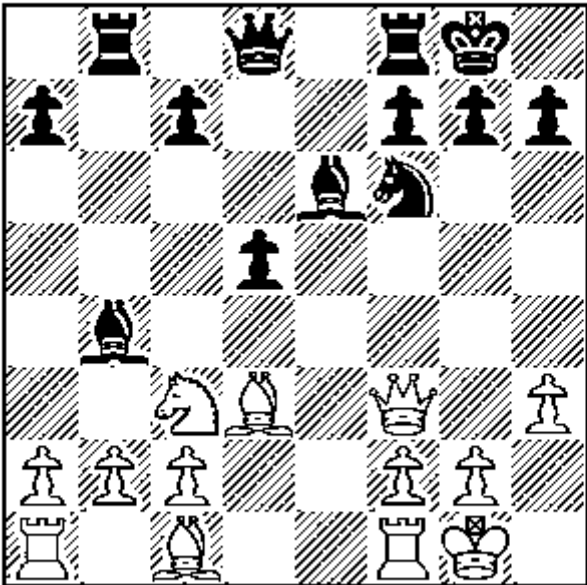
### 11 Qf3

By far the most popular move. This move was prepared by 10 h3, so it's only logical to follow up so. With that said, 11 Ne2 was played in the high-level encounter L.Nisipeanu-F.Caruana, Bazna 2012. White obviously goes straight for the bishop on e6, but I'm never too worried by this approach and by 11 ... Bd6 (retreating the bishop is very sensible when the knight has left c3) 12 Nd4 (12 Nf4 Bd7 leaves the knight quite misplaced on f4, since the bishop on c1 is blocked).



Caruana played the tempting 12 ... c5?!, but after 13 Nxe6 fxe6 14 c4! White establishes a strong bind on the light squares, as well as having the bishop-pair. Instead, 12 ... Bd7! avoids any structural change, while preparing ... c5 with tempo. Postny gives the following variation: 13 c4 c5 14 Nf3 d4 15 b4 cxb4 16 Bb2 Re8 17 Nxd4 Be5 when Black is absolutely fine and he can look forward to blockading the queenside.

**11 ... Rb8!**



Another useful move. Black makes sure that White needs to waste a move on b2-b3 in the future (after White moves his bishop from c1 and Black retreats his from b4). Note that this position can be reached too through 10 ... Rb8 11 Qf3 Be6. Some of you might well prefer this move order, but I chose to keep the move order played in the game for instructional value and to show that White has nothing better than this anyway.

**12 Bf4**

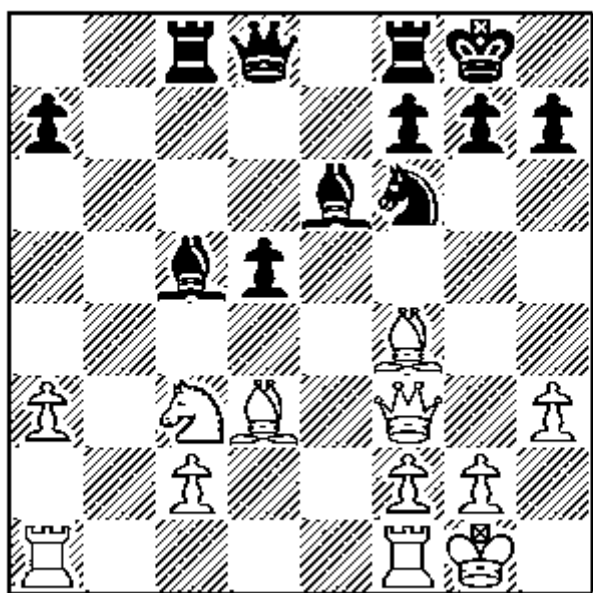
By far the most popular move, although I'm very confident in Black's chances after it. Alternatives are:

a) The other obvious option is 12 Bg5 when Black can transpose to a well-explored position with 12 ... Be7, but the immediate 12 ... h6! looks better: 13 Bh4 (13 Bf4 Bd6! is like the game

but with an extra ... h6, while 13 Bxf6 Qxf6 14 Qxf6 gxf6 is an endgame typical for the Scotch Four Knights, although in this case I believe Black has a slightly more favourable version because he has saved the move ... c6) 13 ... Re8 followed by ... Be7 and Black is completely fine. It's a common concept to play ... Be7 and the slightly odd-looking ... Rb4 when the white bishop retreats to h4.

b) 12 Ne2 is similar to Nisipeanu's 11 Ne2 against Caruana. I think Black should react similarly with 12 ... Bd6! 13 Nd4 Bd7 followed by ... c5 or even ... Be5.

c) I suspect White's best move is 12 a3!, forcing the black bishop to make a concession or at least reveal its intentions: 12 ... Be7 (12 ... Bxc3 13 bxc3 c5 also looks playable, but I'm not sure how good Black's central pawn duo is and those pawns might turn out to be very inflexible) 13 b4 c5 14 bxc5 Bxc5 15 Bf4 Rc8.



This looks like quite a critical position for the 10 ... Be6 sub-variation. I think Black has quite decent counterplay on the queenside and it certainly looks like a very interesting middlegame where both players have the chance of outplaying their opponent. Indeed, I can't really ask for much more.

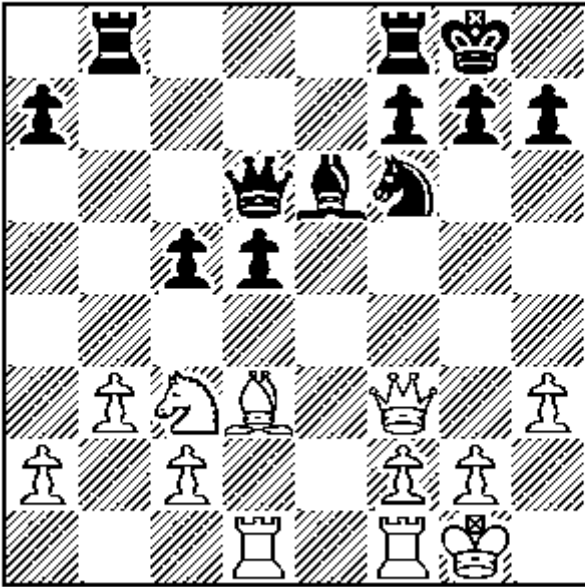
### 12 ... Bd6!

Offering a very desirable trade in the Scotch Four Knights. Exchanging the dark-squared bishops would release a lot of pressure on Black's position, while White's queenside might become easier to attack.

### 13 b3 c5

It might look strange, but I think that 13 ... Bxf4 14 Qxf4 c5! is even more exact. The reason is that Black could more easily drum up counterplay on the queenside with the queen on a5.

### 14 Bxd6 Qxd6 15 Rad1



I'd rather have my queen on a5 here, but this minor subtlety doesn't make Black's position any worse. It's rather White who has to be careful about any ... c4 business.

**15 ... Qc7!**

Redirecting the queen to the queenside.

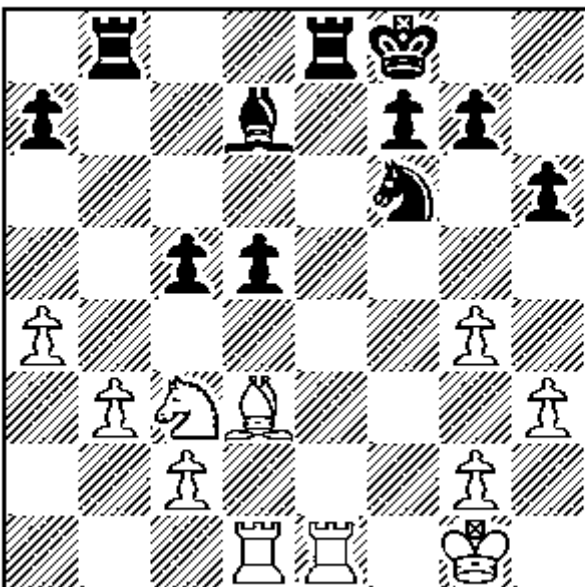
**16 Rfe1 Rfe8 17 Qg3**

This is quite a common idea. White wants to trade queens since this would minimize Black's counterplay while making Black's centre more difficult to protect. In this case, Black has such a good position out of the opening that it is not something to worry about.

**17 ... Qxg3**

17 ... Qa5!? is another option, but there's no reason to avoid the endgame.

**18 fxf3 Bd7 19 g4 h6 20 a4 Kf8**



**21 Bb5?**

Definitely a mistake. White seems to misjudge the arising endgame. 21 Nb5! looks better, when 21 ... Rxe1+ 22 Rxe1 a5! appears quite equal.

**21 ... Bxb5 22 Nxb5 Rxe1+ 23 Rxe1 a6! 24 Nc7??**

A bad blunder that throws away the game. White should probably play something like 24

Nc3, although the energetic 24 ... d4 25 Nb1 c4! 26 bxc4 Rb2 is very unpleasant for him.

**24 ... Rc8! 0-1**

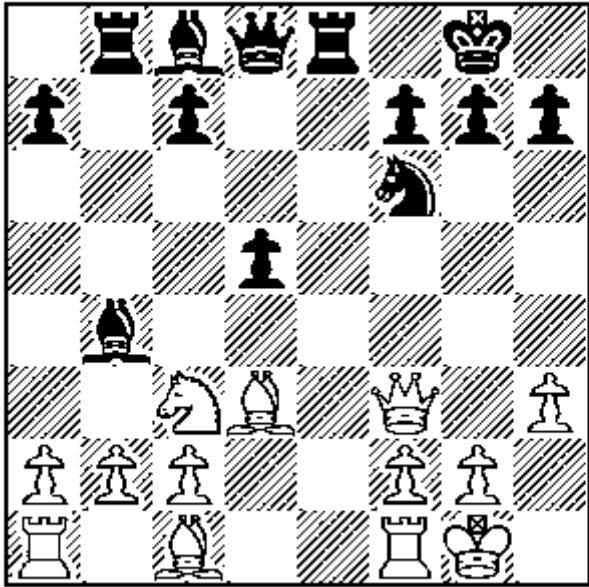
After 25 Nxa6 Rc6 26 Nb8 Rb6 the white knight is lost.

Game 37

**P. Carlsson-N. Grandelius**

Swedish Championship, Orebro 2013

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 d4 exd4 5 Nxd4 Bb4 6 Nxc6 bxc6 7 Bd3 0-0 8 0-0 d5 9 exd5 cxd5 10 h3 Rb8 11 Qf3 Re8!?**



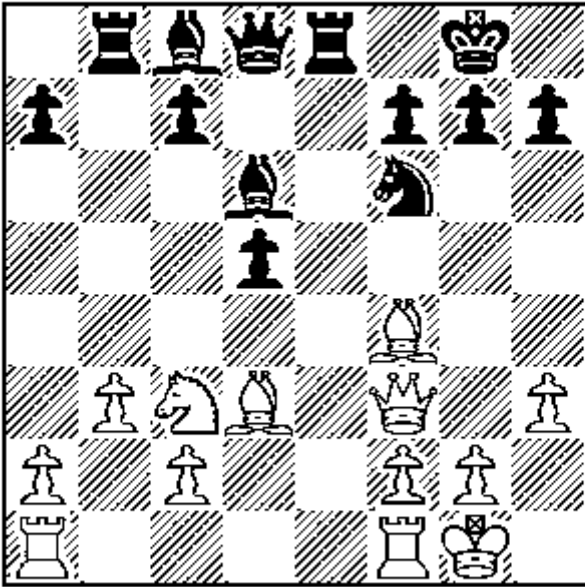
I was able to witness this game live and after it Grandelius told me that he had found the idea the same morning. Basically, Black plays two decent waiting moves while being flexible with the c-pawn (in case he wants to play ... c5 in one go). If White goes Bg5, we go ... Be7, but if White goes Bf4, we go ... Bd6.

**12 Bg5**

Instead:

a) 12 a3!? is untried, but it forces a commitment from the b4-bishop. Best seems to be 12 ... Be7 when after 13 b4 Black has the strong 13 ... a5!.

b) 12 Bf4 Bd6 13 b3 was played by none other than Giri.



However, Axel Smith appears to have found a convincing solution for Black: 13 ... d4! 14 Bxd6 Qxd6 15 Ne4 Nxe4 16 Bxe4 Rb5 followed by ... Rbe5 and ... c5 with a completely equal position, Q.Ducarmon-A.Smith, Vaxjo 2014.

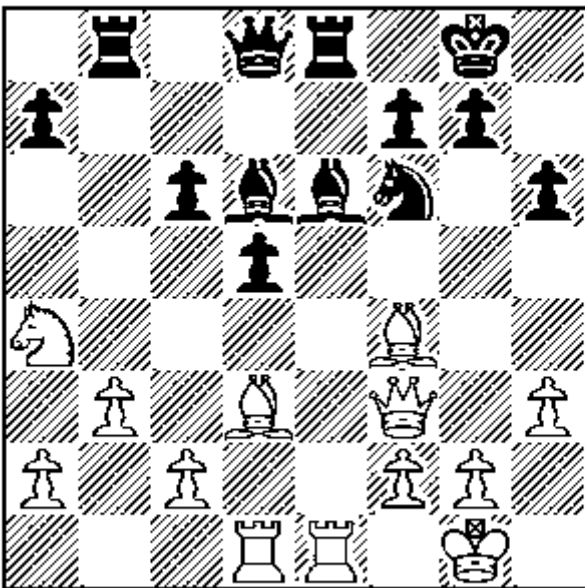
### 12 ... Be7

So far, we've followed Grandelius' recipe on how to handle the dark-squared bishops. A year later, Michael Adams tried the same variation as Black.

### 13 Bxf6?!

Although I don't think White is worse already, this seems like a concession and certainly White is no longer playing for an advantage after this move.

13 Rfe1! looks like more of a challenge, but Black seems to be fine with normal moves: 13 ... Be6 14 Rad1 c6 15 Na4 h6 16 Bf4 Bd6 17 b3.

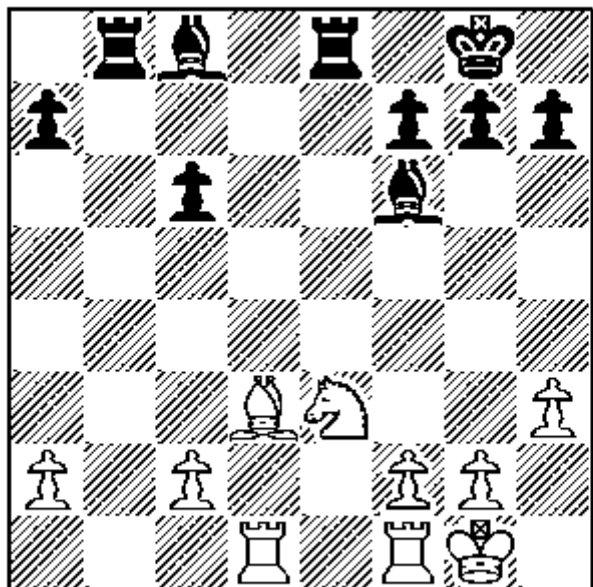


Black has played very sensibly and has equalized without too many problems. Now I think he should have tried 17 ... c5!?, trying to create some counterplay in the centre and not allowing any sort of blockade on the dark squares. 17 ... Rb7, as Adams played against Kravtsiv, allows 18 Bxd6 Qxd6 19 Qe3 when White has a comfortable dark-square blockade.

### 13 ... Bxf6 14 Nxd5 Bxb2 15 Rad1

Better is 15 Rae1! and White at least has a very slight initiative as compensation for the bishop-pair, although the game could fizzle out quickly after, let's say, 15 ... Bb7 16 Rxe8+ Qxe8 17 Rb1 Bxd5 18 Qxd5 g6 when a draw is very likely.

**15 ... c6 16 Ne3 Qf6! 17 Qxf6 Bxf6**



White has absolutely nothing to show for giving up the bishop-pair and from this point on, Black is the only one playing for a win.

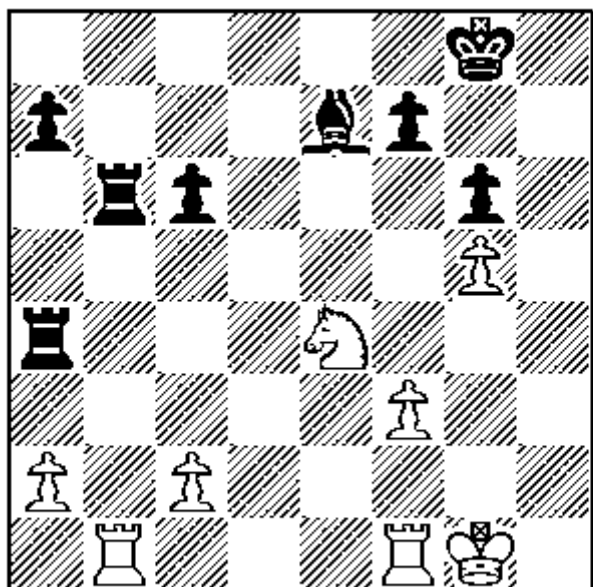
**18 Rb1 Be6 19 Bc4 Bxc4! 20 Nxc4 g6**

Giving up the bishop-pair might look strange, but Black is hoping that his superior minor piece will make itself felt without White's light-squared bishop on the board.

**21 Nd6 Red8 22 Ne4 Be7 23 g4 Rb6 24 g5?!**

A dubious idea in my opinion, stabilizing the e4-square for the knight, but also creating further weaknesses. A sensible move like 24 Rb3 followed by Re1 and Kg2 looks better, although White is still under heavy pressure.

**24 ... h6! 25 h4 Rd4 26 f3 hxg5 27 hxg5 Ra4**



With strong and energetic play, Black has managed to create a weakness on a2 as well as g5.

## **28 Rxb6 axb6 29 Rb1 Rxa2?!**

A very natural move, cashing in, but this seems to let White off the hook since the extra pawn isn't easy to realize. 29 ... b5! seems better, when Black can continue grinding away against White's weaknesses while not allowing any counterplay.

## **30 Rxb6 Rxc2 31 Kf1 Kg7**

Black can't run just yet with the c-pawn since the e7-bishop runs out of safe squares. In fact, White can draw immediately after 31 ... c5?! 32 Rb8+ Kg7 33 Re8 Bf8 34 Rc8 c4 35 Nf6 followed by Ne8 with perpetual check.

## **32 Ra6 Bb4 33 Rb6 Ba3 34 Rb7 Bc5 35 Ke1 Be3 36 Nd6 Bxg5 37 Rxf7+ Kg8 38 Rb7 Bh4+ 39 Kd1 Rf2 40 Rb3**

Black has managed to improve his position and make White's rook slightly less active, but at the cost of a pawn.

## **40 ... Be7 41 Nc4 Bf6 42 Nd2 Bd4 43 Ne4 Ra2 44 Rb4 c5 45 Rb5 Ra3 46 Nxc5 Rxf3 47 Ne6 Bf6 48 Ke2 Ra3 49 Nf4 Kg7 50 Rb6 Ra7 51 Kf3 Kf7 52 Kg4 Ra5 53 Rb7+ Be7 54 Kf3 Re5 55 Rd7 Rf5 56 Ke4 Ke8 57 Nxc6 Kxd7 58 Kxf5 ½-½**

## **Conclusion**

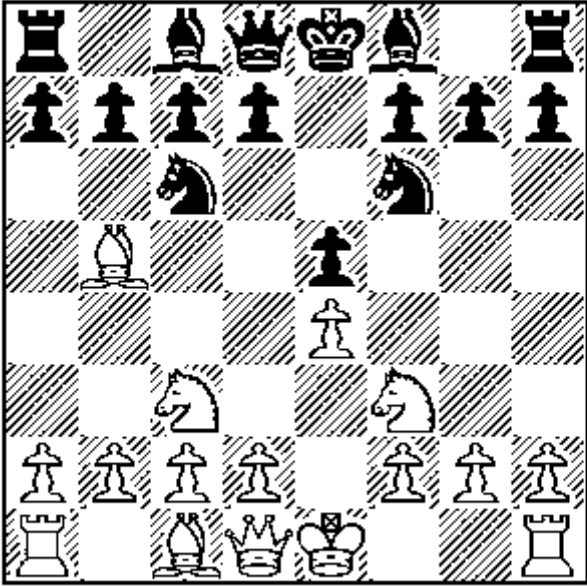
I don't think readers will have the Scotch Four Knights in their nightmares, but the resulting positions do require some patience to play well. The type of play is generally quite slow, even though both sides have their typical tactical traps. It is a very good opening for those who just want to get a position and play chess as White, but it doesn't mean that Black doesn't have his fair chances.

I believe meeting 10 Bg5 with 10 ... Be6 will increase in popularity, especially since there's no obvious problem with it. I would urge the reader not to panic about Black's winning chances. White has no way to force a draw, and if White plays for a draw then it's possible he will compromise his own position just to try and exchange pieces. A strategy doomed to fail.

# Chapter Six

## The Spanish Four Knights

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bb5



The Spanish Four Knights is an old opening with a very solid reputation, but it had rather faded away from top level chess because Black seemed to enjoy a wide variety of sensible options providing him with good play. This all changed when the young Chinese wunderkind Wei Yi proved that the Four Knights is still a venomous opening where Black has to play accurately to obtain good play. Another challenge for me was to find a variation where White couldn't kill the game off as a draw.

### Theoretical Introduction

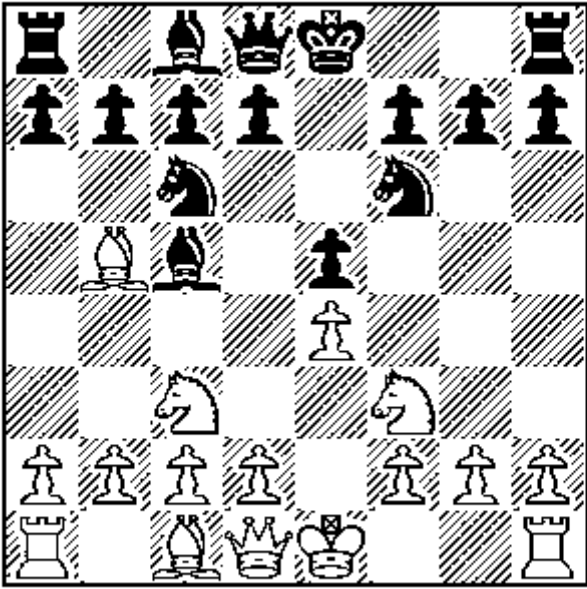
1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bb5

Naturally, I was quite interested in the typical 4 ... Bb4, but I didn't become overly excited about Black's position in the main line. Moreover, when I found out that White could play 5 Nd5 Nxd5 6 exd5 e4 7 dxc6 exf3 to obtain a likely draw, I felt forced to turn my attention elsewhere.

As I explained in the Introduction, my own choice has usually been 4 ... Nd4, which I still believe is a good variation for Black. The problem is if White wants to go for a draw with 5 Nxd4 exd4 6 e5 dxc3 7 exf6 Qxf6 8 dxc3. The position isn't drawn yet, but let's face it: it's not a position you want when you have to win.

Eventually I turned to the very modern 4 ... Bd6!?, which is an ugly but surprisingly effective move. For a long time, this seemed to be a decent way to achieve a playable middlegame, but lately Black has been experiencing problems after 5 d3 h6 6 a3, as in the game N.Grandelius-L.Fressinet, Oslo 2015.

At last, I looked at 4 ... Bc5, which is another uncommon move.



It turned out that it had also received some attention lately and that Black seemed to have very good chances. The game doesn't become dull and drawish, but most importantly White doesn't seem to have any advantage.

In Game 39, we see what happens if White plays a quick d2-d3. This is not a big challenge for Black who can play ... Nd4 with a very good position.

Game 40 covers those variations where White voluntarily takes the knight on c6. This isn't theoretically challenging either, but it leads to a type of play where Black should have some clue of how to handle the resulting structure.

In Games 41 and 42 we will consider the most critical continuation, 5 0-0 0-0 6 Nxe5!. This is White's only chance of obtaining any advantage, but it seems that Black can get an equal, strategically complex position with good chances of playing for a win.

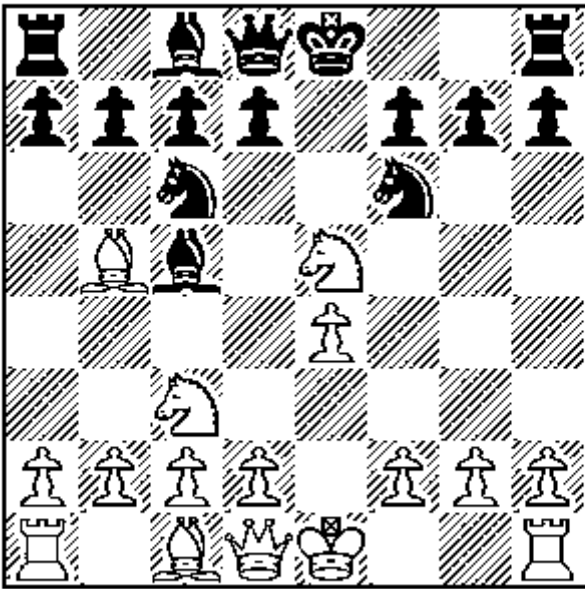
First of all, however, we will see the young star Wei Yi getting crushed in the 5 Nxe5 variation, which more or less immediately disappeared after this game.

Game 38

**Wei.Y-P.Eljanov**

Kocaeli 2014

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bb5 Bc5 5 Nxe5!?**

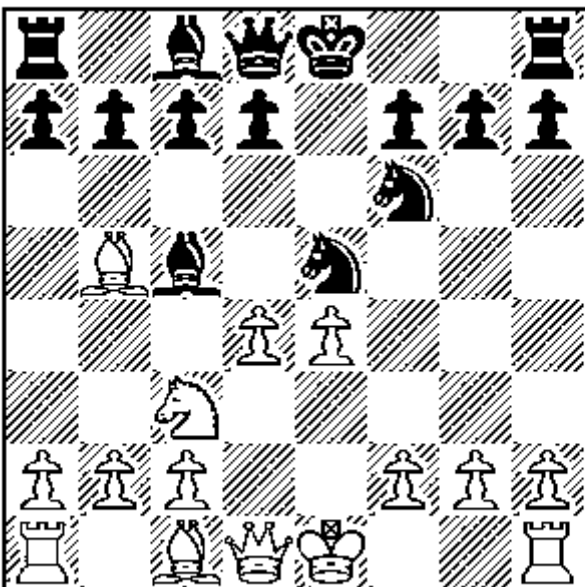


It is well established that in order to obtain some kind of advantage against 4 ... Bc5, White has to capture the e5-pawn, either now or after castling. Against all other tries, Black at least equalizes immediately. Since Wei Yi chose this move on two occasions, it's definitely one of the most critical moves, but Eljanov found an idea which I think puts this line under a cloud. In my opinion, White should be looking at 5 0-0 0-0 6 Nxe5 in his search for an advantage.

#### 5 ... Nxe5

I always have a feeling of nausea whenever I see a move like 5 ... Bxf2+. White is clearly better after 6 Kxf2 Nxe5 7 d4.

#### 6 d4

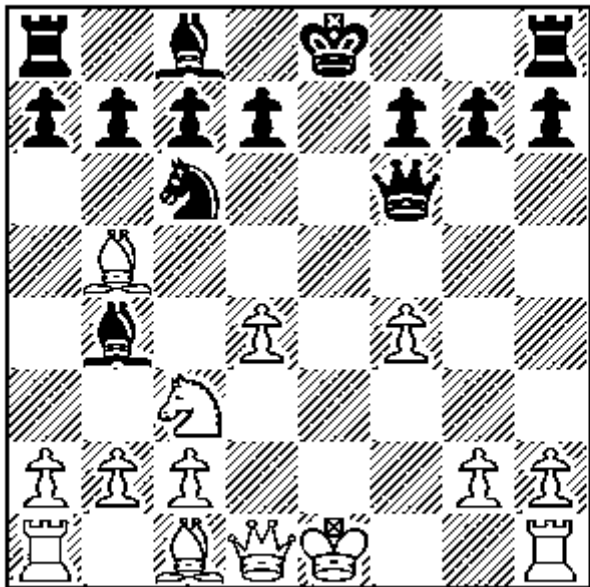


#### 6 ... a6!

This move has been played just 14 times out of 314 games in my database. Nevertheless, it was a wonderful discovery by Eljanov and it's notable that after this game Wei Yi switched to 5 0-0 0-0 6 Nxe5.

6 ... Bd6 is the main move and it looks like Black is doing fine here as well after 7 f4 Nc6 (7 ... Neg4 is a favourite of my engine, but Wei Yi is usually incredibly well prepared: 8 e5 Bb4 9

h3 Ne4 10 Qxg4 Nxc3 11 bxc3 Bxc3+ 12 Bd2 Bxd2+ 13 Kxd2 0-0 14 Qg5 Qxg5 15 fxc5 d5 16 exd6 cxd6 17 Bd3 and White enjoyed the better endgame in Wei Yi-I.Salgado Lopez, Leon (rapid) 2014, although Black managed to draw) 8 e5 Bb4 9 exf6 Qxf6.



Now the critical line seems to be 10 a3 Ba5 (10 ... Bxc3+ is generally a desirable structure, but 11 bxc3 0-0 12 0-0 d5 allows 13 g4!, preventing the activation of the c8-bishop; Black runs the risk of being heavily squeezed on the kingside) 11 Be3 0-0 12 0-0 Bxc3 13 bxc3 d5 14 Qf3 (14 g4? Qe6! wins material) 14 ... Ne7 and Black's position looks playable, although to be honest I'd rather play White. He has the clear plan of going Bd3 and g4 followed by a slow but clear squeeze on the kingside.

### 7 Be2

The main reason why this ... a6 trick works here and not with 5 0-0 0-0 inserted is shown after 7 dxe5 axb5 8 exf6 Qxf6. Now since Black threatens mate on f2, White is obliged to go 9 0-0, but Black doesn't have to castle just yet. He has time to include 9 ... c6!, protecting a valuable pawn first. Here Black has the bishop-pair, an open a-file and certainly can't complain.

### 7 ... Bd6 8 f4

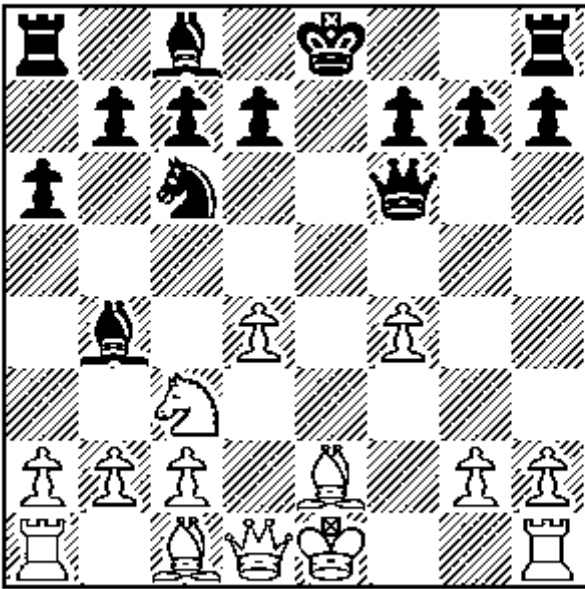
A standard resource.

To be fair, White can play 8 dxe5 Bxe5 when his bishop is more useful on e2 than on b5. This means that White has a slightly improved version of Game 41, but this is far from enough to claim any advantage. White has some ideas with 0-0 and f4, but the accurate 9 Bg5 h6 10 Bh4 c6 11 0-0 Qc7 definitely solves all of Black's problems. White has nothing better than the beautiful 12 f4! Bxf4 13 Rxf4! Qxf4 14 Bg3 Qe3+ 15 Bf2 Qf4 16 Bg3 with a draw.

### 8 ... Nc6 9 e5 Bb4!

I think the 4 ... Bc5 line has obtained a bad reputation simply because White's central pawn's look scary to play against, but if Black returns the piece in this manner the pawn on f4 could easily just become misplaced. White always has to watch out for the e4-square, as we will see in the game Berbatov-Hammer.

### 10 exf6 Qxf6



This is a key position, and one where Black is better off having included ... a6 and Be2.

### 11 Be3

A common move, but not critical in my opinion.

White's biggest test is 11 a3! when Black definitely should play 11 ... Bxc3+ 12 bxc3 d5! 13 0-0 Bf5! when he gets his bishop to a great square before castling and he will establish an advantage based on the e4-square. Had Black not inserted ... a6 and Be2, White would have had Re1+ at this point, disturbing Black's king.

Instead, 11 a3 Ba5? is my recommendation with the bishop on b5, but here White can play the disturbing 12 b4 Bb6 13 Nd5!, putting pressure on f6, c7 and b6 simultaneously. Had the bishop been on b5, Black would have had the move 13 ... Qe6 with check.

### 11 ... d5 12 0-0 Bxc3 13 bxc3 Bf5

Black has managed to obtain his dream position. The bishop on f5 is very well placed and he would love to follow up with ... 0-0-0, ... h5, doubling the rooks on the e-file and manoeuvring the c6-knight to a better square, preferably d6.

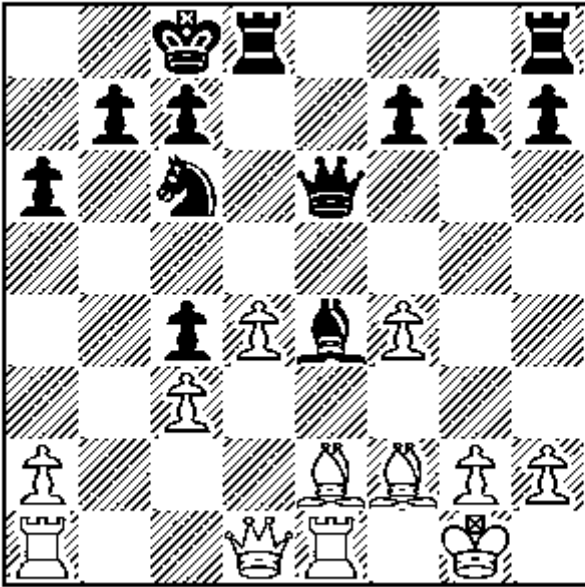
### 14 c4!

White, who has a statically worse position, tries to play dynamically with the bishop-pair, but it's difficult to break the light-square blockade.

### 14 ... 0-0-0 15 c3

15 cxd5 Nb4! was Black's main point.

### 15 ... Qe6 16 Bf2 dxc4 17 Re1 Be4!

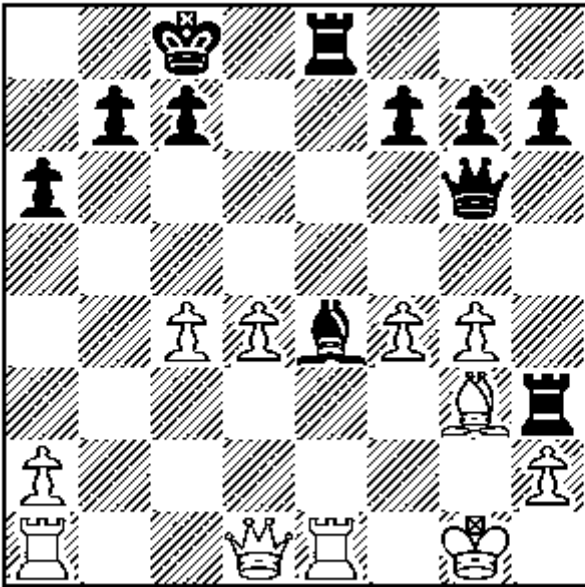


This bishop is a monster. Black has grabbed a pawn on c4 which White might be able to win back, but it won't break Black's terrific light-square blockade.

**18 Qa4 Qg6 19 g3 Ne7 20 Bxc4 Nd5!**

This is light-square domination in a picture. In fact, less than 10 moves later Wei Yi throws in the towel.

**21 Bxd5 Rxd5 22 Qd1 Re8 23 c4 Rh5 24 g4 Rh3 25 Bg3**



White has finally managed to get some air, but his kingside is left in tatters.

**25 ... h5! 26 f5 Qg5 27 Qc1 Qxg4 28 Qf4 Qxf4 29 Bxf4 Rh4 0-1**

An incredibly well-played game by Eljanov, who employed a theoretically important idea and then executed a strategical masterpiece worthy of any book.

At club level, I'd expect 4 ... Bc5 to be a bit of a surprise to many opponents and if they're unfamiliar with how to respond, it's quite likely that they will play a meek d3 move which keeps the game in calmer waters. The good news for us is that it's not whatsoever theoretically challenging, and in fact we have an immediate path to a fine game.

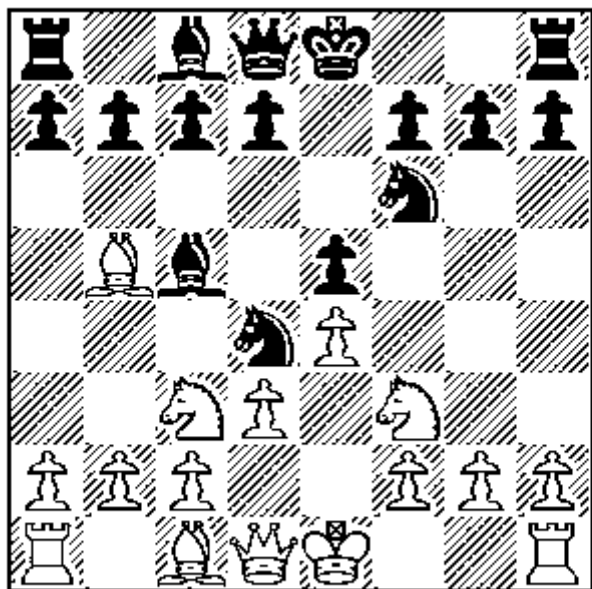
Game 39

G.Milos-I.Morovic Fernandez

Santiago 1989

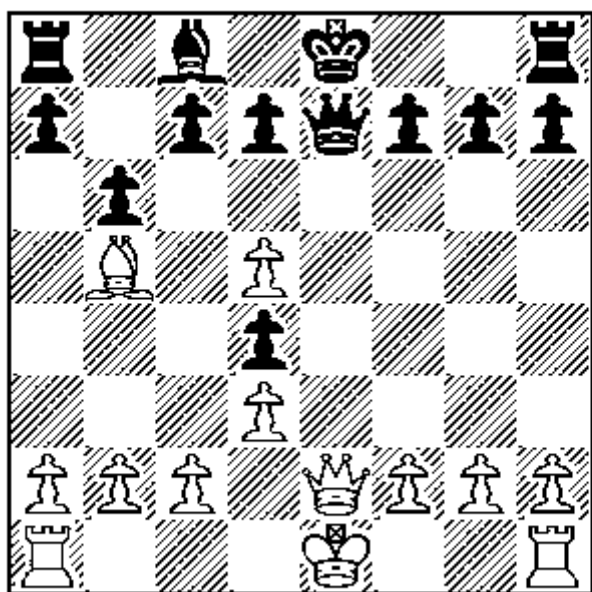
1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bb5 Bc5 5 0-0

5 d3 can be played immediately, but we respond in the same manner: 5 ... Nd4!



Now:

a) 6 Nxd4 gives Black an interesting option in 6 ... exd4 (6 ... Bxd4!? is, of course, good too) 7 Nd5 Nxd5 8 exd5 and here he can play 8 ... Bb4+! 9 Bd2 Bxd2+ 10 Qxd2 Qe7+ 11 Qe2 followed by 11 ... b6!.



This has the idea of putting the king on d6 in the arising endgame, something which White cannot do in reverse.

b) 6 Bg5 is a typical move that looks natural, but doesn't really achieve a lot. Black quickly seizes the initiative: 6 ... h6 7 Bh4 c6 8 Ba4 a5! and White's light-squared bishop gets chased

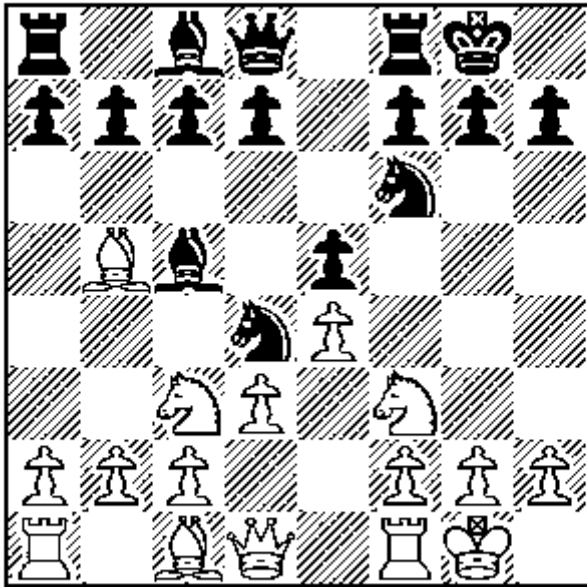
down.

c) 6 Nxe5 is generally what White plays, but after 6 ... 0-0! he suddenly has to counter the simple idea of ... d6; Nf3 Bg4, destroying his kingside. Moreover, 7 Nf3 d5! blasts open the centre before White has managed to castle.

**5 ... 0-0 6 d3**

Please note that this game actually started off as a Berlin Ruy Lopez, with White having played the harmless Nc3 instead of c2-c3.

**6 ... Nd4!**

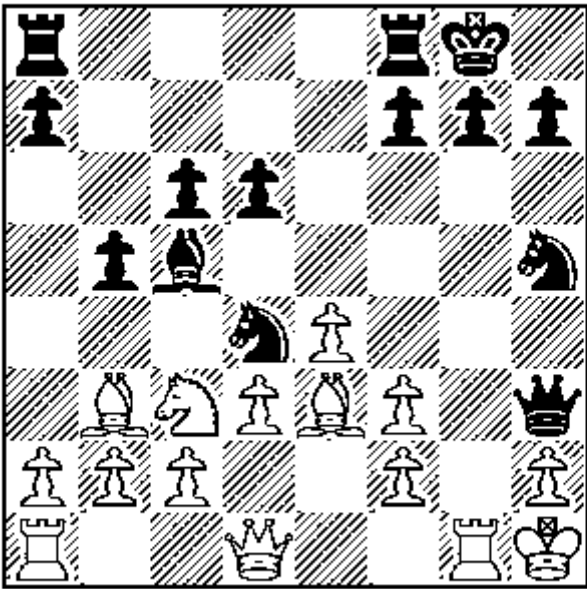


This knight lunge is surprisingly uncommon, but I love the idea behind it. It's generally very dangerous for White to capture the pawn on e5, but otherwise Black just gets to trade a pair of knights, after which White's light-squared bishop stares into thin air.

**7 Nxd4**

Alternatively:

a) Of course, 7 Nxe5 is critical and this was the choice of Peter Svidler, but I just think Black's position is wonderful: 7 ... d6 8 Nf3 Bg4 (Black will completely wreck White's kingside) 9 Be3 (9 Bg5 c6 10 Bc4 Qd7 looks horrible for White; taking on f6 just pours petrol on to the fire due to the open g-file) 9 ... Bxf3 10 gxf3 c6 11 Ba4 b5 12 Bb3 Nh5 13 Kh1 Qh4 14 Rg1 Qh3.



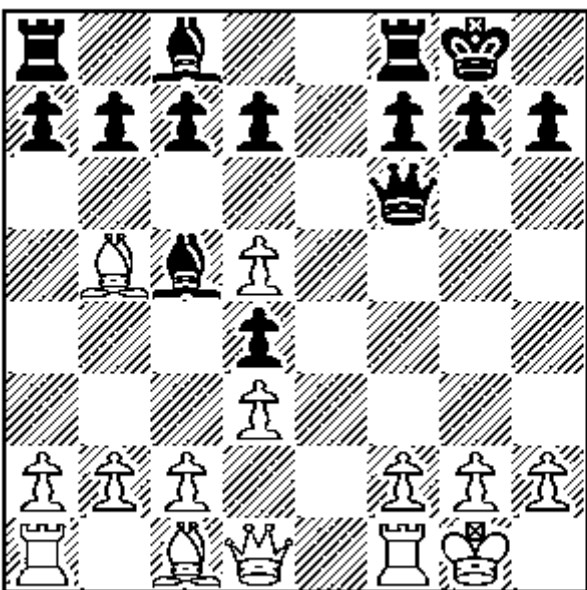
Honestly, who wouldn't love to play Black's position? Svidler, one of the best GMs in world, eventually settles for a worse endgame: 15 Qf1 Qxf3+ 16 Qg2 a5 17 a4 b4 18 Nb1 Qxg2+ 19 Rxg2 Nxb3 20 cxb3 f5. This was agreed drawn in P.Svidler-P.H.Nielsen, Copenhagen 2010, but there's no doubt that Black is clearly better.

b) 7 Bg5?! has a tactical downside: 7 ... c6 8 Bc4 h6 9 Bh4 and now 9 ... Nxf3+! 10 Qxf3 g5 11 Bg3 d5! wins material since ... Bg4 is threatened.

c) 7 Bc4 looks natural, but after 7 ... d6 Black threatens ... Bg4 so White pretty much has to play 8 Nxd4 anyway.

### 7 ... Bxd4

I'm not quite sure why 7 ... exd4!? isn't more popular. Black is certainly not worse in any of the lines I discovered, but perhaps fixing the structure so early makes it a bit tougher to play for a win, as after 8 Nd5 (8 Ne2 c6 followed by ... d5 looks better for Black) 8 ... Nxd5 9 exd5 Qf6!.



That said, this should be enough to claim a tiny initiative for Black. White won't have the chance to play Qf3 himself and there's the risk that his queen will have to develop slightly more artificially than he'd like, although I do agree that the risk of a draw is a bit higher than I'd normally like.

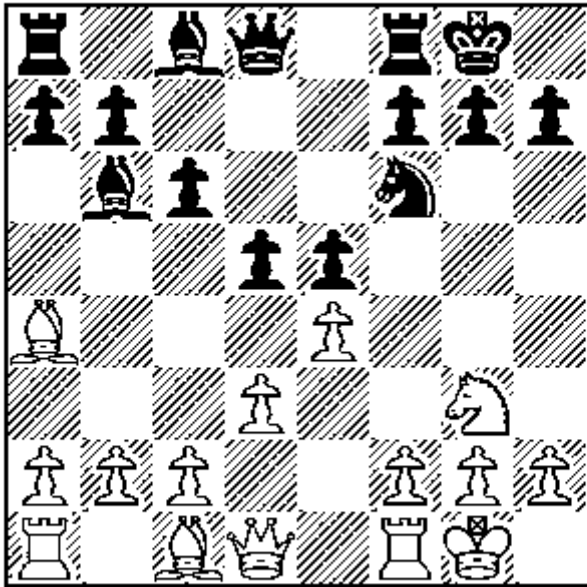
## 8 Ne2

A typical manoeuvre. White re-routes his knight to the kingside, where it can eye the f5-square, while allowing ideas like c2-c3 followed by d4. Instead:

a) 8 Bg5 is the most popular move, but again, this does not work well in these lines. The bishop is more likely to become inactive than anything else and Peter Heine Nielsen has shown this well with 8 ... c6 9 Bc4 h6 10 Bh4 b5. However, after 11 Bb3 I'd prefer to start with 11 ... d6 when Black can combine his ideas of ... a5, ... g5 and ... b4 with a slight but clear advantage.

b) The top-level game E.Inarkiev-P.Eljanov, Jermuk 2009, went 8 Qf3 c6 9 Bc4 d6 10 h3 and now I think Black should have played 10 ... b5 11 Bb3 a5 12 a4 b4 13 Ne2 Bb6 when he has seized some useful space on the queenside. He should follow up with ... h6 and then prepare ... d5.

**8 ... Bb6 9 Ng3 c6 10 Ba4 d5!**

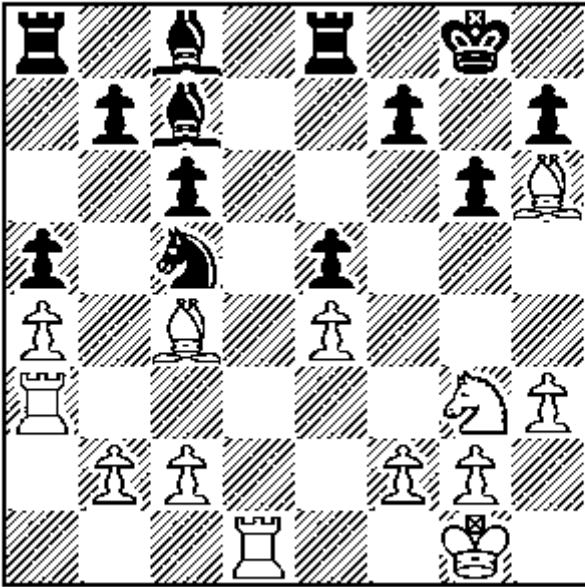


Black's play is very smooth and clear. Trading the knights on f3 and c6 gives him a head start on seizing space in the centre. Indeed, Black is already a bit better.

**11 h3 dxe4**

But I'm not so sure about this. Sure, Black isn't worse and he's probably still a tiny bit better, but why release the tension so early? The simple 11 ... Be6, keeping the tension, looks better.

**12 dxe4 Qxd1 13 Rxd1 g6 14 Bh6 Re8 15 Bb3 Nd7 16 a4 Nc5 17 Bc4 a5 18 Ra3 Bc7?**



This move allows a nasty shock in a seemingly dull position.

Instead, 18 ... Be6 looks like a safe equalizer: 19 Bxe6 Nxe6 20 Rb3 is nothing to worry about since Black has 20 ... Bd8 21 Rxb7?! Nc5! when the rook is trapped.

### 19 Rf3?

White lets the chance slip.

The stunning 19 Nh5! would have caused Black some headaches, as he even loses after 19 ... gxf5? 20 Rg3+ Kh8 21 Bxf7.

**19 ... Be6 20 Bxe6 Rxe6 21 Be3 Rd6 22 Rxd6 Bxd6 23 Bxc5 Bxc5 24 Rd3 Kf8 25 Kf1 Ke7 26 Ke2 ½-½**

I definitely think Black is still better here, although I'm unable to see how to make definite progress. Possibly Black should keep the rooks on the board and try to arrange ... b5, since playing ... Rd8 and trading rooks should just be a draw as White can put the knight on d3.

In our next game we will see what happens if White exchanges the knight on c6 without being provoked. It's another case of the bishop-pair versus a more flexible pawn structure and probably should be equal, but it's important to have a clue about what Black is looking for. Note too that this variation can arise from many different Ruy Lopez variations.

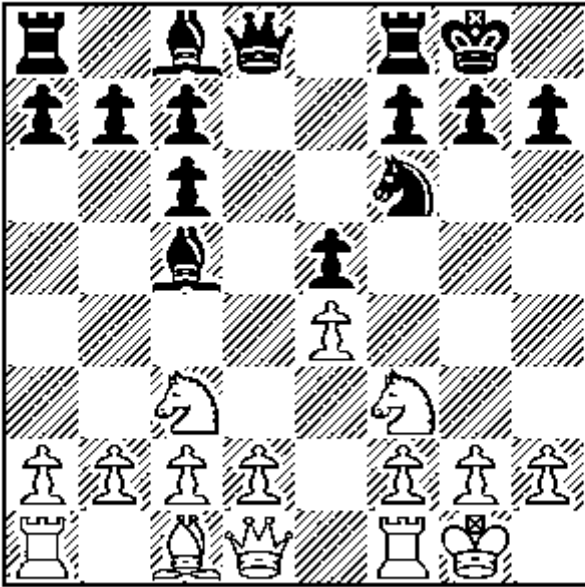
Game 40

**M.Thesing-A.Naumann**

German League 2013

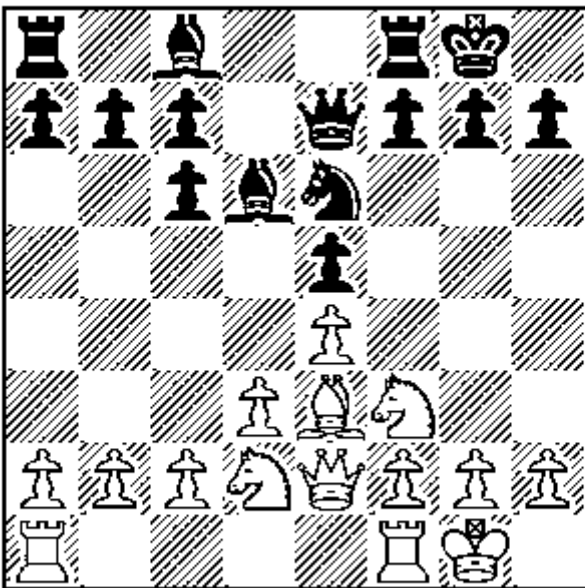
**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bb5 Bc5 5 Bxc6**

As usual, we should take a look too at what happens after 5 0-0 0-0 6 Bxc6 dxc6.



Now:

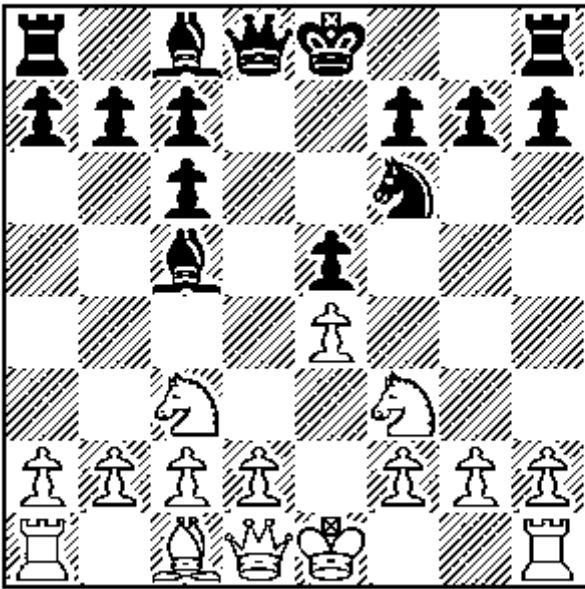
a) 7 d3 leads to the same type of position as covered in our main game. Black can choose from a variety of different set-ups. I like 7 ... Bg4 8 h3 Bh5 9 Be3 Nd7 10 Bxc5 Bxf3 11 Qxf3 Nxc5 when Black doesn't have the bishop-pair, but his knight will reach e6 and White's pawn structure isn't better at all. Another decent set-up is 7 ... Nd7 8 Qe2 Bd6 9 Be3 Qe7 10 Nb1 Nc5 11 Nbd2 Ne6.



This will be followed by ... f6, ... c5 and ... b6 with a strong hold on the dark squares. The bishop on d6 isn't beautiful, but White can't really create anything without giving the bishop scope.

b) 7 Nxe5?! is by far the most popular move, but to me it looks like Black is the one with an edge: 7 ... Re8 8 Nf3 (8 Nd3 Bg4 9 Qe1 Bd4 leaves White horribly tangled) 8 ... Nxe4 9 Nxe4 Rxe4 10 d4 Bd6 and Black can't complain with a strong bishop-pair and attacking chances on the kingside.

**5 ... dxc6**



**6 d3**

Sensible:

a) For some reason, the most popular move continues to be 6 Nxe5, even though Black is the one with an advantage after 6 ... Bxf2+! (compared to after 5 Nxe5, this capture is now strong because White's centre is seriously weakened) 7 Kxf2 Qd4+ 8 Kf1 Qxe5 9 d4 Qe7. Black will castle, develop and just enjoy the much safer king.

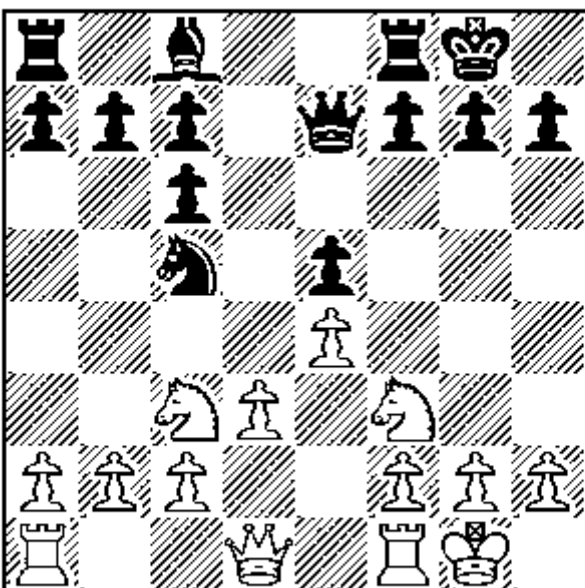
b) Sometimes White starts with 6 h3, ruling out ... Bg4 which can be an annoying pin. This doesn't change anything for us, though. We just continue in the same manner as in our main game.

**6 ... Qe7 7 Be3 Nd7!**

Black is well aware of what he's looking for. His worst-placed piece is the knight on f6 and when redirected to e6, it will actually become his best piece.

Black could also start with 7 ... Bd6, preserving the bishop-pair, and I'm not quite sure which of the options is best. Regardless, Black is completely fine in a manoeuvring struggle.

**8 0-0 0-0 9 Bxc5 Nxc5**



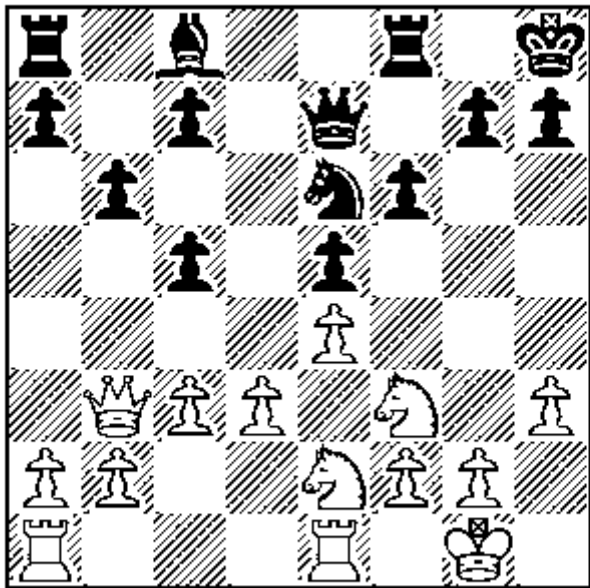
White eventually went for the exchange of bishops and what we have now is a lovely case of an equal position where we can play for a win. There's enough imbalance in the position to do

so, even if doing so might require patience.

**10 h3**

Ruling out the annoying ... Bg4 pin.

**10 ... f6 11 Ne2 Ne6 12 c3 c5 13 Qb3 Kh8 14 Rfe1 b6**



This is a very instructive position, since it shows pretty much exactly what Black is looking for. His pawns on are dark squares, while the bishop and knight are on light squares. Meanwhile White is still trying to find good squares for his knights, but without any success. Playing c2-c3 was necessary to prevent a future ... Nd4, but if White doesn't follow up with d3-d4 himself, the d3-pawn can simply become a weakness.

**15 Rad1 a5?!**

Although typical, I'm not fond of this move since it allows White to play d3-d4 without working for it. I prefer the simple 15 ... Bb7!, putting pressure on the e4-pawn. After, say, 16 Qc2 Rae8! White should avoid 17 d4?! exd4 18 cxd4 f5! which gives Black a very strong initiative with a devilish bishop on b7.

**16 d4! cxd4**

Opening the c-file having played ... a5 looks very risky. I would prefer 16 ... Ba6.

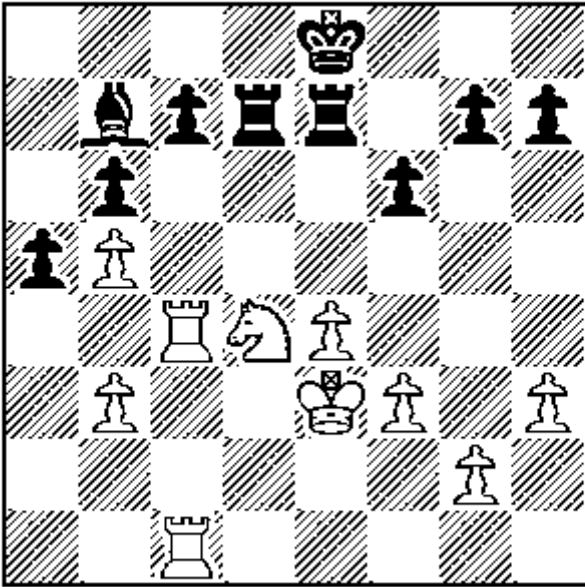
**17 cxd4 exd4 18 Nexd4 Nc5 19 Qa3**

If Black could keep his knight on c5, his worries should be over, but unfortunately White's last prepares Nb3 and b2-b4, kicking the knight.

**19 ... Qf7 20 b4 Na6 21 b5 Nc5 22 Nb3 Nxb3 23 axb3 Bb7**

The engine insists that this is equal, but I would definitely be worried as Black. The c-file is certainly something to be concerned about.

**24 Nd4 Rae8 25 f3 Qe7 26 Qxe7 Rxe7 27 Rc1 Rd8 28 Rc4 Kg8 29 Rec1 Rdd7 30 Kf2 Kf8 31 Ke3 Ke8**



It's clear that with the pressure on the c-file and the terrific knight on d4, White is much better. However, winning isn't easy. White must open up a file so his can might enter the black position.

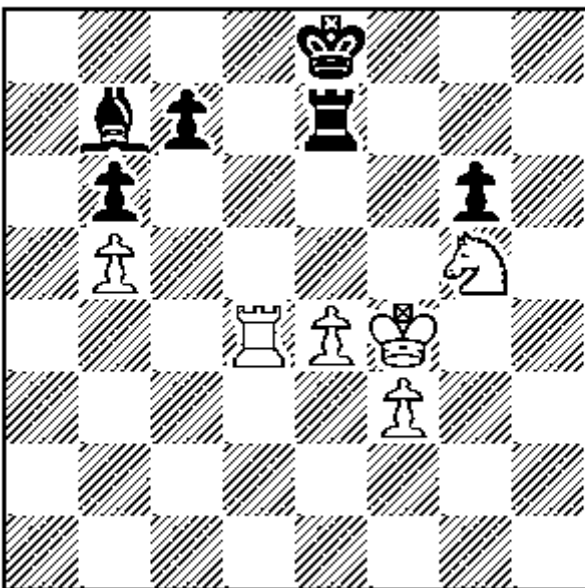
**32 Ra4**

Another reasonable idea is 32 Nf5 Rf7 33 g4 followed by h3-h4-h5 with complete domination.

**32 ... Rd8 33 b4 axb4 34 Rxb4 g6 35 g4 Rd6 36 Ra1 Kd7 37 h4 Kc8 38 h5 Re5 39 hxg6 hxg6 40 Rc4**

40 Rh1! should be enough to penetrate Black's position with decisive effect.

**40 ... Rc5 41 Rac1 Rxc4 42 Rxc4 Rd7 43 Kf4 Rh7 44 g5 Rh4+ 45 Kg3 fxe5 46 Ne6 Rh7 47 Nxe5 Re7 48 Kf4 Kd7 49 Rd4+ Ke8**



**50 e5?**

This is very likely too early, even though it looks natural.

50 Rd1!, transferring the rook to the h-file first, looks more accurate. The e-pawn doesn't have to hurry.

**50 ... Rd7! 51 Rc4 Bd5 52 Rc3 Ke7 53 Nh7 Be6 54 Kg5 Rd5 55 Rxc7+ Kd8 56 Rb7**

**Rxe5+ 57 Kf6 Bc8 58 Rxb6 ½-½**

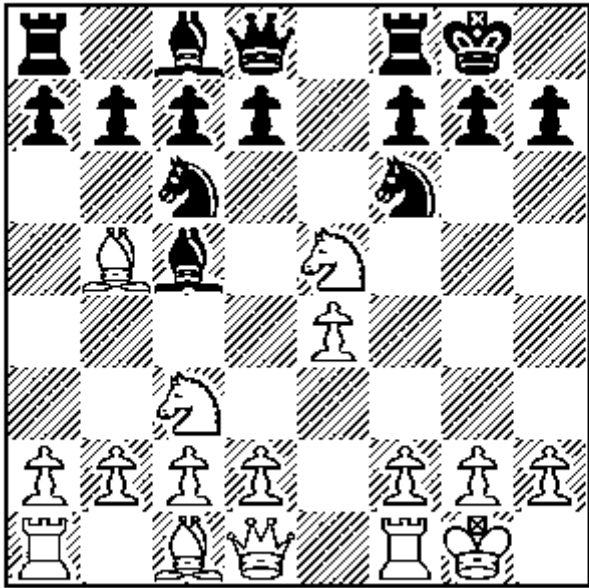
Well defended by Naumann, who definitely had to suffer after opening the c-file. I definitely think White was winning at a few points, but it's never easy to play with flawless technique until the very end.

Game 41

**M.Delgado Crespo-J.Fernandez Garcia**

Las Palmas 2005

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bb5 Bc5 5 0-0 0-0 6 Nxe5!**

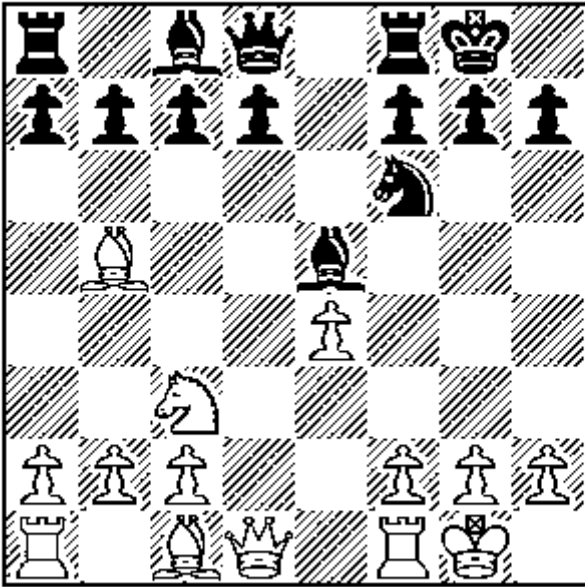


This is rightly considered the biggest and only threat to 4 ... Bc5 from a theoretical point of view. White changes the structure drastically and the arising positions are quite unique.

**6 ... Nxe5 7 d4 Bd6 8 dxe5**

But this meek move is definitely not a challenge for Black. He has very smooth development after it and the bishop on e5 is not awkwardly placed at all. Indeed, the only critical move is 8 f4!, as we'll see in our next game.

**8 ... Bxe5**



### 9 Bg5

I've never liked this move for White in the Four Knights Game. It's not too clear what the bishop wants to achieve, since the pin along the h4-d8 diagonal isn't that annoying.

The main move here is 9 Bd3 when we have reached a position known after 4 Bc4 Nxe4 5 Nxe4 d5 6 Bd3 dxe4 7 Bxe4 Bd7 8 0-0 0-0, but with colours reversed. Kaufman thinks White, or in our case Black, has an edge and I'll at least say that Black is not the one fighting for equality. Indeed, following 9 ... Re8! (increasing the pressure in the centre) 10 Bg5 (10 Re1 d6 followed by ... c6 looks about equal), instead of the common 10 ... h6, I like 10 ... c6!, preparing ... Qc7 before continuing development. This could be met with Bg3 if White's bishop was on h4, but now after, say, 11 Qd2 Qc7 12 h3 h6 Black seems to be a bit better.

### 9 ... h6

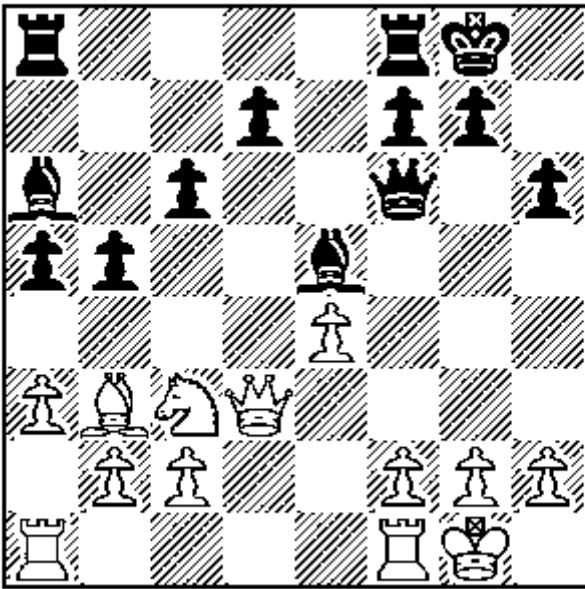
Black could also play like in the note above with 9 ... c6!? 10 Bd3 Re8 and ... Qc7, which should be slightly better for him.

### 10 Bxf6?!

Giving up the bishop-pair for very little compensation.

I'm not sure why White rejected 10 Bh4. Sure, Black is definitely not worse here either, but at least White's position looks okay, especially since 10 ... c6 11 Bd3 Re8?! (11 ... Qb6 is better) can be met with 12 f4! Bxc3? 13 bxc3 Qb6+ 14 Bf2! which is very good for White.

### 10 ... Qxf6 11 Qd3? c6! 12 Ba4 b5 13 Bb3 a5! 14 a3 Ba6

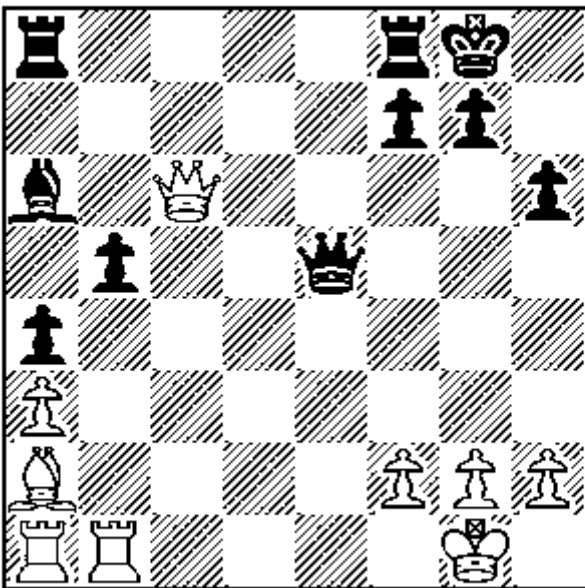


Black has completely outplayed White. Not only does he have the bishop-pair, but White's pieces are stuck in a tangle he can't get out of. Indeed, Black's advantage is already decisive.

**15 Nd1 a4 16 Ba2 Bxb2?**

Unfortunately, Black becomes greedy and overlooks a beautiful win. The strong 16 ... d5! would have cracked White's position completely. All of his pieces look ridiculous and the tactical justification is shown after 17 exd5 b4 18 Bc4 Qf4!, picking up a piece due to the double threat against h2 and c4.

**17 Nxb2 Qxb2 18 Qxd7 Qxc2 19 Rfc1 Qb2 20 Rcb1 Qf6 21 e5! Qxe5 22 Qxc6**

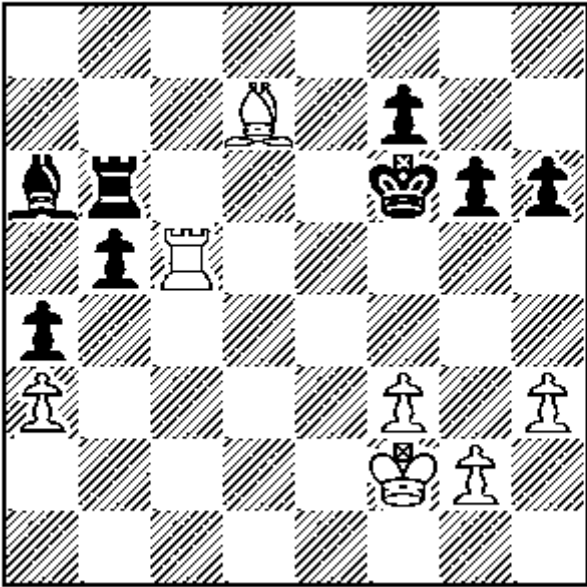


Black has managed to win a pawn, but it's not an easy pawn to convert. True, White's pieces still look strange, but Black will have to play very well to realize his advantage.

**22 ... Ra7 23 Qb6 Qc7 24 Qe3 Qe7 25 Qf3 Qg5 26 Bd5 Re7 27 Re1 Rd8 28 Rxe7 Qxe7 29 h3 Qf6 30 Re1 Qxf3 31 Bxf3 Kf8**

Black has managed to trade the queens, which eliminates most of White's counterplay.

**32 Bc6 g6 33 Re5 Rb8 34 f3 Rb6 35 Bd7 Kg7 36 Kf2 Kf6 37 Rc5?**



After this move White is surely busted.

37 f4! would have made Black work for the point since his king is cut off from the queenside.

**37 ... Ke7!**

The king hurries to the queenside with tempo due to White's awkwardly placed pieces.

**38 Bc8 Kd6 39 Rc3 Bxc8 40 Rxc8 Rc6 41 Rb8 Kc5 42 Ke3 Kc4 43 Kd2 Re6 44 Rb7 f5 45 f4 g5 46 fxf5 hxg5 47 Rc7+ Kb3 48 Rc5 Rb6 49 Rxf5 Kxa3 50 Kc2 b4 51 Kb1 Kb3 52 g3 Rh6 0-1**

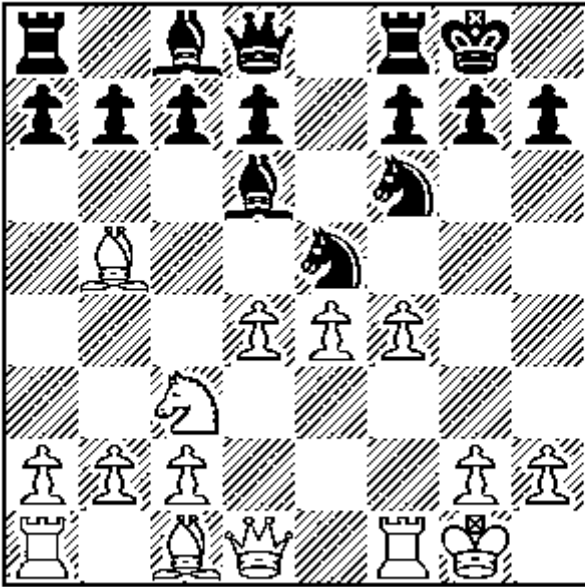
White's last two moves look strange, but his position is still, of course, completely lost. A fine technical victory, but the effort would have been much less had Black spotted the very nice 16 ... d5!.

Game 42

**K.Berbatov-J.Hammer**

European Championship, Aix-les-Bains 2011

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bb5 Bc5 5 0-0 0-0 6 Nxe5 Nxe5 7 d4 Bd6 8 f4!**



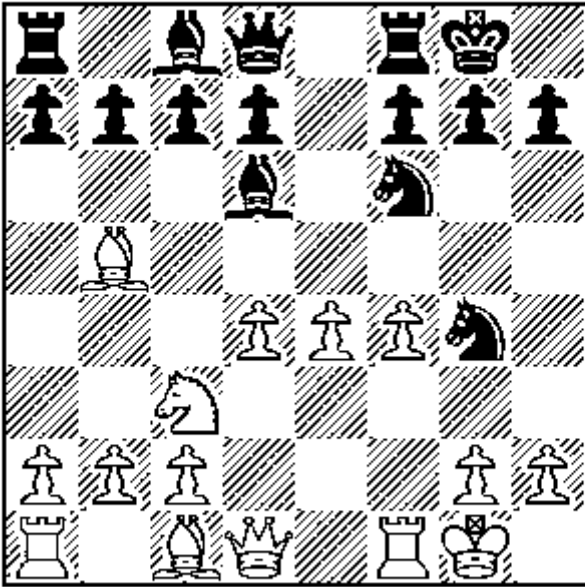
The critical variation against the entire concept behind 4 ... Bc5. White makes sure he will get back the piece via e4-e5. While White's pawn centre might look scary, I think Black's set-up has a very sound positional basis that always ensures him of fine play.

In general, Black allows e4-e5xf6 when White will be left with two pawns on f4 and d4. These may be strong or weak, depending on how the game continues. They may be strong in the sense that White has a space advantage and might try to suffocate Black's pieces, but if something goes wrong, the weakness of the e4-square can be felt.

### 8 ... Neg4!?

This is a rather new and surprising move, but it was recommended by Kaufman in his very interesting book. If White simply plays e4-e5xf6, Black can recapture with his knight which finds f6 a much better square than, say, c6. White can try to disturb the knight through other means, but Black always looks fine.

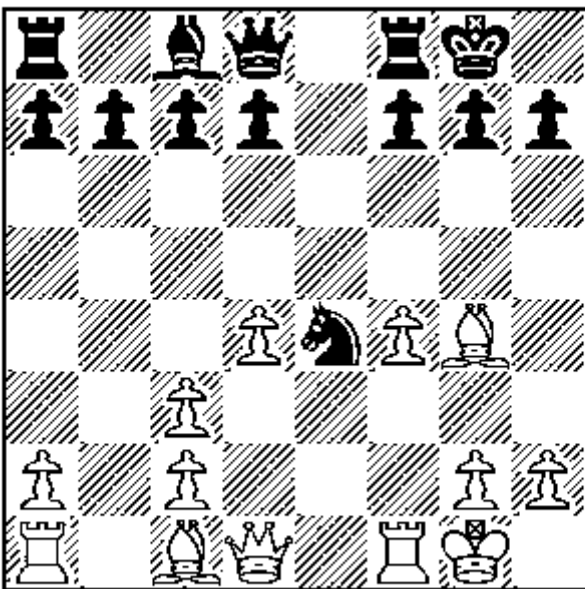
The main move is 8 ... Nc6 which generally leads to a complete mess. Maybe Black is fine here, but in comparison our main line looks good and it's much easier to grasp. One critical game was J.Gallagher-M.Sbarra, Geneva 2005, which went 9 e5 Be7 10 d5 Nb4 11 exf6 Bxf6 12 Bc4 d6 13 Ne4 Bf5 14 Ng3 and Black got a bit squeezed. White went on to win.



## 9 e5

Logical, of course, but White has tried some alternatives:

a) So far White has been doing better with 9 Be2!?. We obviously don't want to put our knight on h6, so we should play 9 ... Bb4! 10 Bxg4 (10 e5 d6 11 exf6 Nxf6 12 Qd3 Re8 13 Bf3 was A.Espinosa-S.Fedorchuk, Navalmoral 2012, where White scored a big upset, but it wasn't because of the opening; at this point maybe 13 ... g6! is best, preventing White from taking too much space on the kingside with f4-f5) 10 ... Bxc3 11 bxc3 Nxe4 when we have quite a typical situation for our variation.



White has the bishop-pair, but Black has a stunning knight on e4, a great light-square blockade and White has to work hard to make the c1-bishop come to life. 12 Bf3 d5 13 Bxe4 dxe4 14 c4 b6 15 c3 f5 16 Be3 was A.Kogan-L.McShane, Plovdiv 2010, where Kogan actually managed to score an upset, but it's quite clear to me that Black has a definite advantage here.

b) 9 h3 leads to a long, quite forced line where Black is comfortable: 9 ... Bb4! 10 e5 d6 11 Be2 dxe5 12 fxe5 Bxc3 13 bxc3 Nd5 14 Bxg4 Nxc3 15 Qd3 Bxg4 16 Qxc3 (16 hxg4 would work if it wasn't for 16 ... Qxd4+!) 16 ... Be6 and Black will play ... Qd5 with a very nice blockade on the light squares.

## 9 ... Be7!?

This is not the most popular continuation, but perhaps it's Black easiest path to a good game.

The more common move is 9 ... Bb4, but in some cases I'd prefer to have my bishop elsewhere. On b4 the bishop might have to take on c3 under unfavourable circumstances, while on e7 it might recapture on f6 at some point. That said, here too Black should be okay:

a) 10 a3 should be met with 10 ... Ba5! (10 ... Bxc3 11 bxc3 d6 12 exf6 Nxf6 13 f5 is a bit better for White, who has successfully cramped Black on the kingside) 11 Be2!? d6 12 exf6 Nxf6 13 f5 d5 when Black seems to be absolutely fine.

b) The most common line is 10 exf6?! Nxf6 11 f5 d5, but if anything this is better for Black.

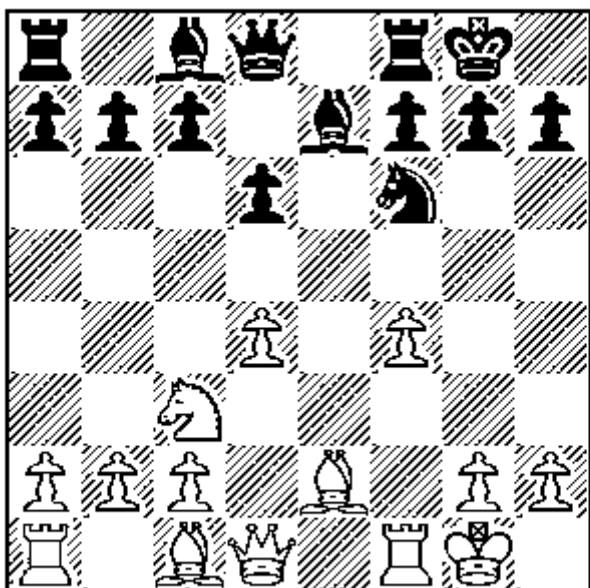
c) 10 Qf3!? is untried. After 10 ... d5 11 h3 Bf5 12 Bd3 Bxc3 13 bxc3 Qd7! 14 Bxf5 Qxf5 15 hxg4 Nxg4 Black looks very comfortable.

d) 10 f5 Re8! 11 exf6 Nxf6 and again Black is absolutely fine.

## 10 h3

Once again, White has alternatives:

a) 10 Be2 is as usual critical, but Black seems to equalize with sensible play: 10 ... d6! 11 exf6 (11 h3 transposes below; see note 'a' to White's 11th move) 11 ... Nxf6.

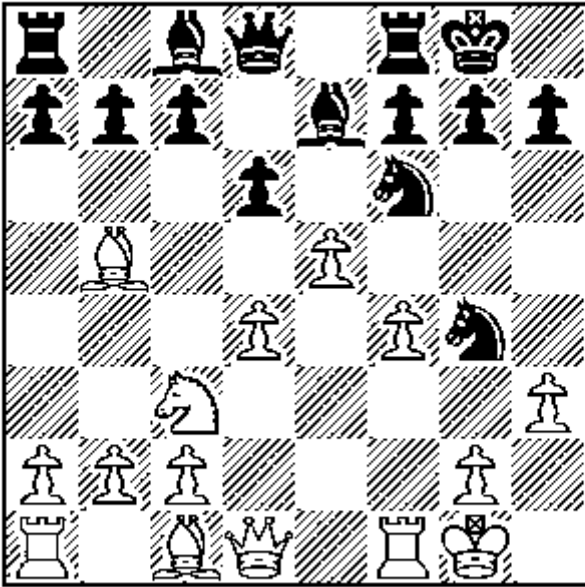


If Black is allowed, he will play ... d5, ... c6, ... Bd6, ... Re8 and develop his pieces to good, natural squares. Black will always keep good control of the e4-square so any attempted kingside attack is doomed to fail. Therefore White should seize his opportunity to cramp Black with 12 d5!, but I still doubt this leads to anything in particular for White. After 12 ... Re8 Black can play ... Bf8 with ideas like ... g6 and ... Bg7, or perhaps even more likely ... Bd7 and ... c6, breaking up White's centre. For example, 13 Bf3 Bf8 14 g4?! (14 b3 g6 15 Bb2 Bg7 looks more sensible, but Black is still very solid) 14 ... c6 15 h3 Bd7 16 Qd3 Nxd5 17 Bxd5 cxd5 18 Nxd5 Bc6 and Black realized his advantage in O.Billon-G.Flear, Saint Affrique 2013.

b) The immediate 10 exf6 Nxf6 is just good for Black, who can play ... d7-d5 in one go. Usually Black has to go ... d6 first and only then ... d5.

c) 10 f5!? was the choice of a young Wei Yi and should be taken seriously, but I don't think it is a big challenge to Black's position. 10 ... d6! 11 exf6 Nxf6 12 Qf3 c6 13 Bd3 was Wei Yi-V.Tkachiev, Jakarta 2012, and now I like the immediate 13 ... d5! followed by ... Re8, ... h6, ... Bd6 and ... Bd7 with a very solid position.

## 10 ... d6

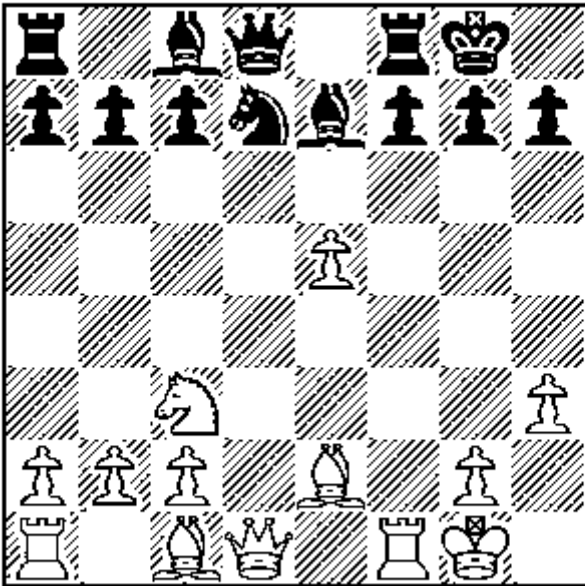


10 ... Nh6 would have been interesting if it wasn't for 11 f5!, suffocating Black's knights even further.

### 11 exf6

Again, by no means forced:

a) 11 Be2!? is quite a critical move, even though it hasn't been tried yet. This position could also arise via 10 Be2. Black shouldn't be greedy: 11 ... dxe5 12 fxe5 Nxe5! 13 dxe5 Nd7.



This is a very interesting position. Black has the sounder pawn structure and thus has a long-term advantage, so White might try:

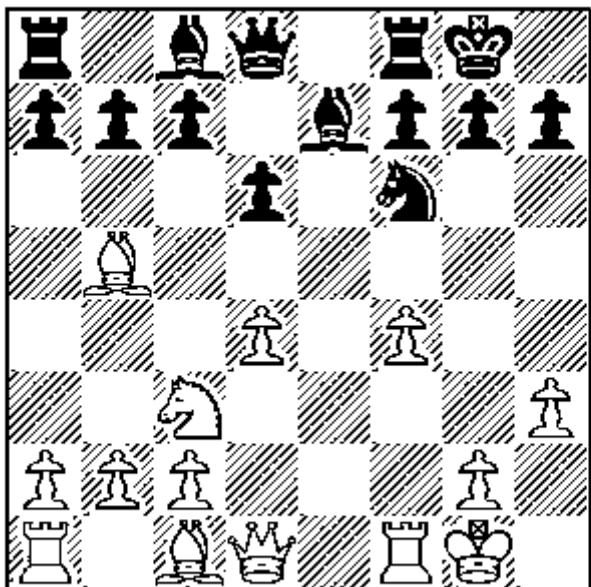
a1) 14 Bf4 Nc5 looks absolutely fine for Black. He has a splendid blockade on e6 and I seriously doubt White can create enough initiative to disturb Black's harmonious position. Black will play ... c6 and ... Be6.

a2) 14 e6!? is more interesting, but after 14 ... fxe6 I doubt White can hope for much more than regaining the pawn on e6 with an equal position. One sample variation is 15 Bf4 Nf6 16 Qxd8 Bxd8 17 Rae1 c6 18 Bd6 Re8 when even though Black is passive, he has an extra pawn and will try to unravel slowly. I can't really see what White can do to Black's position.

b) 11 hxg4 Nxg4 12 Be2 is nothing to worry about, as Black has a very stable blockade on the light squares after 12 ... h5!. If Black is allowed, he can continue with ... g6 and ... Bf5. White could try to disturb Black's plan with the cute 13 e6!?, but 13 ... fxe6 14 Bxg4 hxg4 15 Qxg4 Qe8 gains the bishop-pair for little compensation.

### 11 ... Nxf6

This is a very typical position for our variation, but Black's play is pretty much the same against any of White's attempts: ... d5, ... Re8, ... Bd6, ... c6 and then develop with a solid position. In our stem game White now engages a typical idea with a doubtful execution.



### 12 g4?!

This looks a bit premature:

a) 12 f5 c6 13 Bd3 d5 14 Qf3 Re8 15 Ne2 was O.Boguslavsky-C.Mehne, German League 2012, and now 15 ... c5! looks like a very dynamic way of playing. After 16 c3 Bd7 17 Bf4 Qb6 Black appears to keep up the pressure on White's position.

b) 12 Qf3 d5 13 Bd3 was L.Mansson-M.Welin, Swedish League 2014, but here I'd like to take advantage of White's oddly placed pieces and just go ahead with 13 ... c5! 14 dxc5 Bxc5+ 15 Kh1 b6 when Black's dynamic potential is quite strong. White isn't close to taming the isolated pawn and Black's bishops are more dangerous than White's bishops.

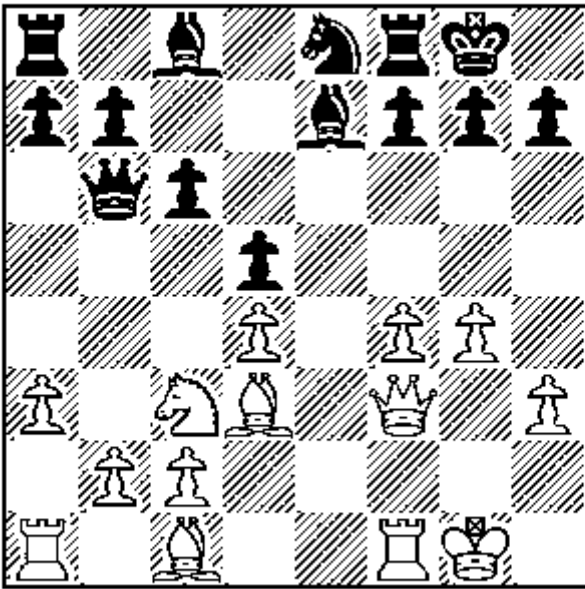
### 12 ... d5!

Black doesn't panic. It's very important to keep control of the e4-square.

### 13 Bd3 c6 14 Qf3 Qb6

An interesting alternative is the immediate 14 ... Ne4!?. After 15 Nxe4 dxe4 16 Qxe4 f5! Black picks up the d4-pawn with a level position.

### 15 a3 Ne8!



A very instructive move by Hammer. The knight is redirected to d6 where will be much better placed and White's pawn avalanche on the kingside is left wondering what it's doing. And, what's more, Black might strike back himself.

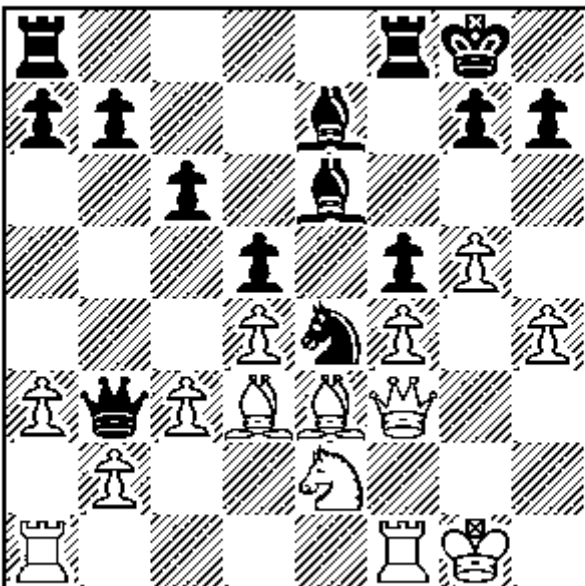
**16 Be3?!**

White had to keep the initiative flowing and play 16 f5! Qxd4+ 17 Be3 Qe5 18 Bf4 when Black would have had to take risks to avoid a draw.

**16 ... f5!**

Another very nice move by Hammer. Now the e4-square is Black's forever and White is far from putting anything on e5.

**17 g5 Nd6 18 h4 Ne4 19 Ne2 Be6 20 c3 Qb3**



To be honest, I'm not quite sure I understand the reason behind this move. Perhaps Hammer wanted to prevent b2-b4, but this seems unlikely seeing that then ... a5 opens up the queenside when the c3-pawn would be left very weak.

I would consider playing 20 ... a5 simply to grab space on the queenside and eventually open up lines there.

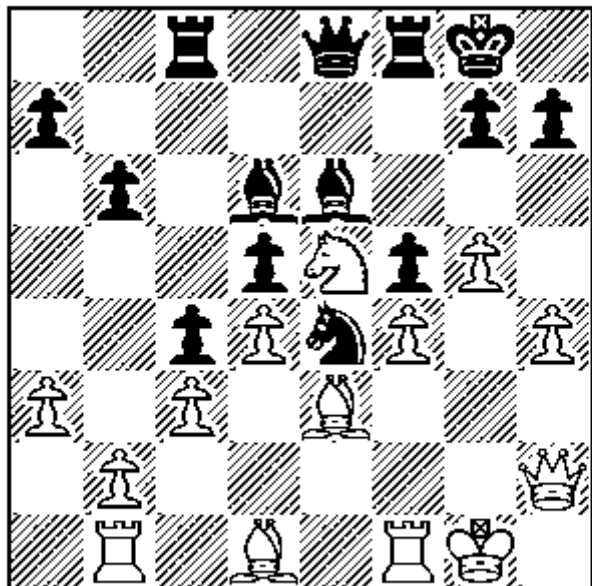
**21 Rab1 b6**

So Black wanted to prepare ... c5, but why did the queen have to be on b3 where it runs the risk of being trapped? I would have preferred to have it on c7.

**22 Nc1 Qa4 23 Qg2 c5 24 Bc2 Qe8**

Finally Black's queen is home safe, but the downside is that meanwhile White has manoeuvred his knight to the e5-square. Still, Black remains better since the knight on e4 does a lot more than the knight on e5, even if Black's advantage isn't that great any longer.

**25 Nd3 Qh5 26 Ne5 Bd6 27 Qh3 Rac8 28 Bd1 Qe8 29 Qh2 c4!?**



A very interesting strategical concept. Black realizes that White's attack on the kingside will never work (h4-h5-h6 is just met with ... g6, keeping the kingside closed). Thus, White now has to worry about a long-term ... b5, ... a5 and ... b4.

**30 a4 a6 31 Ra1 Ra8 32 Bf3 b5 33 axb5 axb5 34 Qc2 Qc8 35 Rfb1 Ra6 36 Qc1 b4**

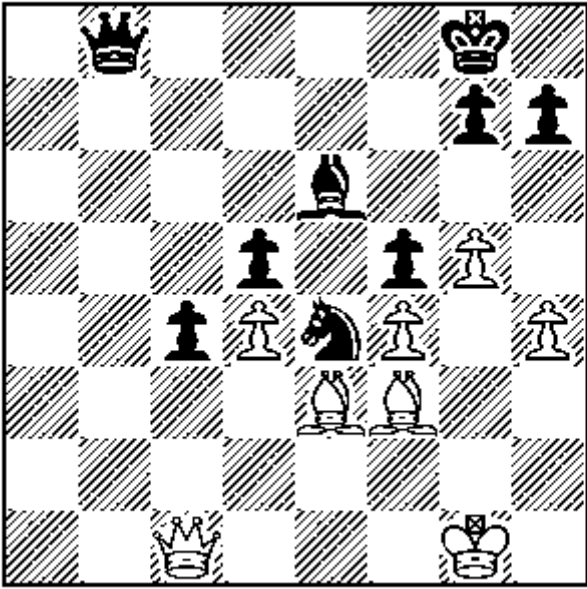
Black's plan initiated with 29 ... c4 has completely been fulfilled.

**37 Rxa6 Qxa6 38 Ra1 Qb6 39 Ra4 Rb8 40 cxb4?**

Finally, White loses his temper and decides to change the structure even though the arising position is much worse for him.

White should probably take it easy and play 40 h5. He can hope that Black will open the position too early and the rook on a4 is ready to spring into action on a8 or a7 in an endgame.

**40 ... Bxb4 41 Rxb4 Qxb4 42 Nc6 Qxb2 43 Nxb8 Qxb8**



White's prospects in this endgame are not very good. The c4-pawn is extremely strong and I don't see how White is to keep Black at bay.

**44 Kg2 Qb3 45 Bd1 Qd3 46 h5 Bc8 47 Bf3 c3 48 g6 Ba6 49 Qe1 Kh8 50 Qc1 Nf6 51 Qa3 Qxe3 52 Qxa6 hxg6 53 hxg6 Qe8 54 Qb7 c2 55 Qc7 Qxg6+ 56 Kf2 Ng4+ 57 Ke1 Qe8+ 58 Kd2 Qe3+ 59 Kxc2 Qxf3 60 Qc8+ Kh7 61 Qxf5+ g6 62 Qf7+ Kh6 63 Qf8+ Kh5 64 Qh8+ Nh6 0-1**

White runs out of checks and there's no point in continuing the game. A terrific strategical game from Jon Ludvig Hammer.

## Conclusion

I am very happy with the move 4 ... Bc5. Not only is it theoretically sound, but it's rare and it gives Black plenty of chances to get a double-edged fight. Besides, not many opponents will be prepared against it.

An early d2-d3 gives Black absolutely no problems if he responds actively with ... Nd4. Exchanging with Bxc6 isn't challenging either, but does lead to a strategical type of position where both players can fight for a win.

It's clear that in order to fight for an advantage White must capture on e5, either immediately or after inserting castling. The immediate 5 Nxe5 suffered a heavy blow in the game Wei Yi-Eljanov, but it's possible that improvements could be found early on. Meanwhile after 5 0-0 0-0 6 Nxe5 we get a complex strategic position where Black seems to be fine due to his excellent control of the e4-square.

# Chapter Seven

## The Remaining Four Knights

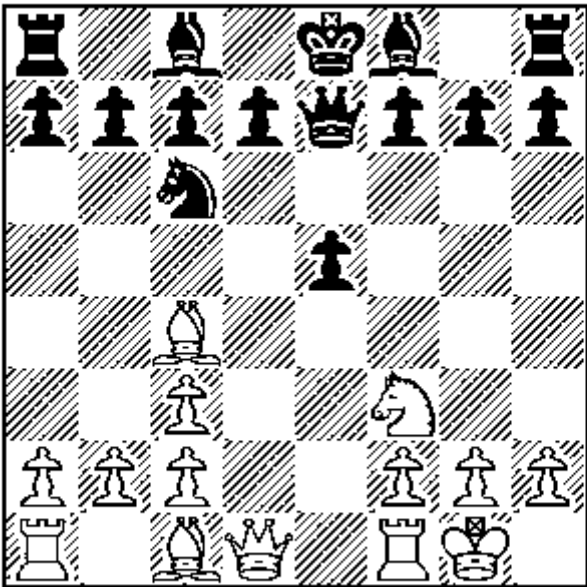
**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6**

This chapter covers all kind of interesting and odd variations of the Four Knights that White can try. None of White's attempts are considered very challenging for Black, but they are all quite tricky and many of Black's natural moves can turn out to be inferior. That is why Black should never underestimate even small, seemingly harmless moves like 4 a3 or 4 Be2.

### Theoretical Introduction

The starting position of our chapter arises after **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6** when White has many tries. Most of them are respectable and Black should have a clue of what to do against them:

a) 4 Bc4 is often frowned upon as a beginner's move. I don't think it's as bad as people say it is, but I do think Black gets a good position after 4 ... Nxe4!. White usually continues with 5 Nxe4 d5 6 Bd3 and this is covered in Game 43. He can also sacrifice a pawn with 5 0-0, but I believe Black obtains good play with 5 ... Nxc3 6 dxc3 Qe7!.



See Game 44 for more information on this move.

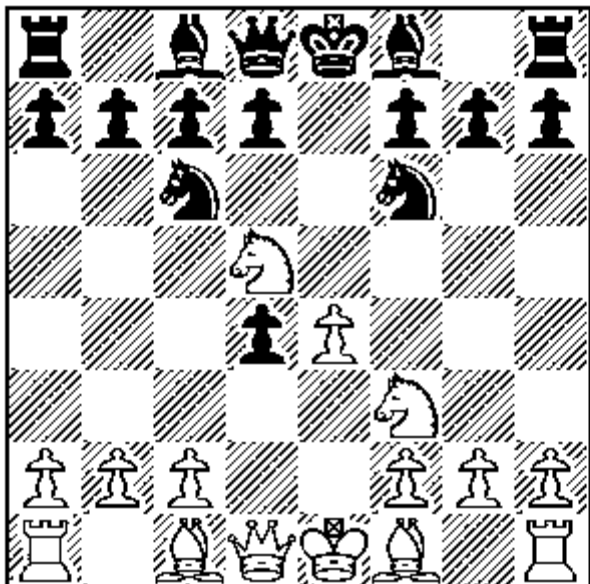
b) 4 a3 eliminates ... Bb4 once and for all. Black doesn't want to play 4 ... Bc5 allowing the typical trick 5 Nxe5, but 4 ... d5! remains. This is covered in Game 45 together with Giri's 4 h3, which isn't much more than an attempt to reach an unexplored position.

c) Game 46 covers the tricky 4 Be2!?, which isn't bad at all. Black's best reaction seems to be 4 ... d5 5 exd5 Nxd5 6 0-0 Nxc3 7 bxc3 e4 8 Ne1 and now the untried 8 ... f5!.

d) The Halloween Gambit, 4 Nxe5!?, is by far the most controversial opening in this chapter. White should be applauded for his courage, but objectively Black is just better and Game 47 shows why.

e) Much more sensible is 4 g3, which I've grouped together with the closely-related 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 g3 in Chapter Eleven (see Games 67 and 68).

f) Finally we reach the Belgrade Gambit, 4 d4 exd4 5 Nd5.



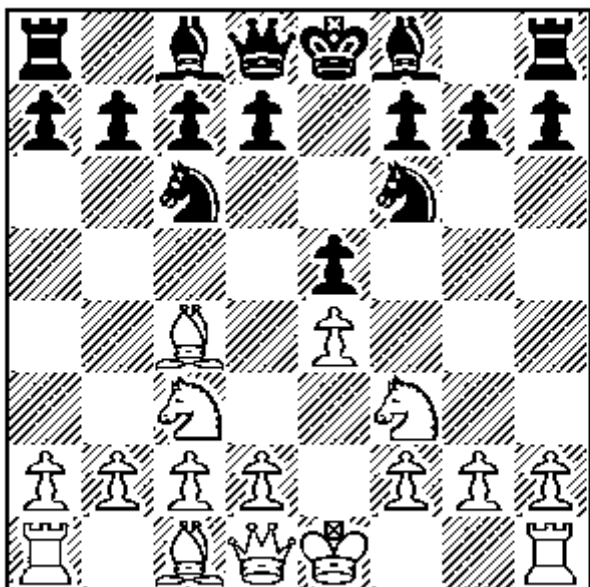
This should be met with the nice 5 ... Nb4!, immediately challenging the knight on d5. We will take a closer look at it in Game 48.

Game 43

**J.Barle-D.Pavasovic**

Bled 2003

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 Nc3 Nc6 4 Bc4!?



This is a controversial move. As far as I'm concerned, almost all literature believes it to be a beginner's mistake and gives it a '?' symbol or even a plain question mark. I believe the criticism to be slightly over exaggerated and that Black still needs to play accurately. However, it is true that many beginners will play this seemingly natural developing move and continue sub-optimally after Black's 'refutation'.

**4 ... Nxe4!**

A well-known trick, which is supposed to even refute 4 Bc4, but I don't think it's as bad for

White as the books seem to think.

### 5 Nxe4

Less experienced players might be tempted into 5 Bxf7+? Kxf7 6 Nxe4, luring Black's king out in the open while regaining material. However, Black's king isn't exposed at all and he will just get a fantastic position by expanding in the centre with 6 ... d5! followed by ... e4 when White loses a lot of time.

The third move, which is actually a respectable gambit, is 5 0-0 and this will be covered in our next game.

### 5 ... d5 6 Bd3!

Best:

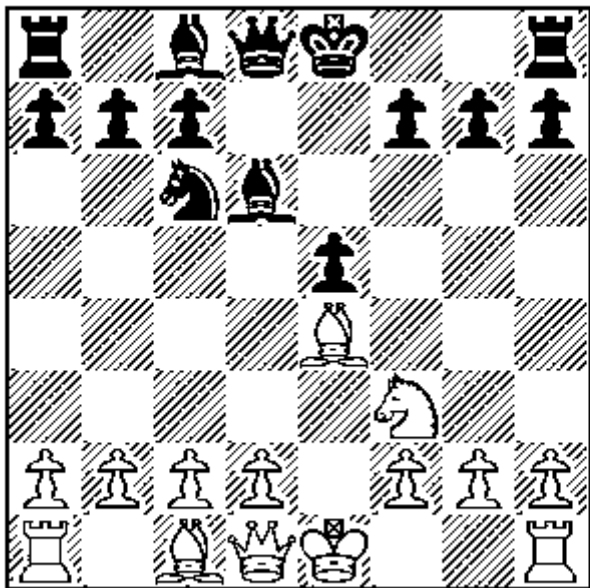
a) The most common move in the database is 6 Bxd5 Qxd5, but naturally this hasn't been played by many strong players. Black is active and has the bishop-pair in an open position where his advantage is undeniable.

b) Neither is 6 Bb5? dxe4 7 Nxe5 a good idea, since Black can play 7 ... Qg5! 8 Nxc6 Qxb5 when he once again has the better development and the bishop-pair.

### 6 ... dxe4

Kaufman makes a great case for the very uncommon 6 ... Nb4!?, but after 7 Ng3 e4 8 Be2 exf3 9 Bxf3 it feels like the position can quickly become relatively dull. The structure is similar to the Exchange French or some boring variation of the Berlin Wall and even though both players can fight for a win, I'd prefer a more unbalanced structure.

### 7 Bxe4 Bd6



Even though the engines think the resulting positions are about equal, I like Black's aggressive potential. He can easily drum up a kingside attack with ... f5 as in our main game.

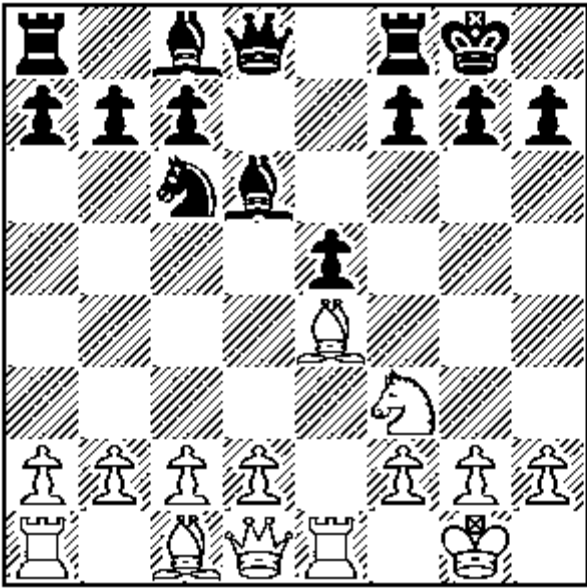
### 8 0-0

White has also tried 8 d4, but things aren't so easy for him after 8 ... exd4 and now:

a) After 9 Nxd4 0-0 White's pieces are awkwardly placed: 10 Nxc6 (10 0-0? loses a piece to 10 ... Nxd4 11 Qxd4 Bxh2+) 10 ... Qh4! (a very strong zwischenzug) 11 Bf3 Re8+ 12 Kf1 bxc6 and Black is clearly better.

b) Sometimes White starts with 9 Bxc6+ bxc6 10 Qxd4 when we have a classic case of the bishop-pair versus pawn structure, but Black's bishops look really nice after 10 ... 0-0 11 0-0 c5 followed by ... Bb7 and ... Qf6 with some initiative.

## 8 ... 0-0 9 Re1!



A very solid continuation, increasing the pressure on the e5-pawn while not declaring anything in the centre. It does slow down a future ... f5 at least. Instead:

a) 9 d3 is a bit passive and after 9 ... Ne7! White has to be careful about ... f5, trapping the bishop on e4.

b) 9 c3 might prepare a future d2-d4, but Black can quickly seize some initiative with 9 ... f5! 10 Bd5+ Kh8 11 d3 and now 11 ... h6 followed by ... Qf6, with similar play as in our main game.

### 9 ... Re8

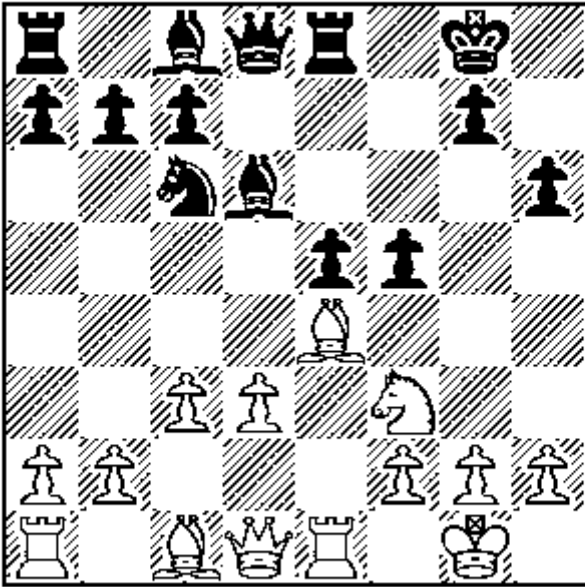
Protecting e5, which is a good idea, but there's another untried idea which might solve Black's problems immediately.

Indeed, 9 ... Nb4!? is an important idea, since Black seems to obtain a good position by force: 10 a3 (10 c3 might look more natural, but Black will play actively in the centre: 10 ... f5 11 Bb1 e4! with good play) 10 ... f5! 11 axb4 fxe4 12 Rxe4 Bf5. Black has very active bishops in return for the pawn and White should probably sacrifice the exchange with 13 Qe2 Bxe4 14 Qxe4, but even though White has some compensation, I definitely don't think he is close to having an advantage.

### 10 c3 h6!

Useful preparation for ... f5. If Black is too hasty and plays 10 ... f5, White would quickly seize the initiative after 11 Bd5+ Kf8 12 d4! with ideas of Ng5.

### 11 d3 f5



Initially the engine frowns at this idea, but sooner or later it realizes that it's actually not that bad. At least in practice I very much like Black's chances.

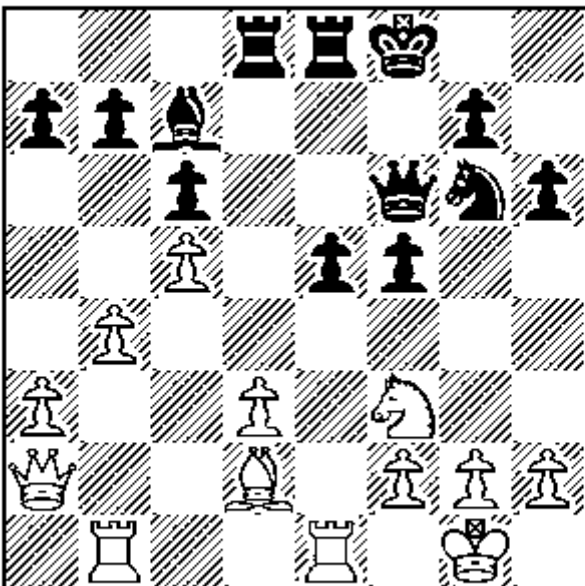
**12 Bd5+ Kf8 13 a3 Qf6 14 b4 Ne7 15 Ba2 Ng6!**

Black has played very sensibly, manoeuvring the knight towards the kingside while White has been seizing space on the queenside for unclear reasons.

**16 Bd2 c6 17 Qc2 Be6 18 c4 Bf7 19 Rab1 Rad8**

I don't like White's queenside attack. Indeed, I don't really see what there is to attack on the queenside and meanwhile Black has focused his forces in the centre. White now quickly goes astray in our main game.

**20 c5?! Bxa2 21 Qxa2 Bc7**

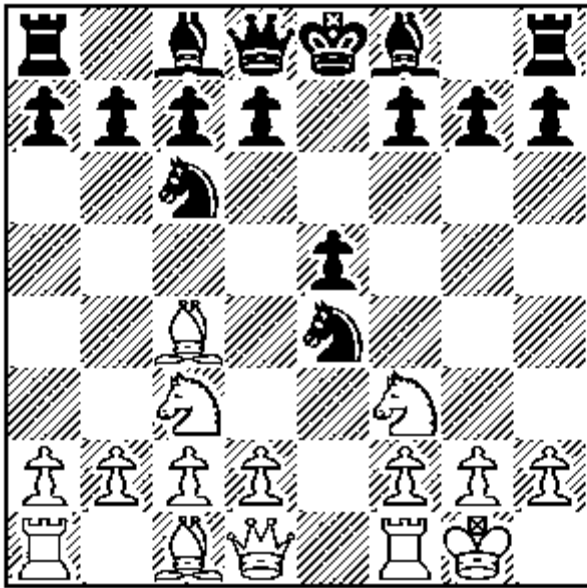


White's d-pawn is clearly retarded, but after ...

**22 Rbd1?? e4! 0-1**

... he had to resign immediately since the knight is trapped on f3.

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bc4 Nxe4 5 0-0



This gambit definitely deserves to be treated with respect. Not because I think it's particularly good, but if Black tries to develop as he usually does he won't get any advantage.

**5 ... Nxc3 6 dxc3**

What we've got here is a position where White is ahead in development, but Black has an extra pawn. The problem for Black is that if he tries to develop normally, White will gain an initiative or at least the pawn back with equal prospects. We want to fight for more than that.

**6 ... Qe7!**

A very rare move, but I definitely believe in it. Black wants to develop smoothly with ... d6 and ... Be6 when White's attack will be neutralized. Any f-pawn lunges by White won't be a problem since Black just plays ... f6 and ... d6 to keep the position closed. Instead:

a) 6 ... d6 won't do because of 7 Ng5! and Black can't properly defend f7.

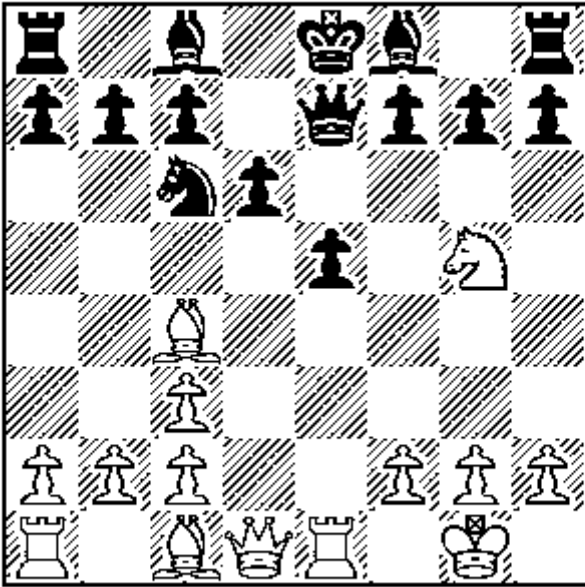
b) The most popular move is therefore 6 ... Be7, which develops while preventing Ng5, but after 7 Qd5 0-0 8 Nxe5 Nxe5 9 Qxe5 White has regained his pawn and the position has a tendency to become drawish.

c) Instead, the latest trend is to play 6 ... f6!? when Black wants to go ... Ne7 and ... d5 to claim the centre. Even though Black should be better, White can try to create some chaos with 7 Nh4 followed by launching the f-pawn up the board.

**7 Re1**

Of course, if White tries 7 Ng5 we can simply play 7 ... Nd8! which is a very cute defence. 8 f4? is principled, but doesn't work because of 8 ... Qc5+, picking up the bishop.

**7 ... d6 8 Ng5**



This doesn't seem to give White anything, but Black's position is bullet-proof. There's simply nothing to attack, so I can't blame White for trying. Indeed, 8 Nd4 Bd7 doesn't change anything. Black will play ... 0-0-0 with a solid position and eventually just consolidate his extra pawn.

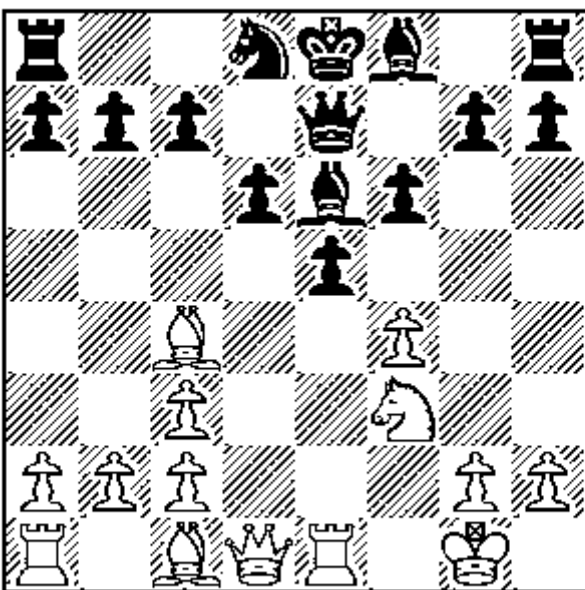
**8 ... Nd8 9 f4 f6!**

As usual, nothing gets through to Black's king.

**10 Nf3**

The first game of our variation comes from way back in 1899, but it still shows that Black is doing excellently: 10 Ne4 Be6 11 fxe5 dxe5 12 Bb5+ c6 13 Bd3 Nf7 and Black is just a clear pawn up. He could attack with ... 0-0-0 followed by ... f5 and ... e4, and Black later won in B.Huelsen-E.Schalopp, Berlin 1889.

**10 ... Be6**



Definitely the right idea, but I'd consider avoiding the complications White can now try to stir up. I'd prefer to start with 10 ... Nf7 and only then ... Be6, or even just ... c6 with the idea of ... d5 or ... g6 followed by ... Bg7 and ... 0-0. I simply don't see where White is supposed to get his compensation. In our main game White only gets one chance, but he didn't take it.

## 11 Bxe6?!

White has to try 11 fxe5 dxe5 12 Nxe5! fxe5 13 Rxe5 when Black should play 13 ... Bxc4 14 Rxe7+ Bxe7 when we have a rook and two minor pieces for a queen and a pawn. White isn't close to sufficient compensation, but I believe creating a material imbalance would complicate technical matters for Black.

## 11 ... Qxe6 12 Nd4 Qd7 13 f5

Now Black is simply a clear pawn ahead and with excellent potential in the centre.

## 13 ... d5 14 Qg4 Bc5 15 b4 Bxd4+

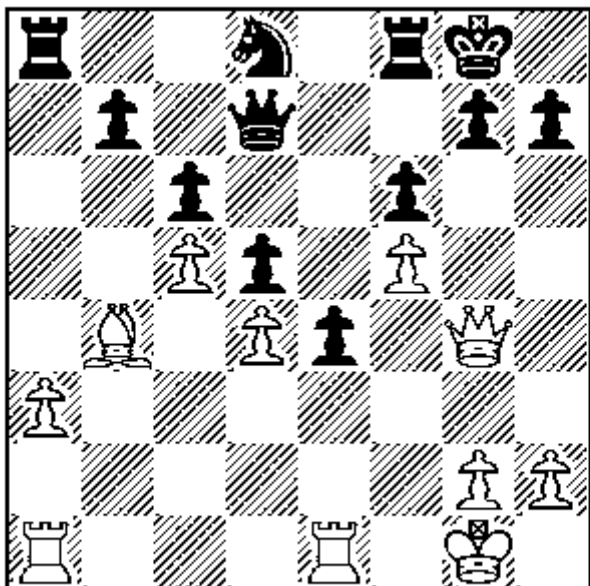
Black goes for a typical position where he has a good knight versus a bad bishop. And if that wasn't enough, Black is up a pawn as well.

It would also be fine to go 15 ... Bb6!? and just develop with ... 0-0 and perhaps ... a5.

## 16 cxd4 e4 17 c4 c6 18 c5!

White has to prevent a future ... Nf7-d6-c4, and this way he also gains a few outposts for his bishop, even though it might difficult to make anything out of them.

## 18 ... a5 19 Bd2?! axb4 20 Bxb4 0-0 21 a3



I can't imagine this is where White wanted his bishop when playing 18 c5, but White's position was bad anyway. In the game he soon blunders, which is logical seeing that he had a worse position from move 5 onwards.

21 ... Nf7 22 Rf1 Rfe8 23 Rae1 e3! 24 Rf3 Re7 25 Qg3 Rae8 26 Bc3 Ng5 27 Rff1? e2! 0-1

Game 45

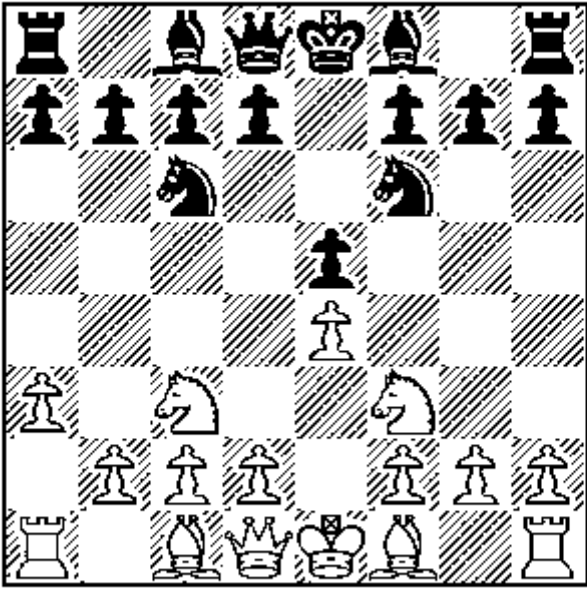
**B.Lovric-B.Kutuzovic**

Medulin 1997

## 1 Nc3 Nf6 2 e4 e5 3 Nf3 Nc6

Now we come to some very strange 4th moves that look ridiculous, but do contain some venom.

## 4 a3!?



Now why in the world would you have to know something about this? White is, in fact, trying to put Black in some kind of zugzwang by eliminating the option of ... Bb4.

Another move that should be mentioned is 4 h3, which I probably wouldn't have considered had Anish Giri not played it three times in the rapid games at the London Chess Classic 2014, scoring 2½ points against Kramnik, Caruana and Adams! Everyone replied 4 ... Bb4 5 Bd3 0-0 6 0-0 d6 7 Re1 and now instead of Caruana's 7 ... Ne7, I like 7 ... Be6 when 8 Ne2?! can be met with 8 ... Nxe4!.

#### 4 ... d5!

Seizing the centre and the best move to try and make a2-a3 useless.

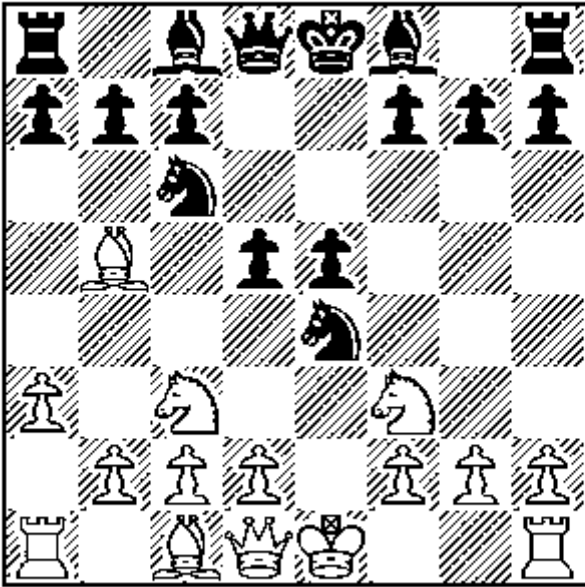
The alternative is 4 ... Bc5, but suddenly we have the 4 Bc4 line with reversed colours. White would love to continue with the famous 5 Nxe5!.

#### 5 Bb5

White's trickiest continuation. Black can actually play 4 ... Bb4 himself in the Scotch Four Knights, but objectively I don't think it's that good.

White could, of course, play like we do ourselves against the Scotch Four Knights with 5 exd5, but then a2-a3 proves to be completely pointless. We just play 5 ... Nxd5 6 Bb5 Nxc3 7 bxc3 Bd6 8 d4 exd4 9 cxd4 0-0 10 0-0 Bg4 and we have a well-known position where the pawn on a3 would even prefer to be on a2.

#### 5 ... Nxe4!



Best, as 5 ... d4 6 Ne2 followed by d3 and Ng3 is quite comfortable for White.

### 6 Qe2

In July 2014 IM Shirazi played 6 Nxe5 against me and even though I was fine out of the opening, I regret not seizing my chance with 6 ... Qg5! when everything works out for Black: 7 Nxc6 Qxg2 8 Rf1 and now 8 ... a6!. The critical line goes 9 Nxd5 axb5 10 Nxc7+ Kd7 11 Nxa8 Kxc6 and this is known to be good for Black. The king is safe on c6, while White's king on e1 is not. Moreover, White has to worry about ... Bc5 and ... Bh3.

### 6 ... Qd6!

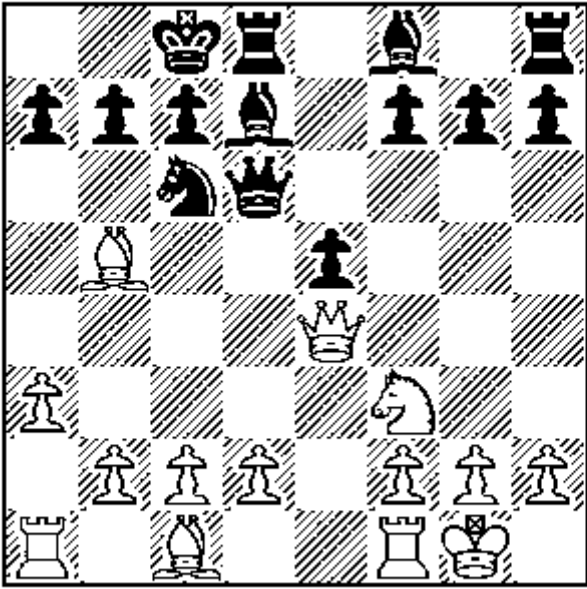
Another strange 'computer' move, but it appears to be best. The queen defends e5, d5 and c6 which is the main point here.

### 7 Nxe4

IM Gullaksen has played 7 Nxd5 twice, but after 7 ... Qxd5 8 c4 Qe6 9 Qxe4 Bd7 10 d4 exd4 11 Qxe6+, as in E.Gullaksen-J.Hector, Fuerth 2002, Black could have played the cute 11 ... Bxe6 12 Nxd4 Bxc4! when the tactics work for him.

### 7 ... dxe4 8 Qxe4 Bd7 9 0-0 0-0-0!

This is an important move to remember, especially since it might not be obvious that it works. In a blitz tournament in April 2015 I faced GM Sinisa Drazic and played the natural 9 ... f6, but I soon had to suffer in a worse endgame after 10 d4!.



**10 Bxc6**

White could, of course, play something calmer like 10 d3, but Black could simply continue with 10 ... f6 followed by ... Kb8, ... g5, ... h5 and a strong attack on the kingside.

**10 ... Bxc6 11 Qxe5 Qg6!**

This is the move I had overlooked in my blitz game. Suddenly Black's bishops work very well against the white kingside.

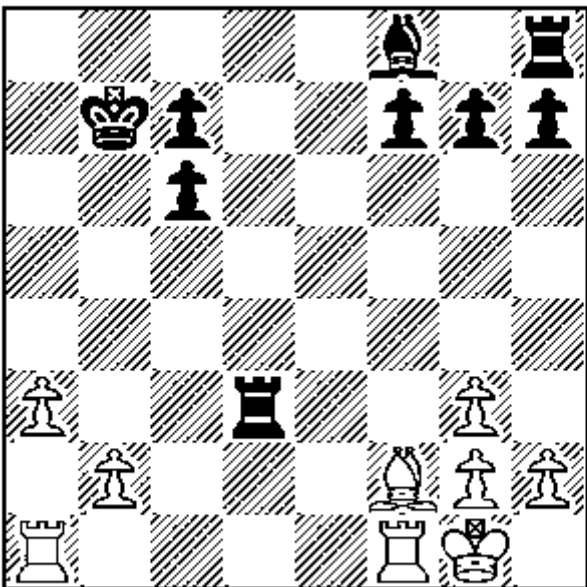
**12 Qg3 Qxc2?!**

Black is, of course, better after this move, but I like 12 ... Bd6! even more. After 13 Qxg6 hxg6 White is unable to defend h2, after which Black will double rooks on the h-file and have a much better endgame.

**13 d4 Qg6**

Too cautious. I don't see why Black shouldn't play the direct 13 ... Bd6!, since 14 Qxg7 Bxf3 and ... Rg8 obviously loses for White.

**14 Ne5 Qxg3 15 fxg3 Rxd4 16 Nxc6 bxc6 17 Be3 Rd3 18 Bxa7 Kb7 19 Bf2**



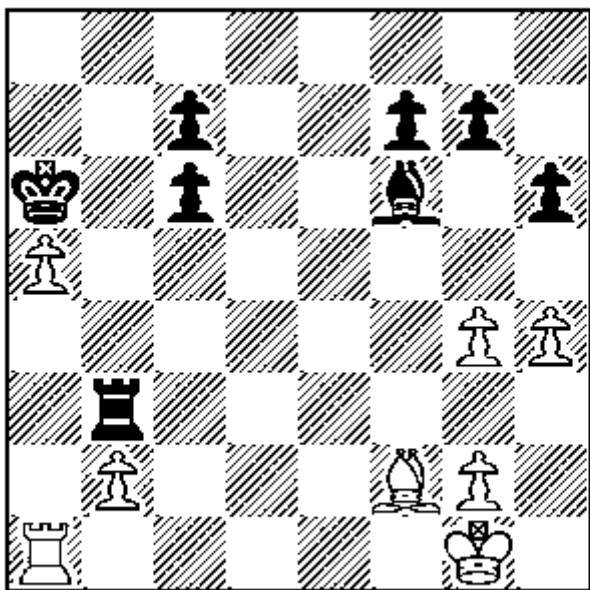
Suddenly we have an endgame where Black is pressing, but his advantage is tiny. Still, Black proves that things aren't that easy for White just yet and with precise moves Black is able to

outplay his opponent.

**19 ... Be7 20 g4 Bf6!**

The bishop is very well placed here.

**21 h4 h6 22 Rfd1 Rhd8 23 Rxd3 Rxd3 24 a4 Rb3 25 a5 Ka6**



White can't prevent the loss of the b-pawn.

**26 Rc1 Rxb2 27 g5?!**

The only idea I can imagine is that White wanted to prevent 27 Rxc6+ Kb7 28 Rc5 Rxf2!.

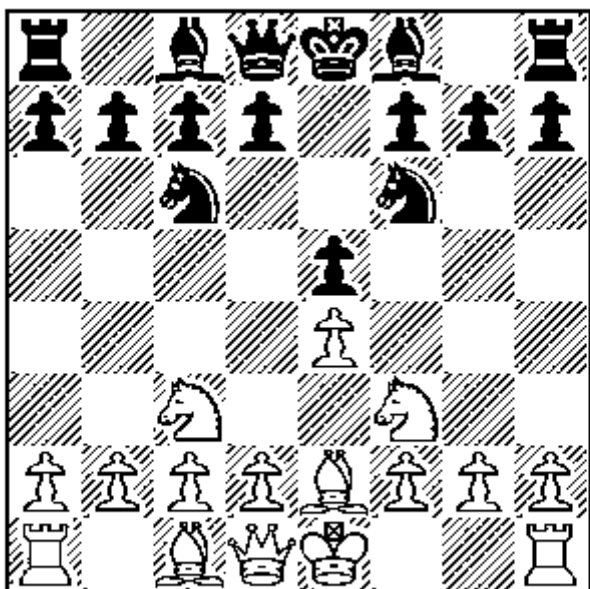
**27 ... hxg5 28 hxg5 Bxg5 29 Rxc6+ Kb7 30 Rc5 Bf4 31 g3 Bd6 32 Rf5 f6 33 Kg2 Be5 34 Kf3? g6! 0-1**

Game 46

**R.Soria Castillo-J.Mellado Trivino**

Seville 2006

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nf6 3 Nc3 Nc6 4 Be2**



This is another sneaky move, and a pet variation of Alexander Grischuk. It looks deceptively calm, but just like White's other lame-looking 4th moves, it's not that bad. Many of Black's natural-looking moves aren't that great and compared to 4 a3, White actually develops a piece.

#### 4 ... d5!

Definitely my favourite continuation, seizing space in the centre immediately, rather than:

a) 4 ... Bc5?! 5 Nxe5! is obviously what White wants.

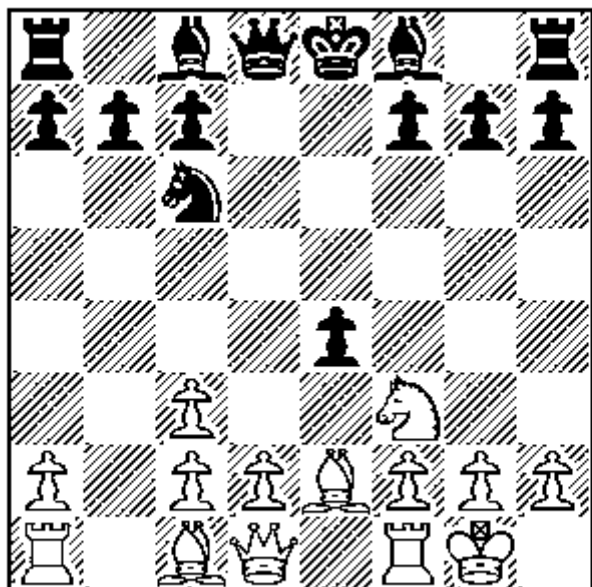
b) 4 ... Bb4 might be fine, but it's worth noting that the famous 'drawing line' 5 Nd5 Nxd5?! 6 exd5 e4 is insufficient here due to 7 dxc6 exf3 8 cxd7+ Bxd7 9 Bxf3 when White is up a pawn.

#### 5 exd5 Nxd5 6 0-0 Nxc3 7 bxc3

We basically have a reversed Scotch Four Knights where White's bishop is on e2 instead of b5. It's arguably better placed on e2, since the bishop often has to return anyway, but Black can play a strong, accurate move to take advantage of the bishop on e2.

Instead, 7 dxc3 Qxd1 8 Rxd1 f6 followed by ... Bf5 is comfortable for Black. He can try to press for a win in typical Exchange Ruy Lopez fashion, since he has a kingside majority and White can't do much on the queenside.

#### 7 ... e4!



Most people prefer the standard 7 ... Bd6 8 d4, but White scores well in this reversed Scotch Four Knights.

#### 8 Nd4?!

For some reason the engine initially likes this pawn sacrifice, but I definitely think it's bad.

White usually prefers 8 Ne1, followed by breaking up Black's centre with f2-f3, and here I think it makes sense to play the untried 8 ... f5! (8 ... Bd6 is always played). The idea is that Black can develop with tempo in case White plays 9 f3 and after 9 ... Bc5+ 10 Kh1 0-0! Black's e-pawn will keep cramping White's centre.

#### 8 ... Nxd4 9 cxd4 Qxd4 10 Rb1

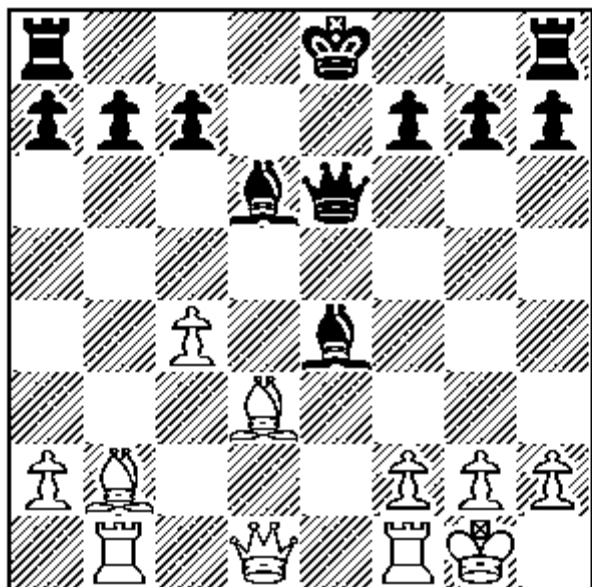
White has sacrificed a pawn, but Black is lagging in development. Indeed, White is hoping that quick development with Bb2 will provide enough compensation for the pawn, but it looks very sketchy to me.

#### 10 ... Bd6 11 Bb2 Qd5

Not so much with the ambition of grabbing the pawn on a2, but because the queen is well

placed here and can easily swing towards the kingside or even the queenside.

**12 d3 Bf5 13 c4 Qe6 14 dxe4 Bxe4 15 Bd3**



It looks like White has managed to create some kind of play along the e-file, but a closer look reveals a strong tactical idea for Black.

**15 ... Bxh2+ 16 Kxh2 0-0-0**

It is in fact White who suffers along the d-file and not the other way around. White chooses to sacrifice a second pawn, but he obtains far from sufficient compensation.

**17 Re1 Rxd3 18 Qh5 Rd2 19 f3 Qg6! 20 Qxg6 hxg6+ 21 Kg3 Bxb1 22 Rxb1**

White now fought on for a few more moves, but the result was already clear.

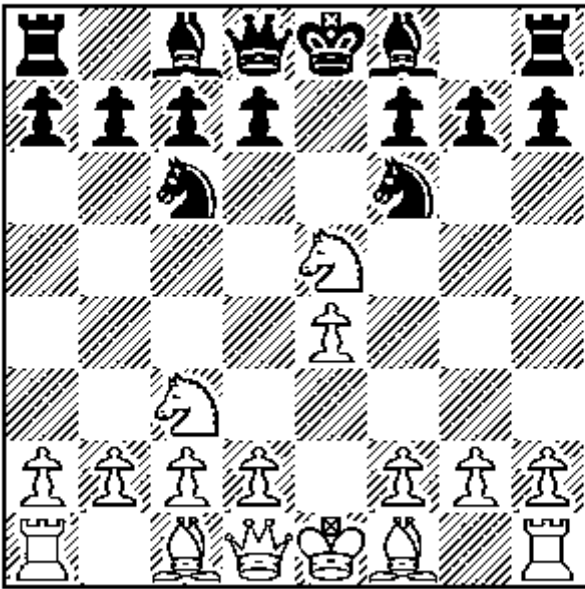
**22 ... Re8 23 Bxg7 Ree2 24 Rh1 Rxc2+ 25 Kf4 Rh2 26 Re1 Rh4+ 27 Kg3 Rxc4 28 Bf6 b5 29 Re7 Rxa2 0-1**

Game 47

**M.Winiaski-B.Bellahcene**

Prague 2012

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Nxe5**



The famous Halloween Gambit. It's probably more well-known than it is good, but it does deserve a mention, especially since many players seem to counter quite cowardly by returning the piece fairly soon.

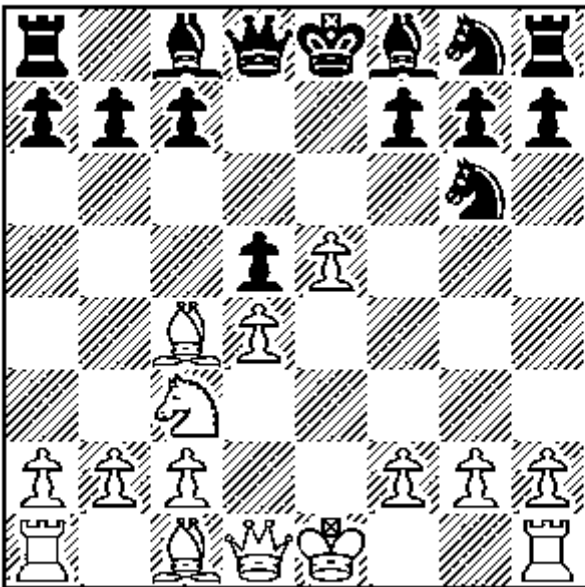
**4 ... Nxe5 5 d4 Ng6**

5 ... Nc6 is surprisingly popular, but White scores very well by kicking around Black's knights: 6 d5 Ne5 7 f4 Ng6 8 e5 Ng8 and now 9 d6! with an unclear position where Black could easily go astray.

**6 e5 Ng8**

The strong Austrian GM Markus Ragger recently played 6 ... Bb4, which is a practical solution, but I definitely think Black should aim for more.

**7 Bc4 d5!**

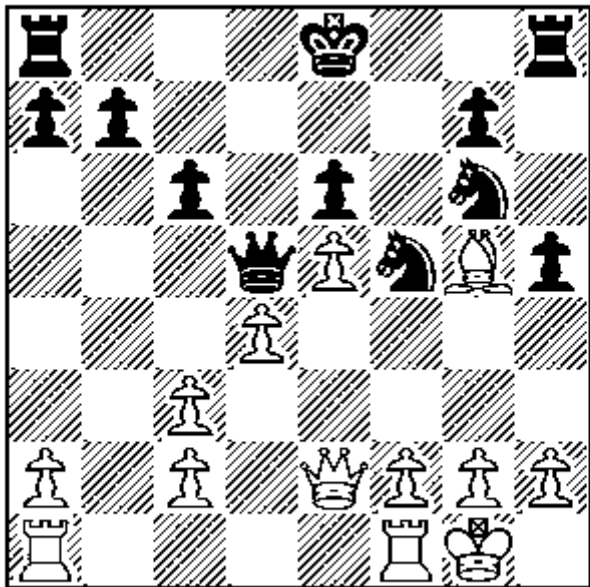


Black gives back a pawn, but gains time for development and establishes strong control over the light squares in the centre.

**8 Bxd5 c6 9 Bb3 Bb4**

White's development advantage is close to non-existent and Black has a very solid light-square blockade which is impossible for White to break down.

10 Qf3 Be6! 11 Bxe6 fxe6 12 Qg4 N8e7 13 Bg5 Qd5 14 0-0 Bxc3 15 bxc3 h5 16 Qe2 Nf5



A beautiful picture. Black's complete domination of the light squares provide him with excellent squares for his pieces, and even though he could have played more precisely, the end result was never in doubt. In fact, Black first increased his light-square domination yet further.

**17 a4 Nfh4 18 f4 Nf5 19 Rad1 b5! 20 axb5 cxb5 21 Rb1 a6 22 Rb3 Kf7 23 Rfb1 Rac8 24 Ra3 Rxc3 25 Rxa6 Qxd4+ 26 Kh1 h4 0-1**

A very nice final position. White has no reasonable way of preventing the mating combination starting with ... Ng3+.

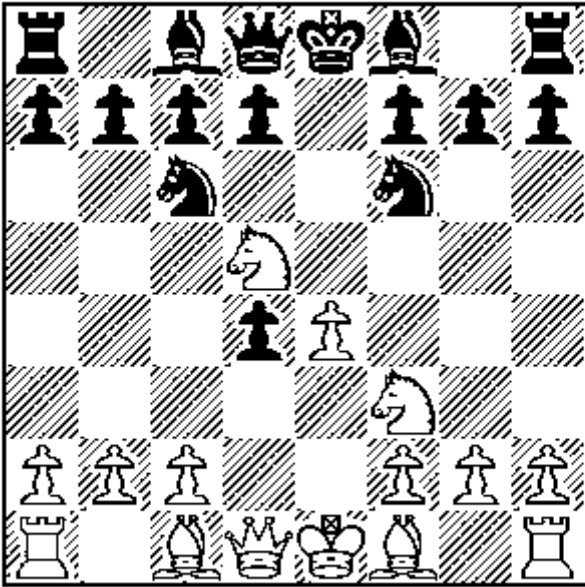
Game 48

**R.Hrzica-T.Banusz**

Trieste 2008

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 d4 exd4 5 Nd5**

This is the so-called Belgrade Gambit, which is quite respectable, but at the same time it's not the most dangerous gambit White can play. Black has proved to have many decent ways to continue the battle, but only in recent years has he found a nice path to fight for an advantage.



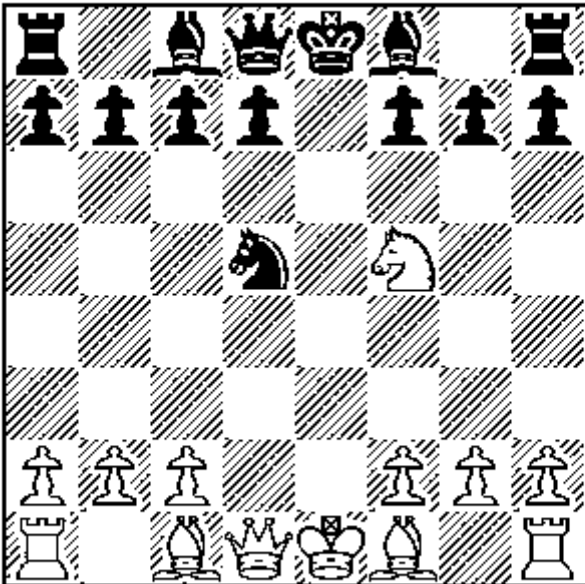
### 5 ... Nb4!

Definitely a computer-like move, but if it works, it works. Black forces White to decide what to do with the knight on d5 and no matter how White continues, Black has a comfortable game.

### 6 Bc4

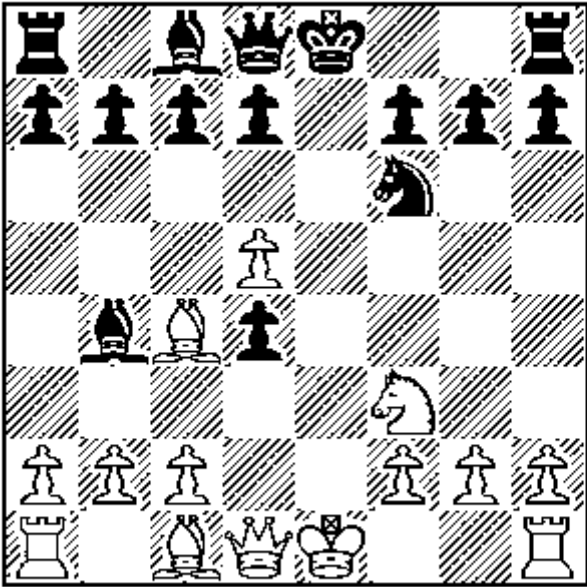
The most common continuation, but White has tried many different moves which is a sign that it's not that easy already for him:

- a) Sometimes White starts with 6 Nxf6+ Qxf6 when the key move for Black to remember is 7 Bc4 Bc5 8 0-0 and now 8 ... d6!, but not 8 ... 0-0 9 e5! when White has good compensation.
- b) Another idea White can try is 6 Nxd4 Nbx d5 7 exd5 Nxd5 8 Nf5.



The knight on f5 would prove to be very strong if Black didn't have the strong 8 ... Ne7!, nullifying it and preparing ... d5 when White's compensation will fade away.

### 6 ... Nbx d5 7 exd5 Bb4+!



Black develops very smoothly and White won't be able to get the pawn back without making concessions.

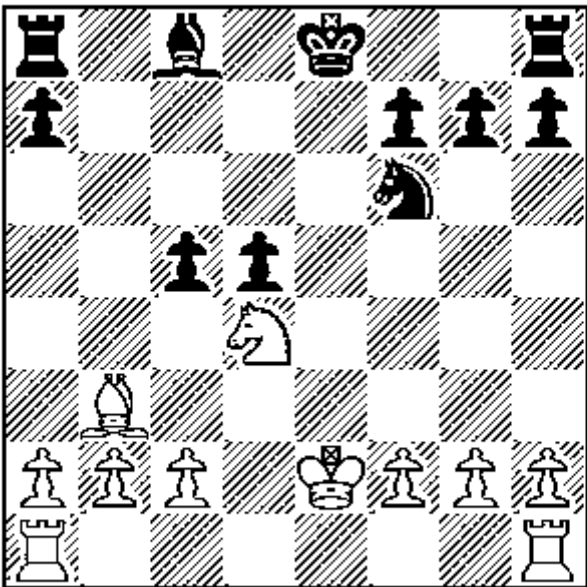
**8 Bb2**

The most aggressive continuation is 8 Kf1, which is far from stupid. White argues that the king is safe on f1 and the bishop on b4 is placed stupidly, but if White's activity doesn't turn into anything, the king on f1 will be awkwardly placed. After 8 ... 0-0 9 Qxd4 Black should play 9 ... h6 to prevent Bg5 and if White insists with 10 h4, Black has the strong 10 ... c5! when White's activity won't lead to anything and the bishop on c4 is badly placed.

**8 ... Qe7+ 9 Qe2 Bxd2+ 10 Kxd2 Qxe2+ 11 Kxe2 c5!**

Black makes sure that when White regains his pawn, he will seize the centre and gain time.

**12 dxc6 bxc6 13 Nxd4 d5 14 Bb3 c5**



This is a structure well known from the Scotch Four Knights, but here Black has a much more favourable version. He gains a lot of time and White's pieces are badly placed, which means that Black's centre is strong and not weak.

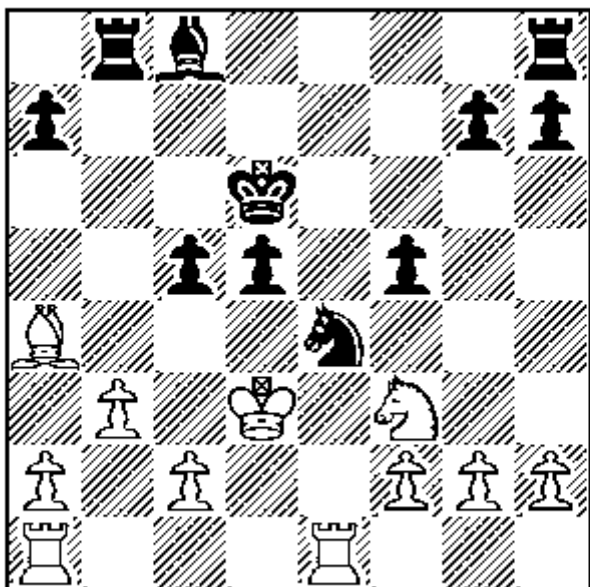
**15 Ba4+ Ke7**

There was also nothing wrong with 15 ... Bd7 16 Bxd7+ Kxd7.

**16 Nf3 Rb8 17 Rhe1 Kd6 18 b3 Ne4**

White has a terrible position and it's not clear what he did wrong. The bishop on a4 is nothing but trouble for him.

**19 Kd3 f5!?**



An interesting continuation, but there was also nothing wrong with taking the pawn on f2.

**20 c4 d4 21 Re2 Nc3 22 Re5 Bb7 23 Ree1 Be4+ 24 Kd2 Nxa4 25 bxa4 Rb2+ 26 Kd1 Rxf2 27 Ng5 Re8 28 Nxe4+ Rxe4 29 Rg1 Ree2 0-1**

A completely crushing game, despite the seemingly calm opening.

## Conclusion

This chapter isn't too deep from a theoretical perspective, but every little variation has its right to exist and they each carry their own little tricky point. Luckily, we usually have a tricky response up our sleeves that should at least nullify White's first move advantage.

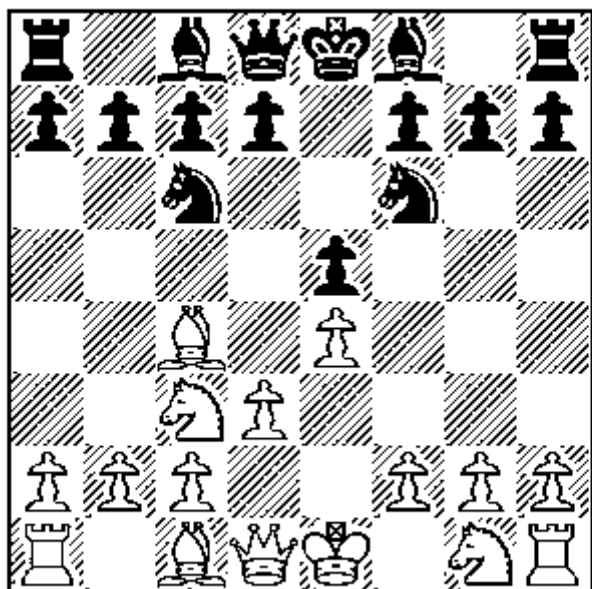
Amongst the variations covered here, I'd say that it's most important to study 4 a3 and 4 Bc4, since these are the variations most frequently played in practice. With that said, I believe 4 Be2 to be very tricky as Black needs to play precisely to get a good position.

# Chapter Eight

## The Bishop's Game and Vienna Gambit

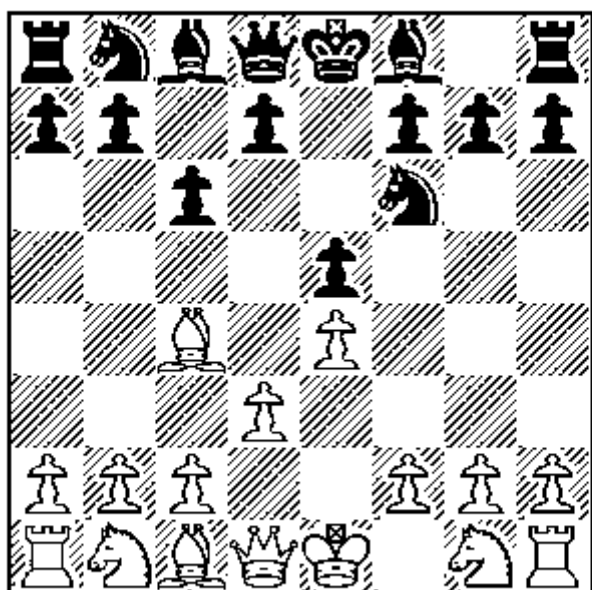
This chapter will cover 2 Bc4 and 2 Nc3. My chosen variations often transpose to each other, which is why I decided to include both in the same chapter.

The first part of this chapter begins with 1 e4 e5 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 Bc4 Nc6 4 d3.



This position can also be reached via a Bishop's Game move order: 2 Bc4 Nf6 3 d3 Nc6 4 Nc3 (here 4 Nf3 is, of course, a common route back to the realm of Chapter One).

At first I wanted to recommend 3 ... c6 against the Bishop's Game.

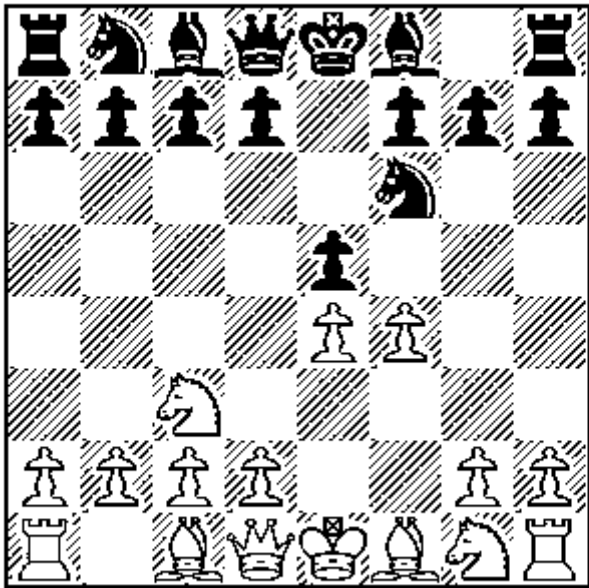


Black wants to expand in the centre with ... d5, but I soon realized that things weren't so simple. In my opinion White's best line is 4 Nf3 d5 5 Bb3 Bb4+ (5 ... Bd6 6 Nc3! is known to be comfortable for White) 6 Bd2 Bxd2+ 7 Qxd2! and although this looks like nothing to worry

about, White can play 7 ... Qd6 8 Qg5! as in Hou Yifan-H.Koneru, Beijing (rapid) 2014, when I can't find a straight equalizer for Black, although the position should be fine.

Instead, I've opted for the Bishop's Vienna Game and the move 4 ... Na5, with which Black wants to pick up the bishop-pair.

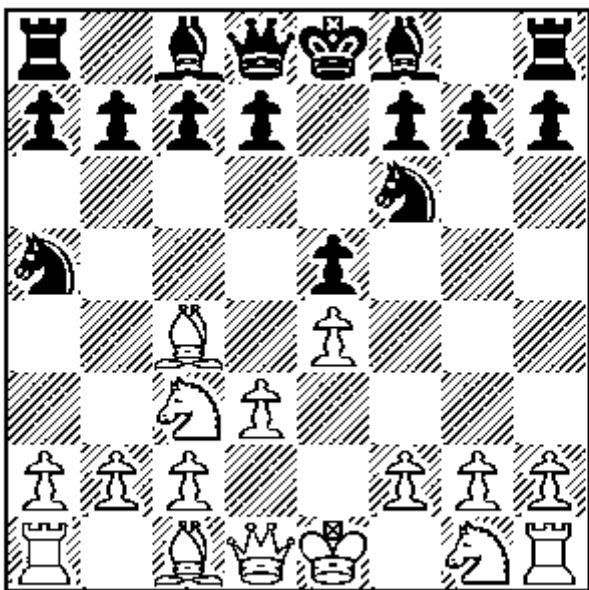
The second part of this chapter covers the Vienna Gambit, 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 f4, which is a different story entirely, but it wasn't important enough to deserve an entire chapter itself.



This is a very aggressive opening where White shows that he's willing to take big risks to play for a win. Lately, though, it feels like White has been receiving blow after blow in this variation. Indeed, it's not very popular today at the highest level, although it's still a venomous weapon at club level.

### The Bishop's Game: Theoretical Introduction

After 1 e4 e5 2 Bc4 Nf6 3 d3 Nc6 4 Nc3 Na5, White has a few options.



In Game 49, we will start by examining those lines where White leaves his bishop on c4 with the idea of recapturing with the d-pawn and establishing a bind on the light squares in the centre, especially the d5-square. After 5 Nge2 we play 5 ... Bc5, which is a good alternative to the

popular 5 ... Be7. The bishop is more actively placed on c5 and gives Black more breathing space, as discussed in Games 49 and Game 50. Black is usually happy taking on the bishop-pair before developing solidly, and only then can it be interesting to break in the centre with ... c6 and ... d5 or perhaps even ... f5.

In Game 51 we discuss 5 Bb3, which allows Black to change the type of play with the very accurate 5 ... Nxb3 6 axb3 d5! 7 exd5 0-0!. This prevents White's main idea which is 7 ... Nxd5 8 Qh5!.

Game 49

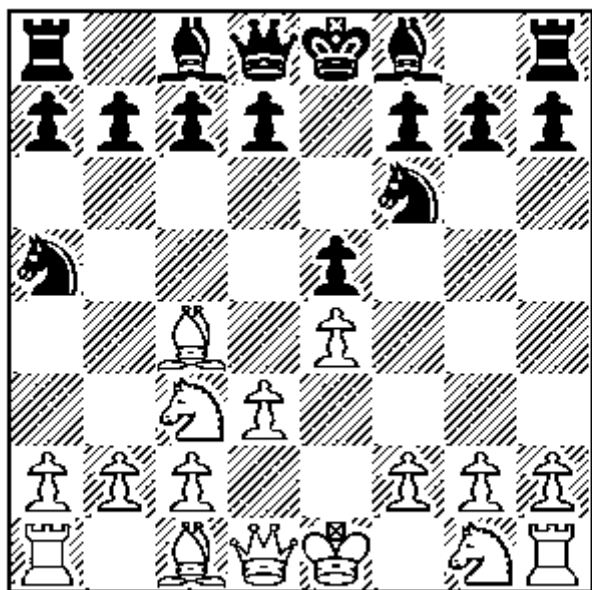
**J.Sorensen-M.Andersen**

Danish League 2014

**1 e4 e5 2 Bc4 Nf6 3 Nc3**

I've always enjoyed playing 3 ... Nxe4, especially in blitz games where the feared Frankenstein-Dracula Variation, which arises after 4 Qh5 Nd6 5 Bb3 Nc6 6 Nb5 g6 7 Qf3 f5 8 Qd5 Qe7 9 Nxc7+ Kd8 10 Nxa8 b6, continues to notch up points in practice. Still, I have my doubts about how theoretically sound this variation is. Even more annoying is 5 Qxe5+, after which Black has to go for 5 ... Qe7 6 Qxe7+ Bxe7 7 Bb3 and we have an endgame which is fine for Black, but let's face it – the drawing tendency here is way too high for my taste.

**3 ... Nc6 4 d3 Na5!**



This move should be familiar to those who studied Chapter One closely. Black would love to pick up White's light-squared bishop and in the Quiet Italian Black will often go ... d6 threatening ... Na5. In this position, White hasn't played Nf3 which enables Black to hunt down the bishop immediately. To White's advantage, he can now put his king's knight on e2 instead, which suits the arising structure much better. The knight could reach g3 and potentially f5, while most importantly it leaves open the possibility of f2-f4.

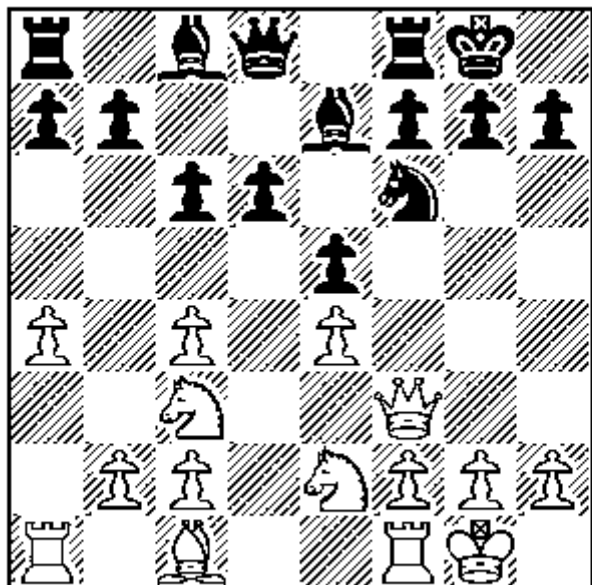
**5 Nge2**

Alternatively:

a) 5 Bb3 will be studied in Game 51.

b) 5 Nf3?! just misplaces White's knight and after 5 ... Nxc4 6 dxc4 Bb4 I'd say Black is better with the bishop-pair.

c) 5 Qf3!? was a move I once intended to play against Jon Ludvig Hammer with the white pieces, but it was the result of some kind of rushed preparation at the subway on my way to the round. Now that I've had some time to look at it, I see that 5 Qf3 is not that stupid. If Black puts the bishop on c5, the queen might actually be useful on f3 supporting moves like Bg5, so I think Black should put the bishop on e7 instead when the white queen's position isn't that big a challenge for Black: 5 ... Be7 6 Nge2 0-0 7 a4 Nxc4 8 dxc4 d6 9 0-0 c6.

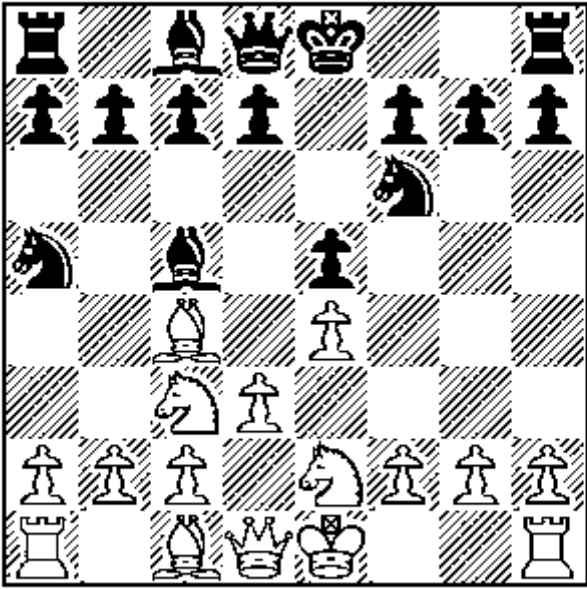


In general, Black's plan in this position is to go ... Be6, ... Qc7, ... Rad8 and enjoy a solid position. With the queen on f3, White's only sensible idea is to try and plant a knight on f5, but as we shall see, it's not very dangerous:

c1) 10 h3 Be6 11 b3 and now Black has an interesting manoeuvre: 11 ... Ne8!? 12 Ng3 g6 followed by ... Ng7, when he will be very flexibly placed and White's knights have difficulties finding anything to do. Black can prepare ... f5 slowly or just develop his forces with ... Qc7 and ... Rad8.

c2) The immediate 10 Ng3 allows Black to disrupt if he wants to: 10 ... Bg4 11 Qd3 Be6 when Black can prepare ... d5 and just develop with ... Qc7, ... Rad8 and perhaps ... g6 at some point.

**5 ... Bc5!?**



I found this move analysed by Lysyj and Ovetchkin in their book *The Open Games for Black* and I really liked the idea. Instead of having the bishop placed on e7, where in this structure it might disrupt the harmony between the pieces, we put it on c5 where it's more active. True, it might be more exposed here, but I haven't found any way for White to take advantage of it.

At first I was tempted to recommend 5 ... Be7, but after, let's say, 6 0-0 0-0 7 a4 Nxc4 8 dxc4 d6 9 b3 we get a type of position I'm not too fond of. We've seen what happens when White puts the queen on f3 which I don't think is that dangerous, but overall I think this position is more pleasant for White to play. He has some space advantage, although to be fair the position is just equal objectively. To those who are interested, a standard set-up for Black is ... c6, ... Be6, ... Qc7 and ... Rad8 against almost anything, but it should be said that White has a vast variety of plans to choose from.

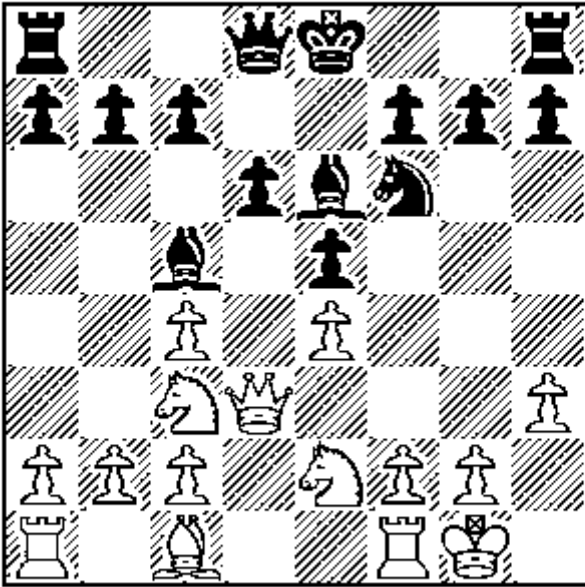
### 6 h3

This move has actually been played by quite strong players, but it just looks sloppy to me. There's really no point of playing a move like h3 just yet.

6 Ng3 has also been played, but somehow this plan looks inferior with Black's bishop on c5 instead of e7. Black is too active for White's plan of putting a knight on f5 to work: 6 ... c6 7 a3 Nxc4 8 dxc4 d6 9 0-0 Be6 10 b3 (10 Qd3 0-0 11 Nf5 is still no good because of 11 ... d5! when the knight on f5 doesn't look good at all) and now 10 ... Bd4!? followed by ... d5 looks very comfortable for Black.

Instead, the superior 6 0-0 will be seen in our next game.

**6 ... Nxc4 7 dxc4 d6 8 Qd3 Be6 9 0-0**



We have reached a position-type that Black should be familiar with. The pawn structure is very well-known and often what White is aiming for when going for this variation, but I don't think it's very promising for him when Black has a bishop on c5. Black's position is much less cramped and there's more space to put pieces on harmonious squares.

**9 ... Nd7!?**

The knight wasn't doing much on f6, so Black prepares an eventual ... f5 break which would really make his pieces spring to life.

Black probably also wanted to avoid 9 ... 0-0 10 Bg5, not that this is anything to worry about: 10 ... h6 11 Bh4 g5! is completely safe and 11 Bxf6 Qxf6 is nothing at all for White.

**10 b3**

White prepares Be3 by enabling the recapture Qxe3 without leaving the c4-pawn en prise.

**10 ... 0-0 11 Be3**

White has managed to trade off Black's bishop-pair, but at the same time it doesn't mean that Black's position is bad. Quite the opposite, he has the strategical advantage of having useful pawn levers and White's structure is very inflexible in that f2-f4 would weaken the e4-pawn a lot.

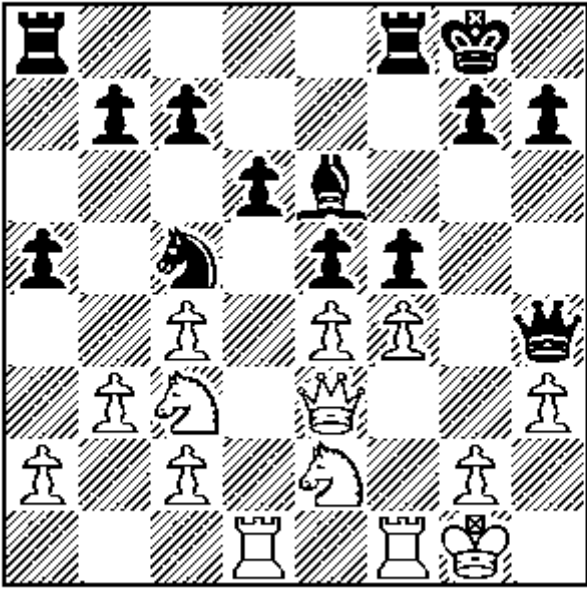
**11 ... Qh4**

I would even consider the immediate 11 ... f5!? when I really like Black's active position.

**12 Bxc5 Nxc5 13 Qe3 a5 14 Rad1**

White can play 14 f4 himself, but this is very risky: 14 ... exf4 15 Nxf4 Rae8 and Black will apply heavy pressure along the e-file.

**14 ... f5 15 f4!**



An appropriate reaction. White realized that the situation in the centre has changed and that he will no longer be stuck with weaknesses after a mass liquidation.

**15 ... Nxe4?!**

15 ... Qh6! would have taken full advantage of White's piece placement and the position looks very equal after, say, 16 exf5 Bxf5 17 Nd5 c6 18 Ne7+ Kh8 19 Nxf5 Rxf5.

**16 Nxe4 fxe4 17 Qxe4**

Now Black is the one with the weaknesses.

**17 ... Rae8**

The computer gives the following strange variation: 17 ... g5 18 Nd4 Bxh3! 19 Nf3 Bxg2! 20 Kxg2 Qg4+ 21 Kh1 Rxf4 when there is a complete mess on the board. I like Black's practical chances though.

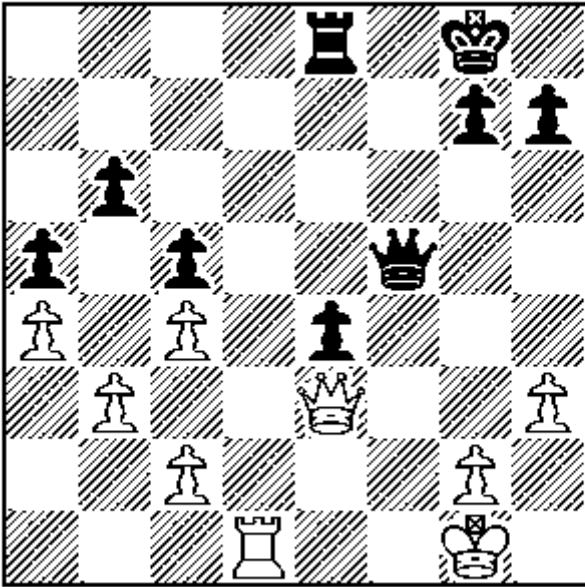
**18 Qe3**

White should probably take the bait with 18 Qxb7, even though we again have a messy position after 18 ... exf4.

**18 ... Qh6 19 Qg3 Rf5 20 fxe5 dxe5 21 Qc3 Rg5 22 Kh2 e4?! 23 Nf4**

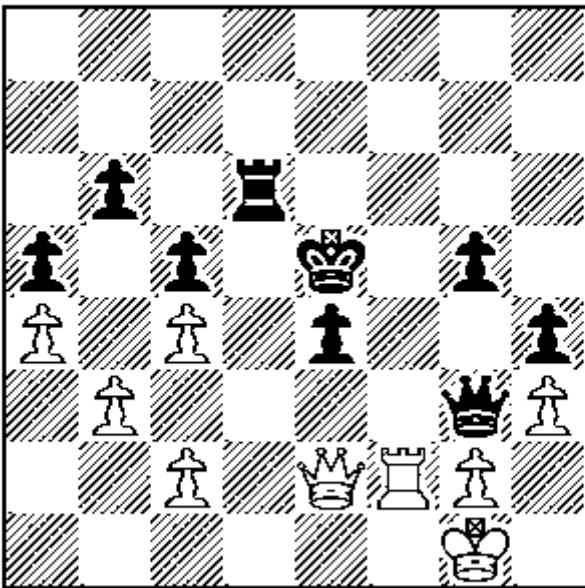
23 Ng3! seems to round up the e-pawn and Black doesn't seem to be dynamic enough to compensate for such a weakness.

**23 ... Rf5 24 Nxe6 Qxe6 25 Rxf5 Qxf5 26 Qe3 b6 27 a4 c5 28 Kg1**



Eventually we've reached an interesting position where White's extra queenside pawn is close to useless, but at the same time Black can't get anywhere with his e-pawn.

28 ... Qe5 29 Rd5 Qf6 30 Rd2 Qa1+ 31 Kh2 Qe5+ 32 Qg3 Qf5 33 Rd5 Qf6 34 Qe3 Re6 35 Kg1 Kf8 36 Rd2 Ke7 37 Rd5 h6 38 Rd2 g5 39 Rf2 Qd4 40 Re2 Kf6 41 Qf2+ Kg6 42 Re3 h5 43 Qe2 Qa1+ 44 Kh2 Qe5+ 45 Kg1 h4 46 Kh1 Re7 47 Kg1 Qf4 48 Kh1 Kf5 49 Kg1 Re6 50 Qe1 Rd6 51 Re2 Ke5 52 Rf2 Qg3 53 Qe2



53 ... Qc3??

I'm full of respect and admiration for Black's fighting spirit and attempts to win a position very difficult to win, but sometimes tragedy strikes and you press so hard you lose instead.

54 Qg4??

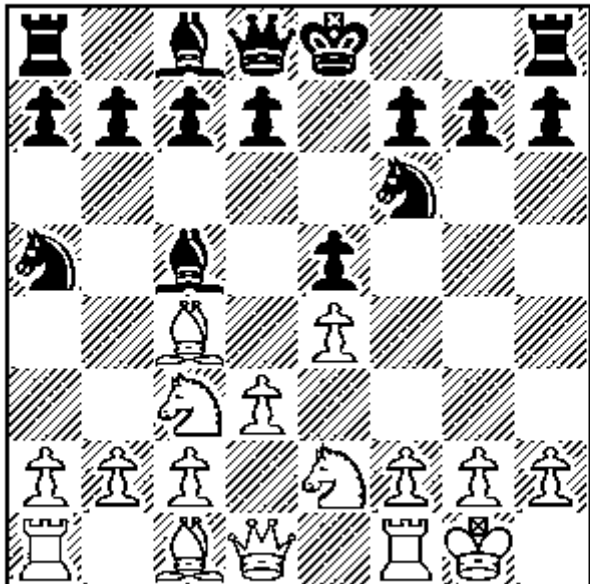
54 Qh5! simply wins for White. Let's try the same line as in the game: 54 ... Qe1+ 55 Rf1 Qe3+ 56 Kh1 Rf6 and now White has the completely killing 57 Qh8!.

54 ... Qe1+ 55 Rf1 Qe3+ 56 Kh1 Rf6! 57 Rd1 Rd6 58 Rf1 Rf6 59 Rd1 Rd6 60 Rf1 ½-½

A tough, well-fought game from an interesting strategical opening where Black easily obtained a good position.

**1 e4 e5 2 Bc4 Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 d3 Na5 5 Nge2 Bc5 6 0-0**

6 Bb3 Nxb3 7 axb3 d5! equalizes immediately for Black. It's important that 8 Bg5 doesn't work because of 8 ... Bxf2+!



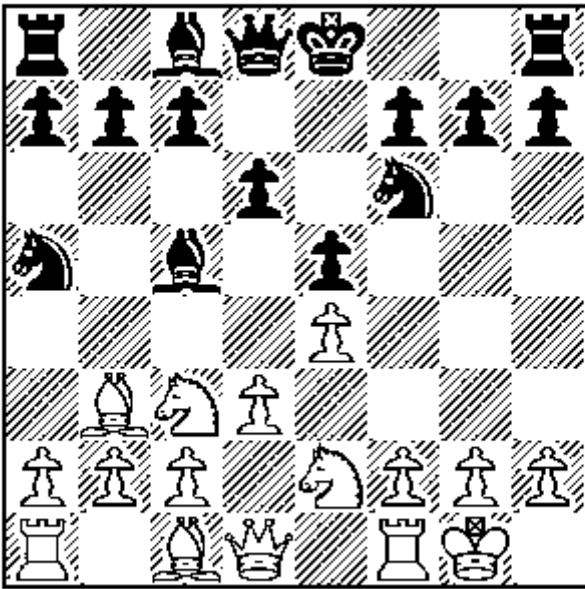
**6 ... d6**

It is also interesting to immediately play 6 ... Nxc4 7 dxc4 and only then 7 ... d6 when Black avoids the possibility of 7 Bb3, not that this is a big deal. On the downside, by defining the structure early on, White doesn't have the same problem finding a decent plan. For example, the main line runs 8 Qd3 Be6 9 b3 0-0 10 Be3 Nd7 with play very similar to the game Sorensen-Andersen. Black prepares ... f5, which is completely fine for him. Now Ovetchkin and Soloviov recommend 11 Bxc5 Nxc5 12 Qe3 with the idea of breaking f2-f4, but after 12 ... Qd7 13 f4 exf4 14 Nxf4 f6 15 Rad1 Rae8 16 Nd3 they don't mention the logical 16 ... b6!. Black can slowly improve his position with ... Qc6, ... Bf7 and ... Bg6 with a wonderful set-up where I'd definitely rather be Black.

Meanwhile I'm not sure why 6 ... 0-0 isn't played more, but one reason could be that after 7 Bb3 Black shouldn't play 7 ... Nxb3 8 axb3 d5 because of 9 Bg5! when he doesn't have the nifty ... Bxf2 resource as above. If Black can't play ... d5 then there isn't really much of an advantage choosing this move order instead of an early ... d6.

**7 Bg5**

Instead, 7 Bb3!? is the recommendation of Ovetchkin and Soloviov in their recent work on the Vienna.



White understands that with the bishop on c5, allowing the dxc4 structure means that Black will have no problems at all because of his more flexible structure, so White makes sure that his own structure becomes more flexible. Now there are two interesting things to note:

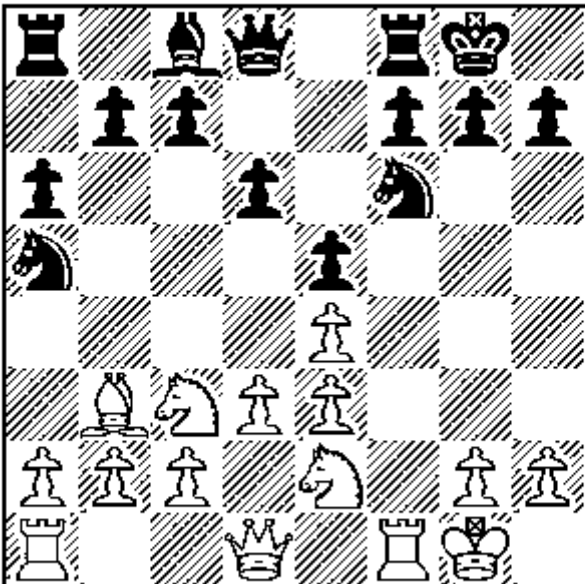
1. The bishop on c5 is exposed and Na4 shouldn't be allowed.
2. White can't really force Black to take the bishop on b3, since a3 Nxb3; cxb3 is ridiculous. This means that Black doesn't have to hurry.

After 7 ... a6! White has a choice:

a) White's most common approach is to try and establish a knight on f5 with Ng3 and Qf3. The problem with this plan is not that Black can prevent it, but that it's simply not very dangerous for Black: 8 h3 0-0 9 Ng3 and now Black's simplest equalizer is 9 ... Nxb3 10 axb3 Be6 11 Qf3 (not only with the idea of Nf5, but also threatening Bg5) 11 ... Nd7! 12 Be3 Bxe3 13 Qxe3 Nb8! 14 d4 exd4 15 Qxd4 Nc6 with an equal position.

b) 8 Bg5 is most easily met by 8 ... h6 9 Bxf6 Qxf6 10 Nd5 Qd8 when Black has a comfortable game with the bishop-pair.

c) 8 Be3 Bxe3 9 fxe3 0-0 is once again a structure I'm not very keen on for the side with the doubled e-pawns, as already discussed in Chapter One.



In this case, White looks quite close to establishing a knight on f5, but it's not really dangerous for Black: 10 Ng3 c6 11 Qf3 Qe7 12 Nf5 and Black can simply go 12 ... Bxf5 13 Qxf5 Nxb3 14 axb3 with a fine position. White can't really do anything and Black has a variety of plans to choose from.

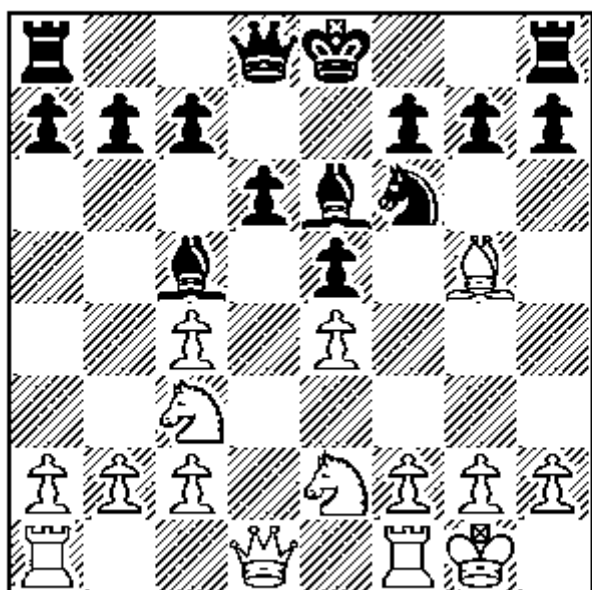
Actually the most popular 7th move is 7 a3, but we already know that Black has a very pleasant position after 7 ... Nxc4 8 dxc4 Be6 9 Qd3 Nd7 10 b3 0-0 11 Be3 and now perhaps even 11 ... f5!?

Returning to 7 Bg5:

**7 ... Nxc4!**

I generally want to respond to an early Bg5 with the immediate 7 ... h6, but in this case it would be a very bad blunder due to 8 Bxf6 Qxf6 9 Nd5 Qd8 10 b4! when Black gets a pretty bad position.

**8 dxc4 Be6**



**9 b3**

9 Nd5 might look tempting, but it's nothing more than a liquidation:

a) 9 ... Bxd5 10 cxd5 h6 and White pretty much has to play 11 Bxf6 Qxf6 when Black is absolutely fine.

b) 9 ... c6!? is a more messy alternative that also looks fine. White can try 10 b4 (10 Nxf6+ gxf6 11 Be3 Bxc4 shouldn't give White enough compensation) 10 ... Bb6 11 Nxb6 axb6 12 Qd3 h6!, but Black seems to have a fine position.

**9 ... h6!**

It's time to put the question to the bishop, which doesn't really have any good squares to retreat to.

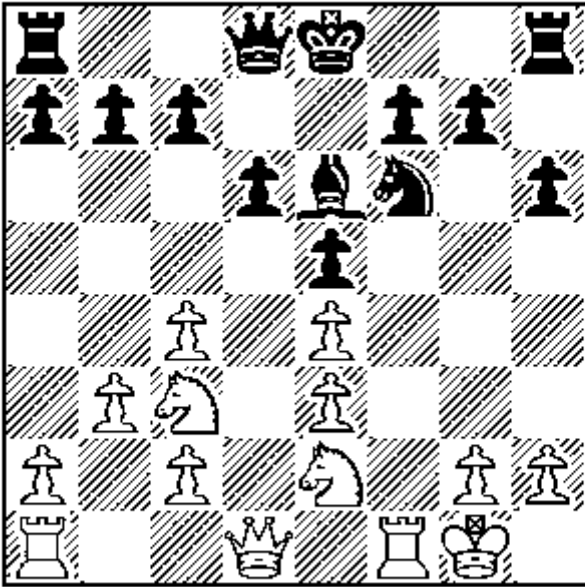
**10 Be3?!**

Creative, but probably not good. The weakened structure will always make itself felt, even though the doubled pawns cover some useful squares for now. Instead:

a) 10 Bh4? is just asking for it: 10 ... g5! 11 Bg3 h5! and Black is just breaking up White's kingside.

b) The lesser evil is probably 10 Bxf6 Qxf6 11 Na4, just trying to equalize by exchanging pieces.

**10 ... Bxe3 11 fxe3**

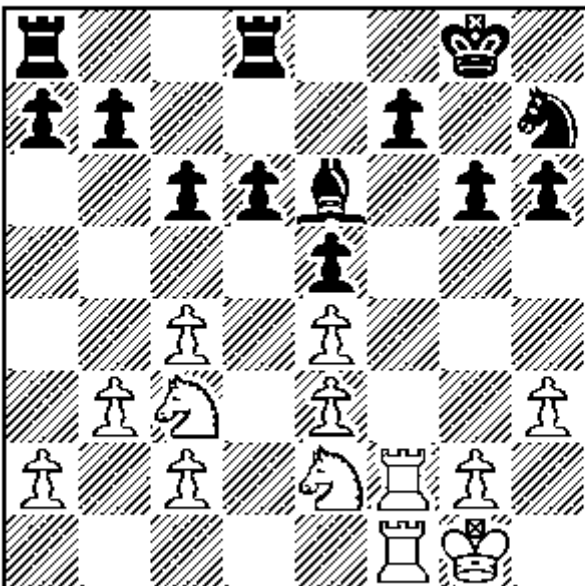


### 11 ... Ng4

A very solid approach.

Black has a choice between many good plans here. My favourite is 11 ... h5!, simply intending to push the h-pawn down the board and after, say, 12 h3 h4 we quickly realize that Black's pawn is very useful on h4. He can play ... Nh5, ... Qg5, ... 0-0-0, and ... Rh6 with a very strong attack on the kingside and, meanwhile, White's knight on e2 looks kind of stupid.

**12 Rf3 0-0 13 h3 Nf6 14 Ng3 g6 15 Qd2 Nh7 16 Raf1 Qh4 17 Qf2 c6 18 Nge2 Qxf2+ 19 R3xf2 Rfd8**



We have reached an endgame, where Black was hoping that White's weaknesses would become more apparent. Pedersen now brought home the full point with some very nice technique.

### 20 Rd1 Kf8!

This is similar to the second game of this book, Dolzhikova-Trent. The king goes to e7 to defend the slight weakness in Black's territory.

### 21 Nc1 Ke7 22 Rfd2 b6!

Useful precaution against potential c4-c5 breaks: for example, against the immediate 22 ... Rd7, White would have 23 c5! dxc5 24 Rxd7+ Bxd7 25 Nd3, even if this is still quite bad for

him.

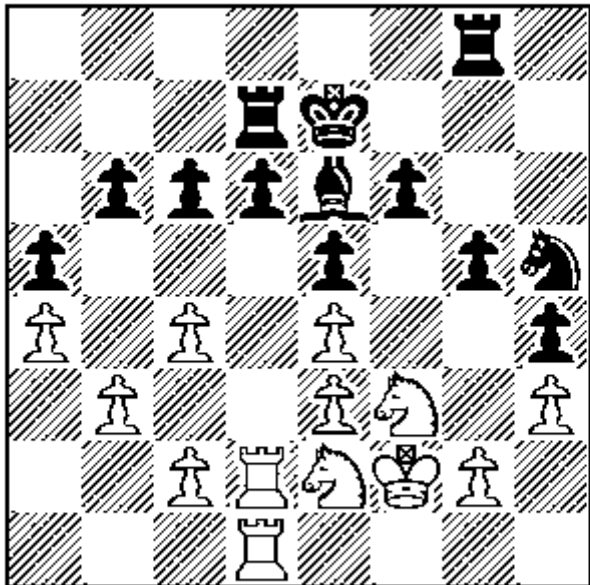
**23 Nd3 h5!**

Black knows which structure he's looking for.

**24 a4 a5 25 Ne1 h4 26 Nf3 g5**

This is very disturbing for White. Look at how his pieces are placed – they do absolutely nothing at all. Meanwhile Black seizes space and will eventually break through on the kingside.

**27 Kf2 Rd7 28 Nh2 Rf8 29 Ke2 Nf6 30 Nf3 Rg8 31 Kf2 Nh5 32 Ne2 Nf6 33 Nc3 Nh5 34 Ne2 f6!**



By simple means, Black improves every piece until White is no longer able to hold his position together.

**35 Nh2 Bf7 36 Ng4 Bg6 37 Nh6 Rgd8 38 Nf5+ Ke6 39 g4 hxg3+ 40 Nexg3 Nxc3 41 Nxc3 d5! 42 exd5+ cxd5 43 cxd5+ Rxd5 44 Nf1 Bxc2 0-1**

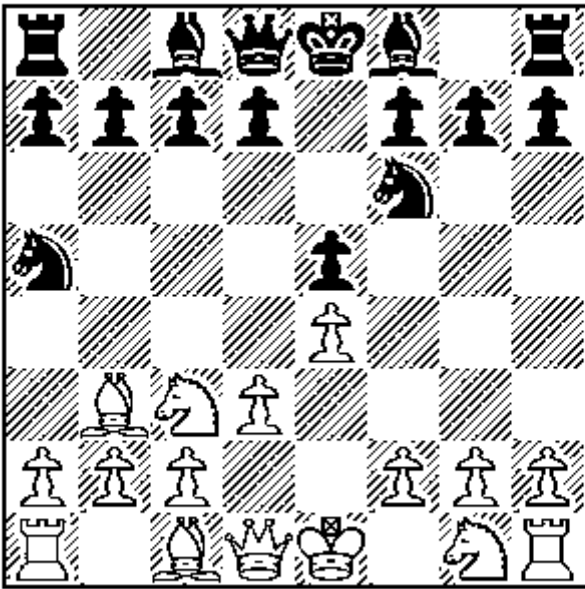
White had seen enough. A great game by Pedersen who definitely impressed me with his endgame technique.

Game 51

**T.Heilala-F.Zimmerman**

Correspondence 2007

**1 e4 e5 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 Bc4 Nc6 4 d3 Na5 5 Bb3!?**

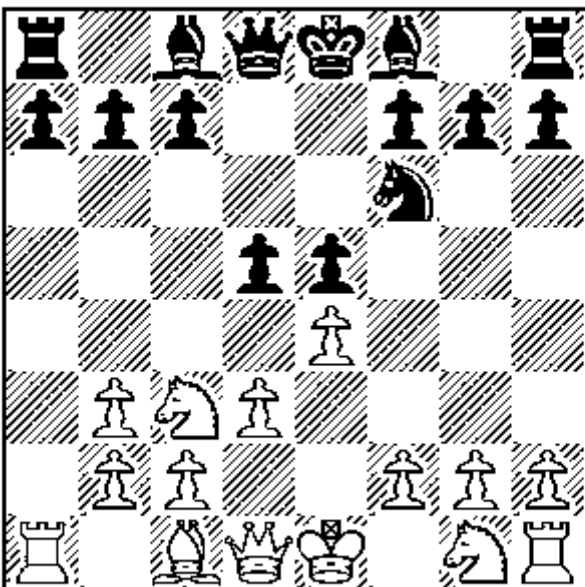


This is probably White's safest move, even though it gives Black the opportunity to liquidate the position in the centre. Black must still take care to equalize completely, although he might be able to venture a wild gambit.

### 5 ... Nxb3

If Black wants to avoid the kind of position that arises after a quick ... d5, 5 ... Bb4 is a good alternative when Black just aims to develop his pieces naturally. After 6 Bd2 0-0 7 Nge2 Nxb3 8 axb3 d6 we get a fairly standard position which I think is close to equal, but there's a complex game ahead where the better player should win. White can't complain too much either, though, since f2-f4 is on the cards with an interesting game.

### 6 axb3 d5!



Why back down from taking the centre? I like making this break whenever I can.

### 7 exd5

The natural move, but White doesn't have to take the pawn.

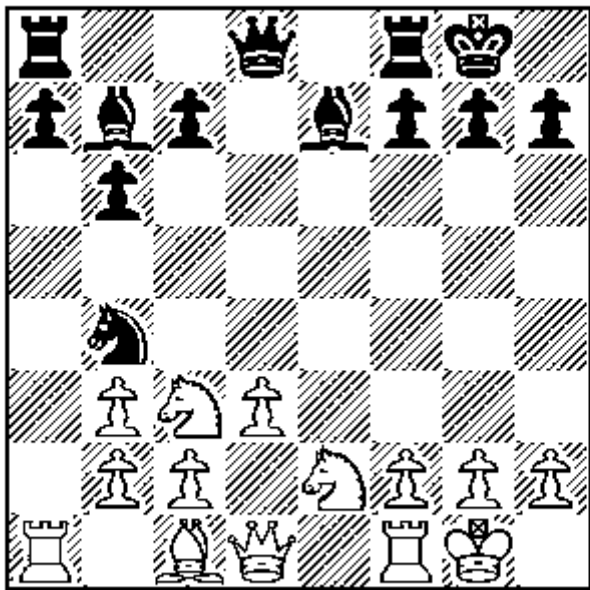
7 Bg5 has been tested quite a bit. The engine loves taking space in the centre with ... d4, but I think White gets an easier position to play with the f2-f4 break, so I'd like to refrain from that structure. In the game T.Nabaty-H.Melkumyan, Sarajevo 2012, Black played the seemingly dull 7

... dxe4!? 8 dxe4 Qxd1+ 9 Rxd1, but still managed to outplay his grandmaster opponent in just a few more moves: 9 ... Bb4 10 Nf3 Be6 11 Bxf6 gxf6 12 Nh4 Rg8 13 h3 a5 14 Kd2 c6 15 Kc1 b5 16 Rd3 a4 and Black was already much better. Another legitimate alternative is 7 ... Bb4 8 exd5 Qxd5 9 Nf3 Bg4 10 0-0 Bxc3 11 bxc3 Bxf3 12 Qxf3 Qxf3 13 gxf3 Nh5 when we have yet another interesting endgame where Black is very comfortable.

### 7 ... Bb4!

After this nuisance of a move, White scores terribly.

White was relying on 7 ... Nxd5 8 Qh5! which pretty much forces Black to sacrifice a pawn. The critical position arises after 8 ... Nb4! 9 Qxe5+ Be7 10 Qe2 0-0 11 Qd1! b6 12 Nge2 Bb7 13 0-0.



As compensation for the pawn, Black has the bishop-pair, a strong bishop on b7 and a kind of bind on White's position that makes White's extra pawn look meaningless for now. Black also has a space advantage and some advantage in development, but I doubt he will be able to cause White serious trouble before White manages to finish development. I do think Black has sufficient compensation objectively and this could be a very good winning attempt compared to our relatively dull main line, but to be completely fair I think Black might find it difficult to carry on finding the optimal continuation in a practical game without extensive home analysis. This is why I chose a simpler approach as my main recommendation.

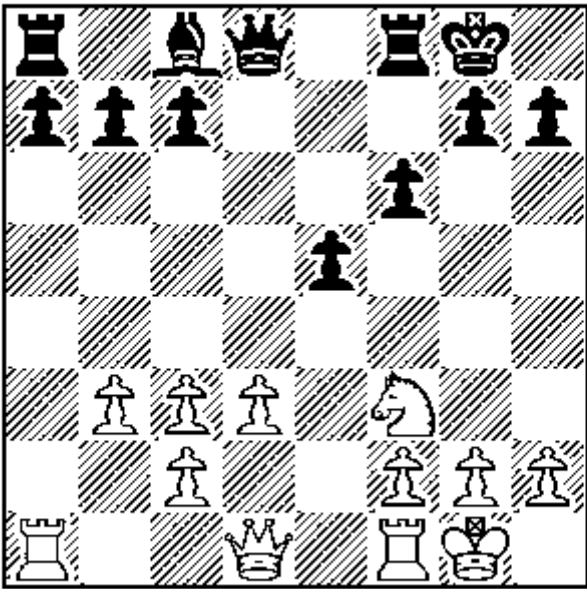
### 8 Bd2

8 Nf3 Nxd5 9 Bd2 transposes below.

### 8 ... Nxd5 9 Nf3 Nxc3 10 Bxc3

White should definitely try to avoid 10 bxc3 Bd6 since Black now has the bishop-pair and the bishop on d2 won't amount to much anyway.

### 10 ... Bxc3+ 11 bxc3 0-0 12 0-0 f6



Up to this position, most moves have been pretty much forced. What we have is a fairly calm position where Black has a bishop against a knight, which should be advantageous. However, things aren't that easy. If Black got an extra move or two to develop quickly, he could easily argue that he's better, but White wants to break open the position quickly with d3-d4 at some uncomfortable moment and try to obtain some pressure in the centre. Meanwhile the c8-bishop has no great squares to develop to, so in reality the position is about equal.

You could easily think that 12 ... Bg4 13 h3 Bxf3 14 Qxf3 c6 would be just equal, but actually White has some pressure against Black's slightly weak pawns on e5 and a7.

### 13 Re1

This rook will be very well placed after White breaks with d3-d4. Instead:

a) The immediate 13 d4 is no problem at all. Black can simply go 13 ... exd4 14 cxd4 Bg4 and move the rooks to the centre with an equal position.

b) 13 Qe2 Qd5! 14 c4 Qc6 looks very harmonious for Black who can play either ... Bg4 or even ... b6 and ... Bb7 with a nice battery.

### 13 ... Bg4

An interesting move, trying to provoke some kind of double-edged imbalance in a calm position. It looks quite good.

The immediate 13 ... b6?! would allow 14 d4! exd4 15 Nxd4 when White definitely has some pressure with Qf3 coming, but Bologan proposes the interesting 13 ... a5!?, trying to fix White's queenside structure. I have to say that I really like the idea too. It's also useful as a semi-waiting move, not really defining Black's plans until White takes action: for example, 14 d4 exd4 15 cxd4 (15 Nxd4 would now allow 15 ... c5! which looks ugly, but after 16 Nb5 Qxd1 17 Raxd1 Bf5 White's pawns are stuck on light squares and only Black can be better) 15 ... Qd6 is absolutely equal with either ... Be6 or ... b6 and ... Bb7 coming up.

### 14 h3 Bh5 15 g4

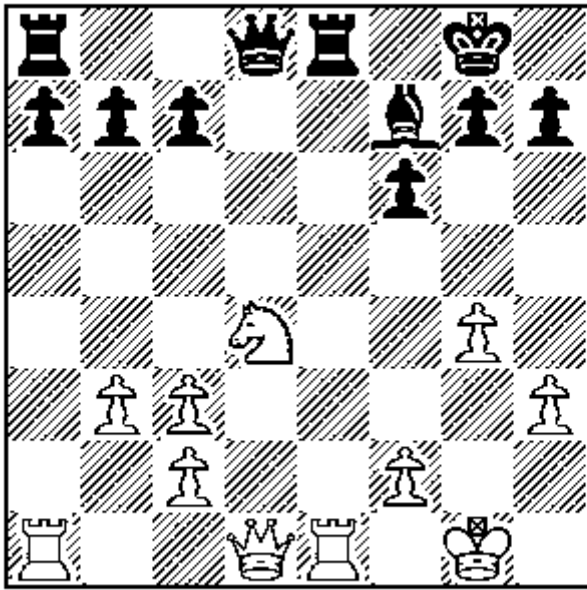
White really needs the d3-d4 break in order to fight for any kind of advantage, so playing g2-g4 is necessary.

### 15 ... Bf7 16 d4 exd4 17 Nxd4

17 Qxd4 a5 is totally fine for Black, while 17 cxd4 is seldom the critical recapture. Black has a good move in 17 ... a5!, playing against White's queenside structure.

### 17 ... Re8

White might look active with Nf5 ideas, but Black's position is incredibly solid and there's really nothing for White to get. This is a correspondence game so White obviously tried to put as much pressure as possible on Black, but ultimately failed to get anything close to an advantage.



**18 Qf3 c6 19 Nf5 Qd7 20 c4 Bg6 21 Rxe8+ Qxe8 22 Kf1 Qd7 23 Rd1 Qc7 24 Re1 Bxf5 25 Qxf5 Rd8 26 Kg2 Qd7 27 Qc5 b6 28 Qe7 c5**

White still looks active, but he doesn't really threaten anything. Indeed, Black is as solid as ever and there's nothing White can do.

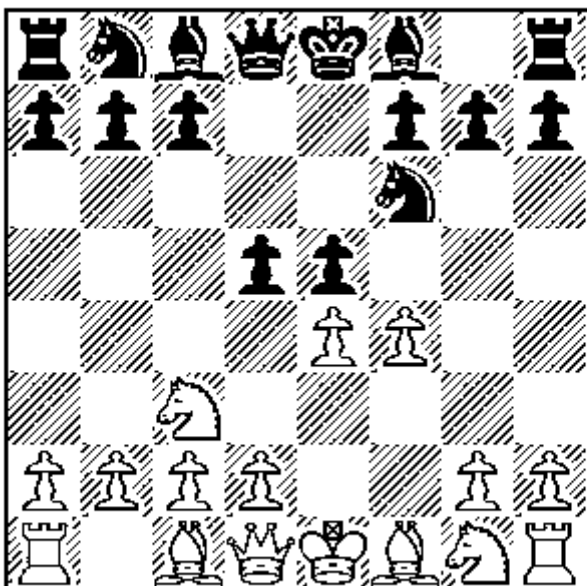
**29 Re4 h6 30 h4 a5 31 Kf3 f5!**

This move basically forces a draw.

**32 Qe6+ Qxe6 33 Rxe6 a4! 34 Rxb6 fxe4+ 35 Kxe4 Ra8 36 bxa4 Rxa4 37 f4 Rxc4 38 Rb2 g6 39 Rb6 Kf7 40 Rb7+ 1/2-1/2**

### The Vienna Gambit: Theoretical Introduction

After 1 e4 e5 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 f4 Black plays the typical 3 ... d5!, breaking in the centre.



We start off our coverage by considering 4 exd5, which is not very common, but if we don't

know what we're doing we might transpose into some kind of King's Gambit. Black should play 4 ... Nxd5 when the critical continuation 5 fxe5 Nxc3 6 bxc3 Qh4+ 7 Ke2 isn't as bad as it looks for White, but it's not a serious attempt for an advantage. This is covered in Game 52.

#### 4 fxe5 Nxe4 5 Nf3

White has quite a few alternatives to this move, but Black seems to get a good game if he watches out for a few traps and isn't tempted to win material with ... Qh4+. These lines will be covered in Game 53.

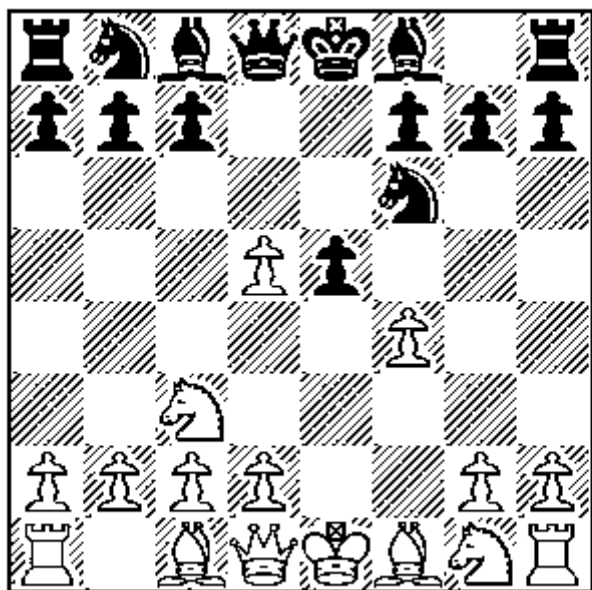
After 5 Nf3, Black seems to have two very promising options. I have played 5 ... Bc5 myself and believe Black has good chances of fighting for an advantage here, but ever since I started investigating this variation from White's point of view, I've been more and more afraid of 5 ... Be7, which is my main recommendation. This is initially discussed in Game 54, with the main line 5 ... Be7 6 Qe2 being covered in Game 55.

### Game 52

**J.Donkers-A.Haast**

Haarlem 2011

1 e4 e5 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 f4 d5 4 exd5



For some reason, I've never faced this move, perhaps because many of Black's replies lead to a transposition to the King's Gambit. Many strong players have, though, ventured this as a surprise weapon when they don't feel like banging their heads against the Berlin Wall.

#### 4 ... Nxd5

Instead, 4 ... e4 is a type of Falkbeer Counter-Gambit from the King's Gambit, which I don't really like it for Black, while 4 ... exf4!? is another variation of the King's Gambit which I believe is quite good for Black. However, I'd like to keep the game within Vienna waters and since Black seems to get a good position with 4 ... Nxd5, I see no reason not to recommend it.

#### 5 fxe5!

The critical move, but not the most popular one. That's probably because it looks like a blunder, but the idea behind it is actually quite ingenious. The alternatives are:

a) The most popular move is 5 Nxd5 when after 5 ... Qxd5 White has tried many moves, without being able to equalize:

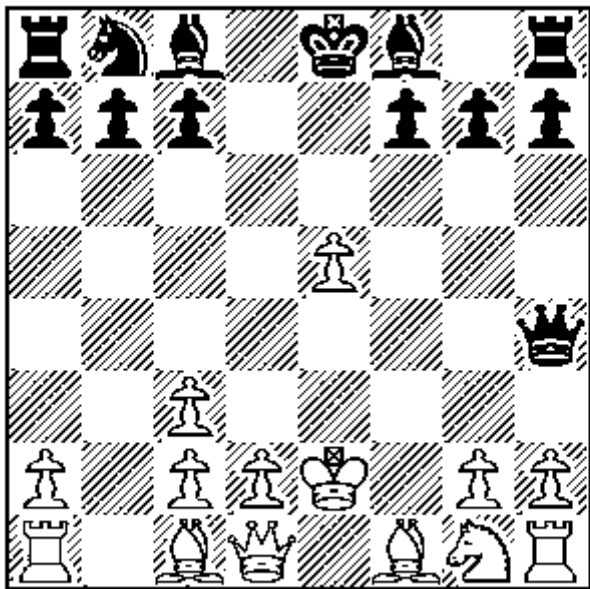
a1) 6 fxe5 Nc6 7 Nf3 Bg4 8 Be2 Nxe5 gives Black a splendid, active position. Black will castle long, play ... Bc5 and just have the much better position.

a2) 6 Qe2 Nc6 7 c3 Be7! is also simply better for Black.

b) The immediate 5 Nf3!? is quite rare. After 5 ... exf4 6 Bc4 we get a position which actually occurs too in the King's Gambit, but is simply good for Black: 6 ... Nxc3 7 bxc3 Bd6 8 0-0 0-0 and Black is definitely better.

**5 ... Nxc3 6 bxc3 Qh4+ 7 Ke2**

Obviously, after 7 g3? Qe4+ White just loses the rook on h1.

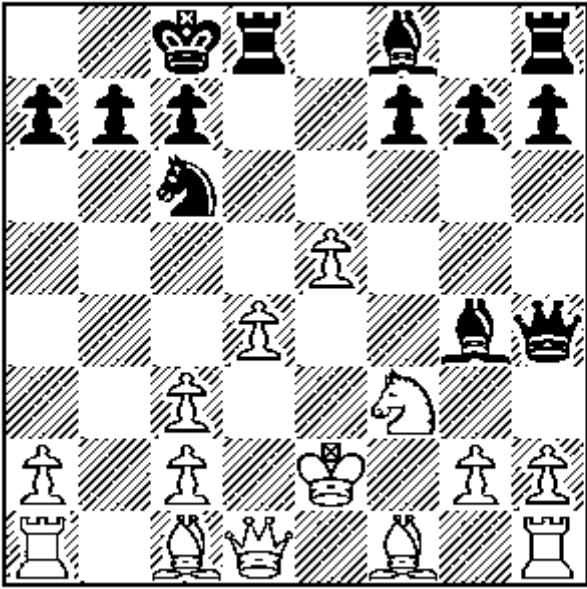


This position looks like something you'd find in a book about opening traps, but the position is far more complicated than at first meets the eye. If White gets a move or two, he'll play Nf3 and d4, gaining time for development while maintaining a big pawn centre. Meanwhile, Black has to try and use his development advantage.

**7 ... Bg4+ 8 Nf3 Nc6 9 Qe1!**

This is the move that revitalized the variation for White. It was played back in 2008 by the fascinatingly creative IM Kamran Shirazi, but most notably it was played twice by Hikaru Nakamura. One of those games was in the US Championship against the strong GM Alexander Onischuk.

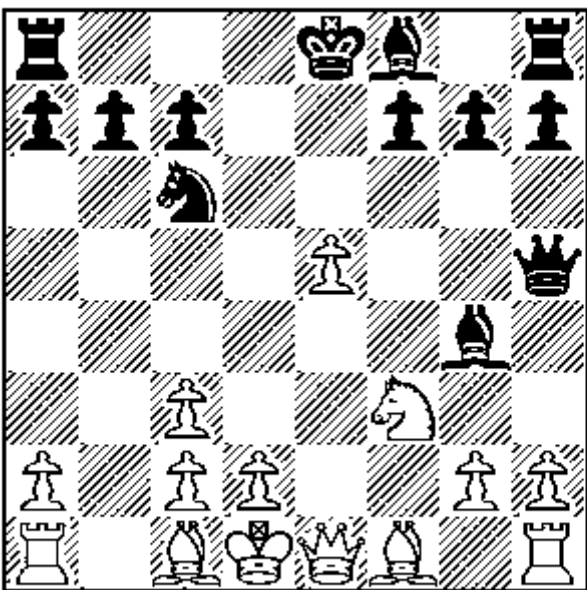
I believe one reason why this variation lost popularity was due to the famous game C.Hampe-W.Steinitz, Vienna 1859, which went: 9 d4 0-0-0 ...



... 10 Bd2? (I don't really understand the point behind this move) 10 ... Bxf3+ (modern engines show that 10 ... Rxd4!! wins immediately because of 11 cxd4 Nxd4+ 12 Kd3 Bf5+ 13 Kc3 Nxf3 14 Qxf3 Qb4#) 11 gxf3 Nxe5?! (again, 11 ... Nxd4+!) 12 dxe5 (after 12 Qe1! White actually obtains some pressure with the bishop-pair and we would have been robbed of some beautiful chess history) 12 ... Bc5 13 Qe1 Qc4+ 14 Kd1 Qxc3 15 Rb1 Qxf3+ 16 Qe2 Rxd2+! 17 Kxd2 Rd8+ 18 Kc1 Ba3+ 19 Rb2 Qc3 20 Bh3+ Kb8 21 Qb5 Qd2+ 22 Kb1 Qd1+ 23 Rxd1 Rxd1# 0-1.

In modern games, everyone after 9 d4 0-0-0 has preferred 10 Qe1 when Black should refrain from all the beautiful piece sacrifices and just play 10 ... Qh5! followed by ... f6 with a dangerous attack.

**9 ... Qh5 10 Kd1!**



Yes, the diagram is correct. It's not a typo; the queen and king have just switched places. I'd be tempted to play this variation as White just for the laughs, but really Black needs to be accurate to try and obtain some kind of advantage.

**10 ... Bxf3+**

The game H.Nakamura-A.Onischuk, US Championship, Saint Louis 2010, went 10 ... Nxe5

11 Be2! 0-0-0 12 Nxe5 Bxe2+ 13 Qxe2 Qxe2+ 14 Kxe2 Re8 15 d4 f6 16 Be3 fxe5 17 d5 when White had a slight edge in the endgame, although Onischuk eventually held the draw.

### 11 gxf3 0-0-0!

Development before material. I know it's surprising, but I'd rather not play 11 ... Qxf3+ since White is the one getting the initiative after 12 Be2 Qd5 13 c4! Qxe5 14 Rb1 with Bb2 ideas.

### 12 d4??

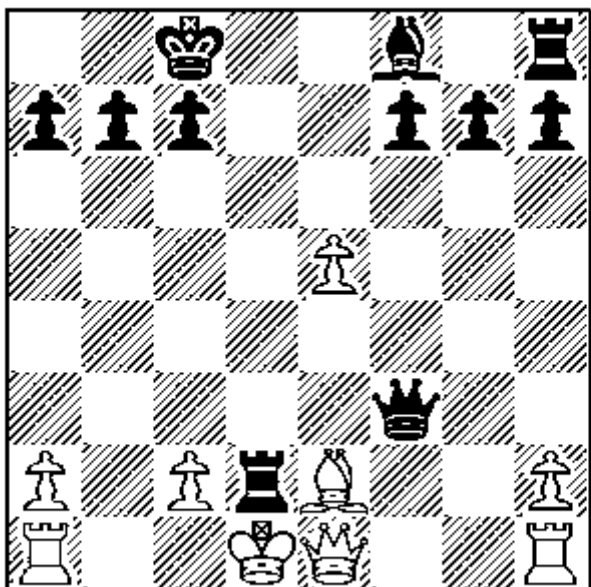
One wrong step and it's all over.

Hikaru Nakamura instead played 12 Qe4 in his rapid game with Sophie Milliet, but after 12 ... Qxe5 13 d4 Qa5 14 Bd2 Bologan correctly points out that Black has 14 ... g6! with dangerous ideas of ... Bh6, as well as of kicking the queen with ... f5. Here the endgame with 13 Qxe5 Nxe5 is perhaps White's best shot, but White has some weaknesses to deal with and the bishop-pair doesn't fully compensate for them.

### 12 ... Nxd4!

And just like that, White's position collapses like a house of cards.

### 13 cxd4 Qxf3+ 14 Be2 Rxd4+ 15 Bd2 Rxd2+!



It looks like Anne Haast knows her classics. Compare this sacrifice to the one by Steinitz mentioned above.

### 16 Qxd2 Qxh1+ 17 Qe1 Qxe1+

A very practical decision, going into the endgame with a handful of extra pawns. Black could have continued the attack, but there's nothing wrong with taking the safe road.

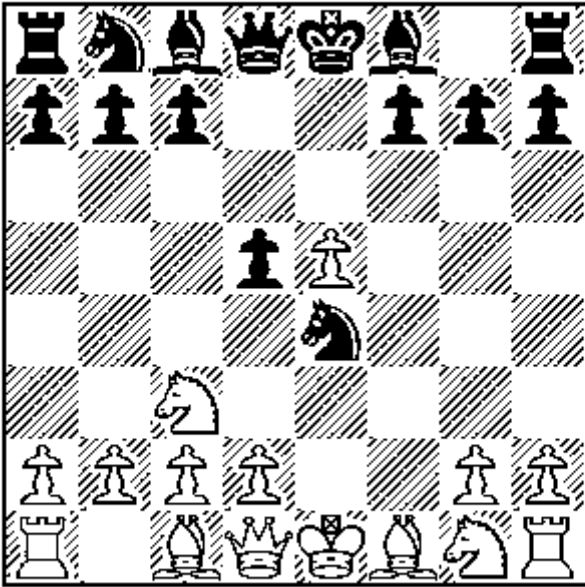
18 Kxe1 Bb4+ 19 Kf2 Bc3 20 Rd1 Bxe5 21 Bg4+ Kb8 22 Rd7 Bxh2 23 Rxf7 Be5 24 Ke3 a6 25 Ke4 Bf6 26 c4 Re8+ 27 Kd3 Re5 0-1

Game 53

**J.Sequera Paolini-M.Lokander**

Cappelle-la-Grande 2013

1 e4 e5 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 f4 d5 4 fxe5 Nxe4



### 5 Qf3!?

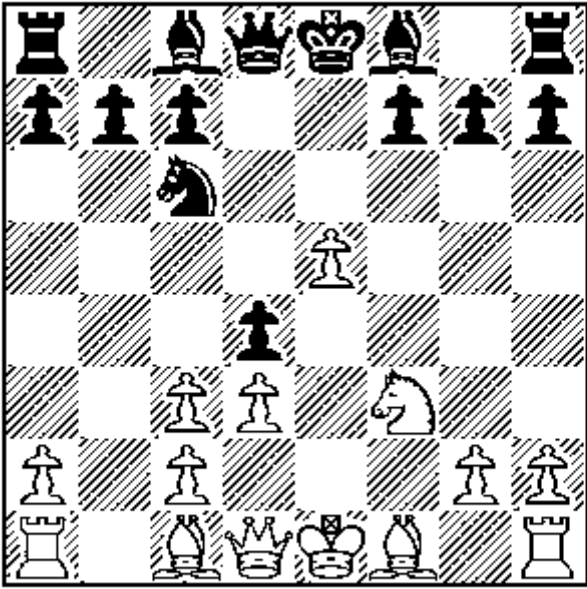
Quite surprisingly, I've faced this move as often as 5 Nf3, even though statistically it's much rarer. White wants to put immediate pressure on the e4-knight, as well as transfer the queen to the kingside before developing the pieces.

The most popular move by far is 5 Nf3, but in this game we will cover a few different options that crop up from time to time:

a) First of all, 5 Nxe4?! dxe4 is just inferior for White. He'd like to put his knight on f3, but the e4-pawn obstructs White's development quite a bit and after 6 d4 exd3 7 Bxd3 he is simply left with a weak pawn on e5.

b) 5 d4? wants to tempt Black into giving check on h4: 5 ... Qh4+? 6 g3 Nxf3 looks crushing, but 7 Nf3 Qh5 8 Nxd5! is just good for White. The simplest continuation is 5 ... Bb4! when 6 Bd2? loses to 6 ... Bxc3! 7 bxc3 Qh4+.

c) 5 d3!? looks like a blunder, but it carries a nasty trap: 5 ... Qh4+?! 6 g3 Nxf3 is actually quite bad for Black because of 7 Nf3 Qh5 8 Nxd5!. Instead, I will recommend an idea I learned about while watching Jan Gustafsson's amazing DVD: 5 ... Nxc3 6 bxc3 d4! (White wanted to play d3-d4, Nf3, Bd3 and develop a kingside initiative, but this pawn is a thorn in his side) 7 Nf3 Nc6.

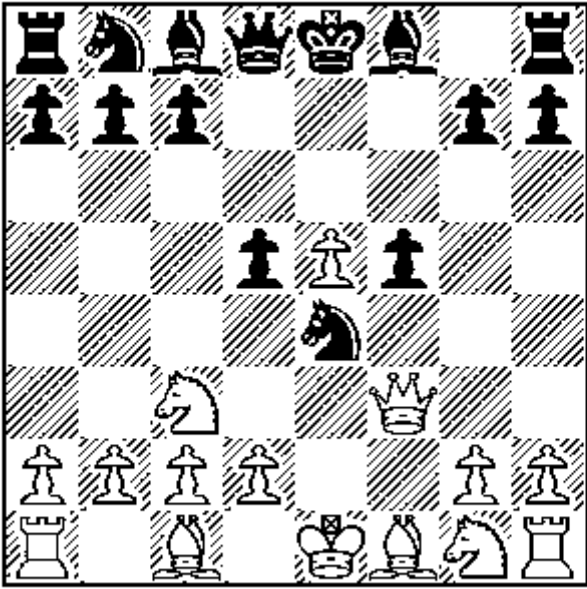


Here White has generally tried two moves, either releasing the tension in the centre immediately or just ignoring it by developing quickly:

c1) After 8 cxd4 Black needs to insert a zwischenzug: 8 ... Bb4+! (not 8 ... Nxd4?! 9 c3 Nxf3+ 10 Qxf3 when White will succeed in building a strong pawn centre after all; after the text, White has to recapture on f3 with a pawn which is far worse for him) 9 Bd2 Bxd2+ 10 Qxd2 Nxd4 11 c3 Nxf3+ 12 gxf3. Let's now see how a well-known grandmaster handles the black position against a lower-rated amateur (indeed, it's no surprise that no high-rated players go for this line as White): 12 ... 0-0 13 d4 c5 14 Bc4 Be6 15 Bb3 cxd4 16 cxd4 Bxb3 17 axb3 f6 18 Qe3 fxe5 19 dxe5 Qh4+ 20 Kf1 Rf5 21 Ra4 Qh3+ 22 Kf2 Raf8 23 f4 Qg4 24 Rg1 Rxf4+ 25 Ke1 Qh4+ 26 Qg3 Rxa4 27 bxa4 Qe4+ 28 Kd2 Rd8+ 29 Kc3 Rc8+ 0-1, P.Siedlinski-V.Malaniuk, Rewal 2012.

c2) 8 Be2 is quite a sensible approach. White doesn't bother trying to build up a strong pawn centre, but just develops and hopes that his initiative will get him somewhere: 8 ... Bc5 9 0-0 (9 c4 0-0 10 0-0 Re8 is just very comfortable for Black; the e5-pawn is nothing but a liability and Black enjoys harmonious development) 9 ... dxc3+ 10 Kh1 0-0 11 Qe1. This position has been tested extensively and Black can choose between many different moves which should give him an advantage. I think the simplest is 11 ... Re8! when after 12 Qxc3 (12 Bf4 Nd4 is not really what White wants) 12 ... Bd4 13 Nxd4 Qxd4 we get an endgame where White loses his e-pawn and will have to suffer for the rest of the game.

**5 ... f5!**



Somehow I managed to remember what Gustafsson had recommended in his DVD on the Open Games, and played 5 ... f5 rather quickly.

After the game I looked the position up and noticed that 5 ... Nc6!? had become popular, with the general assessment being slightly better for Black. I don't have any objection to this assessment, since I do believe Black is better, but I enjoy the positions arising after 5 ... f5 more. Both moves should provide Black with some advantage.

For those of you who prefer 5 ... Nc6, the critical line seems to be 6 Bb5 Nxc3 7 dxc3 Qh4+ 8 g3 Qe4+ 9 Qxe4 dxe4 and this endgame should be a bit better for Black, although practical results so far have favoured White. Indeed, it's noteworthy that Nakamura has played this endgame in the US Championship, and with success.

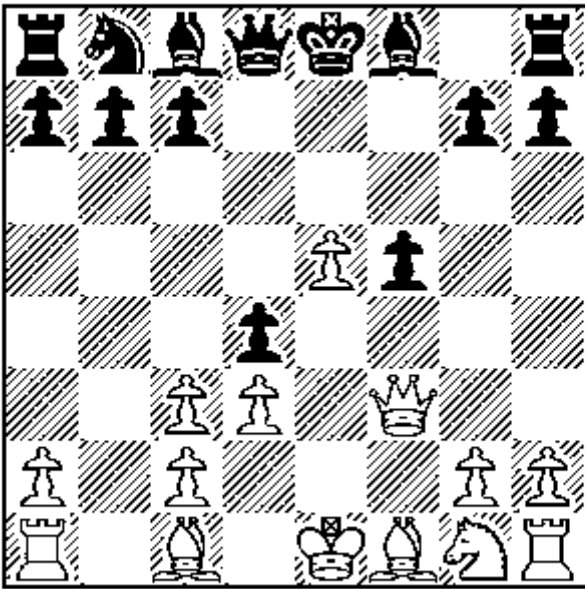
### 6 d3

Otherwise:

a) It's quite easy to see that 6 exf6 Nxf6 is terrible for White. The kingside has been weakened for nothing and Black will have very quick development.

b) The legendary Blackburne won an interesting game with 6 Nh3 Nc6 7 Bb5 Qh4+ 8 Kf1 Bc5 9 Nxd5 0-0 10 Bxc6 bxc6 11 Ndf4, but here Mikhalchisin found the strong improvement 11 ... g5! and after 12 Qb3+ Kh8 13 Nd3 Ba6 14 c4 Bxc4 White resigned in J.Krivec-A.Mikhalchishin, Bled 2005.

### 6 ... Nxc3 7 bxc3 d4!

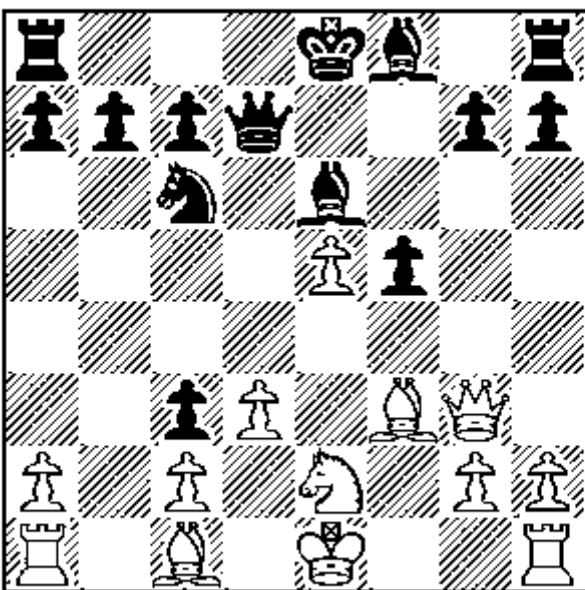


The same pawn thrust we saw against 5 d3. Black puts a wedge into White's position and I don't really see a way for White to get rid of the pressure.

### 8 cxd4?!

I don't think my opponent was very well prepared and this isn't very good. It's also possible that he was frustrated by the fact that despite playing a highly unusual variation against a much lower-rated opponent, I showed no sign of being out of book.

White's main try has always been connected with 8 Qg3, trying to put pressure on Black's kingside while enabling the development of his own kingside pieces: 8 ... Nc6 9 Be2 (9 Nf3 looks more logical, but it's difficult to regain the c3-pawn with the knight on f3, so White usually puts the bishop on f3 and the knight on e2 instead; another downside is that this set-up enables Black to play ... Qd5, as shown by 9 ... dxc3 10 Be2 Qd5 11 0-0 Bc5+ 12 Kh1 0-0 when White has no apparent compensation whatsoever for the pawn) 9 ... Be6 10 Bf3 Qd7 11 Ne2 dxc3!

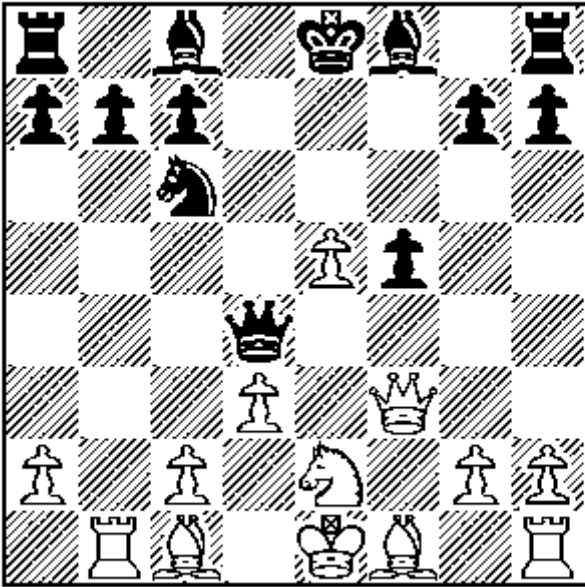


This is played not only with the greedy intention of grabbing a pawn, but also because it enables ... Nb4, attacking a weak spot in White's camp: for example, 12 Be3 (12 0-0 Nb4 is quite awkward for White) 12 ... Nb4 13 Rc1! Nd5! (Black can simply focus on putting the pieces on good squares, not grabbing pawns greedily; White's last may look extremely strange, but if

Black plays 13 ... Nxa2 White gets unexpected counterplay with 14 Bxb7 Rb8 15 Qf3! when he has ideas with Bc6, Bg5 and Rb1) 14 Bxd5 Qxd5 15 0-0 0-0-0 and I definitely prefer Black's position. White's pieces are all very strangely placed.

Instead, Gyula Sax played 8 Qf4 in 2013 when he tried to make the variation playable again. The idea is simply to recapture the pawn with the queen. However, I find it hard to take such an approach seriously as an attempt for an advantage, and Black seems to get some edge with simple, developing moves: 8 ... dxc3 9 Qc4 Nc6 10 Nf3 (obviously not 10 Qxc3?? Bb4, picking up the queen) 10 ... Qe7! (Black wants his bishop on e6, and now there's no way of preventing it) 11 Qxc3 Be6. Black will follow up with ... 0-0-0 when he can choose between entering favourable endgames with ... Qc5 or attacking White on the kingside with ... h6 and ... g5.

**8 ... Qxd4 9 Rb1 Nc6 10 Ne2**



I knew my position had to be good, but I wasn't sure what Black was supposed to play here. I should have grabbed the e5-pawn and just enjoyed the much better position, but I was tempted into grabbing another pawn while not opening any lines for White's bishops.

**10 ... Qa4?**

I'm really not sure why I didn't play 10 ... Qxe5, since 11 Bb2 Qa5+ 12 Bc3 Qxa2 13 Rb2 Qf7 just looks like desperation. Black is up two pawns and White has nothing to show for it. I guess I'm just a coward.

**11 Kd1!?**

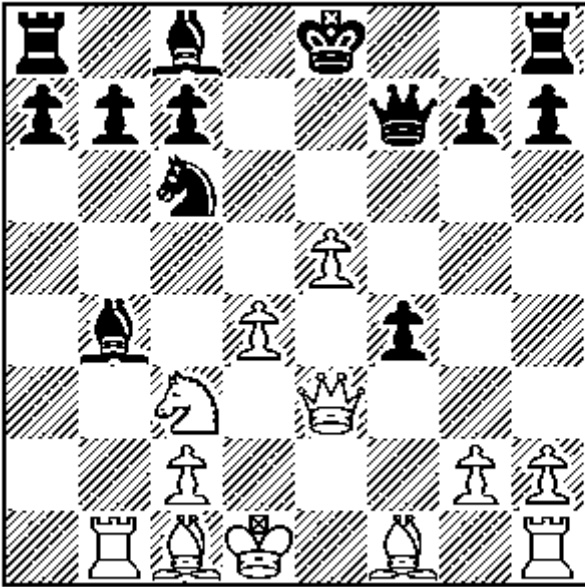
This idea somehow didn't occur to me. I thought White had to develop his knight, then the bishop, and castle kingside, but this is actually much smarter. If White plays dynamically, which he has to do, the king won't be attacked.

I do, however, think that 11 c3! Qxa2 12 Rb2 Qf7 13 d4 is an even better way for White to continue. His centre really starts to worry me.

**11 ... Qxa2 12 Nc3 Qf7 13 Qe3?!**

White needs to play quickly and develop his initiative before Black consolidates. 13 e6! is an ingenious way of doing so: 13 ... Bxe6 14 Rxb7 is quite dangerous for Black, but 13 ... Qxe6 14 Nb5 Bd6 keeps some advantage.

**13 ... Bb4 14 d4?! f4!**



Now it's all over, and we both knew it. Black doesn't only have an extra pawn, he has a development advantage and the safer king.

**15 Qd2**

15 Qxf4? Qxf4 16 Bxf4 Bxc3 drops a piece.

**15 ... Bg4+ 16 Ke1 0-0-0 17 Rxb4**

Desperate, but necessary as nothing was holding White's position together.

**17 ... Nxb4 18 Nb5 Nc6 19 c3 f3 20 Qf4 f2+ 21 Qxf2**

21 Kxf2 was a better try, but 21 ... Qg6 still gives Black a decisive attack.

**21 ... Qb3 22 Qd2 Nxe5 23 Nxa7+ Kb8 24 Nb5 Nc4 25 Qd3 Rhf8 0-1**

My opponent had seen enough; his king gets mated in the middle of the board. Far from a perfect game, but an interesting one nonetheless.

Game 54

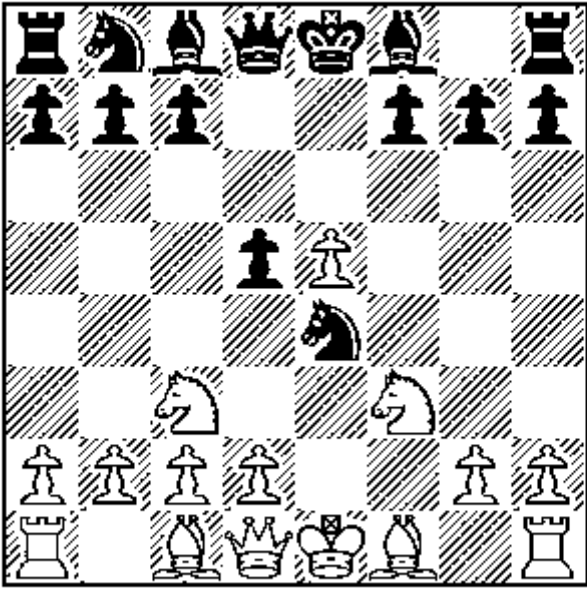
**H.Spangenberg-A.Karpov**

Buenos Aires (rapid) 1994

Hugo Spangenberg is a very talented grandmaster from Argentina who unfortunately retired way too early. This was the last round of a four-game match with Anatoly Karpov and the score was 1-2, so Hugo had to win. Hence, the choice of opening.

**1 e4 e5 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 f4 d5 4 fxe5 Nxe4 5 Nf3**

By far the main move.



### 5 ... Be7!?

A timid square for the bishop, but it is developed and Black keeps the option open of a ... c5 break.

I used to think 5 ... Bc5 was the best move and this is also the move I've usually played. After 6 d4 Bb4 7 Bd2 c5 Black has a strong position, although the game remains complicated. I think a better move for White after 5 ... Bc5 is 6 Qe2! when 6 ... Bf2+ 7 Kd1 Nxc3+ 8 bxc3 is still complicated, but I believe in Black's prospects here as well. Therefore, if you're looking for a good alternative to my main recommendation, I can definitely recommend 5 ... Bc5. When preparing for an important game against the Norwegian Super-GM Jon Ludvig Hammer, I was faced with a problem I'd never faced before: how do you prepare against someone who works with the world champion? After long consideration, I chose the Vienna Gambit, hoping that he hadn't analysed it too deeply and that I would get my chance in the arising complications. On my way to the playing venue I was reviewing my analysis and I realized that I really hated White's position after 5 ... Be7, which is why I recommend it for Black, and fortunately for me, Hammer played 1 ... c5.

### 6 d4

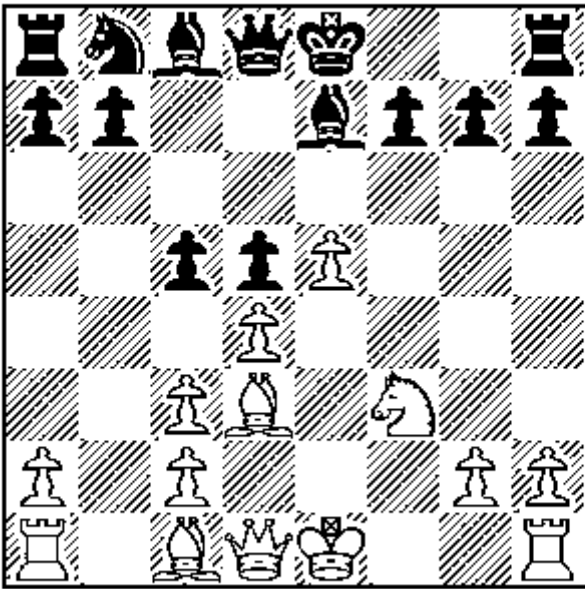
There's also:

a) The main move is 6 Qe2, putting the question to the knight immediately. This will be covered in our next game.

b) The observant reader might have noticed that after 6 d3 Black can't play 6 ... Nxc3 7 bxc3 d4, but it doesn't mean that Black has a bad position. He can simply develop with 7 ... c5 8 Be2 Nc6 9 0-0 0-0 and enjoy a good position. White has generally tried to attack on the kingside, but there's not much Black has to worry about and 10 Qe1 (10 Bf4 Bf5 11 Qe1 Qd7 followed with ... Rae8 is also better for Black) 10 ... f6! opens up the position to Black's advantage.

c) 6 Bd3!? is the pet move of the Junior World Champion Lu Shanglei, and he has used it three times against very strong grandmasters, scoring just a point. Objectively, I don't think the move amounts to much. 6 ... Nc5 7 Bb5+ c6 8 d4 cxb5 9 dxc5 Be6 10 Be3 was L.Shanglei-V.Malakhov, Ningbo 2011, and here 10 ... 0-0 11 Nxb5 Qa5+ 12 Nc3 Nc6 followed by ... Bxc5 looks very good for Black.

### 6 ... c5! 7 Bd3 Nxc3 8 bxc3

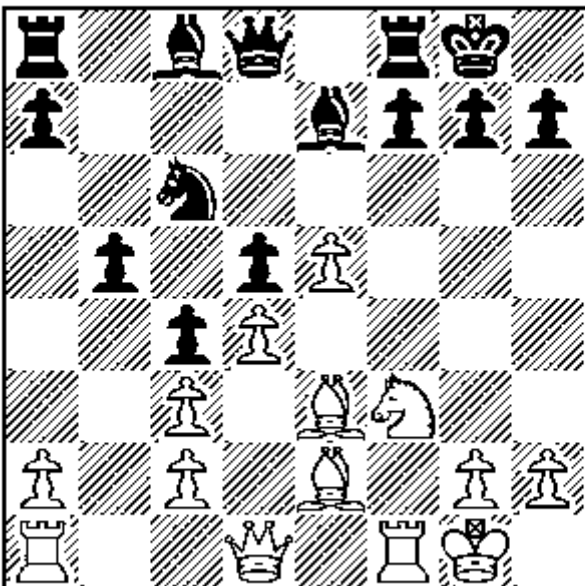


It looks like White has managed to get what he wants in the Vienna. He has a stable pawn-chain in the centre and attacking prospects on the kingside. However, Karpov now shows his class with a very strong move.

**8 ... c4!**

This move clamps down on White's queenside, effectively tearing it in two. The bishop will find it very difficult to do anything from e2 and while Black will attack on the queenside, White's kingside attack isn't really bound to succeed.

**9 Be2 Nc6 10 0-0 0-0 11 Be3 b5!**



Right to it. Karpov wastes no time getting his queenside pawns rolling.

**12 a4**

If White plays 12 Qe1, I think it's a good idea to play 12 ... Bf5! when the bishop can help in the defence while also annoying White by attacking the c2-pawn.

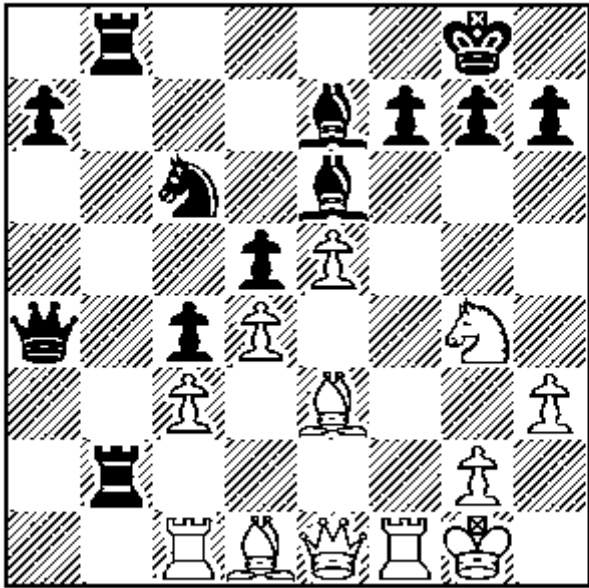
**12 ... b4 13 cxb4 Nxb4**

I was actually expecting Karpov to play 13 ... Bxb4! when the bishop can nail itself on c3 while the heavy artillery enters along the b-file. In the game, White manages to slow Black down on the queenside for a while.

**14 c3 Nc6 15 Qc2 Be6 16 h3**

White keeps trying for a kingside attack. It shouldn't work, but remember this was a rapid game where White had to win. Objectively 16 Rb1 Rb8 17 Rxb8 was better, although White's temptation to play for mate is understandable.

**16 ... Rb8 17 Nh2 Rb3 18 Ng4 Qa5 19 Rac1 Rfb8 20 Qd2 Rb2 21 Qe1 Qxa4 22 Bd1**



White has officially left the entire queenside in ruins while trying to develop some kind of attack on the kingside. In a serious tournament, I doubt it would succeed, but in a rapid game even a world champion can slip up.

**22 ... Qa2 23 Qg3 Kh8!**

Karpov knows that Black doesn't need much material to defend his king.

**24 h4 Rb1 25 Rxb1 Rxb1 26 Bh6!?! Bf8!**

Black has everything covered and it's hard to see how White wants to deliver mate.

**27 Bg5**

27 Nf6 is very flashy, but also not threatening. Black can safely play 27 ... Qa1! with a winning position.

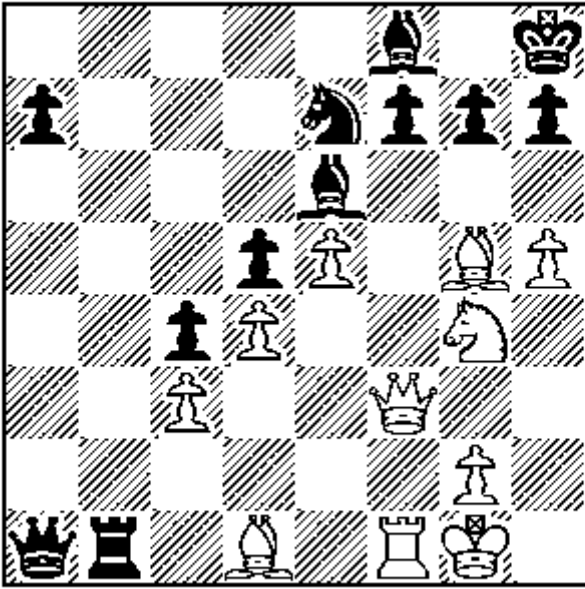
**27 ... Qa1?!**

In this winning but still complicated position, Karpov start to drift.

**28 Qf3 Ne7**

It was probably time for 28 ... Kg8!, holding the kingside together. Note that Qg3 isn't an idea here because the bishop on d1 would be en prise.

**29 h5**



**29 ... Nf5?!**

This allows White to draw. It might look awkward, but Black's best defence is connected with the move 29 ... Ng8! 30 h6 g6 when White can't break through on the kingside. This would be, of course, very difficult to spot in a rapid game.

**30 h6 g6 31 Bf6+ Kg8 32 Bg5 Kh8 33 Bf6+ Kg8 34 Bg5 a5**

I have no idea what was going on here. Why did Black avoid the repetition with 34 ... Kh8 when it would win him the match?

**35 Nf6+ Kh8 36 g4**

The engine still says it's a draw, but the position is now incredibly dangerous and difficult to grasp.

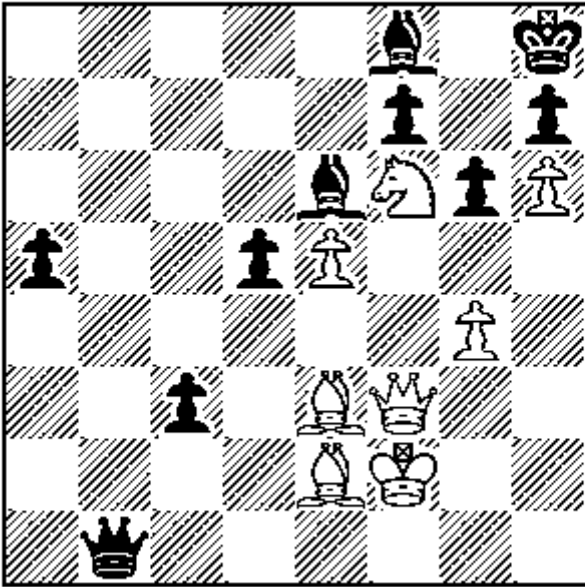
**36 ... Nxd4! 37 cxd4 Qxd4+ 38 Be3 Qd3?!**

And, finally, the 12th world champion drifts into a worse position. Instead, 38 ... Qxe5! 39 Qf2 Rb2 40 Bd4 Rxf2 41 Bxe5 Rxf1+ 42 Kxf1 Bxh6 43 Nxd5+ Bg7 44 Nf6! should end in a draw.

**39 Be2**

39 Nd7! Be7 40 Nc5! was better, when the knight tears Black's kingside apart by distracting the bishops.

**39 ... Rxf1+ 40 Kxf1 Qb1+ 41 Kf2 c3**



### 42 Nd7?

The players were probably getting very low on time, but 42 Nxd5! was actually the move to win the game and equalize the score. White is threatening Qf6 and Ne7+, and after 42 ... Bxd5 43 Qxd5 Black is unable to defend f7.

### 42 ... Be7 43 Bc5 Bh4+!

Perhaps this check is what Spangenberg overlooked.

### 44 Kg2 c2 45 g5 Bxg5 46 Be3 c1Q 47 Bxc1 Qxc1 48 Qb3 Bxd7 49 Qxd5 Bc6 0-1

A very complex game where Spangenberg's attack could have paid off, even though it shouldn't have. The entire variation is complex, but Black shouldn't have anything to worry about.

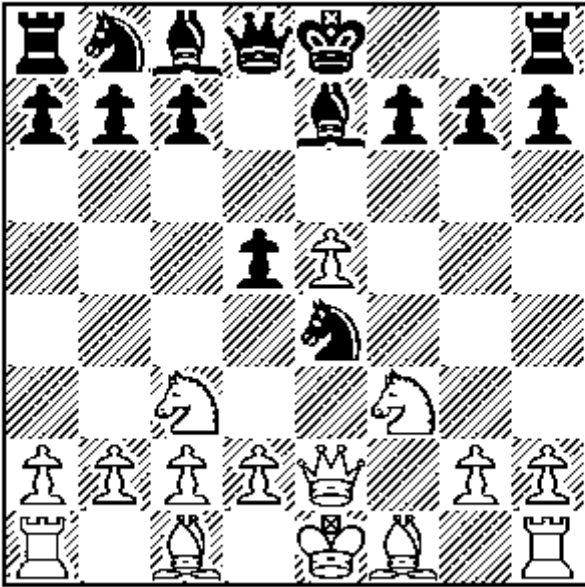
## Game 55

### D.Charochkina-I.Turova

Dagomys 2008

### 1 e4 e5 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 f4 d5 4 fxe5 Nxe4 5 Nf3 Be7 6 Qe2

This is definitely considered to be White's main move these days. White forces Black to release the tension in the centre while being able to recapture with dxc3.



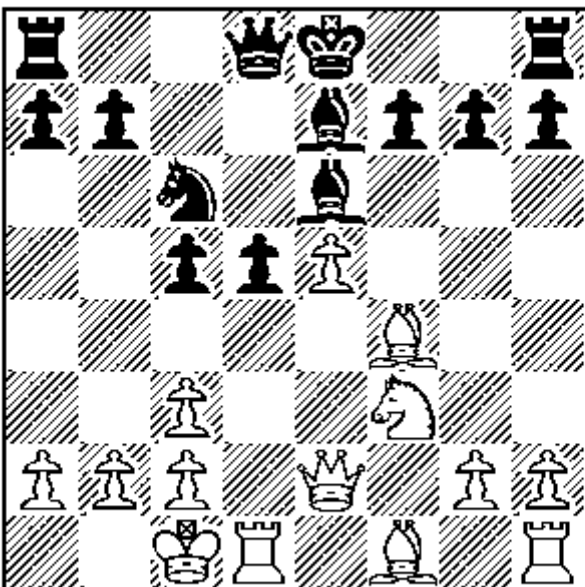
**6 ... Nxc3 7 dxc3 c5!**

Black's development scheme is simple: he will play ... Nc6, ... Be6 and then get his king safe. Black usually begins 7 ... 0-0, but recent developments have shown that Black may benefit from castling long or even delaying castling for the sake of developing a strong initiative.

**8 Bf4**

White prepares long castling, but this game shows that White's king might come under fire on the queenside. The creative Swedish GM Jonny Hector has played 8 Qf2, which is quite unusual. White wants to play Be2 and castle kingside, since he realises that his king won't be very safe on the queenside. The problem is that White will find it more difficult to develop any initiative on the kingside as well. However, as Black seems to be doing extremely well against 8 Bf4, it might be that this is White's best try: 8 ... Qb6! (Black tries to make White's development difficult and now White has to make some kind of concession on the queenside) 9 Be2 0-0 10 0-0 Nc6 and now after 11 b3 Black can exploit his development advantage to open up the position with 11 ... Bf5 12 Bd3 Bxd3 13 cxd3 f6!

**8 ... Nc6 9 0-0-0 Be6**



**10 h4!**

This might look like a shot into mid-air, but White would love to harass Black's bishops with either Ng5 or Bg5. By trading off one of Black's bishops, White hopes that his king will become safer and Black's centre weaker. This is definitely something we should avoid.

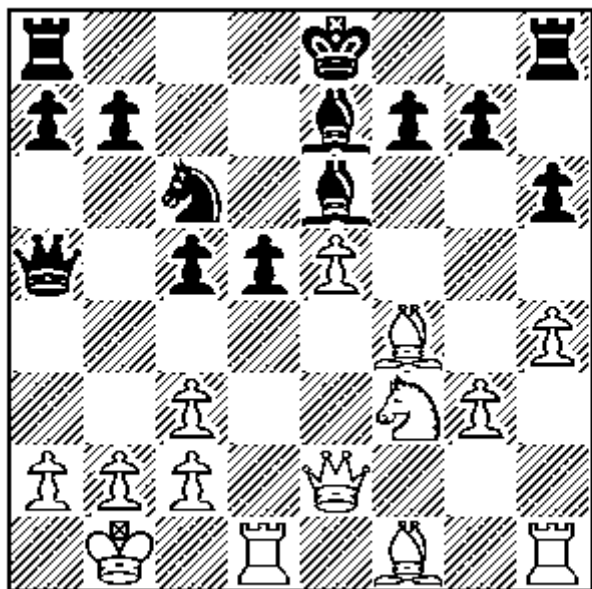
Sometimes White starts with 10 Kb1, but after 10 ... Qa5 play will probably transpose into our main game after 11 h4 h6 since White doesn't have many other plans available.

White could also try to fix the centre with 10 c4 d4, but doing so looks very uncomfortable for him. Black will play ... Qd7, ... 0-0 and develop a strong initiative on the queenside by opening lines: 11 h4 h6 12 Qe4 Qa5 13 a3 Qa4 14 Nd2 Na5 15 Qd3 was F.Roellig-J.Hector, Berlin 1993, and here 15 ... b5! looks like a decisive attack to me.

### 10 ... h6! 11 Kb1

It's more common for White to begin with 11 g3, generally with the idea of trading bishops with Bh3. After 11 ... Qa5 12 a3 surprisingly White is better off on the queenside moving his pawns instead of protecting them with his king (12 Kb1 is more common and transposes to our main game). White wants to make it more difficult for Black to break with ... d5-d4, but Black still has a very nice position after 12 ... 0-0-0 13 Bh3 Kb8 14 h5 Rhf8!? (a useful waiting move, knowing that White will probably take on e6 soon; indeed, White has a hard time finding any decent ideas without taking on e6, usually followed by trying to take advantage of Black's weakened kingside) 15 Kb1 Qb6!? (preparing ... Na5-c4) 16 Bxe6 (a neutral move like 16 Rdf1 can be met with 16 ... Na5 17 Nd2 c4! when Black threatens both ... Bxa3 and ... d4) 16 ... fxe6 17 Nh4 Bxh4! 18 Rxh4. Black has the superior minor piece and a sound pawn structure. Moreover, g7 isn't much of a problem since it's very easy to defend and quite difficult for White to attack.

### 11 ... Qa5 12 g3



This position has been played 20 times in my database, including in three games of the very strong Russian GM Ivan Popov. Black usually castles queenside with a very solid position, but in our main game Turova goes for a splendid attacking idea.

### 12 ... d4! 13 c4 b5!

Terrific. Black blasts open the queenside immediately and my analysis shows that White is already really struggling.

### 14 Nd2

Not only does this move strengthen White's light squares, it also enables White to defend

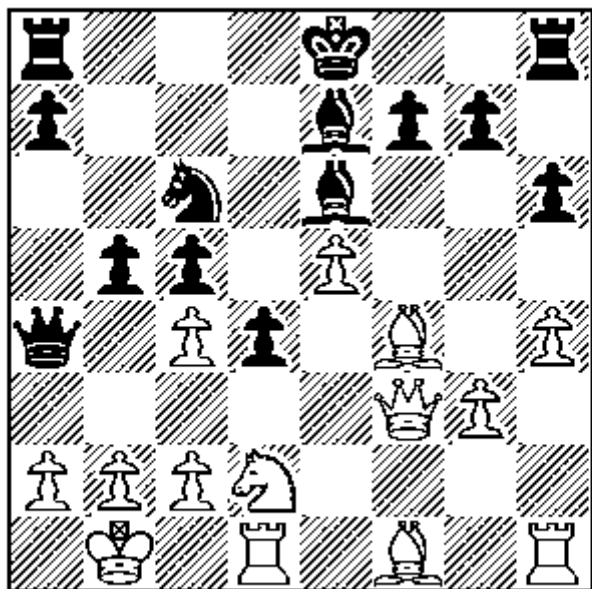
along the third rank with Qf3.

14 Qe4 is best met with 14 ... Rc8! (I analysed 14 ... Qa6 very deeply and came to the conclusion that after 15 Bh3 Bxc4 16 a3 b4! Black has a very strong attack, but White might be able to draw with very accurate defence) 15 Bh3 (inserting 15 Bd2 Qa6 doesn't change anything) 15 ... bxc4 16 Bxe6 fxe6 and Black has a very promising attack on the queenside.

**14 ... Qa4!**

Increasing the pressure on the queenside with threats such as ... Nb4.

**15 Qf3**



**15 ... Rc8**

Black could also play the appealing 15 ... Nb4!? which sacrifices an entire rook with check. However, it looks like White can hold after 16 Qxa8+ Bd8 17 Qf3! bxc4 18 Bxc4 Bxc4 19 Nxc4 Qxa2+ 20 Kc1 Qxc4.

**16 Qb3**

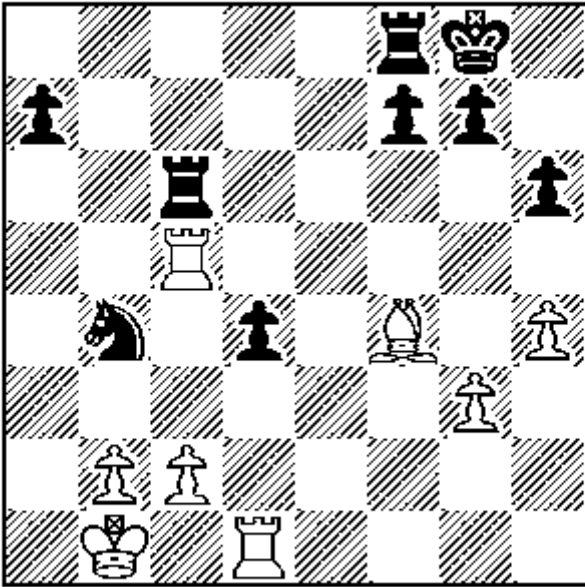
White agrees to an inferior endgame, but at least survives Black's brutal attack.

**16 ... Qxb3**

I think 16 ... Rb8!, trying to force White into trading on a4, might be even stronger. After 17 Qxa4 bxa4 Black can put some serious pressure on White along the b-file.

**17 axb3 bxc4 18 Nxc4 0-0**





This way Black manages to keep her extra pawn and even though White perhaps should draw with accurate play, it's no picnic for her.

### 28 Ra5

Maybe the rook endgame arising after 28 Bd2 Rxc5 29 Bxb4 Rc4 30 Bxf8 Kxf8 31 Re1 gave better chances of holding.

**28 ... Nxc2 29 Rd2 Rfc8 30 Rxa7 Rc4 31 Re2 Nb4! 32 Rg2 Nd3 33 Bd6 Rc1+ 34 Ka2 Rd1 35 Re7 Nc1+ 36 Ka3 Rd3+ 37 Ka4 Rb3! ½-½**

Black has played a fantastic game, but at this point the scoresheet says the game ended in a draw. I'm not quite sure why since Black is much better, but perhaps the decision was affected by the match score as this was a team game.

### Conclusion

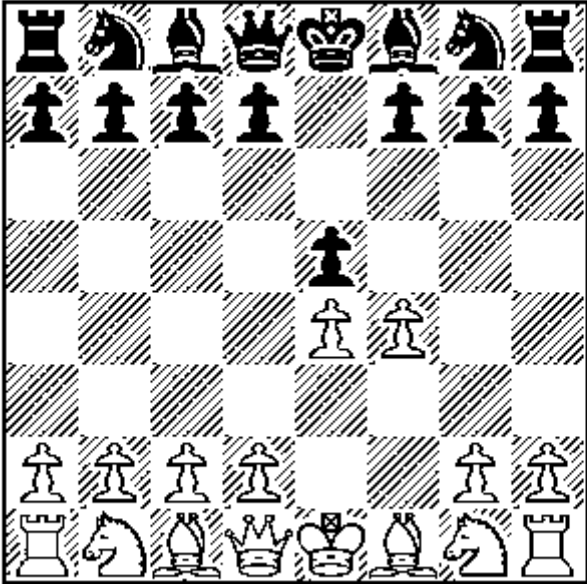
This has been a long chapter, especially since I covered two entirely different openings within it. The Bishop's Vienna Game has never been considered to be a big challenge theoretically, but it leads to an interesting middlegame where both sides have their chances and there aren't too many forcing lines; it's more about ideas than concrete moves. I prefer to put my bishop on c5 instead of e7, and then develop my pieces to natural squares before considering how to break in the centre. Just remember that 5 Bb3 can be met with the clever 5 ... Nxb3 6 axb3 d5 7 exd5 0-0!

The Vienna Gambit is completely different. White goes straight for the throat, but lately this opening has been under a cloud since Black has developed many convincing replies. White still has a few tricks and traps along the way, but if Black knows what he's doing I think he could well find himself fighting for an advantage.

# Chapter Nine

## The King's Gambit

1 e4 e5 2 f4



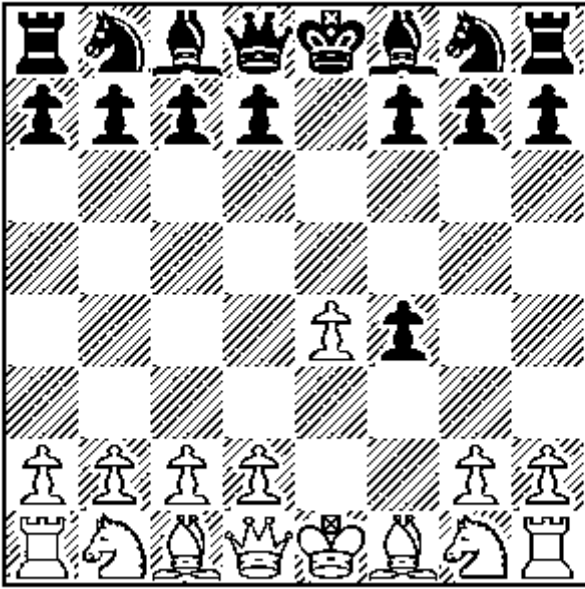
The most romantic opening of them all must be the King's Gambit. Countless beautiful attacking games have been won with this opening, but for a long time it has been viewed with suspicion. Who could forget Bobby Fischer's Bust to the King's Gambit?

These days, with computers analysing every variation, the King's Gambit has proved itself to be surprisingly playable at the highest level, as was confirmed when John Shaw recently published a 700 page book on the opening. Despite this, I believe I have found some very interesting ideas that aren't too well known.

### Theoretical Introduction

1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4

I have tried 2 ... Nc6 3 Nf3 f5!?, which is a very interesting and fun variation, but if Black wants to fight for the advantage, I think we have to accept the pawn sacrifice.



### 3 Nf3

The big alternative is 3 Bc4 which Shaw claimed to be refuted, but it has since been revitalized once again. I still believe Shaw's variation to be good for Black, but my recommendation is the very unusual 3 ... c6!?, aiming to break in the centre with ... d5. Black seems to have good chances of fighting for an advantage here. This is covered in Game 57 and the analysis just after it, where White prevents ... d5 with 4 Nc3, which allows another surprising idea.

Strange third move alternatives such as 3 Be2 are covered in Game 56, but if Black knows what he's doing, he can count on a sizeable advantage against all of them.

### 3 ... Nf6!

This is a very natural move, yet people seem to obsess over analysing 3 ... g5.

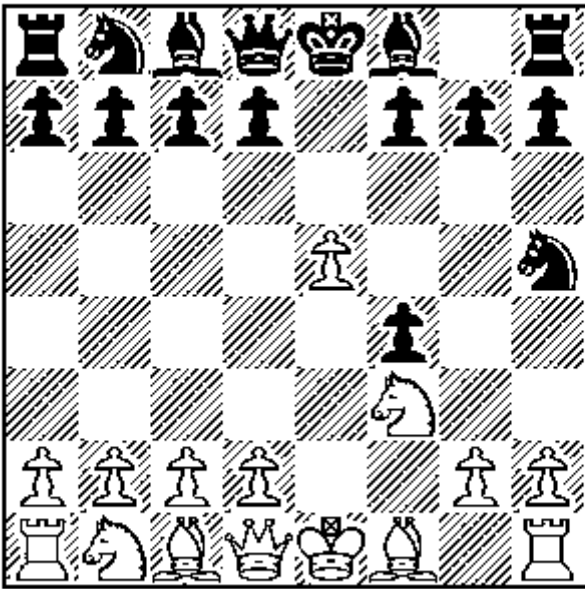
### 4 e5

Alternatively:

a) 4 Nc3 d5! 5 exd5 Nxd5 is very good for Black as White is yet to regain his sacrificed pawn. This is covered in Game 58.

b) 4 Qe2 wants to prevent ... d5, but Game 59 shows why it doesn't exactly do that.

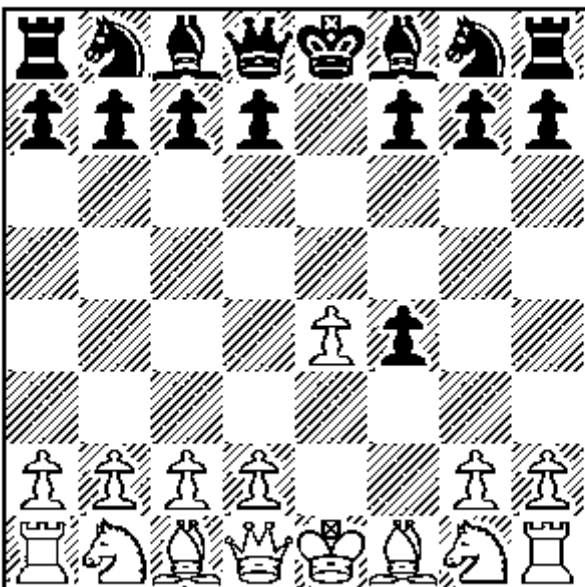
### 4 ... Nh5!



This is where the knight belongs in this variation. It might look exposed on the rim, but at the same time it cramps White's kingside and it might now be difficult for White to develop if he doesn't get the f4-pawn back comfortably. This position is covered in Game 60 and the following analysis, including Shaw's variation with 5 Be2.

Game 56  
**P.Thoeng-J.Hector**  
 Antwerp 1994

**1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4**



At this point, there's no doubt that White's two main moves are 3 Nf3 and 3 Bc4, but there has occasionally been some fuss about other 3rd moves by White. None of them has ever been popular since the days of the 19th Century, but they could be used as an occasional surprise weapon at club level.

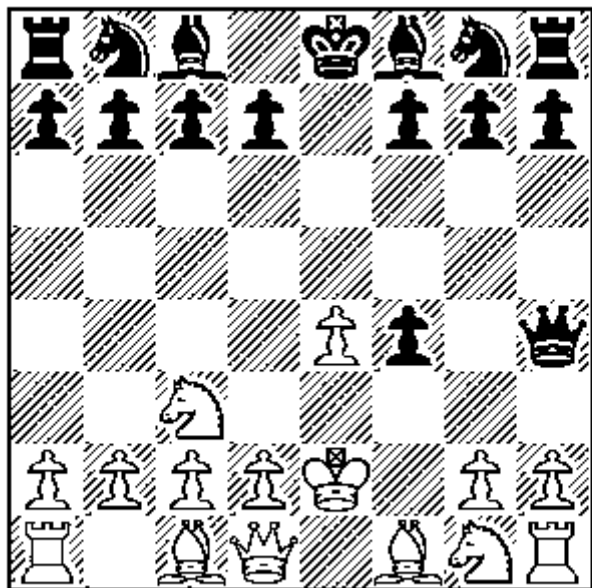
**3 Be2**

A few years ago in my local library, I picked up the latest Secrets of Opening Surprises 14

and saw an article devoted to 3 Be2 by Simon Williams. I was naturally quite suspicious and when I saw that he mentioned 3 ... f5 as the 'refutation', I switched chapter and assumed that the article wasn't very serious. I believe most readers will recognize 3 Be2 from a brilliant April Fool's joke on the ChessBase website. Eventually it turned out that the King's Gambit wasn't revitalized after all, and 3 Be2 only got a few hours in the limelight.

White also has:

a) 3 Nc3 is an old favourite of Kamran Shirazi, and it's actually not that bad. It was recently played successfully in a serious tournament game by Richard Rapport and even Magnus Carlsen used it once in the World Blitz Championships. 3 ... Qh4+ 4 Ke2 might look like a joke, but White hopes to gain time with Nf3 and then continue development quickly with d4 and Kf2 when the king will be quite safe after all.



Still, it shouldn't work out very well. I think the most important thing to remember here is to just keep calm and not exaggerate the fact that the king is on e2. If Black starts throwing away pieces and pawns to get at the king, he's going to get disappointed. The idea of 4 ... Qe7! was brought to my attention by John Shaw in his excellent book on the King's Gambit, and I see no reason why it shouldn't be good for Black. The point is really that the queen isn't as exposed on e7 as it would be on h4 and now Black can safely prepare the ... d5 break to open up the centre (sometimes prepared with ... Nf6):

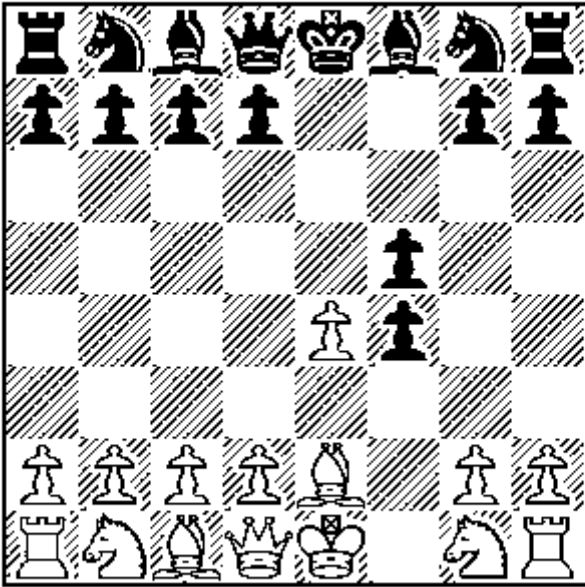
a1) 5 d4 is really quite optimistic: 5 ... Nf6 (now there's no simple way of defending the centre and ... d5 is on the cards) 6 e5 d6 7 Nf3 dxe5 8 dxe5 g5 was C.Bauer-E.Bacrot, Enghien les Bains 1999. Black is already clearly better.

a2) 5 d3 prevents the immediate ... d5 by defending e4, but after 5 ... Nf6 6 Bxf4 d5! it's quite clear that White's king is experiencing some real issues.

a3) Shaw correctly considers 5 Kf2! to be the best move for White, but I think Black can get an edge in many ways. My choice would be 5 ... d6 6 Nf3 g5 when Black can play very solidly with ... h6, Bg7 and ... c6, when I don't really believe in White's compensation with the king on f2.

b) 3 d4 is the little brother of Steinitz's 3 Nc3 variation. Fortunately for us, we can play in a similar manner: 3 ... Qh4+ 4 Ke2 Qe7! and White doesn't really have a comfortable way of defending his centre, with ... Nf6 and ... d5 on the way.

**3 ... f5!**



Yes Mr. Williams, you were absolutely correct. This strike more or less kills any kind of fun for White. With this slightly surprising move, Black's development rapidly speeds up and he increases his influence over the centre.

**4 exf5 Qh4+ 5 Kf1 d5!**

The idea behind 3 ... f5 is already quite obvious. Black will win back the f5-pawn, have a strong pawn centre, and I don't really see how White will get at the f4-pawn.

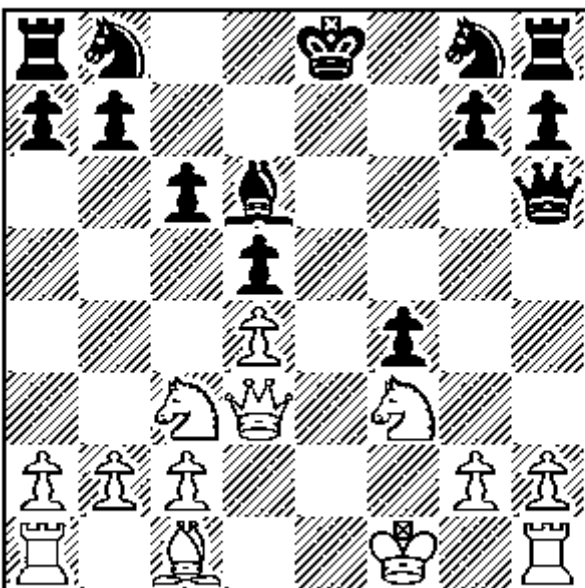
**6 Nc3**

If White begins with 6 Nf3, we just go 6 ... Qh6 followed by ... Bxf5 with an extra pawn.

**6 ... c6 7 d4 Bxf5**

Another interesting option would be 7 ... Bd6!?, because by defending the f4-pawn this way, Black's queen won't have to sit on h6 where it could be slightly awkwardly placed.

**8 Nf3 Qh6 9 Bd3 Bxd3+ 10 Qxd3 Bd6**



In my eyes, Black is simply up a pawn out of the opening.

**11 h4 Ne7 12 g4 Nd7 13 Bd2 0-0-0 14 Re1 Qf6**

White has gained some space on the kingside, but the compensation is still not very visible.

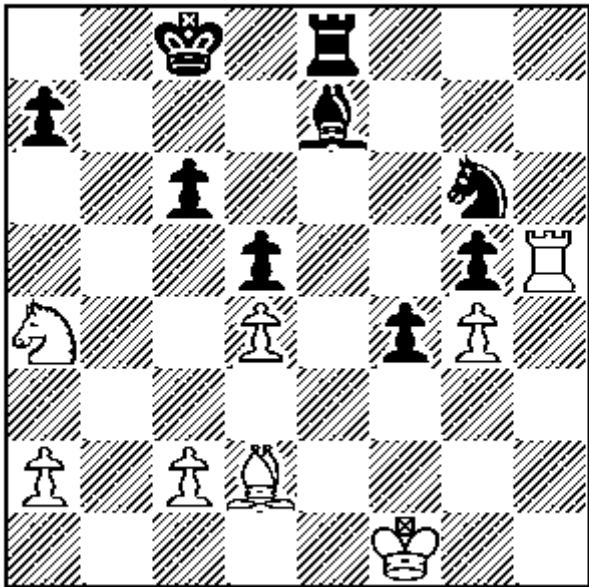
**15 h5 h6 16 Rh2 g6 17 hxg6 Qxg6**

Perhaps it would be better to play 17 ... Nxg6, to avoid White's temporary activity in the game.

**18 Qxg6 Nxg6 19 Re6 Ndf8 20 Rf6**

It's not really clear what White achieves with his rook in the black camp. Instead, if White just plays solidly with 20 Re1, it's not so simple to improve Black's position, and 20 ... Kd7 21 Kf2 followed by Reh1 seems to pick up the h6-pawn.

**20 ... Be7 21 Rf7 Ne6 22 Na4 Rde8 23 b4 Rhf8 24 Rxf8 Bxf8 25 b5 Ng5 26 Nxg5 hxg5 27 bxc6 bxc6 28 Rh5 Be7**



Black has consolidated his extra pawn and White's minor pieces have a really hard time finding any targets. On the other hand, Black can slowly improve his pieces with simple means, such as ... Ng6-f8-e6.

**29 Rh6 Rg8 30 Nb2 c5 31 dxc5 Bxc5 32 Nd3 Bd4 33 Nb4?**

Now White definitely goes astray. There was no need to abandon the g4-pawn.

**33 ... Ne5 34 Nxd5 Rd8 35 Ne7+ Kb7 36 Nf5 Bc5 37 Rh7+ 0-1**

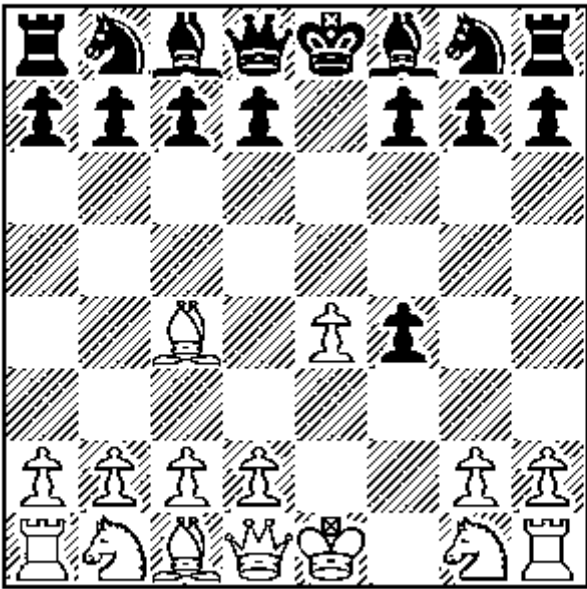
I'm not sure if White resigned after making his move or if his time ran out. Either way, his position is lost.

Game 57

**D.Dragicevic-S.Solomon**

Ballarat 2010

**1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 Bc4**



The King's Bishop's Gambit is incredibly rich in history and it's considered to be very romantic. It's quite interesting that despite being a 19th Century opening, its theoretical verdict is still being heavily debated. John Shaw only spent one chapter on 3 Bc4 since he was sure that it was refuted, but that is a claim that has been heavily debated ever since. In my own opinion, I do believe Black has an objective advantage, but let's keep in mind that King's Gambit players won't really care about the theoretical verdict.

### 3 ... c6!?

This rare move is quite interesting. Black wants to break ... d5 with tempo if allowed. There's also:

a) John Shaw's refutation begins with 3 ... Nc6 when his analysis shows that 4 Nf3 g5 is quite problematic for White if Black is well prepared. Objectively, White's best chance lies in 4 d4 Nf6 5 Nc3 Bb4 6 Nge2 when Black has the cute 6 ... f3!, and eventually we reach the following position: 7 gxf3 d5 8 exd5 Nxd5 9 0-0 Nxc3 10 bxc3 Bd6 11 Ng3 0-0 12 Ne4. Shaw claims that Black is better, but Williams doesn't completely agree. I feel this is playable for White, but I would be lying to myself if I didn't consider Black's position to be a bit better.

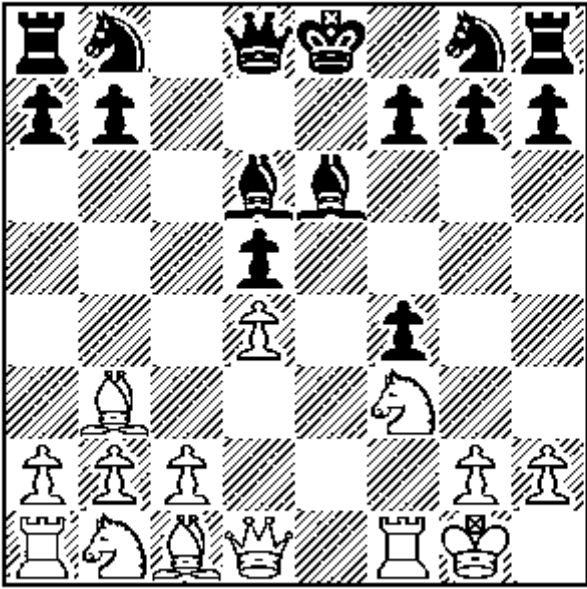
b) Bologan found another interesting resource in 3 ... Qh4+!? 4 Kf1 d6. The queen check used to be frowned upon due to White's quick development with Nf3, but I suspect that's because of a bunch of beautiful miniatures from the 19th Century. I think Bologan makes a great case for this variation as well, but just like with most King's Gambits, here White is looking for a messy, interesting game and doesn't really care about the theoretical evaluation. He has scored well in practical games, and as recently as this year, Ivanchuk won a great game against Karjakin after 5 Nc3 Be6 6 Bb3!.

### 4 d4

Alternatively:

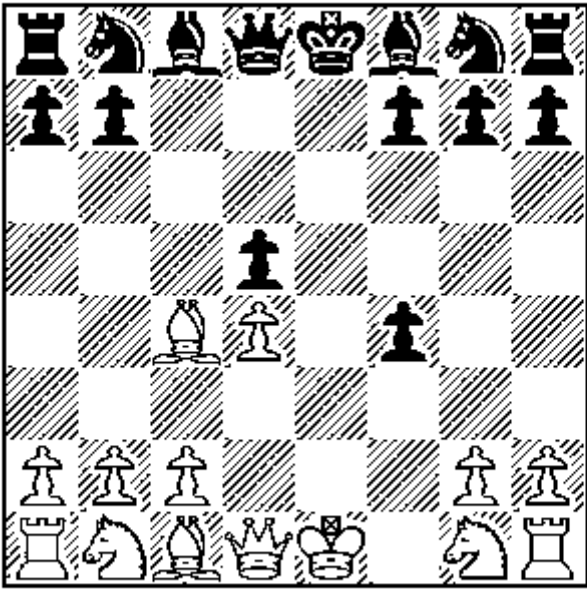
a) By far the most popular move is 4 Nc3 which prevents ... d5 for at least another move. This will be dealt after this illustrative game.

b) White could also start by playing 4 Nf3, but after 4 ... d5 5 exd5 cxd5 he has to play d2-d4 sooner or later, such as with 6 Bb3 (6 Bb5+ Nc6 just leaves the bishop badly placed on b5: for example, 7 0-0?? Qb6+ drops a piece immediately) 6 ... Be6 7 d4 Bd6 8 0-0.



The key move here is 8 ... h6!, which prevents a future Ng5, and in some cases Black could also play ... g5 himself. White doesn't even have the centre as compensation here, so Black is clearly better.

c) 4 Qe2 can simply be met with 4 ... Be7 followed by ... d5.  
**4 ... d5 5 exd5 cxd5**



When I first looked at these positions, I thought they were kind of dull and that Black really didn't have anything. However, this is quite far from the truth. Black will enjoy a much more harmonious position, White's light-squared bishop will be uncomfortably placed everywhere, and Black will always keep an edge with the weak e4-square.

**6 Bb3**

This allows Black to defend the f4-pawn.

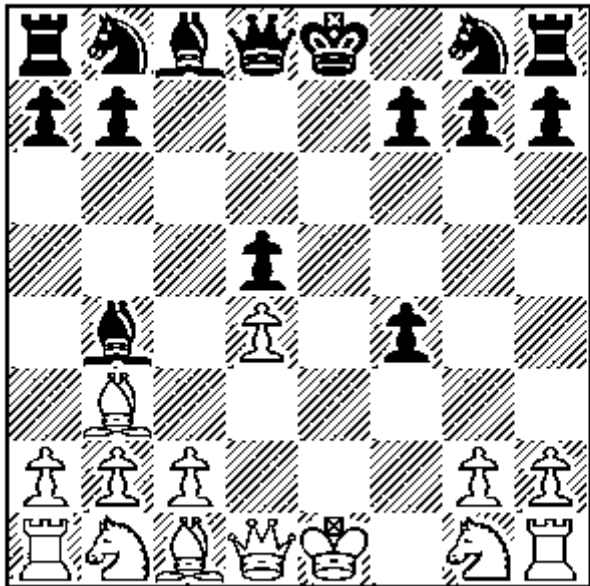
6 Bb5+ Nc6 7 Bxf4 at least regains the pawn on f4, but Black can use the awkward placement of the b5-bishop: 7 ... Qa5+!? 8 Nc3 Bb4! 9 Bd2 Nf6 10 Qe2+ Be6 11 Nf3 0-0 12 0-0 Ne4 13 Bxc6 Nxd2 14 Nxd2 bxc6 when Black is definitely better with the bishop-pair and strong pressure on White's queenside. Here 7 Qe2+!? might be an improvement, but Black is still better

after 7 ... Be7 8 Bxf4 Nf6 9 Nf3 0-0 10 0-0 Bg4 when we have such plans such ... Ne4 and ... f5, ... Re8 and ... Qb6.

### 6 ... Nf6?!

This is definitely not the most challenging approach. Black should try to make White's life much more difficult by defending the f4-pawn.

The immediate 6 ... Bd6 is in the right spirit, but White can try to disturb Black with 7 Nc3, putting pressure on the d5-pawn. The engine still thinks Black's position is great after sacrificing it for rapid development, but I think we have an even better solution in 6 ... Bb4+!.



This is not an idea commonly seen in the King's Gambit, but it seems to work well. Black simply wants to discourage Nc3:

a) After 7 Bd2 Qh4+ 8 Kf1 Bxd2 9 Qxd2 Nf6 Black just seems to be up a pawn to me. White usually gets quick development and control of the centre as compensation, but here he has nothing. Black will play ... Be6, ... 0-0 and just enjoy a much better position.

b) If White accepts the challenge with 7 c3 Bd6, his only critical continuation is 8 Bxd5, but Black gets a great position after 8 ... Qh4+ 9 Kf1 Ne7 when he can develop a very strong initiative on the kingside with ... 0-0 and ... Nf5 or ... Bg4. Black hasn't even sacrificed a pawn for this position.

c) 7 Nc3 Bxc3+ 8 bxc3 Qh4+ 9 Kf1 Be6 is great for Black. Even if White manages to regain his pawn on f4, the weaknesses on the queenside are permanent and the b3-bishop is a sad sight.

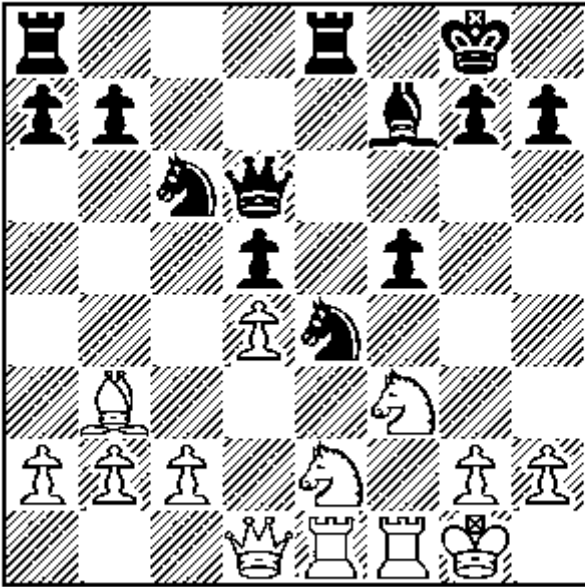
### 7 Bxf4 Bd6 8 Qe2+ Be6 9 Bxd6 Qxd6 10 Nf3 0-0 11 0-0 Nc6 12 Nc3

We have a fairly typical position, but I don't see any reason for Black to have returned the f4-pawn so easily. With that said, I still enjoy Black's position. The white queen on e2 is quite awkwardly placed and Black's control of the e4-square will always be useful.

### 12 ... Rfe8

I would probably prefer 12 ... Rae8 followed by ... Ne4 and ... f5, as in the game, when the rook on f8 would be useful.

### 13 Qd3 Ne4 14 Rae1 f5 15 Ne2 Bf7 16 Qd1



I definitely feel that Black has won the opening battle. The knight on e4 can be compared to the knight on e2, which has yet to find a good square, and White's bishop on b3 isn't doing much either. That said, White still has a pretty solid position.

**16 ... Re6**

Unnecessarily allowing counterplay. 16 ... Re7 looks more cautious to me.

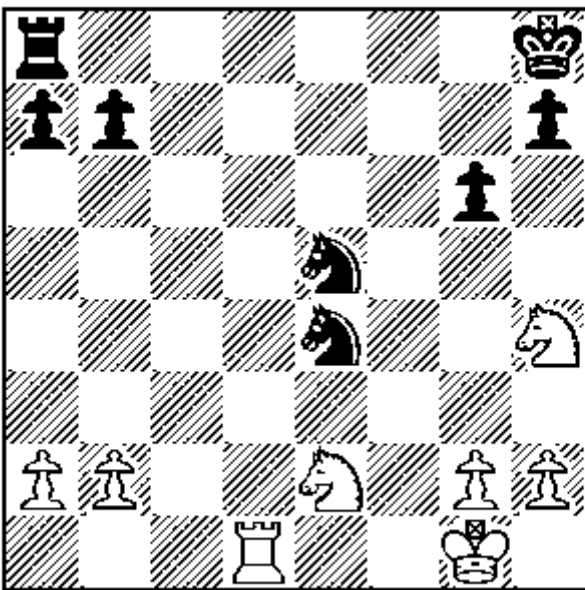
**17 c4! Re7 18 cxd5 Bxd5 19 Nh4!**

White changes the position through tactical means and Black isn't able to preserve his static advantages.

**19 ... g6 20 Rxf5! Bxb3**

20 ... gxf5? 21 Nxf5 followed by Bxd5 and Nxe7 gives White a clear advantage.

**21 Qxb3+ Kh8 22 Rd5 Qb4 23 Qxb4 Nxb4 24 Re5 Rxe5 25 dxe5 Nd3 26 Rd1 Nxe5**



We've reached an endgame which White should hold without too much difficulty, but the 200-point rating difference now reveals itself.

**27 Rd5**

The knight on h4 is clearly the problem piece and there was no reason to avoid 27 Nf3 Nxf3+ 28 gxf3 when the 'wrecked' pawn structure is absolutely nothing to worry about. Indeed, White

even has the more active rook.

**27 ... Re8 28 Nd4 Nf6 29 Rd6 Kg7 30 Nhf3 Nc4!**

And just like that, Black wins a pawn.

**31 Re6 Nxb2 32 Ne5 Na4 33 Nd7 Rxe6!?**

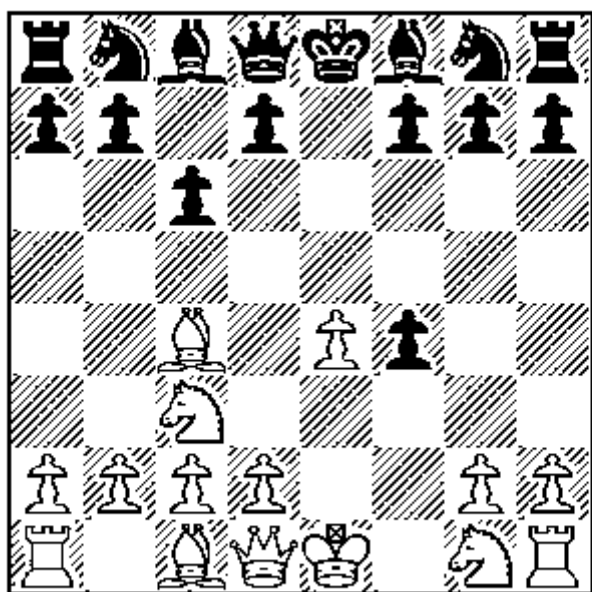
This move is well-calculated, since Black manages to obtain connected free pawns on the queenside after a while, but it looks like White is still inside the drawing zone.

**34 Nxe6+ Kf7 35 Nd8+ Ke7 36 Nxf6 Kxd8 37 Nxb7 Ke7! 38 Kf2 b5 39 Ng5 Nc3 40 h4 a5 41 Ke3 Nxa2 42 Ne4 a4 43 Kd2 a3 44 Nc5 b4 45 g4 Nc3 46 Nb3 a2 47 Kc2 Na4 48 h5 g5 49 Na1 Nc5 50 Kb2 b3 0-1**

I have no idea what happened here. Perhaps White lost on time, as I see no way for Black to make any progress if White sits and waits with 51 Kc3 Ke6 52 Kb2.

**4 Nc3**

**1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 Bc4 c6 4 Nc3**



In my database, this has been White's most popular reaction by far, but I think I've managed to find a very good, novel idea to put this line into doubt.

**4 ... b5!**

A surprising side-idea behind 3 ... c6. Black forces the play and wants to try and misplace White's pieces before breaking up the centre.

Black usually plays 4 ... Nf6 followed by ... d5 anyway, but this gives White decent chances after, let's say, 5 Bb3 d5 6 exd5 cxd5 7 d4 Bd6 and now 8 Nge2!, which is quite trendy and was used by Ivanchuk to beat Giri in 2013.

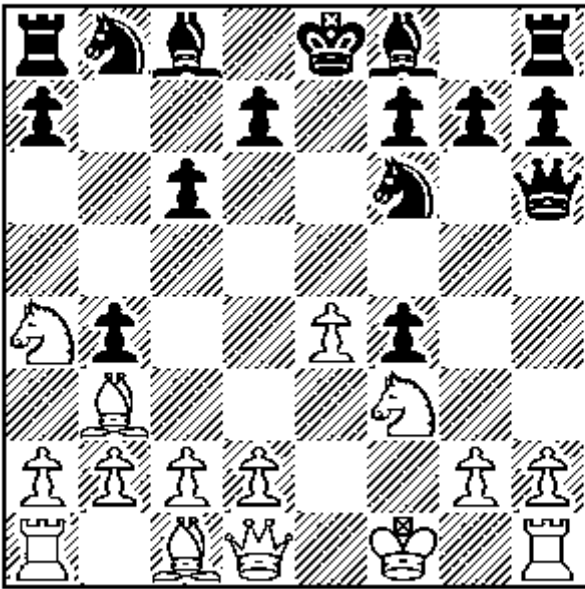
**5 Bb3 b4!**

As far as I'm concerned, this has never been played, not even in correspondence chess.

**6 Nce2**

6 Na4 definitely misplaces the knight, but Black still has to play accurately to prove an advantage. At first I felt like 6 ... d5 was the most principled continuation, seeing that the knight on a4 looks misplaced, but I realized that after 7 exd5 cxd5 8 Nf3 Nf6 9 d4, even though Black should be better, the knight on a4 actually springs to life via c5.

I like 6 ... Qh4+! better, and if 7 Kf1 Nf6 8 Nf3 Qh6.



It's quite common for players to shy away from the check on h4 in this variation, but sometimes for the wrong reasons. Here White's piece placement clearly shows that Black doesn't have anything to worry about and although the game is complicated, I would take the black pieces any day.

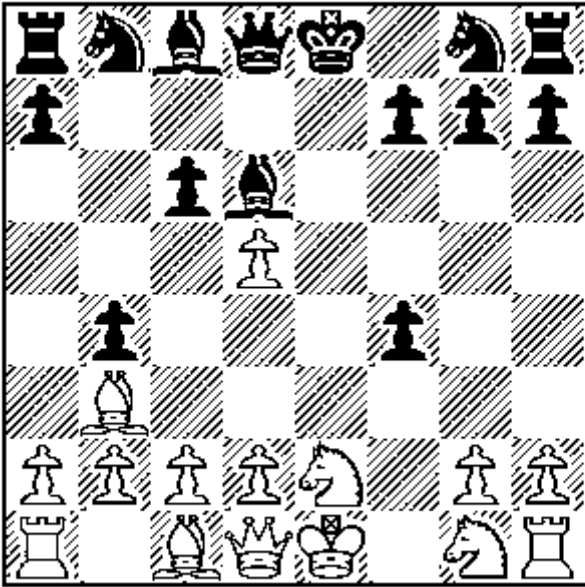
Play might continue 9 e5 (9 d3 is way too meek and 9 ... d5! just gives Black an excellent position) 9 ... Nd5 when White would obviously like to develop his queenside and take some space in the centre with d2-d4, but this isn't possible with the knight on d5. Therefore, White's only sensible idea is to kick the knight with the c-pawn first: 10 c4 bxc3 11 bxc3 Be7 12 c4 Nb6 13 d4. White has managed to claim a big pawn centre, but for what? Black will break it down with ... d5 and in the end White's king on f1 is just weak and Black is up a pawn. Indeed, after 13 ... 0-0 14 Kf2 Nxa4 15 Bxa4 d5 Black is clearly better if you ask me.

### 6 ... d5!

Black strikes in the centre without delay and tries to claim that White's pieces are awkwardly placed. It's quite strange that Black has only pushed pawns so far, but his pieces already have much more potential than White's.

### 7 exd5 Bd6!

I'd call this a gambit, but then I realized that Black has already grabbed a pawn on f4, so perhaps this should be dubbed a counter-gambit. I'd like to tempt White into taking the pawn on c6, but this is probably too greedy for him. Instead, White should prefer to develop quickly and try to regain the f4-pawn to free his own pieces.



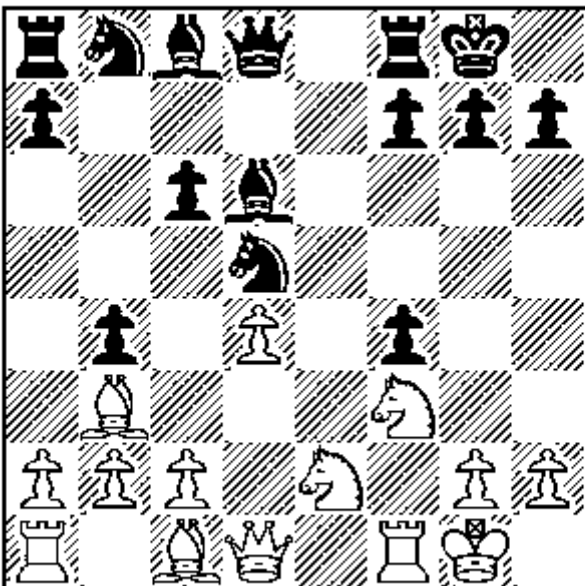
### 8 Nf3

8 dxc6?! looks like the wrong pawn to focus on: 8 ... Qh4+! (there's nothing dangerous about inserting this check now that Black is the one controlling the centre) 9 Kf1 Ne7 10 Nf3 Qf6 and I'd like to see White get his pawn back on f4 now. Black will castle, recapture the pawn on c6 and just have the much better game. White can barely develop his queenside.

### 8 ... Nf6 9 0-0 0-0 10 d4!

10 dxc6 might be better now that Black can't play ... Qh4+, but White's position is still very risky. Black simply develops actively while maintaining the pawn on f4 with 10 ... Nxc6 11 d4 Ba6 12 Re1 Qc7, whereas I don't see how White will easily develop his queenside.

### 10 ... Nxd5



Black finally takes the d5-pawn and now it's up to White to regain the one on f4.

### 11 Ne5

Trying to get to the f4-pawn by blocking the d6-bishop.

White could, of course, just take it back immediately with 11 Bxd5 cxd5 12 Bxf4, but after 12 ... Nc6 13 Bxd6 Qxd6 14 Qd2 a5 we have a minority attack on the queenside which creates difficulties for White. It's clear that Black's early b-pawn launch was successful.

### 11 ... Ba6 12 Bxf4!

White does best in taking the pawn immediately, as 12 Rf2 Nd7! is something he should avoid.

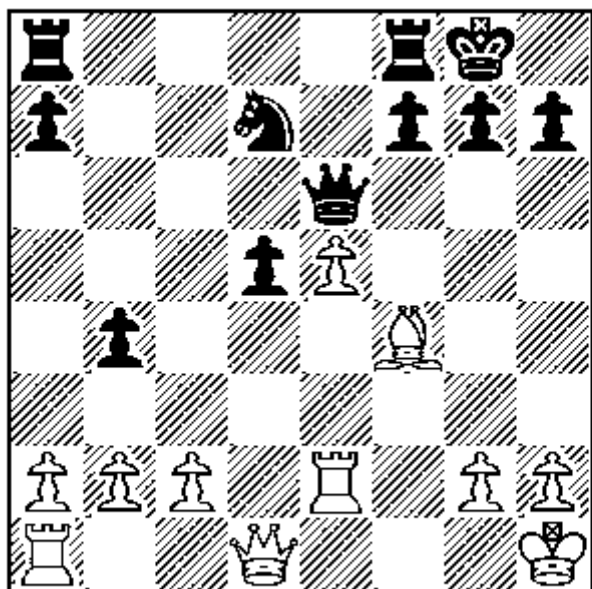
### 12 ... Bxe5!

Perhaps a bit surprising, but this exchange gives Black the opportunity to obtain a favourable pawn structure. Instead, 12 ... Nxf4 13 Rxf4 just opens up the gateway towards f7 and that's something a King's Gambit player would certainly know about.

### 13 dxe5

13 Bxe5? Ne3 wins the exchange.

13 ... Qb6+ 14 Kh1 Nd7 15 Bxd5 cxd5 16 Re1 Bxe2 17 Rxe2 Qe6



This is precisely the position Black was aiming for with 12 ... Bxe5. His position is very comfortable, whereas White's f4-bishop will have to defend the e5-pawn for the foreseeable future. Black will increase the pressure on the queenside with ... Rfc8, ... a5 and ... Nc5.

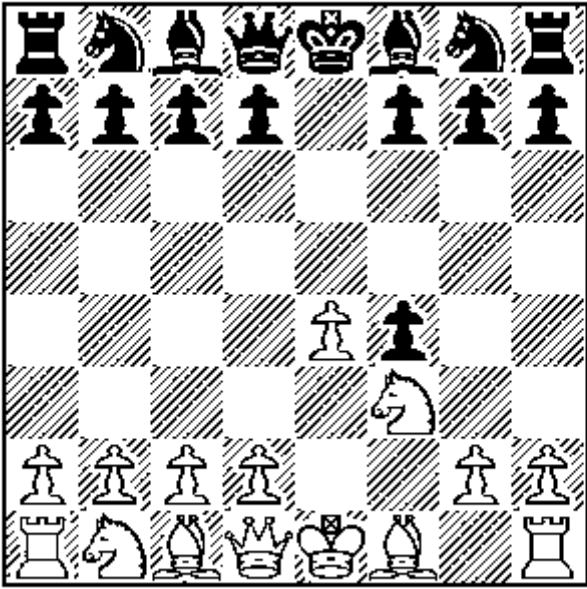
In our next game we will start covering 3 Nf3, and I think it's quite fascinating that a game played 94 years ago is still theoretically relevant today.

Game 58

**R.Retzi-A.Brinckmann**

Kiel 1921

1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 Nf3



### 3 ... Nf6!

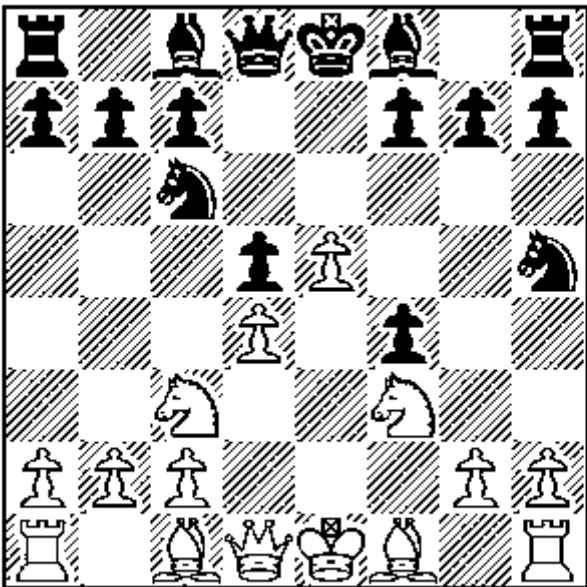
Nowadays most of the fuss is about 3 ... g5 and there is lots of analysis showing that perhaps Black is better. Still, White gets typical King's Gambit play which might be difficult to deal with practically, so why not pick something lesser known but still good for Black? After all, 3 ... Nf6 is a very logical move in all types of Open Games.

### 4 Nc3

The critical move is 4 e5, as we will see, but John Shaw mentioned 4 Nc3 as a decent alternative in his recent book. Alternatives like 4 d3 and 4 Qe2 will be covered in our next game.

### 4 ... d5 5 exd5

White could play 5 e5, but Black just seems to obtain a very good position after 5 ... Nh5! 6 d4 and now we have the important 6 ... Nc6!.



White's idea is generally to play Be2 and get to the knight on h5, but Black's clever ... Nc6 makes sure that this position works well for Black. Not only does the knight put pressure on d4, but Black could definitely use the option of castling long:

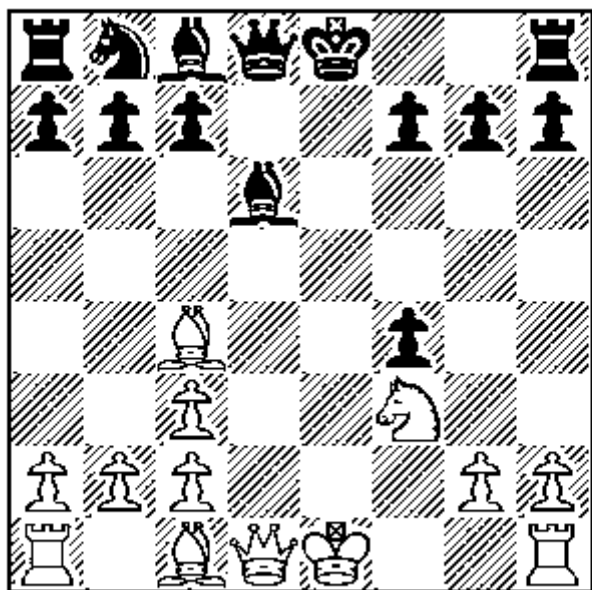
a) 7 g3 is a strange computer idea, but after 7 ... Bg4! (7 ... fxg3 8 Ng5! actually gives White a decent attack) 8 Bxf4 Nxf4 9 gxf4 Nxd4 10 Qxd4 Bxf3 11 Rg1 c6 there's no doubt that Black is

much better with an extra pawn and the bishop-pair.

b) 7 Be2 g5! (there's no reason to shy away from this now; White can't challenge the kingside with h2-h4 and the h5-knight can always spring to life on f5 via g7) 8 Nxc3 Qxc3 9 Bxh5 Qh4+! (9 ... Qxc3? 10 Bf3 is not to be recommended, as the white knight on d5 will cause all kind of havoc in Black's position) 10 Kf1 Be6 11 Bf3 f6! and Black successfully challenges White's centre in time. Indeed, 12 Nxd5 0-0-0! opens up the centre when the weakness of the king on f1 will become apparent. However, the immediate 11 ... 0-0-0? 12 Ne2! would allow White to consolidate his centre and put pressure on f4.

### 5 ... Nxd5 6 Nxd5

Shaw gives some very good and interesting analysis on the move 6 Bc4, but he himself doesn't believe it holds up if Black plays accurately: 6 ... Nxc3! 7 dxc3 (7 bxc3?! Bd6 will most likely lead to an endgame after 8 Qe2+ Qe7 9 Qxe7+ Kxe7 where White seems to be struggling for compensation, as Shaw points out) 7 ... Bd6!.



This is a risky strategy which leads to double-edged complications according to Shaw. After looking through his excellent analysis of the alternatives, I felt that even though Black can get a better position, White isn't far from a draw. Eventually I managed to find an improvement on Shaw's analysis: 8 0-0 0-0 9 Nd4 Qg5!. This move doesn't look like the most logical one, walking straight into a pin along the c1-h6 diagonal. However, Black has a clever idea in mind: 10 Qf3 Qc5!. This is where Black's queen was heading. Black gains a tempo attacking c4 while also planning to utilize a pin himself. Now:

a) 11 Bb3 Nc6 puts pressure on d4 and makes sure that White won't get his pawn back.

b) After 11 Bd5 Nd7 Black is threatening ... Ne5 so White is pretty much forced to play 12 b4 Qb6 13 Bxf4 Bxf4 14 Qxf4 Nf6. White has managed to regain his f4-pawn, but the weaknesses created with b2-b4 are permanent and Black will enjoy a good game with ... a5 and perhaps ... c5.

### 6 ... Qxd5 7 d4 Be7!

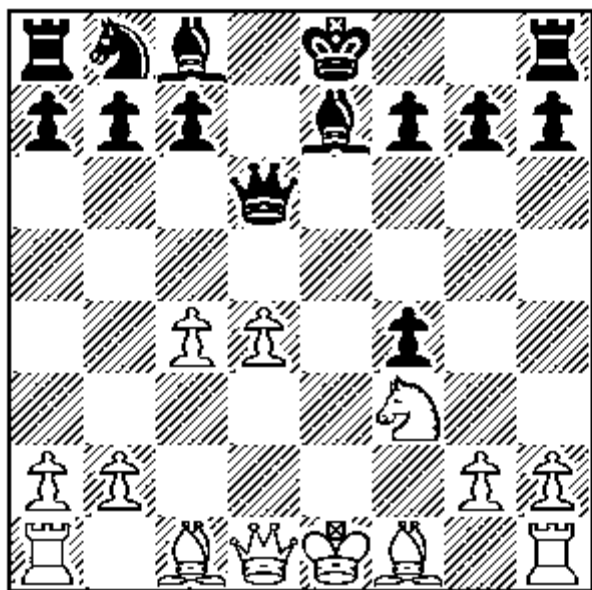
The best square for the bishop. It can help prepare ... g5, which is more useful than playing it to d6: 7 ... Bd6 8 c4 Qe4+ 9 Kf2 has scored incredibly well for White, who will develop quickly with Bd3 and Re1.

### 8 c4

Otherwise, 8 Bxf4?? immediately drops a piece to 8 ... Qe4+, while 8 Be2 g5! leaves White

short of ideas on how to regain the f4-pawn.

**8 ... Qd6!**



This move is omitted in Shaw's analysis (he only analyses 8 ... Qe4+ when White gains a lot of time attacking the queen further on), but it looks very good for Black. Basically Black intends to hang on to his pawn on f4 and on d6 the queen is flexibly placed.

**9 Bd3**

Alternatively:

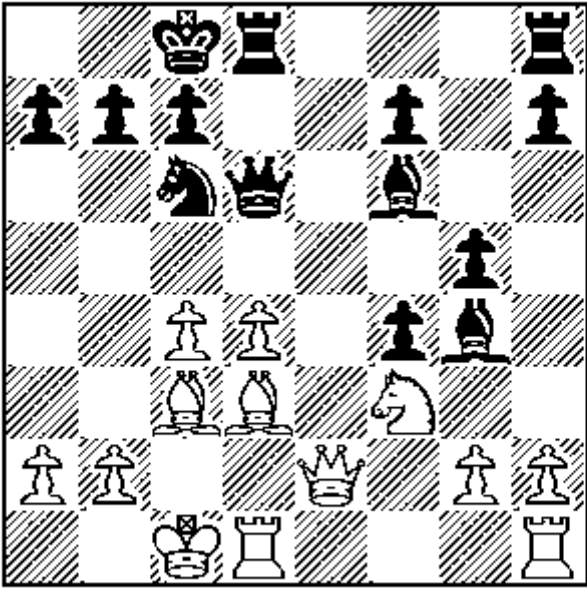
a) White could try to regain the pawn on f4 with 9 c5 Qf6 10 Qd2, but playing c4-c5 is terrible positionally. Black is simply better after 10 ... Be6 11 Qxf4 Bd5.

b) The immediate 9 Qd2 g5 is nothing to worry about either.

**9 ... g5**

Brinckmann's move is very sensible, protecting his extra pawn and maintaining a good position, but I'd be interested in playing 9 ... Nc6!? as well, putting pressure on the d4-pawn. After 10 d5 Ne5 11 Nxe5 Qxe5+ 12 Qe2 f6 we will get an endgame and following ... g5 Black seems to be a clean pawn up.

**10 Qe2 Bg4 11 Bd2 Nc6! 12 Bc3 0-0-0 13 0-0-0 Bf6**



Some annotator at ChessBase gives the evaluation as unclear at this point, but I don't think it's that unclear. White lacks serious compensation for his pawn.

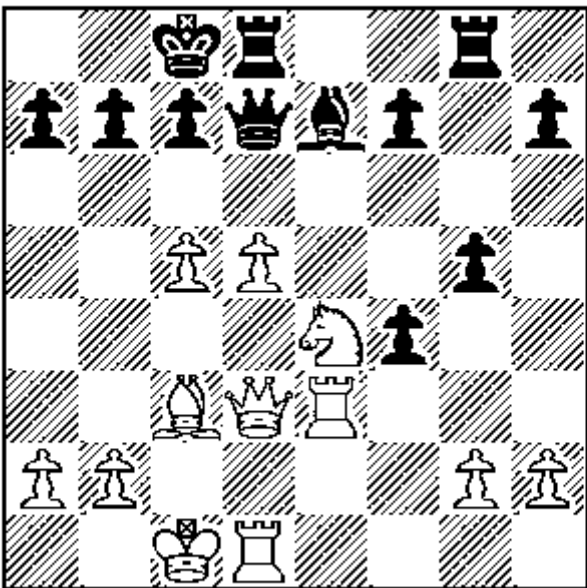
**14 Rhe1 Ne7?**

This doesn't look right. I don't see what's wrong with 14 ... Nxd4, grabbing a second pawn. Moreover, I thought it was still the custom for players in the early 20th Century to accept sacrifices.

**15 Qf2 Bf5 16 Qc2 Bxd3 17 Qxd3 Qd7?! 18 Nd2?!**

White could have grabbed the initiative with 18 d5! Bxc3 19 Qxc3 when Black has to consider Nxg5, Ne5 and Qf6. Black's kingside is quite weak.

**18 ... Nf5 19 Ne4 Be7 20 d5 Rhg8 21 c5 Ne3? 22 Rxe3!**



A strong exchange sacrifice, not losing any time and eliminating Black's best piece. White's attack should now be decisive.

**22 ... fxe3 23 c6 bxc6 24 Qa6+ Kb8 25 Bd4 c5 26 Bxc5 c6 27 Rd3 Ka8 28 dxc6?**

Spoiling a beautiful attack. 28 d6! should win, but only if White finds the very cool 28 ... e2 29 Kd2! when everything is protected and covered.

**28 ... Qc7 29 Rxe3 Bxc5 30 Nxc5 Rb8! 31 Qb7+?? 0-1**

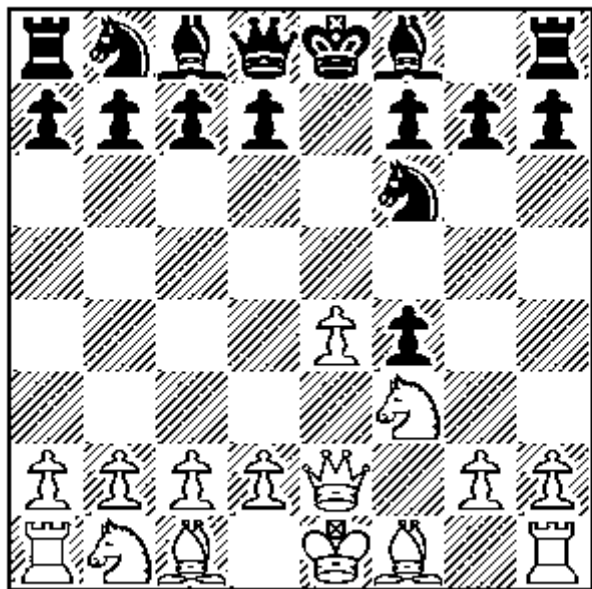
A terrible blunder, but White's position wasn't good anyway. I assume Reti had planned 31 ... Rxb7 32 cxb7+ Kb8 33 Na6+, but then realized that this wasn't allowed.

Game 59

**V.Budde-K.Goehring**

German League 1985

1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 Qe2



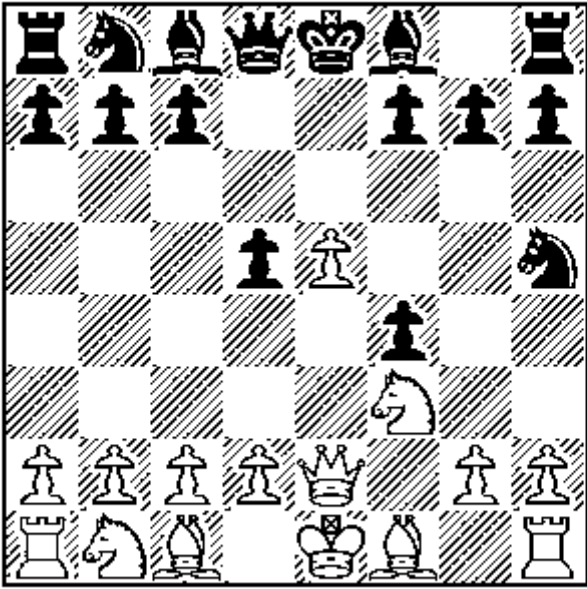
My database shows that Budde very rarely plays the King's Gambit; he had only played it once 15 years prior to this game. As such, I suspect that 3 ... Nf6 came as a surprise to him and 4 Qe2 was improvisation, possibly to avoid any kind of preparation from the black player. The problem is that the queen on e2 really doesn't do anything. Most importantly, it doesn't stop Black from breaking in the centre.

Another meek move that won't scare Black away is 4 d3 when Black can simply continue in the usual manner with 4 ... d5 5 e5 Nh5. As usual, White's main trick 6 Be2 g5 7 Nxg5 just works well for Black because of 7 ... Qxg5 8 Bxh5 Qh4+! 9 Kf1 Be6 when Black will play ... Nc6 and ... 0-0-0 with a much better position.

**4 ... d5! 5 e5**

The engine thinks that White's best bet is to play 5 d3 dxe4 6 Bxf4, but after 6 ... Bd6 7 Bxd6 Qxd6 it's clear that White will be left with a weak isolated pawn on the e-file and Black will have the better development. In my opinion White does better by keeping a complicated position, at least in a practical sense.

**5 ... Nh5**



The standard square for the black knight in the King's Gambit, at least how I treat it. The knight might look strange here, but it paralyses White's kingside and will always be able to return to the centre after perhaps ... g5 and ... Ng7-f5.

### 6 b3

Not very common, but the usual development doesn't seem to work well either. In fact, developing the bishop to b2 makes a lot of sense since the bishop won't do much on the c1-h6 diagonal. This way, the bishop can at least discourage ... g5.

After something like 6 d4 g5 7 Nc3 Nc6, I don't know how White is supposed to get any compensation for his pawn.

### 6 ... Be7

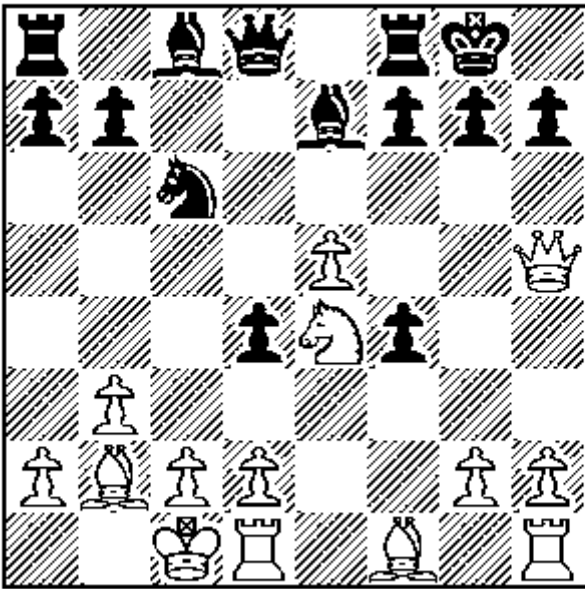
Developing, but I still think Black can play 6 ... g5 7 Bb2 Rg8 without being too worried.

### 7 Bb2 0-0 8 Nc3 c5 9 0-0-0 d4!

Black plays very actively and sensibly. White's development looks like a joke – just look at his bishops on f1 and b2! Still, the game is complicated and it's easy to go astray when not paying attention to the details in this complicated opening.

### 10 Ne4 g6

Defending against the threat of Nxd5 when the knight on h5 would be en prise, but I'm not sure it's such a big threat anyway. After, say, 10 ... Nc6 11 Nxd4 cxd4 12 Qxh5 ...



... Black could develop quite a strong attack after 12 ... Qa5 13 Kb1 Be6 followed by ... Rfc8, ... Ba3 and ... Nb4.

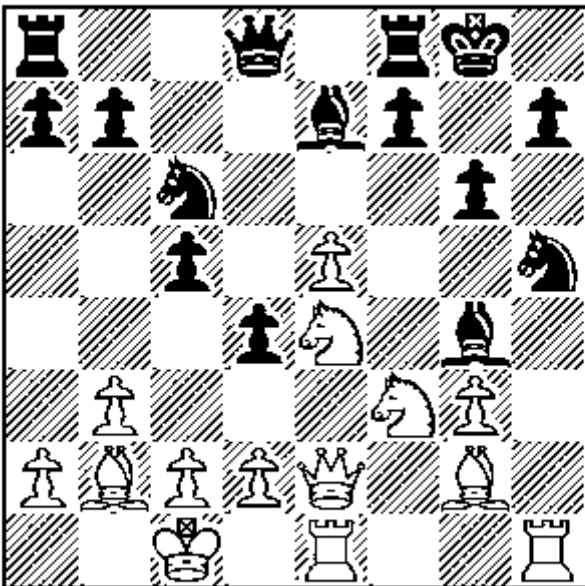
**11 g3!?**

White needs to begin some counterplay before he's completely overrun.

**11 ... Nc6 12 Re1 fxe3?!**

Black should still be better, but I see no reason to open the h-file. I prefer 12 ... a5, attacking on the queenside. If White tries to stop us with 13 a4, we get a great square with 13 ... Nb4 when we have all kinds of threats, like ... d3 or even ... b5 at some point.

**13 hxg3 Bg4 14 Bg2?**



After this White runs into serious trouble.

White could have unravelled with 14 Qg2! when Nf2 will create some counterplay on the kingside. Black can play greedily with 14 ... Bxf3 15 Qxf3 Nxe5, but after 16 Qg2 White does have some serious counterplay with g2-g4 and an attack along the h-file.

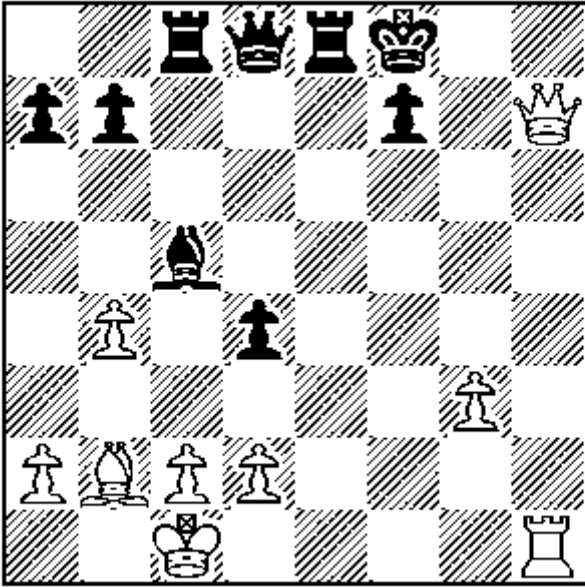
**14 ... Nxe5!**

It's not only good, but obtains full points for bravery. Eating pawns requires bravery and accurate calculation, but Black has seen that the complications favour him.

**15 Nxc5 Bxf3 16 Bxf3 Nxf3 17 Qxf3 Bxc5 18 Re5 Rc8 19 Rexh5 gxh5 20 Qxh5 Re8**

This position had to be foreseen when capturing the pawn on move 14, and seeing that White's attack will fail isn't easy to realize that far ahead.

**21 Qxh7+ Kf8 22 b4**



From this point, White played on a full rook down. I don't think it's very interesting for us to analyse, but I'll leave the rest of the game in case you want to play through it.

**22 ... Bb6 23 a4 Qf6 24 a5 Bc7 25 Qd3 Be5 26 Rf1 Qg7 27 b5 Re6 28 Kb1 Qxg3 29 Qe4 Qg6 30 Rf5 Rce8 31 Qf3 Kg8 32 Qh3 Bg7 33 Rf3 Re1+ 34 Ka2 Qe6+ 35 Qxe6 R8xe6 36 Kb3 R1e2 37 d3 Rg2 38 Rf5 b6 39 a6 Re5 40 Rxe5 Bxe5 41 Ba3 f5 42 Kc4 Rxc2+ 43 Kd5 Bc7 44 Kxd4 Kf7 45 Bb4 Ke6 46 Be1 Rb2 47 Kc4 f4 48 d4 f3 49 d5+ Kd7 0-**

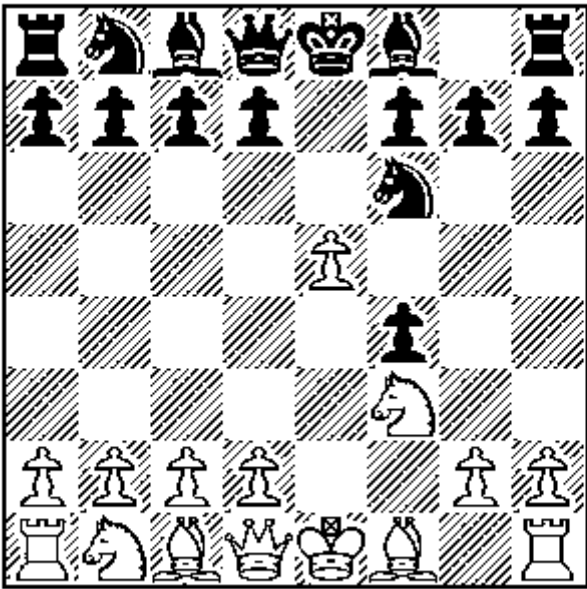
A very convincing and good game by Goehring, who was rewarded for his accurate and brave play.

Game 60

**S.Graham-D.Cumming**

Correspondence 2010

**1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 e5**



Finally, we reach the most critical continuation, immediately seizing space in the centre and kicking the knight on f6.

**4 ... Nh5!**

This is where we want our knight in this variation. It might look awkwardly placed, but it tends to paralyse White's kingside as well as the bishop on c1.

**5 d4**

Undoubtedly the most natural continuation. White has an impressive pawn centre which will attract a lot of King's Gambit players, but the problem is that these pawns really aren't doing much. Black will be able to challenge White's centre without any major trouble.

Shaw recommends 5 Be2, which will be covered after this game.

**5 ... d6! 6 Bc4**

Instead:

a) 6 exd6 Bxd6 is no problem for Black. White is nowhere near getting his pawn back and Black will castle with a good position.

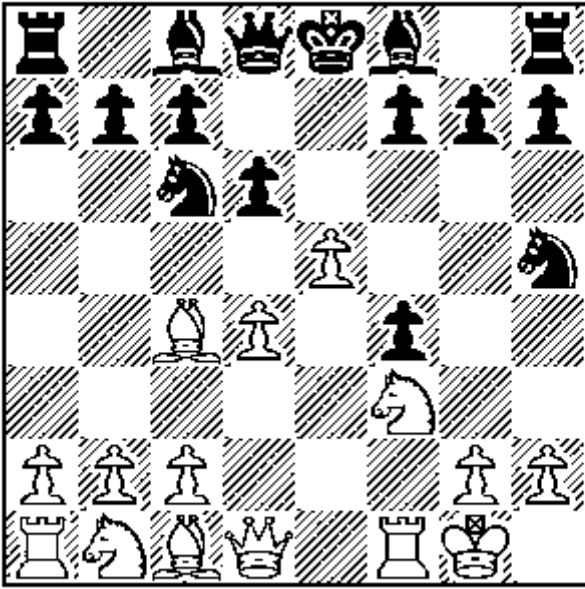
b) As Shaw points out, 6 Qe2 contains a neat trap, but after the clever 6 ... d5! the queen just looks silly on e2. However, Black should definitely avoid 6 ... Be7?? 7 exd6 Qxd6 8 Qb5+!, picking up the knight on h5.

**6 ... Nc6**

Keeping up the pressure on the e5-pawn.

Note that White's last move contained another cheap trap: 6 ... dxe5? 7 Bxf7+! Kxf7 8 Nxe5+ would be quite nasty to fall for.

**7 0-0**



### 7 ... g6!

A strong move, not to fianchetto the bishop on g7, but simply to stabilize the knight on h5. Black could definitely consider releasing the tension in the centre immediately, but White has the trick 7 ... dxe5 8 Nxe5 Nxe5 9 Re1! when all the threats against e5, h5 and f4 make sure that White gets his material back without too many concessions. We would much rather force White to get a pawn on e5 than a rook.

Black could also consider 7 ... Bg4, but the dangers are that White gets to play h3 in a favourable situation where Black has to give up the bishop-pair and perhaps also the f4-pawn. For example, if White plays like in the game with 8 exd6 Bxd6 9 Re1+, Black would probably have to lose some time with 9 ... Be7, since 9 ... Ne7?! 10 h3! Bf5 11 Ng5 is awkward.

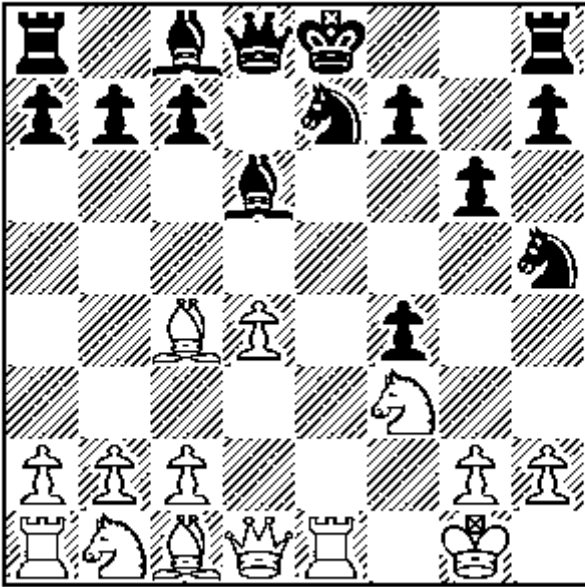
### 8 exd6

A sensible move, opening up the centre on White's own terms, but not forced:

a) If White plays some kind of neutral developing move like 8 Nc3, we'd love to give him a weak pawn on e5 with 8 ... dxe5. White should probably create some complications with 9 d5, but Black is spoilt for choice with 9 ... Bc5+ 10 Kh1 Nd4 or 9 ... Na5, just hunting the bishop.

b) 8 Re1 is good preparation for opening up the e-file, but Black can change tack. We'll simply keep the position closed with 8 ... d5! followed by ... Be6 when the rook on e1 looks rather silly. White is still far from regaining the f4-pawn and Black can always consider increasing the support with ... g5.

### 8 ... Bxd6 9 Re1+ Ne7!

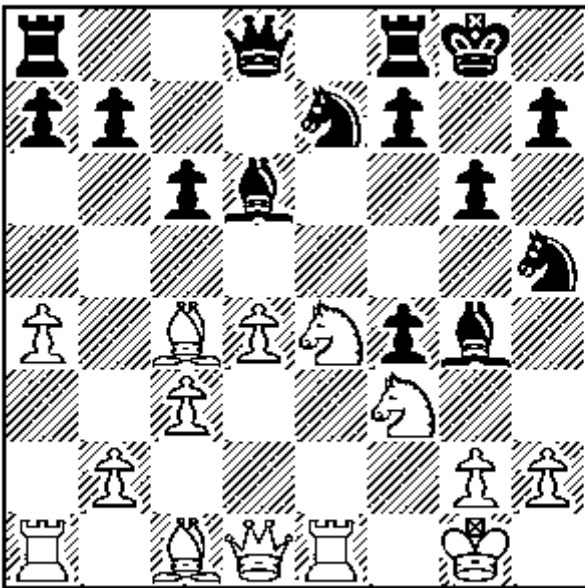


The bishop on d6 is ideally placed, so we'd prefer not to move it again. Meanwhile, the knight on c6 wasn't doing much, but from e7 it can reach f5 or d5.

**10 Nbd2 0-0 11 Ne4 Bg4**

Definitely an annoying pin. It also leaves the f5-square open for Black's knight on e7 when all kinds of kingside attacking ideas come to mind.

**12 c3 c6 13 a4**



I know, this is a correspondence game and my computer likes this move, but seriously, if White has to play these kinds of moves then it's a big sign that something has gone terribly wrong. At the same time, I have a hard time suggesting a better plan for White.

**13 ... Nd5 14 Qb3**

Seeing that White runs into huge trouble with his weak kingside in the game, perhaps he should start with 14 Nf2 Be6, but to my eyes Black just seems to be a pawn up.

**14 ... Bxf3 15 gxf3 Nb6 16 Bd3 Rb8!**

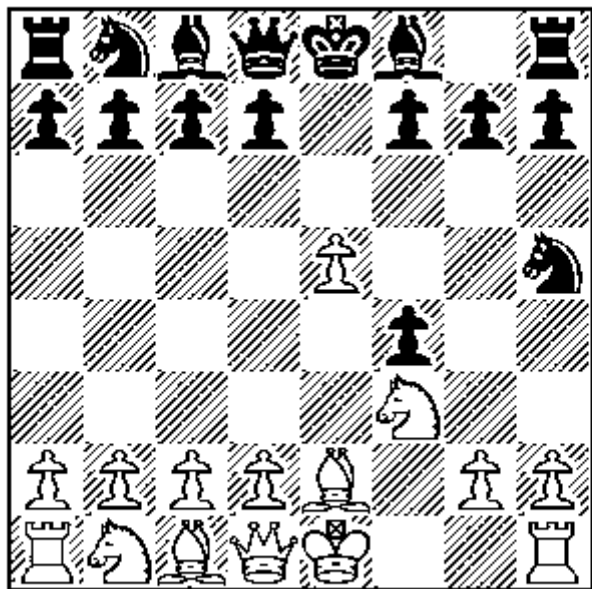
I always think twice before I play this kind of move, but defending b7 looks like the best idea. Now White's counterplay runs out in the sand.

**17 Bd2 Bc7 18 Re2 Nd5 19 Bc4 Ne3! 20 Bxe3 fxe3 21 Rxe3 Kh8 0-1**

White is helpless against Black's coming kingside attack with ... f5, ... Nf4 and ... Qg5. In a normal tournament game, I think it would be too early to resign, but it's understandable in a correspondence game. Only surviving 21 moves as White in a correspondence game without making any serious mistakes is quite noteworthy, but getting a bad position straight out of the opening never helps.

**5 Be2**

**1 e4 e5 2 f4 exf4 3 Nf3 Nf6 4 e5 Nh5 5 Be2**



Finally, we reach something we can dub a main line. It's not really White's most popular continuation, but it is the recommendation of John Shaw. As he points out, White eyes the knight on h5 while preparing to castle, but as my analysis shows, this isn't enough for an equal game. Black will still be able to successfully attack the white centre.

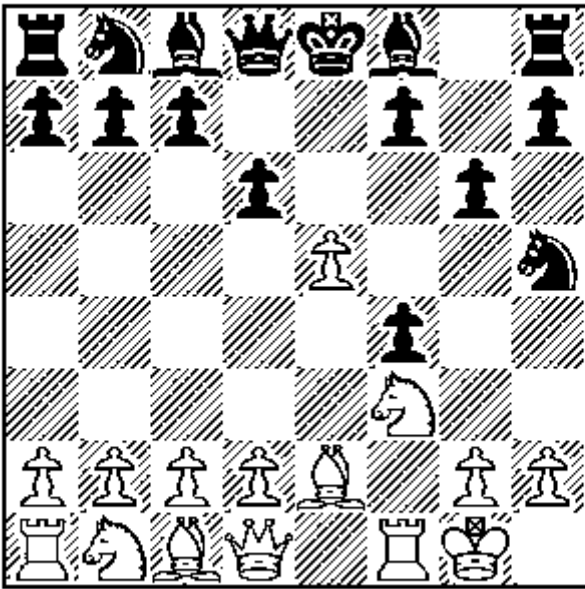
**5 ... d6!**

Fighting White's spearhead on e5.

**6 0-0**

Just as in our main line, Black would like to make sure that White is left with a weak pawn on e5. The problem for White is that if he plays 6 d4 dxe5 7 Nxe5, Black can just go 7 ... Qh4+ when the white king has to enter the limelight.

**6 ... g6!**



Giving the knight on h5 some very valuable support. Meanwhile, Black will do everything to attack e5 with ... Nc6 and perhaps even ... Bg7.

Obviously, 6 ... dxe5 is playable, but 7 Nxe5 Qd4+ 8 Kh1 Qxe5 doesn't win a piece since White has 9 Bxh5.

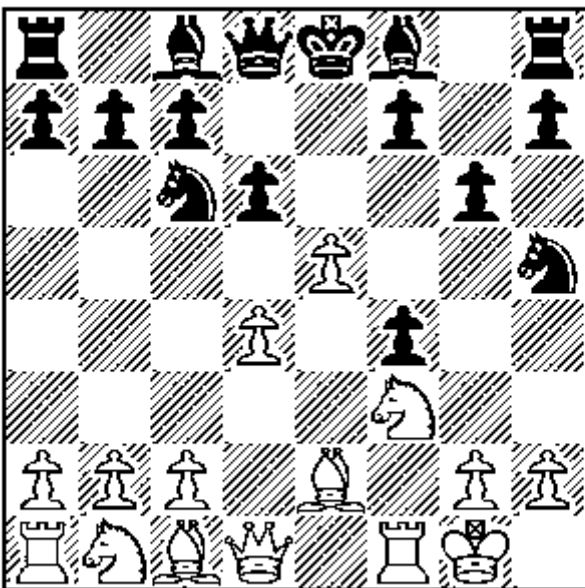
**7 d4**

Alternatively:

a) 7 Re1 also looks sensible, putting a rook on the soon-to-be-opened e-file. If Black plays 7 ... Bg7 instead, he cannot recapture on d6 after 8 exd6. My suggestion is to continue 7 ... Nc6! 8 exd6 (the same goes for 8 d4 Bg7 9 exd6 Qxd6) 8 ... Bxd6, seeing that White doesn't have any dangerous discovered checks along the e-file.

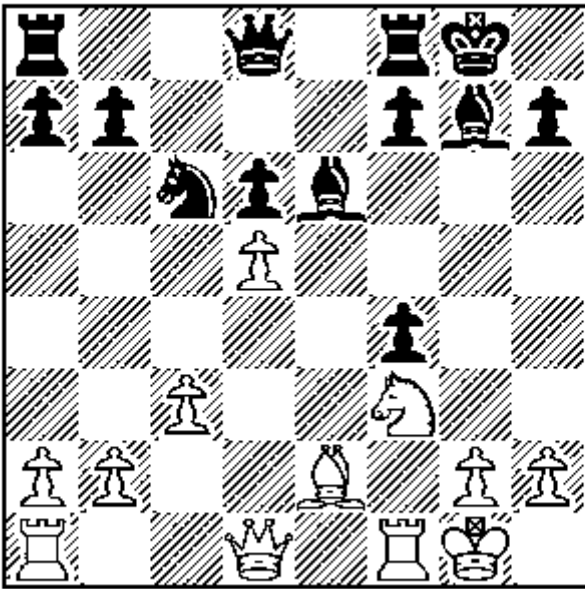
b) If White plays 7 Nc3 Black should respond with 7 ... Nc6, transposing back to Shaw's line and our main one after 8 d4. On the other hand, 7 ... dxe5? 8 Nxe5 Qd4+ 9 Kh1 Qxe5 actually loses to 10 Re1!

**7 ... Nc6**



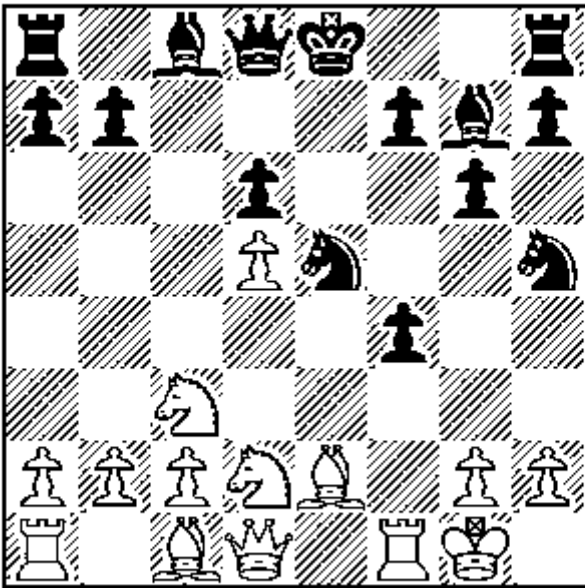
I like putting maximum pressure on e5 with ... Nc6 first. That's because if White decides to release the tension with exd6, Black would be happy to recapture with his bishop.





Finally, we reach the critical position. White can capture either piece, but regardless I believe in Black's prospects. Black is still up a pawn and it's not clear how White will regain it: for instance, 15 dxc6 (15 dxe6 fxe6 followed by ... d5 just looks like an extra pawn for Black) 15 ... bxc6 16 Qd2 Be5 and White can't get his pawn back.

**10 ... Ne5 11 Nd2**



At this point, Shaw writes "White will restore material equality, but I cannot claim any advantage as Black's piece coordination is fine." In fact, I think it's even worse than Shaw describes it, especially after the strong:

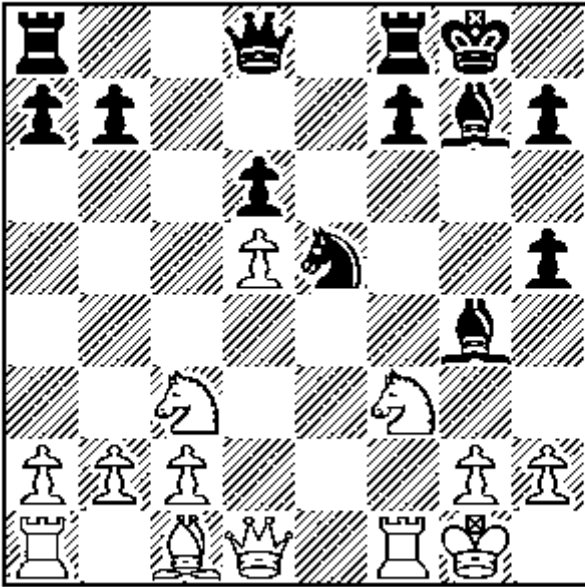
**11 ... 0-0! 12 Bxh5 gxh5 13 Rxf4**

13 Qxh5?? Bg4 awkwardly traps White's queen.

**13 ... Ng6**

I believe any King's Indian player would recognize the great power of Black's coordination here. The bishop on g7 is a monster and White's development is a joke. In fact, Black will get even more time for development after ...

**14 Rf1 Bg4 15 Nf3 Ne5**



... when he can loosen up White's kingside further by taking on f3 or perhaps going ... h5-h4-h3.

### Conclusion

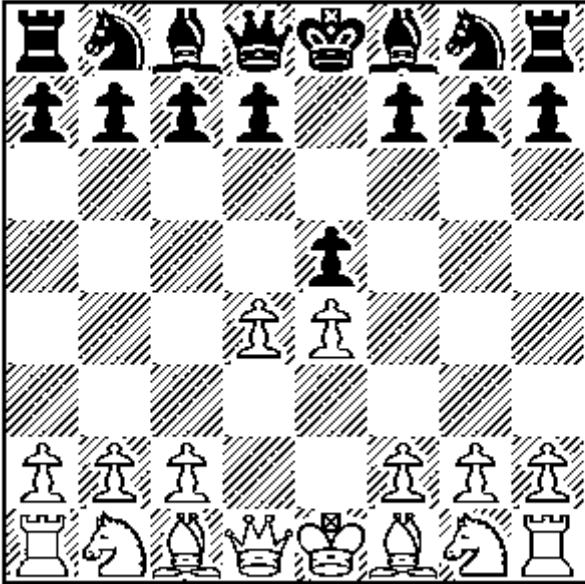
There's no doubt that the King's Gambit is alive, but that doesn't mean Black should curl up in a ball and cry. Instead of searching for a complete refutation of the King's Gambit, I'm satisfied with being able to press for an advantage and I've done this by picking variations that are less well known than the established main lines. After all, playing 3 ... g5 in the King's Gambit is exactly what White wants. The opening is more about getting double-edged play than an objective advantage, and we should welcome this kind of attitude which definitely leads to some interesting games.

Against 3 Bc4, I really like my new idea with 3 ... c6 4 Nc3 b5!?. Even though it might not be better than any other well-known antidote, it gives Black pleasant play and White needs to play very carefully to get out of the opening alive. Against 3 Nf3 I've recommended a relatively unknown set-up with 3 ... Nf6 4 e5 Nh5, where the knight could play a useful role even though it doesn't initially look like it. The game remains complicated, but the onus is on White to prove compensation and I think objectively that Black's chances are very good.

# Chapter Ten

## The Centre Game

1 e4 e5 2 d4

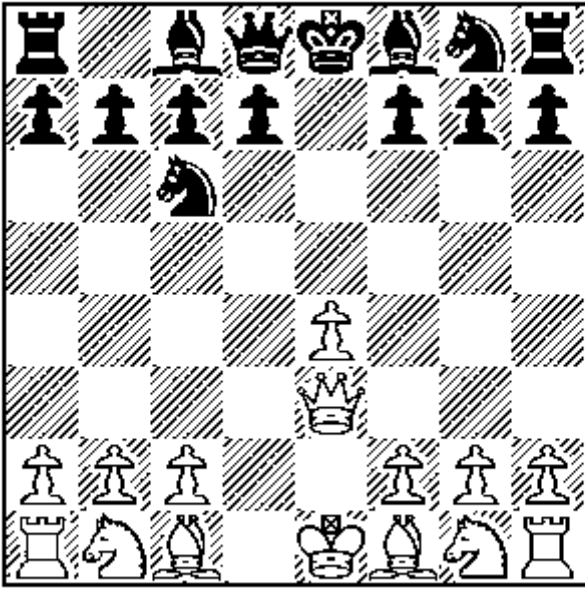


The Centre Game is another of those romantic openings where White can get a surprisingly strong attack if Black isn't careful. These days, it's not a common opening at all, since Black has worked out many successful antidotes.

### Theoretical Introduction

The Centre Game can be divided into two parts, one where White recaptures on d4 with the queen, and one where White keeps sacrificing pawns for development and open lines.

After 1 e4 e5 2 d4 exd4 3 Qxd4 Nc6 White's most common continuation is 4 Qe3 with the idea of switching the queen to the kingside and castling queenside.

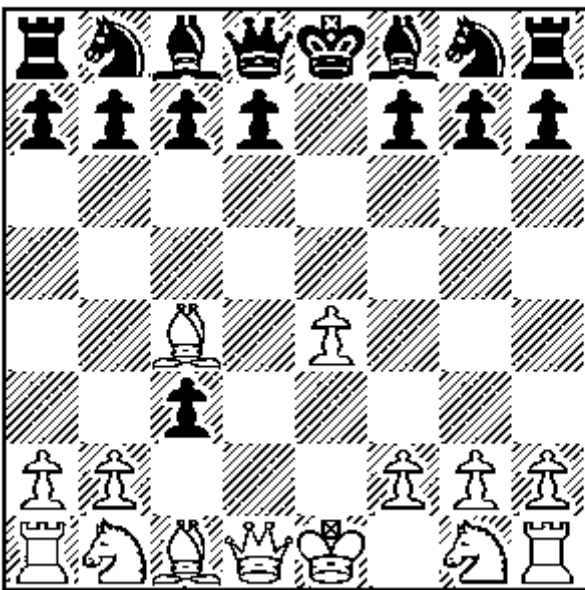


Many games have continued 4 ... Nf6 5 Nc3 Bb4 6 Bd2 0-0 7 0-0-0 Re8 8 Qg3, but now Black has started to realize the strength in 8 ... Nxe4!, instead of the more famous and flashy 8 ... Rxe4. This is covered in Game 61. An old favourite of mine, 4 Qa4, is covered in Game 62 but it's not good at all.

Another way of playing the Centre Game is through **3 c3**. The standard reaction these days is to respond with 3 ... d5 and enjoy an equal game, but I'm not satisfied with equality; I want to play for more with 3 ... dxc3. You might think this is very risky, but at the same time Black's position is solid and it is very frustrating for White to try and prove compensation.

In Game 63 we see White recapture on c3 with 4 Nxc3 when I think Black should play ... Nc6, ... Bc5, ... d6 and ... Nge7, not providing White with any targets. It's not so easy for White to create compensation for the pawn.

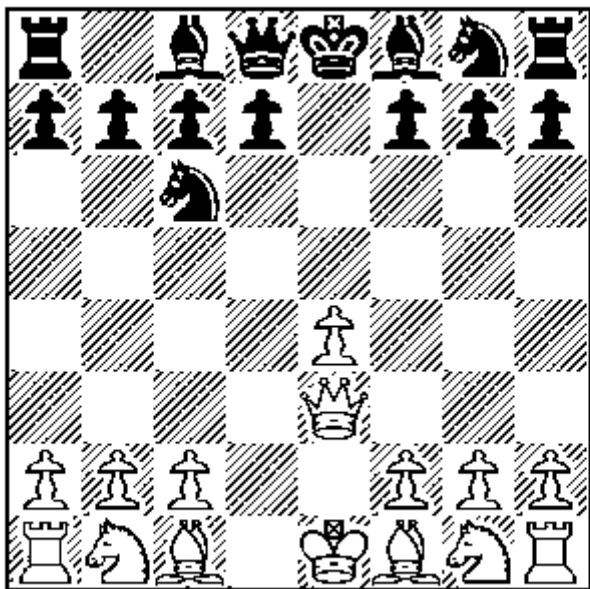
The most aggressive continuation is 4 Bc4.



And now we accept a second pawn sacrifice! Game 64 covers those variations where White puts his knight on d2 in response to our 4 ... cxb2 5 Bxb2 Nc6 6 Nf3 Bb4+ and Game 65 covers those variations where White puts his knight on c3.

**1 e4 e5 2 d4 exd4 3 Qxd4**

Beginners are usually taught to avoid this kind of move, developing the queen early and allowing to Black gain time while developing. In general, I think this is a good rule to follow and I wouldn't recommend this variation for White, but it does lead to some original positions which are worth knowing about.

**3 ... Nc6 4 Qe3**

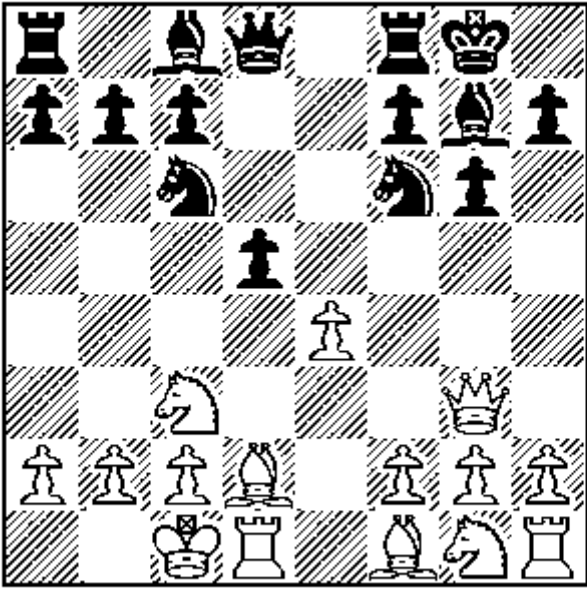
Most likely the best square for White's queen. It's not immediately exposed, it prevents ... Bc5 and in the future White can create some kind of attack on the queenside when it's useful to have the queen close to the kingside.

**4 ... Nf6**

I also think Black can obtain a good game with the move 4 ... g6, which has been played quite a bit. It leads to some original positions, but I think Black has better chances of fighting for the advantage with our main line. White usually goes 5 Bd2 Bg7 6 Nc3 Nf6 7 0-0-0 0-0 and now he has a few different moves:

a) Most common is 8 Bc4, but White has scored terribly after 8 ... Re8 when Black can hunt down the c4-bishop with ... Na5 and ... d5 when the white queen on e3 is awkwardly placed.

b) Nepomniachtchi always prefers 8 Qg3, usually following up with h2-h4 at some point, engaging in some kind of kingside attack. However, in a blitz game in Beijing last year against Peter Leko he ran into trouble after 8 ... d5!.



The game continued 9 Bg5 d4 10 f3 h6 11 Bxf6 Bxf6 12 Nd5 Be5 13 f4 Bg7 followed by ... Be6 with a very promising position for Black. White's knight on d5 is difficult to maintain.

### 5 Nc3

Alternatively:

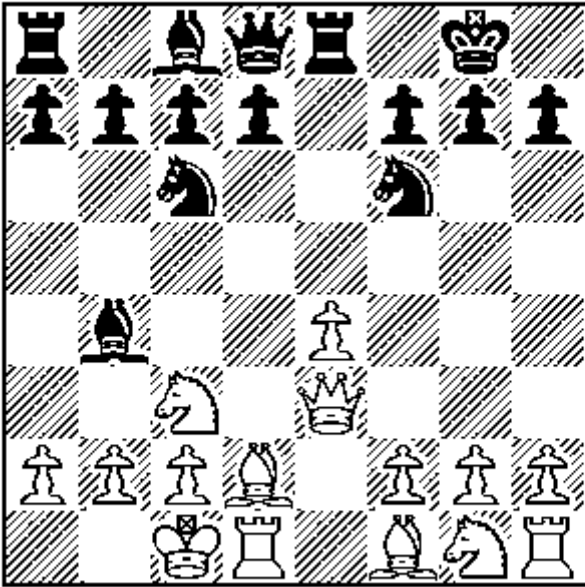
a) Sometimes White begins with 5 Bd2, which is a well-known trick to confuse the black player. The established continuation is to go 5 ... Bb4 since White doesn't want to play c2-c3, so he has nothing better than 6 Nc3, transposing to our main line. In the game J.Strasser-M.Lokander, Bad Wiessee 2011, I actually did get confused and responded with 5 ... Be7 6 Nc3 d5!. Moreover, after 7 exd5 Nxd5 8 Nxd5 Qxd5 I got a good initiative, so I don't really see what's so tricky about White's move order. This even looks like a better response than transposing to our main line.

b) For a long time, I was oblivious to the move 5 e5, even though it actually makes a lot of sense. Luckily for us, the tactics works in our favour, even though it might not look at first like it: 5 ... Ng4 6 Qe4 Ngxe5 7 f4 (it looks like Black is losing a piece, and he is, but we get to develop very quickly and White is definitely the one under pressure here) 7 ... d5! 8 Qe2 Bg4 9 Nf3 Bc5! and if White is greedy and plays 10 fxe5, we quickly get a winning attack with 10 ... Nd4 followed by ... Bxf3 and ... Qh4+. Definitely something to keep in mind.

### 5 ... Bb4

Without a doubt the best square for the bishop. It's an active square, puts pressure on White's centre and leaves the e-file open for further pressure against the e-pawn.

### 6 Bd2 0-0 7 0-0-0 Re8



It's basically at this point that theory branches out a little bit, but it's quite clear that if White wants anything, he has to go 8 Qg3 when some interesting complications arise. Black's last move puts more pressure on e4, White's vulnerable point especially since the queen is awkwardly placed on e3. With 8 Qg3, White tries to sacrifice the pawn to open up lines towards the black king and also to develop quickly, in the spirit of Frank Marshall.

### 8 Qg3

I faced 8 Bc4 in a rapid game back in 2011 and there's really not much to say about the move. The bishop is likely to be kicked and then Black can develop a strong initiative either in the centre or on the queenside:

a) One idea that has worked well in practice is 8 ... Na5 9 Be2 d5, which is definitely principled, but I feel like White can equalize tactically with the clever 10 Nxd5! Nxd5 11 Qd3! when Black has pieces hanging everywhere.

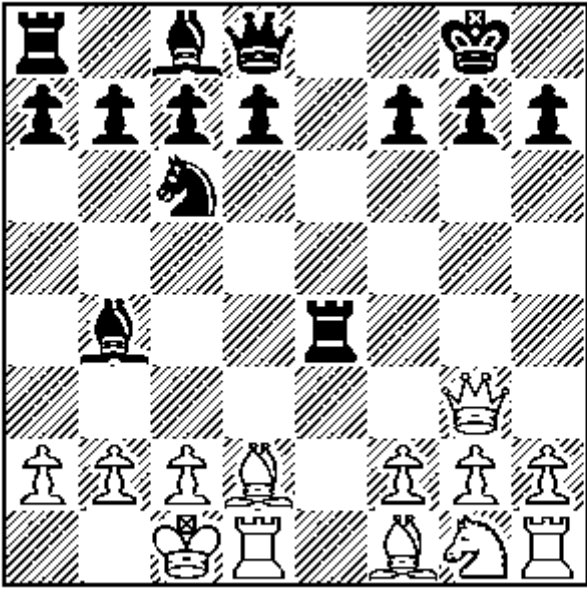
b) 8 ... d6 9 f3 (if White just develops normally with 9 Nf3, I like the simple developing move 9 ... Be6, since Black doesn't have to do anything special to prove an advantage; trading bishops would ease Black's development and White will eventually just be left with a weakness on e4 and an awkward queen on e3) 9 ... Ne5 10 Bb3 a5! and White has scored terribly in this position. Black has a strong queenside attack with ... a4 and ... b5, and if White tries to halt it with 11 a4, we simply go 11 ... Nfd7 and all of White's weaknesses become even more apparent.

### 8 ... Nxe4!

When browsing through the latest literature, I stumbled upon a book on the Petroff Defence by Konstantin Sakaev, where he recommended 8 ... Nxe4 and showed some good lines. They indicated that Black had a bright future and didn't have to suffer. Ever since, I've been playing this variation with good results, whenever I've had the fortune to face it.

For years, the key move was considered to be 8 ... Rxe4!? when the complications were supposed to be in Black's favour, but I never really understood what was going on and the positions looked so scary, I was slightly afraid of this whole variation.

### 9 Nxe4 Rxe4



Black is up a pawn, but we have a rook exposed on e4 and we don't have much queenside development to show.

### 10 c3

Probably best, as shown by:

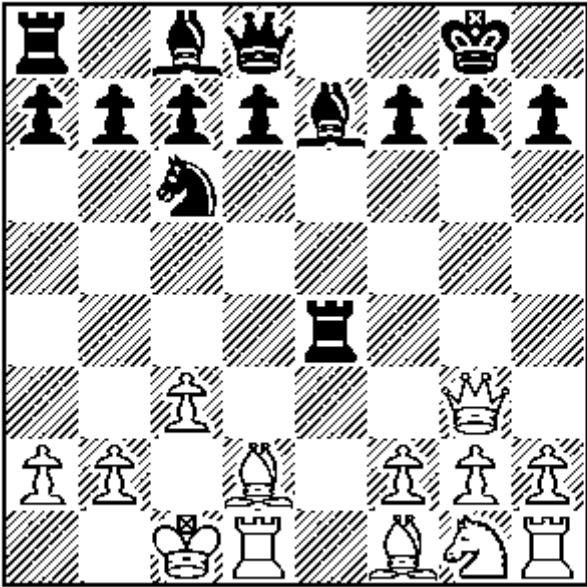
a) White would like to play the natural 10 Bd3, but here Black has the disruptive 10 ... Bxd2+.

b) Against 10 Bxb4 Black can just develop with normal moves and get a good position: 10 ... Nxb4 (10 ... Rxb4!? is another interesting alternative if you want to keep the rook active) 11 a3 Nc6 12 Bd3 Re8 followed with ... d6 and ... Qf6 with a good position where the extra pawn will soon be consolidated.

c) 10 Bf4 was played by Ian Nepomniachtchi in a serious game back in 2007 against Vallejo Pons, but he didn't seem very well prepared. After 10 ... Qf6 11 Nh3 d6 12 Bd3 Paco Vallejo played the sneaky 12 ... Nd4!? and achieved a good position. The simpler 12 ... Re8 is a very good alternative, when I don't think White has anything for the pawn.

d) In his annotations to the aforementioned game I.Nepomniachtchi-F.Vallejo Pons, Moscow 2007, Korchnoi mentioned the option of 10 Bg5, but I can't honestly see what Black would have to fear after 10 ... Be7 11 Bxe7 Rxe7 followed by ... d6 and ... Be6. 11 h4 is probably more in the spirit of the variation, but after, let's say, 11 ... d6 White has to waste more time preventing ... Rg4 and this just doesn't look dangerous.

### 10 ... Be7!



This is the idea that I believe revitalized the entire 8 ... Nxe4 variation. It looks very strange to trap our own rook in the centre of the board, but these days it's more about making moves work tactically than making them look good.

10 ... Bf8 looks more natural, but after 11 Bd3 Re8 12 Nf3 White can develop a decent initiative.

#### **11 f4**

Not a beautiful move from a positional point of view, but it creates some space for White's queen. Now Bd3 is a very serious idea and Black has to solve the situation with his trapped rook, or does he?

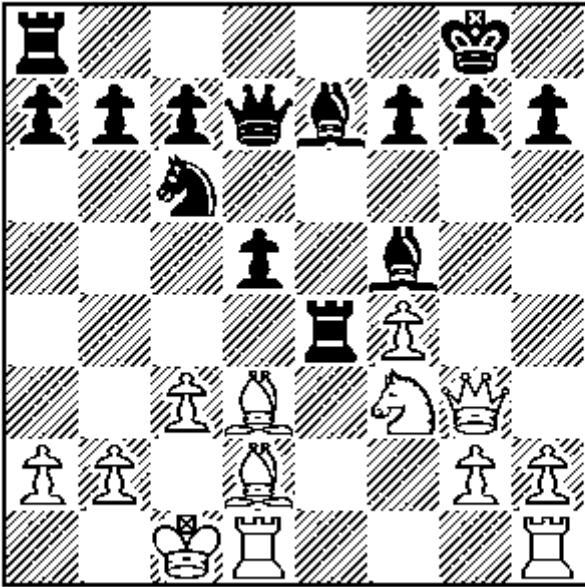
Of course, we also have to look at 11 Bd3, but Black's main idea is that we have the strong 11 ... Bh4! 12 Qf3 Re8 when we have managed to force White's queen to a square where it's exposed to future attacks (with ... Ne5 especially), while still getting the rook back safely.

Two years earlier, Jack Rudd had tried 11 Nf3, but after 11 ... d6 Black had the annoying threat of ... Rg4 which made White lose time with 12 h3 and after 12 ... Ne5 it was already clear that Black was much better in J.Rudd-S.Haslinger, Liverpool 2008.

#### **11 ... d5! 12 Nf3**

The immediate 12 Bd3 is met in the same way with 12 ... Bf5!

#### **12 ... Bf5 13 Bd3 Qd7!**



A very strong exchange sacrifice and I assume that Avrukh is the one to be credited for this great idea. Black already has a pawn and the positionally much superior position, so by sacrificing an exchange, we completely remove White's initiative and take it over ourselves.

**14 Bxe4 Bxe4**

Now White is the one who has to be careful. The bishop on e4 is nothing but a monster, and the game shows that Black's queenside attack is very quick. In fact, I already think this position is much worse for White.

**15 Be3**

Alternatively:

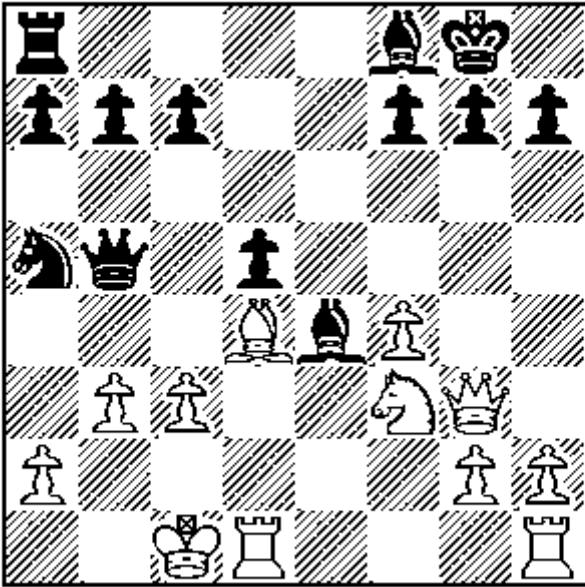
a) One good point to mention is that 15 Ng5 appears to relieve some of the tension, but Black has 15 ... Bxg5 16 fxg5 Ne5! when ... Qa4 gives him a winning attack.

b) In the only other human encounter with this exchange sacrifice, White went for 15 c4, trying to undermine Black's outpost on e4. but Black found a very typical resource: 15 ... Nb4! 16 Bxb4 Qa4 17 Nd4 Qxb4. Black was already much better and went on to score a slight upset in A.Kobzar-I.Ioffe, Voronezh 2014.

**15 ... Na5!**

Opening up the gateway for the black queen to join in the queenside attack.

**16 Bd4 Bf8 17 b3 Qb5!**

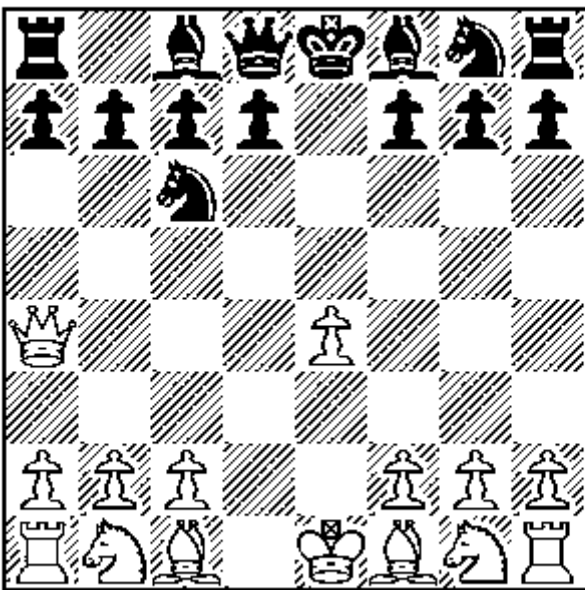


Black's attack plays itself. There are ideas with ... Ba3, ... Nxb3+, ... Nc4 and even ... c5, as in the game where White doesn't survive long. Indeed, do now enjoy the finale of an excellent attacking game with surprising theoretical value!

**18 Kb2 c5 19 Be5 Nc4+ 20 Ka1 Ne3 21 Ng5 Qe2! 22 Rc1 Nc2+ 23 Rxc2 Bxc2 24 Re1 Qd3 25 Qg4 Qf5 0-1**

Game 62  
**E.Levi-G.West**  
 Melbourne 2002

**1 e4 e5 2 d4 exd4 3 Qxd4 Nc6 4 Qa4**



This is the so-called Malmö variation. When I was 11 years old, I found a small Swedish book in my local library about this opening and consequently it became my main weapon against 1 e4 e5 as White. When looking back at this variation, I don't really know what I was thinking.

**4 ... Nf6**

My recommendation, but Black can play pretty much whatever he wants and still get a good

position. In that aforementioned book, Sörenfors didn't think it was very good for Black, but there are several holes in his analysis. To be fair though, the book is old and the analysis was probably not checked with an engine.

Sometimes Black plays 4 ... g6, which is fine as well, but Black needs to be on the look-out for brutal caveman attacks like the one Sörenfors recommends for White: 5 Nc3 Bg7 6 Bd2 Nf6 7 0-0-0 0-0 and now 8 h4!?

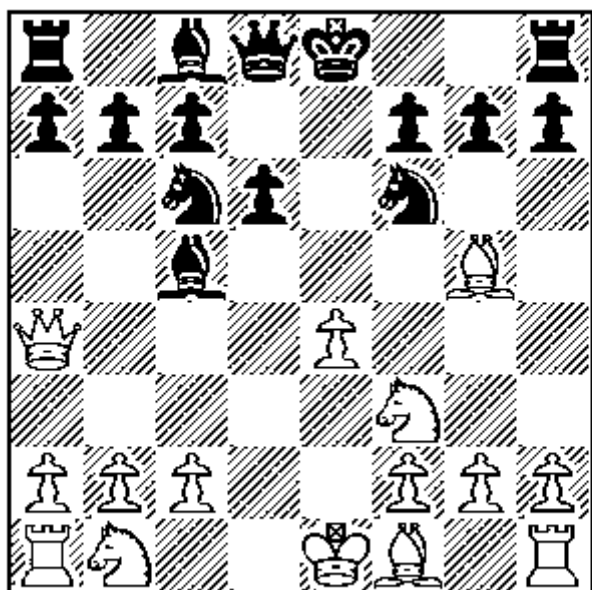
### 5 Bg5

5 Nf3 is a mistake according to Sörenfors, but I doubt Black has anything better than to transpose to our main game after 5 ... Bc5 6 Bg5. Likewise, 5 Nc3 Bc5 should transpose as well.

### 5 ... Bc5!

The most active square for the bishop. There is now a threat of ... Bxf2.

### 6 Nf3 d6



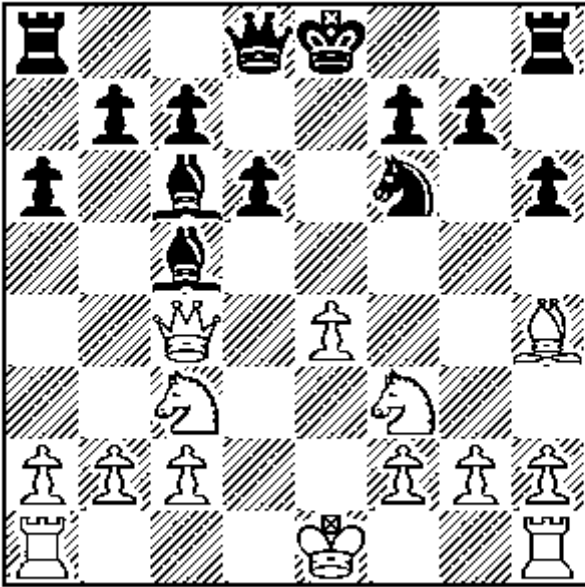
Black play is based on driving away the queen on a4 with ... Bd7.

### 7 Nc3

This shows that White isn't afraid of ... Bd7, but perhaps White should be.

7 c3 looks like a reversed Centre Counter where the queen could drop back to c2, but Black easily gets a much better game after 7 ... h6 8 Bh4 g5 9 Bg3 Qe7 10 Nbd2 Bd7 11 Qc2 and now the thematic 11 ... d5!, striking before White has managed to develop and get his king to safety.

### 7 ... h6 8 Bh4 Bd7 9 Bb5 a6 10 Bxc6 Bxc6 11 Qc4



White has given up the bishop-pair, but he hopes that he will be able to create some play with 0-0-0 and Nd5. However, it's quite clear that only Black can be better with a solid position and the bishop-pair. Moreover, Black can now obtain a clear advantage.

**11 ... g5 12 Bg3 b5 13 Qd3 b4!**

Impressively, Sörenfors mentioned this entire variation, although his evaluation wasn't quite correct.

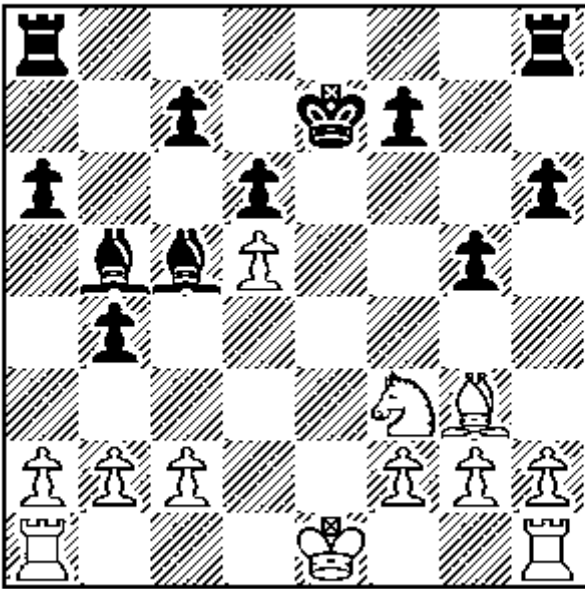
**14 Nd5 Nxd5 15 exd5 Bb5!?**

Sörenfors only looked at the immediate 15 ... Qe7+ 16 Kd2 and now 16 ... Bb5, but to be fair, even this is clearly better for Black. After 17 c4 bxc3+ 18 Qxc3 Qe2+ 19 Kc1 it looks like White gets some interesting counterplay with Re1, but Sörenfors had overlooked the strong 19 ... Qc4! when Black has the bishop-pair and a better structure in the endgame. Indeed, it should really be winning for Black.

**16 Qf5**

White should probably prefer 16 c4 when Black doesn't have anything better than 16 ... bxc3 17 Qxc3 Qe7+ 18 Kd2 Qe2+ 19 Kc1 Qc4, just like in the variation above.

**16 ... Qd7 17 Qf6 Qe7+ 18 Qxe7+ Kxe7**



Black has managed to force a much better endgame right from the opening and the win is now a technicality.

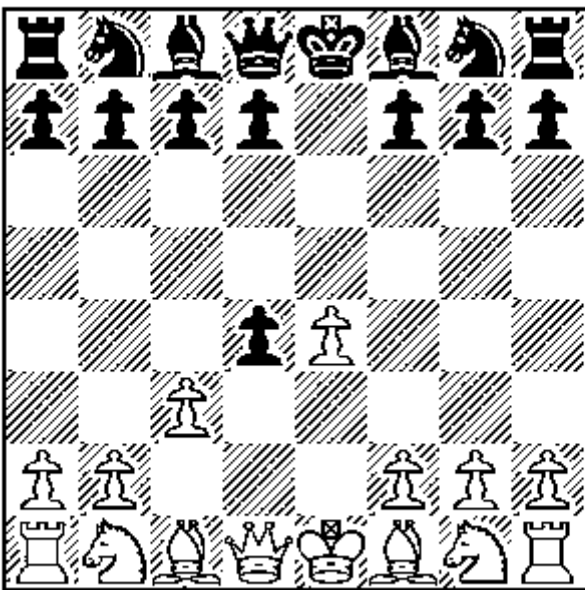
**19 0-0-0 f5! 20 h4 f4 21 Bh2 Bxf2 22 hxg5 hxg5 23 Nxg5 Be2 24 Bxf4 Bxd1 25 Rxd1 Raf8 26 g3 Kd7 27 Kd2 Rf5 28 c4 bxc3+ 29 Kxc3 Bxg3 30 Be3 Be5+ 31 Kb4 Rb8+ 32 Ka5 Bxb2 33 a4 Rb3 34 Bd2 Rxd5+ 35 Kxa6 Bc3 36 Bxc3 0-1**

Game 63

**S.Yee-A.Nguyen**

Bandar Seri Begawan 2012

**1 e4 e5 2 d4 exd4 3 c3**



I believe this can be called the Nordic Gambit (it's also known as the Danish Gambit), which definitely should spark my enthusiasm as a Swede, but I have to admit it hasn't.

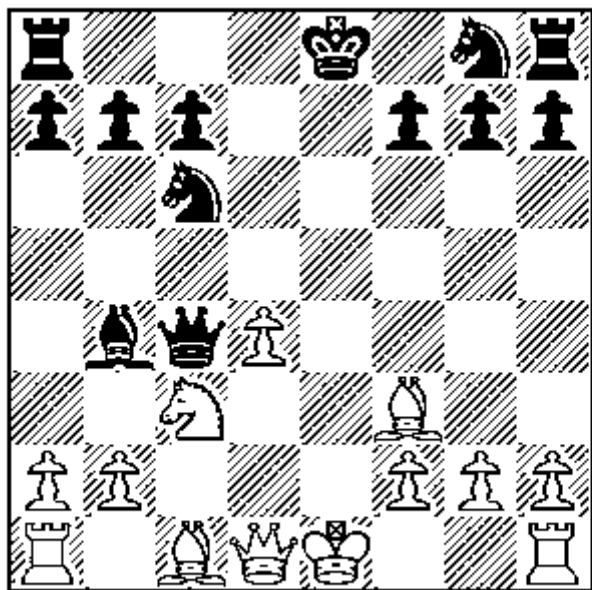
**3 ... dxc3!**

Eventually, I decided to be brave and accept the pawn sacrifice. At least in practical games, I believe it's quite unusual to accept gambits like this one as most people generally try to give

back the pawn and hope for a solid, equal position. That's a shame, though, and inspired by my former team mate GM Erik Blomqvist, I believe in accepting pawns.

Some might argue that the text is dangerous and that we have to defend for a long time, but in practical games I've noticed that grabbing pawns is good in many ways. Psychologically, White is the one under great pressure. Pawn sacrifices demand some kind of compensation, but if it's not obviously visible and can be neutralized, it's easy for White to drift into a position where Black is just a pawn up.

With all that said, I must admit that so far I've usually tried 3 ... d5, which is a very well-known variation. After the semi-forced sequence 4 exd5 Qxd5 5 cxd4 Nc6 6 Nf3 Bg4 7 Be2 Bb4+ 8 Nc3, Black plays 8 ... Bxf3! 9 Bxf3 Qc4!.



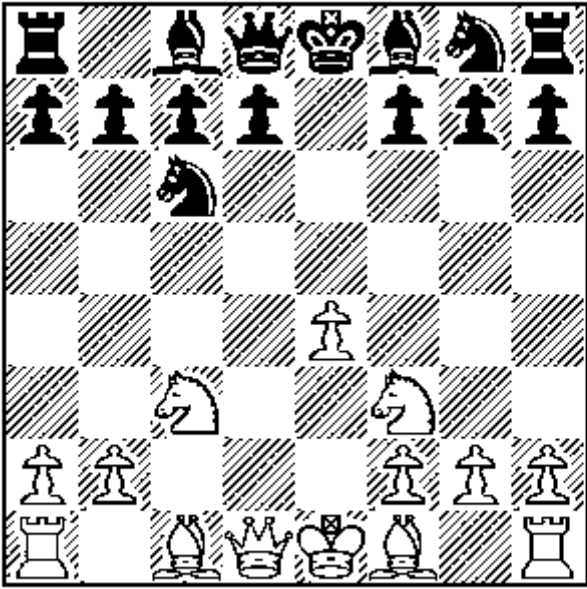
This is a brilliant sequence discovered by Capablanca, which interrupts White's natural development. It usually leads to an endgame where Black has scored very well, even though I believe White should be completely fine with accurate play. What's attractive about this variation is that it works against all possible White move orders, which also explains why it's widely recommended in various books and DVDs. My initial idea was to recommend this line as well, but the more I looked at it, the more I wanted to find something else, something less analysed and something to put more pressure on White.

Against this specific white move order, Kaufman recommends 3 ... Qe7!?, which is quite a strong idea brought to life by recent engines. Black goes for the e-pawn and with the queen on e7, there are some ... d5 ideas White has reckon with. The engines think that White should play 4 cxd4 Qxe4+ 5 Be3 Nf6 6 Nc3 Bb4 7 Nf3 when they claim sufficient compensation, but I'm far from sure this is the case. The problem with this variation is that it doesn't work very well if White plays a Goring move order: 3 Nf3 Nc6 4 c3 Qe7? just isn't very good since 5 Bd3 d5 6 0-0 dxe4 7 Bxe4 works out in White's advantage.

#### 4 Nxc3

The Nordic Gambit is similar to the Morra Gambit, but with the e-pawn gone instead of the c-pawn, which I definitely think favours Black.

#### 4 ... Nc6 5 Nf3



An important position. It can arise too from 3 Nf3 Nc6 4 c3 dxc3 5 Nxc3, as well as from 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 exd4 4 c3 dxc3 5 Nxc3.

### 5 ... Bc5!

Basically the best square for the bishop, in my opinion.

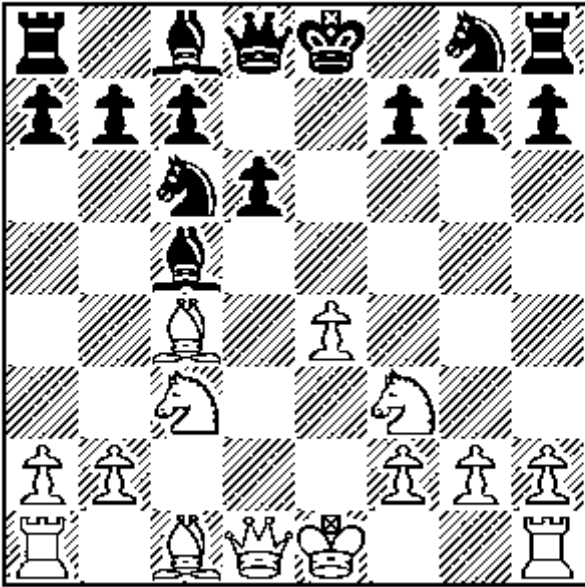
The main alternative is 5 ... Bb4, which is playable, but I don't like the idea of giving up the bishop-pair on c3. Black is still a pawn up, but White gets something to work with for the pawn. Taking on c3 will be more or less necessary, otherwise Black will have to face Nd5 when White has castled.

I even analysed the very strange-looking 5 ... Bd6!?, with the idea of being able to play ... Nf6 without getting kicked with e4-e5, but eventually I realized that although it might be playable, there's really no reason to look for an alternative to our main line.

### 6 Bc4

In this position, I'd try to avoid placing my g8-knight on f6 and rather have it on e7, at least for the time being. That way Black won't have to worry about e4-e5 or Bg5 pins to destroy his coordination.

### 6 ... d6!



There would be nothing wrong with the immediate 6 ... Nge7 if it wasn't for 7 Ng5! and now 7 ... Ne5 can still be met with 8 Nxf7!, since 8 ... Nxf7 9 Bxf7+ Kxf7 10 Qh5+ picks up the bishop on c5.

### 7 0-0

In his attacking repertoire Gambiteer I, Nigel Davies recommends 7 Qb3, which logically puts more pressure on f7 when Black isn't in time to respond with ... 0-0. However, after 7 ... Qd7! Black simply defends the f7-pawn and asks: "What now?". White is the one who has to worry about ... Na5 ideas or just simple development with ... Nf6. Davies recommends 8 Nd5, but this doesn't put pressure on f7 so Black can play 8 ... Nge7! (one trick to avoid is that 8 ... Na5? 9 Qc3! forks g7 and a5) 9 Qc3 and now Davies doesn't mention the very natural 9 ... 0-0. Perhaps he thought it didn't work because of 10 Bh6, but after 10 ... Qg4! White has real problems.

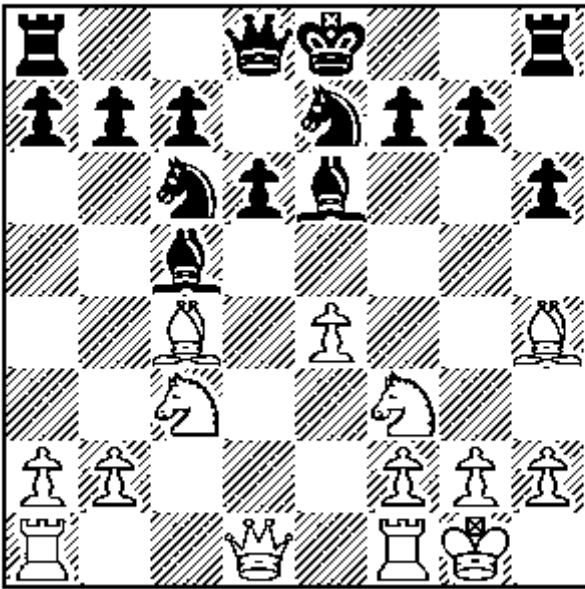
### 7 ... Nge7!

Very unusual, but logical in my opinion. The most popular move is 7 ... Nf6, which is also totally fine for Black in view of 8 Bg5 h6 9 Bh4 g5 10 Bg3 0-0 when Black's position looks good, but with a loosened kingside you always need to be careful.

### 8 Bg5

Surprisingly, White's best try seems to be to liquidate into an endgame with 8 Na4 0-0 9 Nxc5 dxc5 10 Qxd8 Rxd8, with the point that 11 Bf4 regains the pawn on c7, but it doesn't completely equalize either. Black seems to have some initiative along the d-file after 11 ... Bg4 12 Bxc7 Rd7 13 Ne5 Rxc7 14 Nxc4 Rd8 15 Rfd1 Rcd7, even though White should hold with sensible play.

### 8 ... h6 9 Bh4 Be6



Very natural development. I'll admit that Black's position is a tiny bit passive, but it's definitely worth it for a pawn.

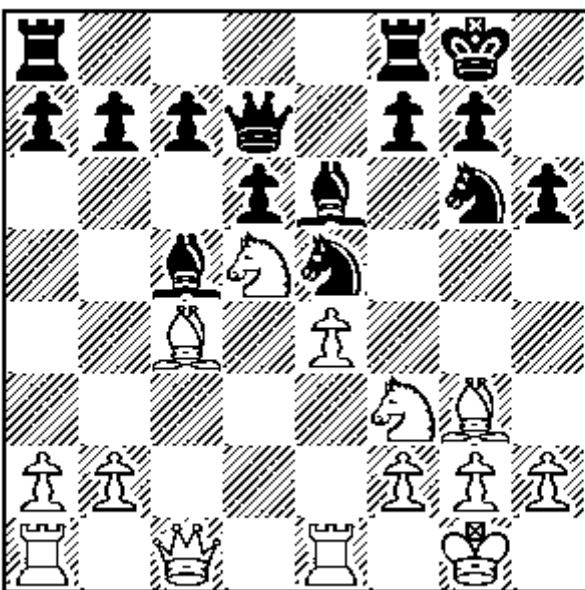
### 10 Nd5

The critical continuation would be 10 Bxe6 fxe6 11 Qb3, but it seems like Black keeps his extra pawn with 11 ... g5 12 Bg3 Qc8 when we slowly unravel with ... Bb6 and ... Qd7.

### 10 ... 0-0 11 Re1

A young Matthieu Cornette tried the visibly attractive 11 b4 and after a long, forced sequence we reach the position after 11 ... Bxb4 12 Qb3 Bc5 13 Nxe7+ Nxe7 14 Bxe6 fxe6 15 Qxe6+ Rf7. Although the position initially looks good for White, he actually has nothing. Black will play ... Qe8, ... Nc6 and White is just left a pawn down. Cornette tried to shake things up with 16 e5, but he didn't manage to save the game.

### 11 ... Qd7 12 Qc1 Ng6 13 Bg3 Nce5



This is exactly what can so easily happen to White. Black grabs a pawn, gets a temporarily passive position, but manages to develop solidly and then White's compensation completely evaporates.

### 14 Be2 Bxd5 15 Nxe5 Nxe5 16 exd5 Rae8 17 Qc3 Re7

Another option is to force White to surrender his g3-bishop with 17 ... f5!?

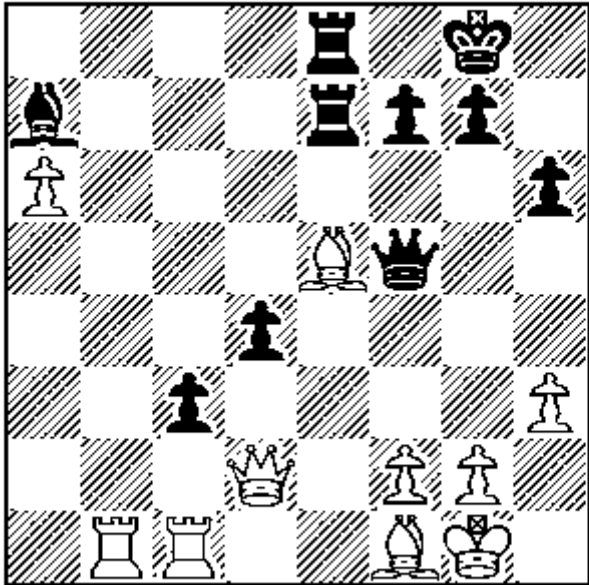
**18 h3 Rfe8 19 b4 Bb6 20 a4!**

Somehow White has managed to get some kind of counterplay on the queenside and even though Black is still better, White is back in the game.

**20 ... a6 21 Rec1 Qf5 22 a5 Ba7 23 b5! axb5 24 Bxb5 c6 25 dxc6 bxc6 26 Bf1**

26 Bxc6!? was another option.

**26 ... d5 27 a6 c5 28 Rab1 d4 29 Qd2 c4 30 Bxe5 c3**



I'm not completely sure what's going on, but Black's central pawn duo looks much more dangerous than White's a6-pawn.

**31 Qd3 Qxe5 32 Rb7 g6 33 Rcb1 Kg7 34 g3 Rc8 35 Rxe7 Qxe7 36 Rb7 Rc7**

Allowing White to liquidate into a drawn endgame. 36 ... Qd6! would have kept Black's advantage very much alive, although perhaps White can still draw after 37 Qf3 Qe6 38 Bd3 c2 39 Bxc2 Rxc2 40 Rxa7.

**37 Rxc7?**

37 Rxa7! Rxa7 38 Qxd4+ followed by Qxc3 must be drawn.

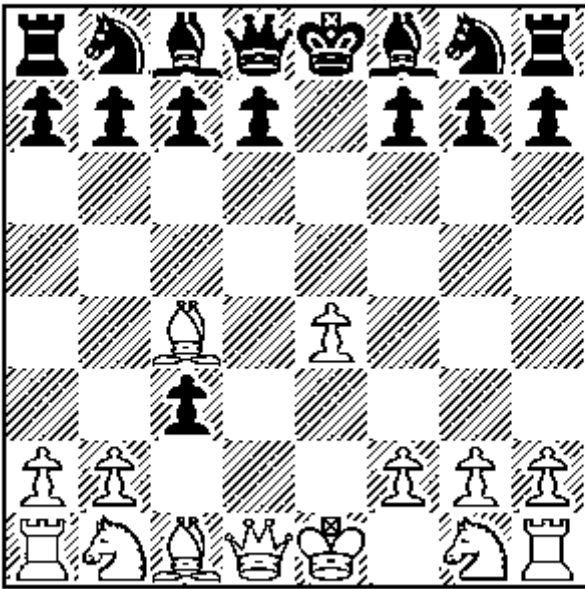
**37 ... Qxc7 38 Qc2 d3! 39 Bxd3 Qxg3+ 40 Kf1 Qxh3+ 41 Ke1 Qh1+ 42 Bf1 Qf3 0-1**

Game 64

**M.Saca-I.Ivanov**

San Francisco 1996

**1 e4 e5 2 d4 exd4 3 c3 dxc3 4 Bc4!?**

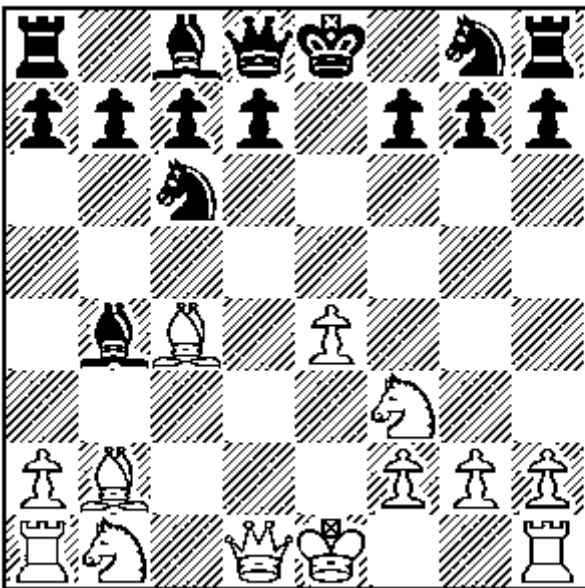


When I was 15, I taught some beginners in my class how to play chess, as preparation for the Swedish National Schools Team Championships. I found that the Nordic Gambit worked quite well, teaching them the importance of developing as well as about tactical possibilities. When preparing for those lessons, I realized that this Nordic Gambit wasn't such a silly opening as I had imagined and that White's initiative can be quite dangerous if Black isn't careful.

**4 ... cxb2!**

Why be one pawn up when you can be two pawns up?

**5 Bxb2 Nc6 6 Nf3 Bb4+!**



Black should be focused on development, development and more development right now, so anything that comes with check, we'll take! White can now block the check with either 7 Nbd2 or 7 Nc3, with the latter being the most popular choice, as will be covered in our next game.

**7 Nbd2**

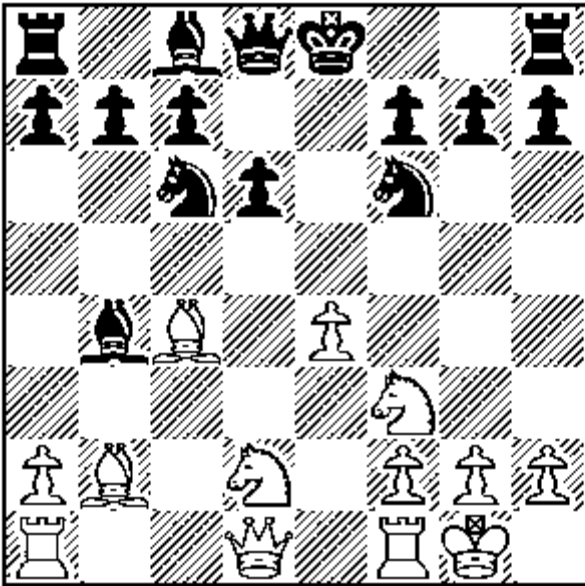
Another interesting idea is 7 Kf1!?, but it looks like Black has 7 ... Nf6 8 e5 d5! when White lacks compensation.

**7 ... Nf6 8 0-0**

Once again, 8 e5 is successfully met with 8 ... d5! 9 exf6 dxc4 10 fxf7 Rg8 and suddenly

White has to watch out for ... c3!, which is a surprising resource.

8 ... d6



Black looks forward to solidly continuing with ... 0-0 and ... Qe7 when White's compensation really becomes questionable. However, in the game White now panics.

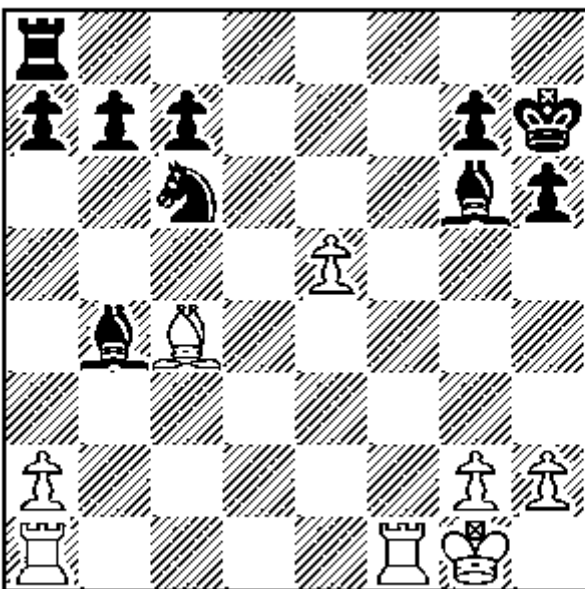
9 Ng5?

This entire strategy is doomed to fail.

9 ... 0-0 10 f4 h6 11 Bxf6 Qxf6 12 e5

Desperately playing for complications, but there is nothing.

12 ... dx e5 13 Nde4 Qg6 14 Nxf7 Rxf7 15 Qd5 Bf5 16 fxe5 Bxe4! 17 Qxf7+ Kh7 18 Qxg6+ Bxg6



Black has played very calmly and kept everything under control. White is out of tricks and the rest is a simple matter of technique.

19 e6 Re8 20 Rad1 Na5 21 Bd3 Rxe6 22 Bxg6+ Kxg6 23 Rd7 Bc5+ 24 Kh1 Bd6 25 g3 Nc6 26 Rff7 Ne7 27 Rf2 b5 28 Rb2 b4 29 Kg2 a5 30 Rd8 a4 31 Ra8 a3 32 Rd2 Nf5 33 Ra5 Ne3+ 34 Kh3 Nc4 35 Rxd6 Rxd6 36 Rc5 b3 37 axb3 a2 38 Rxc4 a1Q 39 Rg4+ Kh7 40 Kh4 g5+ 41 Kh5 Qd1 42 h3 Qe2 43 b4 Qe8# 0-1

## Game 65

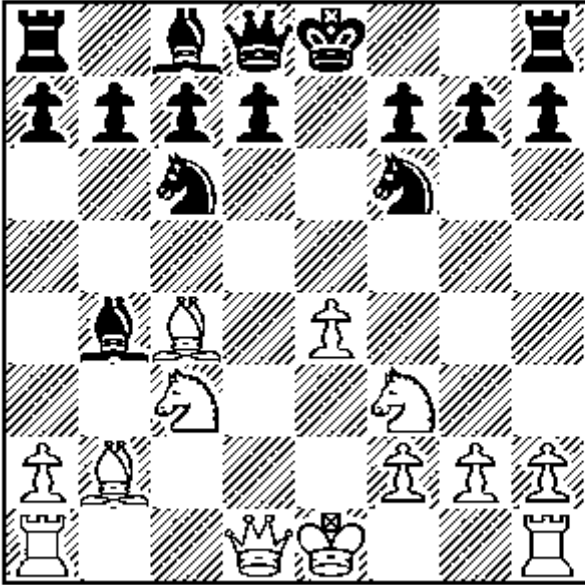
### City of Copenhagen-City of Uppsala

Correspondence 1875

**1 e4 e5 2 d4 exd4 3 c3 dxc3 4 Bc4 cxb2 5 Bxb2 Nc6 6 Nf3 Bb4+ 7 Nc3**

The most active square for the knight and also the most popular continuation. White's most dangerous continuation is to go Qc2 and 0-0-0 followed by a vigorous attack on the kingside, but castling kingside isn't bad either.

**7 ... Nf6**



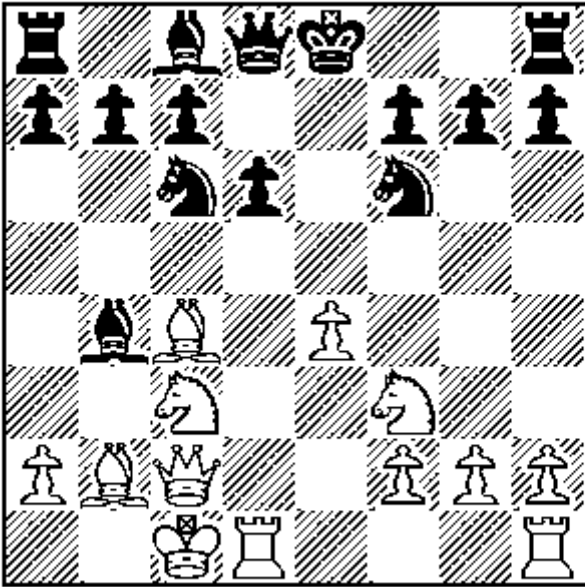
**8 Qc2!?**

A dangerous approach. White wants to castle queenside and then attack with Nd5, h2-h4 and Ng5, which in practice is very difficult to deal with. The engine initially thinks Black is completely winning, but it's not very practical to enter those kind of positions.

First of all, when we play ... Nf6 we always need to consider what to do against e4-e5, but here 8 e5 gives Black a good chance of fighting for the centre: 8 ... d5! (8 ... Ne4 9 Qd5! is a typical idea I'd try to avoid) 9 exf6 Qxf6!. This is not a common tactical motif, but it works here; c3 and c4 are hanging and White isn't close to sufficient compensation.

Instead, if White castles kingside, I like the simple idea of preventing Nd5 with 8 ... Bxc3 (it might also be okay to play 8 ... 0-0 9 Nd5 Be7 followed by ... d6) 9 Bxc3 0-0 10 Re1 d6 when Black has a very solid position and there's nothing whatsoever wrong with it. We can consolidate with ... Nd7-e5, ... Bg4 or ... Be6 at some point.

**8 ... d6 9 0-0-0**



### 9 ... Bxc3!

Definitely the safest continuation. The computer wants us to allow Nd5 and claims that Black is winning, but until we too can calculate several thousand variations every second, I'd stay clear of it. 9 ... 0-0 is the most popular continuation, but 10 e5! Ng4 11 h4 or even 11 Nd5 scores terrifically for White.

### 10 Qxc3!

White has to try and make the e4-e5 break work to challenge Black's position.

10 Bxc3 has been quite popular, but after the simple 10 ... Qe7 11 e5 it leads to nothing at all: 11 ... dxe5 12 Nxe5 Nxe5 13 Bxe5 0-0 followed by ... Be6 with two extra pawns for Black.

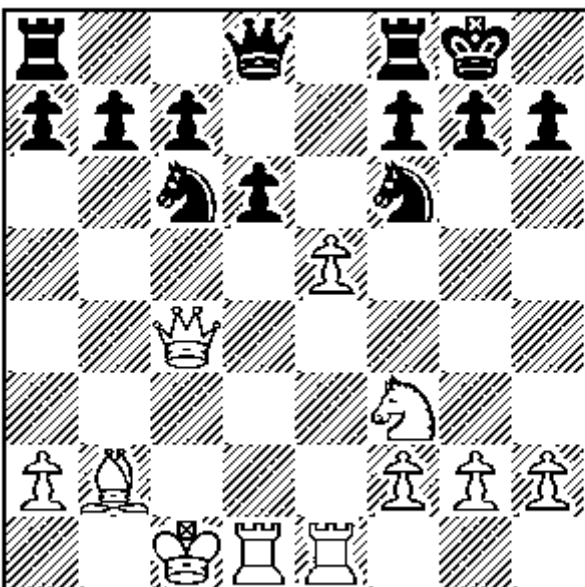
### 10 ... Be6!

On the other hand, 10 ... Qe7? 11 e5! is really dangerous. One point is that Black cannot castle so easily because of 11 ... dxe5 12 Rhe1 0-0 13 Ba3!.

### 11 Rhe1

It is important that Black has the resource 11 e5 Ne4!.

### 11 ... Bxc4 12 Qxc4 0-0 13 e5



White has played as actively as possible and he has now managed to achieve the e4-e5 break with the queen on d8. He is very active, but Black has no weaknesses. We're two pawns up and a kingside attack isn't going to work, so if Black just hangs in there, the two extra pawns should tell.

### 13 ... Ne8

GM Graf chose another variation in a more recent game: 13 ... Nd7 14 Qg4 f6 15 exd6 Rf7 16 Kb1 cxd6 17 Rxd6 Qc8 18 Qe4. Black has returned one pawn, but his position is solid. I don't really like having such a passive position, but Black is definitely better.

### 14 g4

White notices that Black's best attempt at liquidating the situation in the centre is by playing ... f6 to get rid of the e5-pawn, and thus prepares a future g4-g5 to open up lines for the b2-bishop.

### 14 ... Kh8?!

It seems to me like Black shouldn't try to force through the idea of ... f6.

I like the idea of 14 ... Qd7 followed by ... Qe6. If White captures on e6, Black will gain a lot from opening up the f-file when White has played g2-g4.

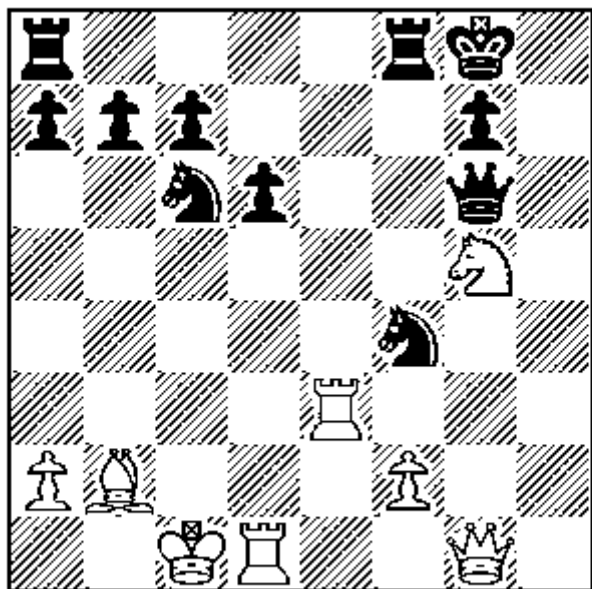
### 15 h4! f6 16 exf6 Nxf6 17 g5?

17 h5! followed by h5-h6 looks much more dangerous and even though Black still is better after 17 ... d5! and ... Qd6, White has managed to complicate the position and obtain some initiative.

### 17 ... Nh5! 18 Qg4 Nf4 19 g6 Qc8

White's attack has led to nothing and Black now consolidates his two-pawn advantage.

### 20 Qg1 Qd7 21 Ng5 hxg6 22 h5 Qf5 23 hxg6 Qxg6 24 Re3 Kg8



White has desperately tried to create something on the kingside, but Black's pieces are well placed and we're up three pawns! Entering an endgame doesn't help, but White has nothing.

25 Nh3 Qxg1 26 Rxg1 Ne5 27 Nxf4 Rxf4 28 Reg3 Re8 29 Rxg7+ Kf8 30 Rxc7 Nd3+ 31 Kb1 Rb4 32 Kc2 Nxb2 33 Rgg7 Re2+ 34 Kc3 Rf4 0-1

## Conclusion

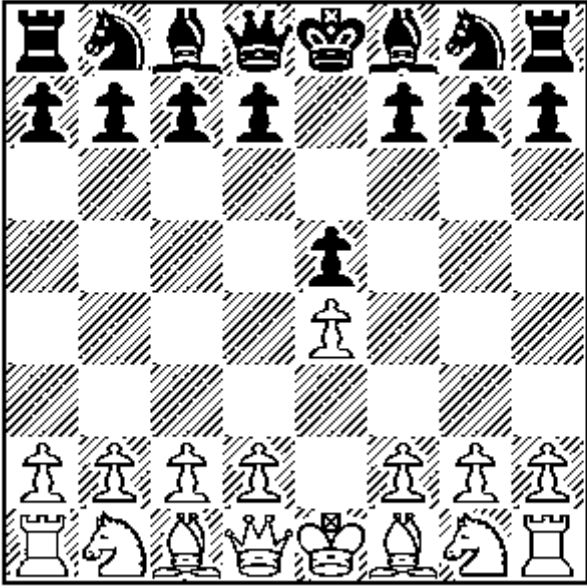
This chapter might feature one of my most controversial recommendations, but I do believe it's a

good idea to accept White's pawn sacrifices. White really struggles to prove enough compensation and this will be more disturbing for your opponents than for you at the board. Black should just make sure to hurry up with development and not let White gain even more time: for example, the last game demonstrated the very important idea of voluntarily playing ... Bb4xc3 in order to slow down White's initiative. On the other hand, White's prospects after 3 Qxd4 don't look good at all. White might have aggressive intentions, but the latest state of theory shows that his approach is more likely to backfire than to succeed.

# Chapter Eleven

## Odds and Ends

1 e4 e5



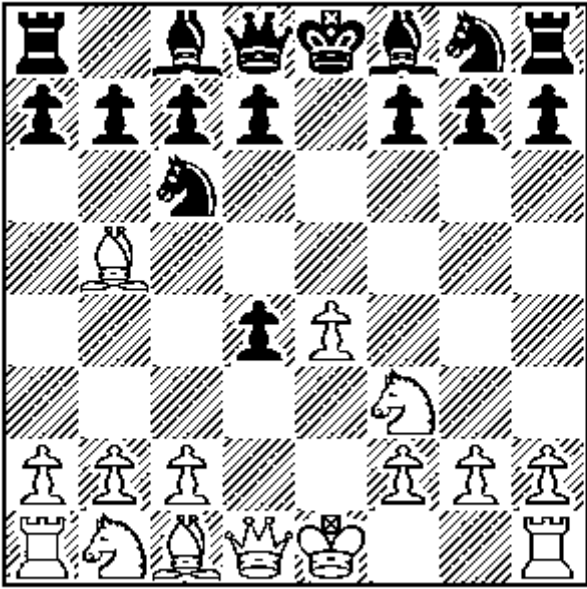
Our final chapter wraps up this book with a mixture of offbeat but respectable variations, such as the Ponziani, to the absurd ones like Nakamura's attempted Scholar's Mate.

Game 66

**J.Kindler-R.Kleinschroth**

Waldshut 1991

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 exd4 4 Bb5**



This mixture between the Scotch Game and the Ruy Lopez is actually called the Relfsson Gambit, and it can in many cases transpose to the Ruy Lopez. After, let's say, 4 ... a6 White can play 5 Bxc6 dxc6 with a Ruy Lopez Exchange variation or play 5 Ba4 when 5 ... Nf6 would transpose to the Centre Gambit. Neither of these is very challenging theoretically, but they may well be outside the scope of your repertoire. Luckily, we have a good variation that doesn't transpose to any well-known Ruy Lopez line and still gives Black good chances of an advantage.

**4 ... Bc5!**

Black simply develops and protects his extra pawn. It turns out that White's compensation isn't satisfactory.

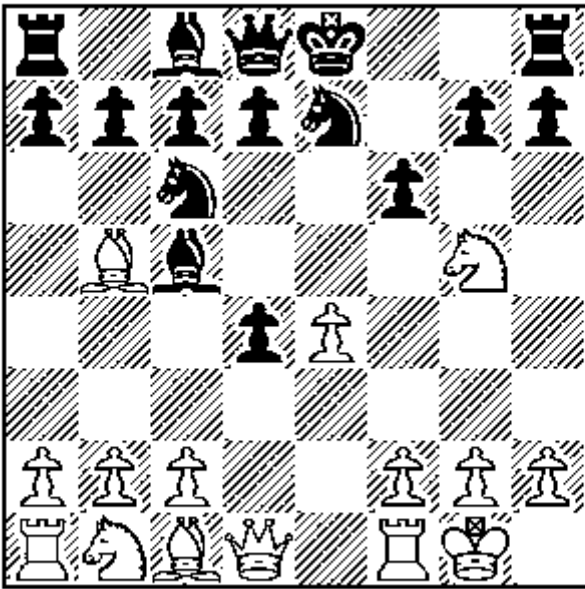
**5 0-0**

This is what everybody plays and for some reason White has been scoring well, but turning the game into some kind of Nordic Gambit should also be considered. After 5 c3!? dxc3 6 Nxc3 I want to play 6 ... Nge7 which is a typical idea, since if Black puts the knight on f6 it would be exposed to all kinds of Bg5 and e4-e5 ideas. If White wants to create some kind of complications before Black develops and gets settled, he should try 7 Ng5, which introduces some tactical tricks, but Black can simply go 7 ... f6! 8 Nf7 Bxf2+ 9 Kxf2 Kxf7 when White isn't close to having enough compensation for two pawns. In fact, Black's king is looking quite safe.

**5 ... Nge7 6 Ng5!?**

This is the creative idea White has been relying on and so far it has produced good results, although to be fair there's not a lot of grandmaster games. White introduces some tactical ideas based on bringing the queen out to h5, which would put pressure on f7, h7 and the bishop on c5.

**6 ... f6!**



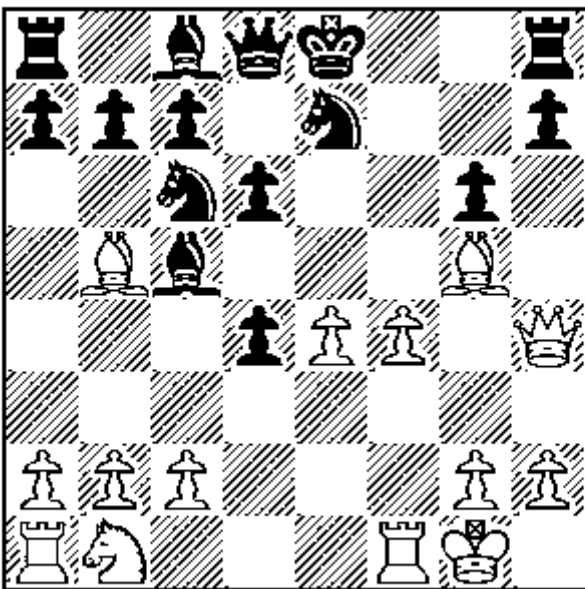
My favourite response to these Ng5 lunges. White has to do something and retreating doesn't really scare me since ... f6 isn't a horrible move to include.

**7 Nf7!?**

Full points for creativity, but unfortunately for White it doesn't lead anywhere. That leaves:

a) 7 Nf3 0-0 followed by ... d6 and ... Bg4 is ultra-solid for Black. I can't see how White is supposed to get compensation for the pawn.

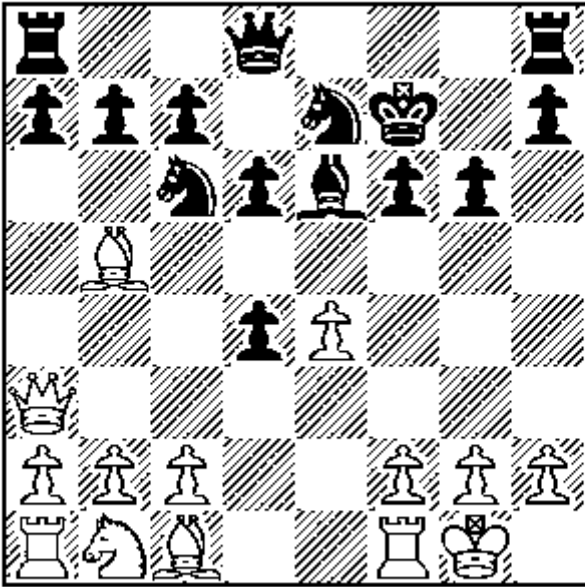
b) I actually found a game where White went all-in with 7 Qh5+ g6 8 Qh4 fxe5 9 Bxe5 d6 10 f4 when Black panicked and lost.



However, if Black just plays calmly with 10 ... Be6 11 f5 Bf7, he can consolidate his extra piece with ... Qd7 and ... 0-0-0.

**7 ... Kxf7 8 Qh5+ g6 9 Qxc5 d6 10 Qa3 Be6**

White has got the bishop-pair, but Black keeps his pawn with a very solid position. The king is completely safe on f7 and White can't develop very comfortably.



### 11 f4

White realizes that he has nothing for the pawn and goes for Black's king which is a reasonable plan.

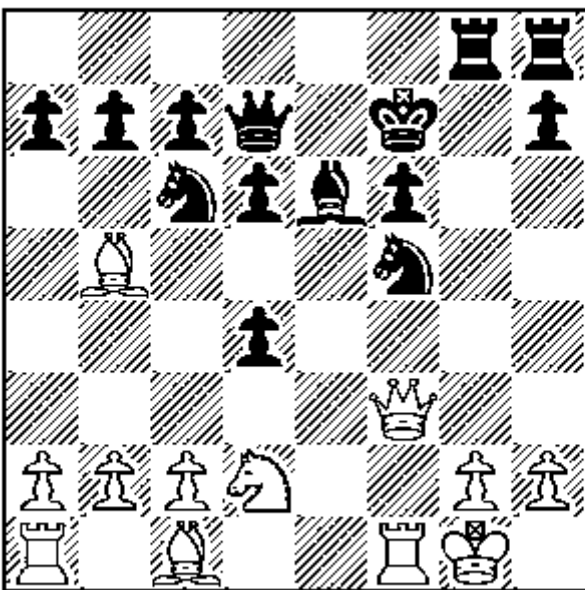
### 11 ... Qd7 12 f5?!

But this is definitely too hasty since White will in no way get compensation for two pawns. I'd prefer 12 Nd2 followed by Nf3 and Bd3 when White is a pawn down, but his position isn't too bad. Black should probably open up the centre with ... f5 at some point since his coordination and development is better than White's.

### 12 ... gxf5 13 Qf3 Rag8! 14 exf5 Nxf5

White has sacrificed a second pawn and opened up the kingside, but now there's nothing left for him to do. His queenside isn't developed and he's not even close to making a dangerous threat as Black quickly takes over.

### 15 Nd2



### 15 ... Rg6?!

Black's last move doesn't ruin anything, but it misses the chance to make a brilliant sacrifice: 15 ... Rxf2+!! 16 Qxf2 Rg8 when Black's attack with ... Bd5, ... Ne3 and the queen is completely

crushing.

**16 Ne4 Ne5 17 Qe2 c6 18 Bd3 Rhg8 0-1**

Black's position is of course fantastic, being two pawns up, but it still looks a bit early to resign. Still, this was a well-played game by Kleinschroth who didn't panic when White tried to throw the kitchen sink at him.

The following set-ups with g3 and Bg2 might look strange since White has a pawn on e4, but if Black wants to seize the centre he has to open up the diagonal with ... d5 anyway, which is my preferred method in fighting against all the early g3 variations.

Game 67

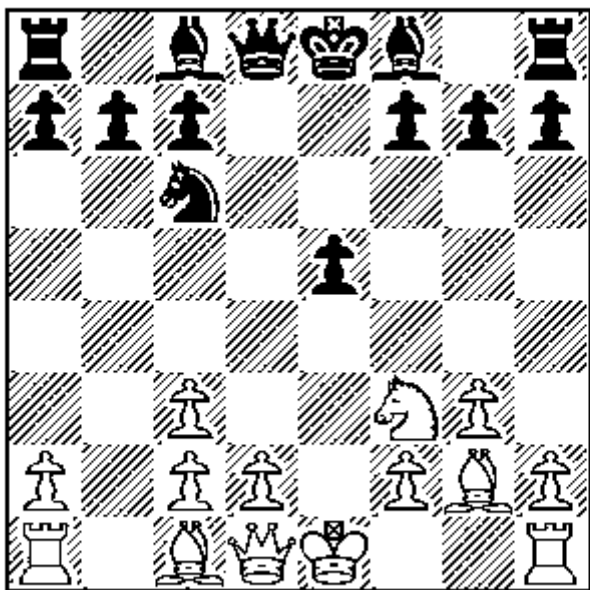
**D.Dzhakaev-Y.Bayram**

Istanbul 2003

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3**

Another possible move order would be 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 g3 d5 4 exd5 Nxd5 5 Bg2 Nxc3 6 bxc3 Nc6 when White can choose between putting the knight on e2 and f3. In this game I will cover the variations with a knight on f3 and I'll examine the lines with Ne2 in our next game.

**2 ... Nc6 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 g3 d5 5 exd5 Nxd5 6 Bg2 Nxc3 7 bxc3**



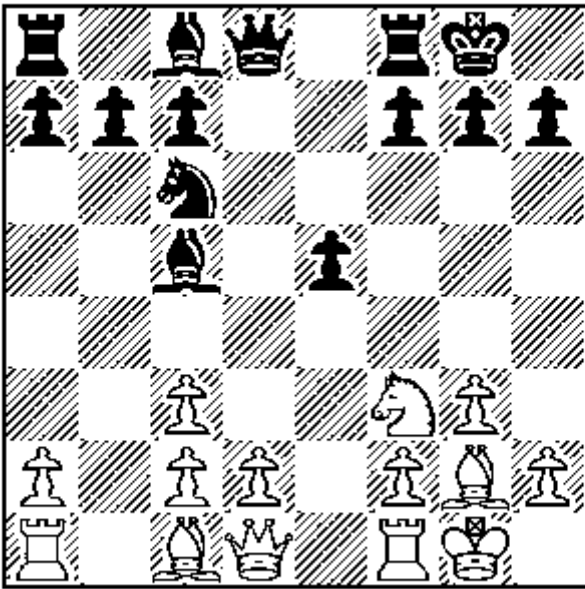
White's set-up is very solid and it has recently been used by none other than Mamedyarov in some high-level games. White will usually try to open up the centre with d2-d4, but if Black succeeds in preventing it then White has to settle for d2-d3, with an interesting strategical battle in which Mamedyarov has been very successful.

**7 ... Bc5!**

I like having my bishop as actively placed as possible. The downside is that the bishop could be hit by a future d2-d4, but Black has a very clever 9th move to prevent this.

With that said, 7 ... Bd6 looks very reasonable as well and it was recently played by Sergey Karjakin.

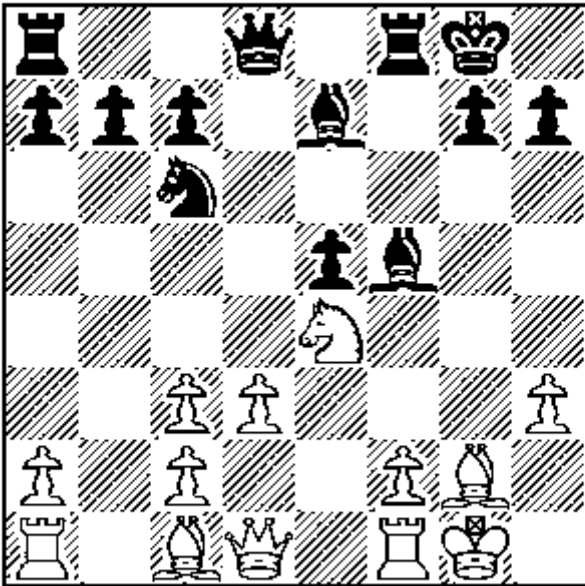
**8 0-0 0-0**



## 9 Re1

I think that if White wants to play for an opening advantage, he has to try this sneaky move, putting pressure on the e5-pawn:

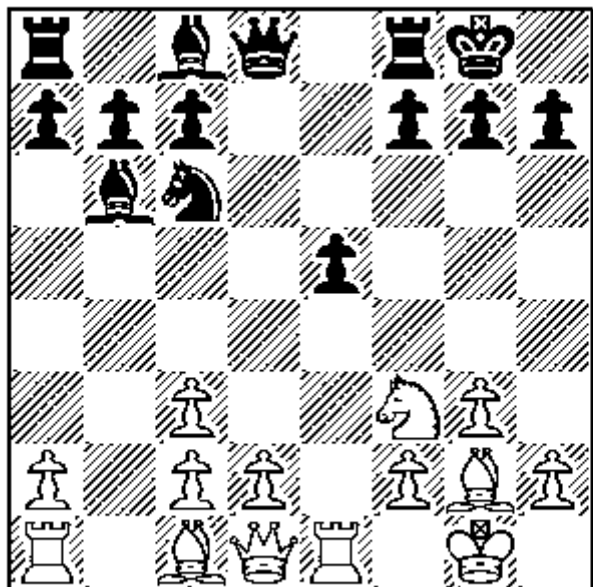
a) 9 d3 looks a bit too timid to be a serious challenge for Black, but it has its points. This is a speciality of Igor Glek and lately the Serbian GM Stevic. The main continuation is the aggressive 9 ... Bg4 10 h3 Bh5 11 g4 Bg6 and now 12 Ng5!. White has very good control of the light squares in the centre, but at the cost of having to play g2-g4 which weakens White's kingside. Black usually takes advantage of this by playing 12 ... Be7 13 Ne4 f5!? 14 gxf5 Bxf5.



We have a very interesting situation. White's play is completely based on his blockade on e4, but apart from this his position isn't much to write home about. The kingside is weak and he has no reasonable pawn breaks on which to base his strategy. Black is definitely fine, but don't underestimate the knight on e4. One example is the game I.Glek-B.Thorfinnsson, Otranto 2011, which went 15 Ng3 Bd7 16 Qh5 Qe8 17 Qxe8 Raxe8 and here a reasonable plan would be ... b6 followed by ... Nd8-e6-f4. White would also have to look out for ... Bd7-a4, putting pressure on the c2-pawn.

b) Another idea is to play the nice move Qe1, either immediately after 9 d3 Bg4, but most commonly after including 10 h3 (10 Qe1 f6! is similarly a good idea, especially since 11 Qe4 is met by 11 ... Be6! 12 Nd2 Qd7 with a good, solid position) 10 ... Bh5 11 Qe1. This is generally met with 11 ... Re8, but I think Black should play the solid 11 ... f6! when we can follow up with ... Qd7, ... Rad8 and ... Bf7 with a very solid position. Instead, 11 ... Re8 12 Qe4 is scoring well for White, who has plans such as Nd2-c4, Nh4, Ng5 or even Qc4.

**9 ... Bb6!**



This idea is far too clever to be my own. In fact, I learned it from watching Jan Gustafsson's fantastic DVD on the Open Games and I still haven't found a reason why it's not more popular. I've used it myself with great success.

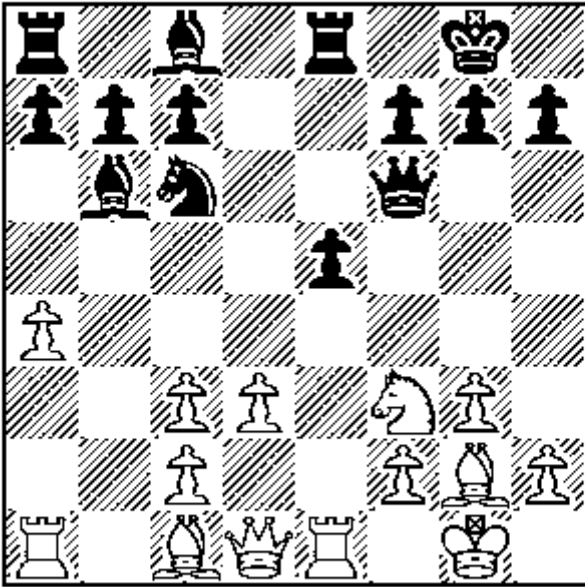
It is in fact a high-class waiting move. The bishop is removed from any potential Ne4 threat, but most importantly d2-d4. The move Black would want to play is 9 ... Re8, but practice has shown that White has the clever 10 d4! exd4 11 Rxe8+ Qxe8 12 cxd4 with a tiny, but annoying pull. By removing the bishop, Black uses a tactical trick to avoid running into this d2-d4 strike.

Recently 9 ... Qf6 has become popular, but I've never liked my queen here so early and even though Black is most likely fine, Mamedyarov keeps repeating this variation with the white pieces: 10 d3 Bg4 11 h3 Bh5 12 Be3 Bb6 13 g4 Bg6 14 Nd2 Qh4 and now Mamedyarov's most recent try against Fridman was 15 Qf3! followed by Qg3 with an interesting endgame.

**10 h3**

It is, of course, very important that Black can meet 10 Nxe5 with 10 ... Nxe5 11 Rxe5 Bxf2+!, since 12 Kxf2? drops an exchange due to 12 ... Qf6+.

White's last move prevents ... Bg4, but I don't think this is necessary. I don't believe Black has enough compensation after 10 d3 Bg4 11 h3 Bh5 12 g4 Bg6 13 Nxe5 Nxe5 14 Rxe5. Thus White usually goes for 10 d3, when Black's 9 ... Bb6 has definitely turned out to be useful and now I think it's a good time to go 10 ... Re8! followed by ... f6, ... Be6, ... Qd7, ... Rad8 and taking things from there. After some preparation it's possible to play for ... f5 and create some play on the kingside. Mamedyarov played 11 a4 against Kramnik, but I think Black gets a fine position after 11 ... Qf6!.



This move generally goes better with ... Re8 than the set-up with ... f6 and ... Be6. Now Black can try to establish an annoying bind with ... Bg4 and there are also tactics with ... e4 against the c3-pawn. For example, if White tries to play like Mamedyarov did against the 9 ... Qf6 variation, Black has the cute 12 Be3 Bg4 13 h3 e4! when he will take a pawn on c3 with a pleasant advantage.

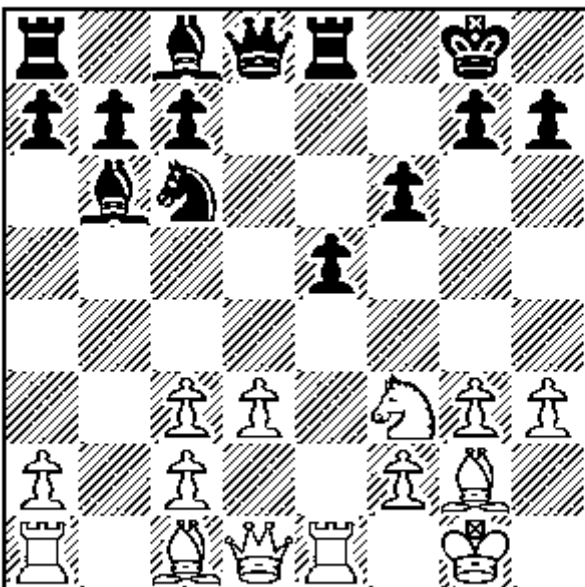
### 10 ... Re8

This move is definitely not a mistake, but I would prefer not to let White play the d2-d4 break. Instead, I would go 10 ... Be6!? followed by ... f6 and ... Qd7 with tempo. White clearly won't be able to achieve d2-d4 in one go, even though this is not very dangerous to Black.

### 11 d3

White could seize his chance with 11 d4, but Black is definitely not in trouble after 11 ... Bf5!? and White can't do much about his weak c-pawns. However, do note that 11 ... e4? would be a bad mistake here due to 12 Ng5 when 12 ... f5 13 Qh5 leads to some very awkward weaknesses in Black's kingside.

### 11 ... f6



There's no point in going for a ... Qf6 set-up now that White has already wasted a move on

h2-h3, so we go for ... Be6 and ... Qd7. White, however, immediately changes tack.

### 12 d4?!

I don't get the feeling that White has control of what he's doing at this point, since he's wasting a lot of time with d2-d3, h2-h3 and only then d3-d4.

Normal development would be 12 Be3 Be6 13 Nd2 Qd7 14 Kh2 Rad8, although I still prefer Black's chances in this middlegame.

### 12 ... e4?!

Aggressive, but probably not the best. Black definitely has an edge after the simple 12 ... exd4! 13 Rxe8+ Qxe8 14 cxd4 and now the accurate 14 ... Na5! followed by ... Be6 with a great light-square blockade.

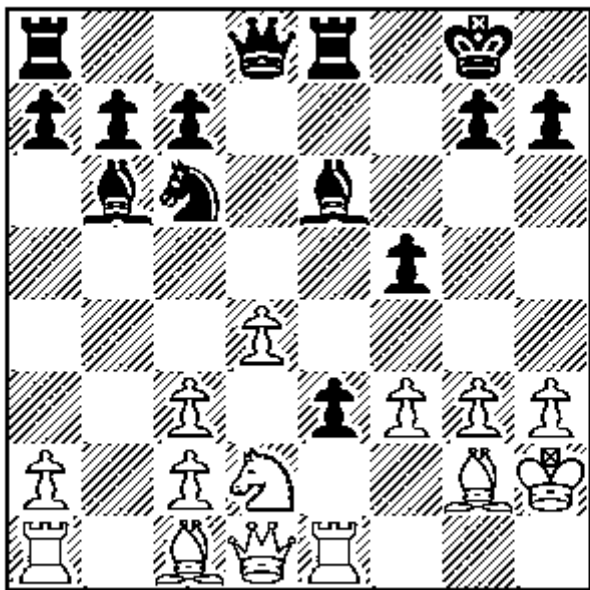
### 13 Nd2

White should definitely have tried 13 Nh4! when 13 ... f5?! 14 Qh5 is awkward for Black. It's not easy to protect f5 and we probably have to play something like 14 ... Ne7 when White seizes a strong initiative with 15 g4.

### 13 ... f5!

Now Black is in charge again. We have the legendary e- and f-pawns, and White runs the risk of allowing a light-square blockade on the queenside.

### 14 Kh2 Be6 15 f3 e3!?



A very creative idea that I definitely like.

### 16 Rxe3 f4! 17 gxf4 Nxd4!

A strike of brilliance. It should end in a draw if White defends accurately.

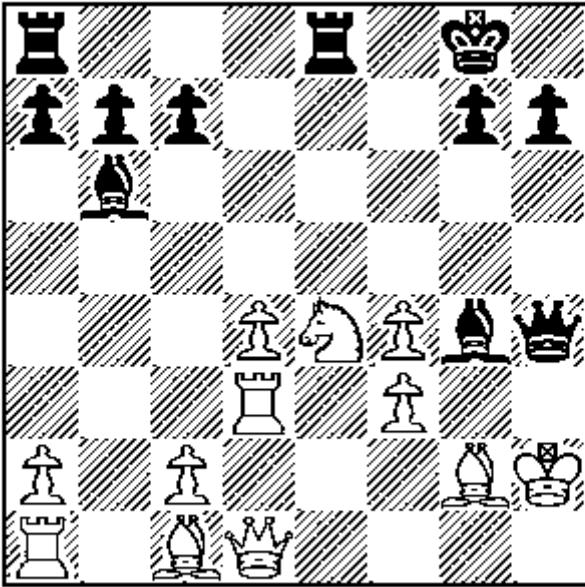
### 18 Rd3!

18 cxd4 Qxd4 wins material since White can't protect both rooks and 19 Nb3? drops the queen on d1.

### 18 ... Qh4 19 cxd4 Bxh3! 20 Ne4?

Perhaps White wanted to play for a win against his lower-rated opponent, but he will soon regret this. White had to play 20 Bxh3! Qf2+ 21 Kh1 Re1+ 22 Qxe1 Qxe1+ 23 Kg2 when I doubt Black has more than perpetual check.

### 20 ... Bg4+!



It's possible that White overlooked this move.

**21 Kg1 Rxe4 22 Be3 Bh5 23 fxe4 Bxd1 24 Raxd1 c6 25 c4 Qg4 26 f5 Re8 27 f6 Rxe4 0-1**

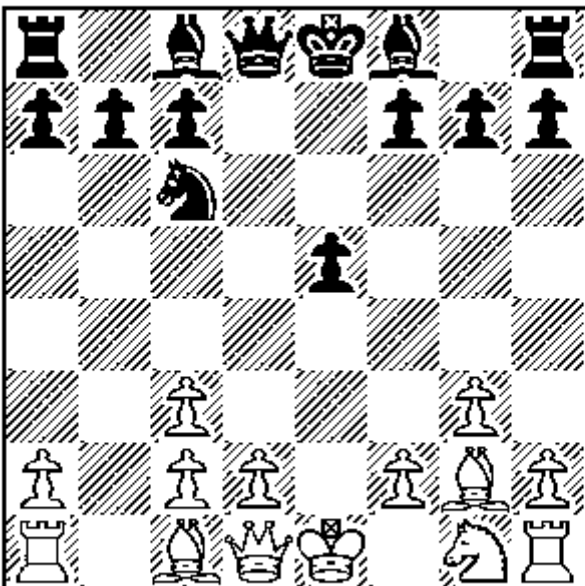
A very nice game by Black, who scored a fine upset against White's somewhat slow and artificial play with d2-d3, h2-h3 and Kh2.

Game 68

**A.Baturina-D.Kuljasevic**

Bol 2013

**1 e4 e5 2 Nc3 Nf6 3 g3 d5 4 exd5 Nxd5 5 Bg2 Nxc3 6 bxc3 Nc6**



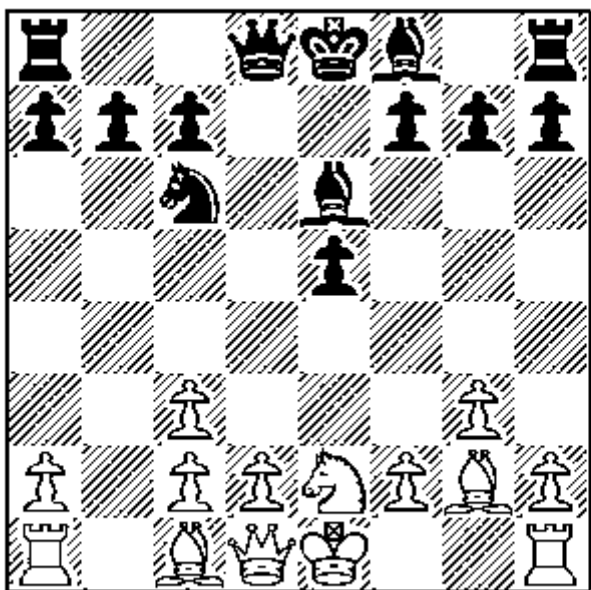
In this game we will cover those variations where White delays or avoids developing the knight to f3. Luckily for us, I think they are easy for Black to handle and that the immediate 7 Nf3 is much more challenging for Black to face.

**7 Ne2**

Sometimes White starts with 7 d3 in order to delay the development of the knight, but needless to say this limits White's options as well. White can no longer break with d2-d4 in one

go, for example. With that said, 7 d3 has been tried by Mamedyarov in a rapid game. I think the option that fits our repertoire best is to play 7 ... Bc5 when 8 Nf3 would be a direct transposition to our previous game, while if White goes 8 Ne2 Black can play like in our main game with 8 ... Be6 9 0-0 Bd5, with a very solid position.

**7 ... Be6!**



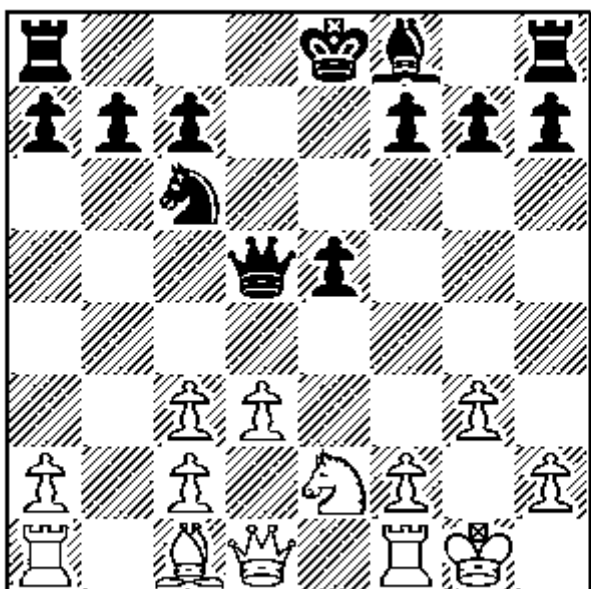
This clever idea seems to close the entire variation with a knight on e2, since Black's position is simply without problems. It came into the limelight when Kramnik played it against Shirov in 2005 and won a nice game, and White hasn't been able to revive the variation since then.

**8 d3**

In the stem game A.Shirov-V.Kramnik, Monaco (rapid) 2005, White played 8 0-0 Bd5 9 d3 Bxg2 10 Kxf2 Qd5+ 11 f3 and now I think Black can do even better with 11 ... Bc5!

Kramnik's 11 ... 0-0-0 allowed 12 c4 followed by Be3, and by starting with 11 ... Bc5 we don't have to allow Be3.

**8 ... Bd5 9 Bxd5 Qxd5 10 0-0**



### 10 ... Bc5

Black has managed to develop all his pieces and is ready to castle. Meanwhile White doesn't have any active moves and he's missing his light-squared bishop around the king.

Another idea would be to play like Kramnik with 10 ... 0-0-0 11 c4 Qd7 and then try to attack with ... h7-h5-h4. However, compared to the Shirov-Kramnik game, White hasn't played f2-f3 which means that ... Bc5 doesn't actually stop Be3.

### 11 c4 Qf3

11 ... Qd7 could now be met with 12 Be3 when White's position should be fine.

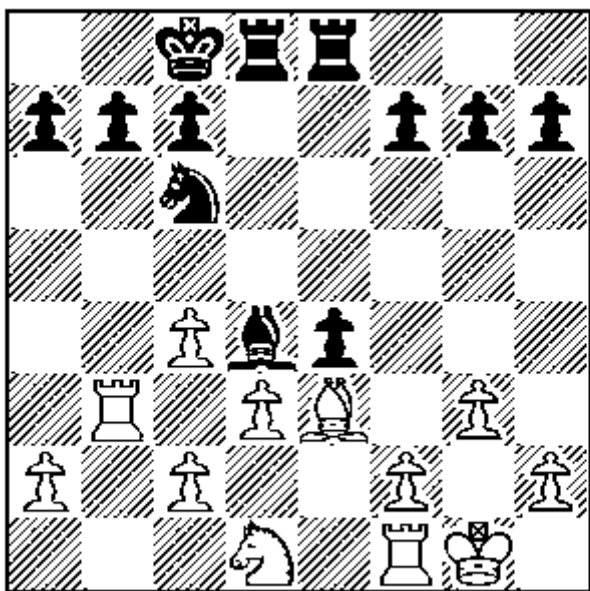
### 12 Nc3 Qxd1 13 Nxd1?!

This is definitely where White's big problems start. White should have played 13 Rxd1, when 13 ... 0-0-0 14 Be3 Bd4 15 Bxd4 Nxd4 looks like a small edge for Black, but White should be able to hold.

### 13 ... 0-0-0 14 Be3 Bd4!

White's problems with coordination are now apparent. It's no longer easy to get the d1-knight into play.

### 15 Rb1 Rhe8 16 Rb3 e4!



A very strong move, undermining White's structure and making sure Black will enjoy the much better endgame.

### 17 Bf4 exd3 18 cxd3 Re2

White has been completely outplayed in just a few moves and the endgame should already be lost.

### 19 a3 Bb6 20 Nc3 Rxd3

Picking up the first pawn, while maintaining a much better position.

### 21 Nxe2 Rxb3 22 Rc1 Rxa3

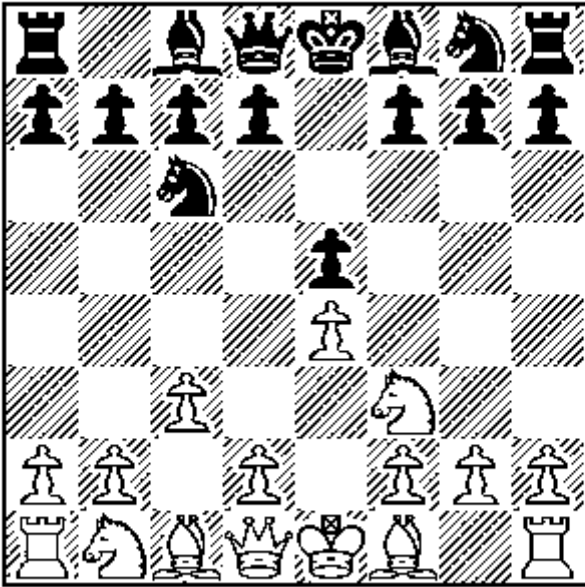
Picking up a second pawn.

### 23 Nc3 Nd4 24 Kg2 Ne6 25 Nd5 Bc5 26 Rd1 c6 0-1

Black is about to gain even more material with ... Ra2, so White understandably decided to call it a day. A very convincing, one-sided victory by Kuljasevic.

## The Ponziani

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 c3



We come to the Ponziani, an opening which has never received main-line status, but it has always been considered quite a respectable sideline. Visually, it's very natural to play 3 c3 in order to go d2-d4, but it doesn't quite work out if Black attacks the centre first.

The Ponziani gained a slight boost when Carlsen employed it in the Wijk aan Zee tournament of 2013 against Erwin L'Ami, but lately Black has been focusing on a fascinating piece sacrifice which I am very keen on playing myself. As it turns out, White must demonstrate incredible and inhuman accuracy to even survive the opening phase. However, although I really like this variation, it is also quite demanding.

### **3 ... Nf6**

My second recommendation is 3 ... d5, which leads to relatively calmer play, as we'll see below.

### **4 d4**

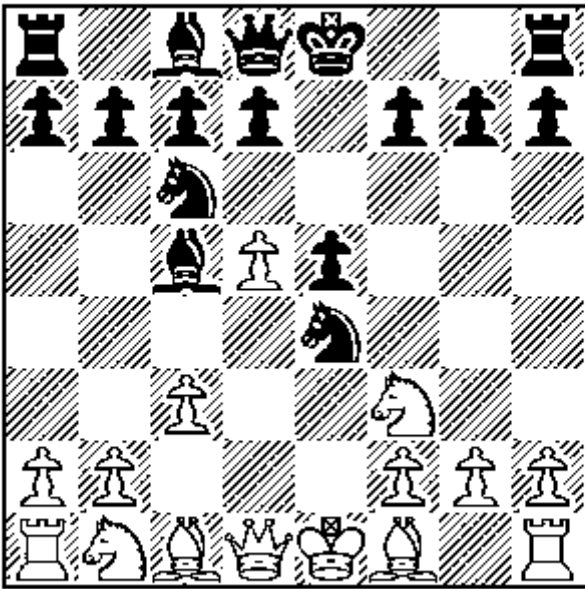
A move like 4 d3 would transpose to our coverage of the reversed Philidor – see Game 71.

### **4 ... Nxe4! 5 d5**

This has been played in 95 % of the games in my database, but after this move there's no backing down.

White's last chance to avoid coming under a fantastic attack is with 5 Bd3, which is never played. White seems to be able to equalize after, say, 5 ... d5 6 Nxe5 Nxe5 7 dxe5 Bc5 8 0-0 Bf5, although Black is clearly not worse. This seems to be the best White can do in the Ponziani for the time being.

### **5 ... Bc5!!**



One exclamation mark for the quality of the move; another exclamation mark for the aesthetics.

### 6 dxc6

6 Be3 Bxe3 7 fxe3 Ne7 8 Nxe5 0-0 is just horrible strategically for White. After ... d6 and ... Nf6 Black's pressure on the e-file should be decisive.

### 6 ... Bxf2+!

Of course, not 6 ... Nxf2? 7 Qd5! when White escapes.

### 7 Ke2 Bb6!

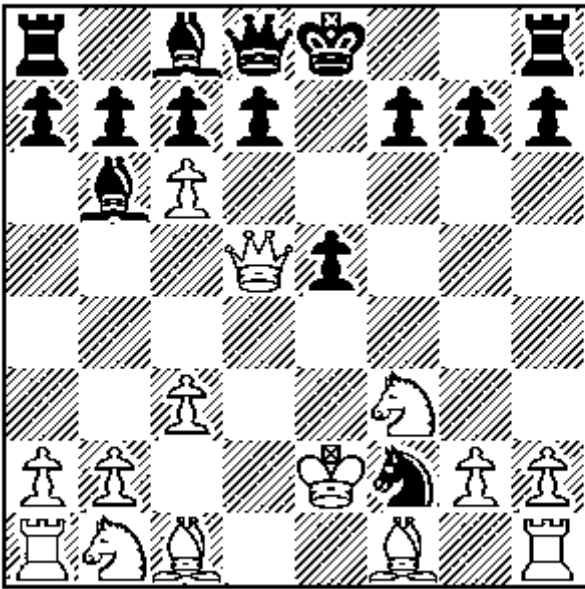
Another excellent move that is difficult to find.

Black used to try 7 ... bxc6 which looks natural since ... a6 is a big threat, but White appears to consolidate with 8 Qa4! f5 9 Nbd2 when the main line goes 9 ... 0-0 10 Nxe4 fxe4 11 Qxe4 d5 12 Qxe5 Re8 13 Qxe8+ Qxe8+ 14 Kxf2 and I'm quite sure that White's three pieces are better than Black's queen at this point.

### 8 Qd5!

8 Be3 might look natural, but if Black just seizes the centre with 8 ... Bxe3 9 Kxe3 d5!, Black's central pawns should soon give him a very strong attack. For example, 10 Nbd2 Qf6 11 Bd3 0-0 12 Rf1 Qh6+ 13 Ke2 Nc5 and White seems to be defenceless against ... Nxd3 and ... e4.

### 8 ... Nf2



### 9 Rg1

Surprisingly the only move to keep White in the game:

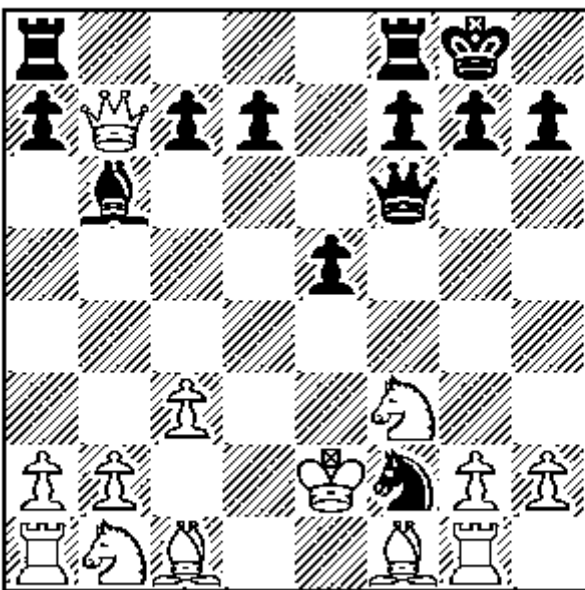
a) It might look natural to play 9 Qxe5+, but after 9 ... Kf8 10 Rg1 Black can use the e-file to attack White's king with 10 ... f6! (10 ... Ng4!? looks like a good alternative) 11 Qf4 g5!! (the immediate 11 ... dxc6 would allow 12 Nd4!) 12 Nxg5 dxc6 and suddenly White's king is terribly exposed: for example, 13 Be3 Nd3 14 Qf3 Ne5 15 Qe4 Kg7! followed by ... Ng4 and ... Re8.

b) Another move to consider is 9 Bg5, but after 9 ... f6 10 Nxe5 Qe7! White is forced to enter a horrible endgame: 11 cxd7+ Bxd7 12 Qxd7+ Qxd7 13 Nxd7 Kxd7 14 Be3 Nxf1 15 Bxb6 axb6 16 Nd2 Ra5 17 g4 h5 18 Bg2 Re5+ 19 Kf1 hxg4 20 Kg1 Re2 and already White could have resigned in P.Soderberg-R.Engman, Swedish League 2011.

### 9 ... 0-0!

A second piece sacrifice, but with it Black really accelerates his development.

10 cxb7 Bxb7 11 Qxb7 Qf6



Up to this point, White's play has been rather forced, but now he has to defend. He's up two pieces, but Black has a fantastic attack and two pawns in the centre with which to blow White away.

## 12 Na3!

A very important move if White wants to survive. He develops a knight while not hemming in the other pieces (on d2 the knight would block the bishop on c1), which is better than:

a) First of all 12 Be3? allows 12 ... Bxe3 13 Kxe3 Rab8 followed by ... Rxb2 when White is completely busted.

b) The engine initially recommends 12 Qd5, but Black quickly steamrollers White in the centre: 12 ... c6 13 Qd2 (13 Qxd7 Qg6! doesn't let White's king escape) 13 ... e4! 14 Nd4 e3! 15 Qc2 and now 15 ... Rae8 keeps a very strong attack, which I doubt White will survive.

c) Another move that has been suggested is 12 Qa6, but Black quickly steamrollers White here too: 12 ... e4! 13 Nd4 c5 14 Nc2 d5 15 Be3 Ng4 and White can't do much about the upcoming ... d4.

d) 12 Nbd2 transposes to our main line after 12 ... e4 13 Nc4, but perhaps Black can try to improve with 12 ... d5!? 13 Qxd5 c6.

## 12 ... e4

12 ... Rab8 doesn't seem to lead to more than a messy endgame after 13 Qd5 c6 14 Qxd7 e4 15 Nd4 Nd3 16 Qf5! Qxf5 17 Nxf5 Bxg1 18 Nc4 and now I start to like White's pieces, since it's not that easy to get Black's rooks into play.

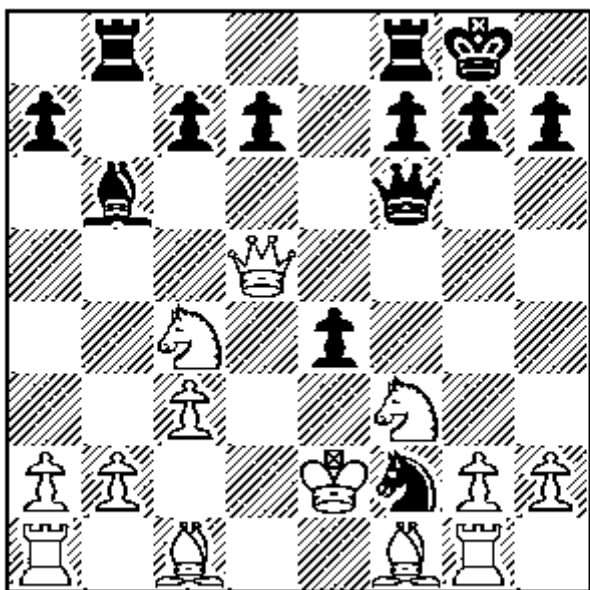
## 13 Nc4!

Giving back a piece, but it's a small price to get out of the opening alive.

## 13 ... Rab8!

13 ... exf3+? 14 Qxf3 Rfe8+ 15 Be3 lets White slip away far too easily.

## 14 Qd5



At this point Black has a lot of messy options and none of them seems to lead to a clear advantage. My analysis below is far from final, though, and I am sure there are still plenty of fascinating variations to discover.

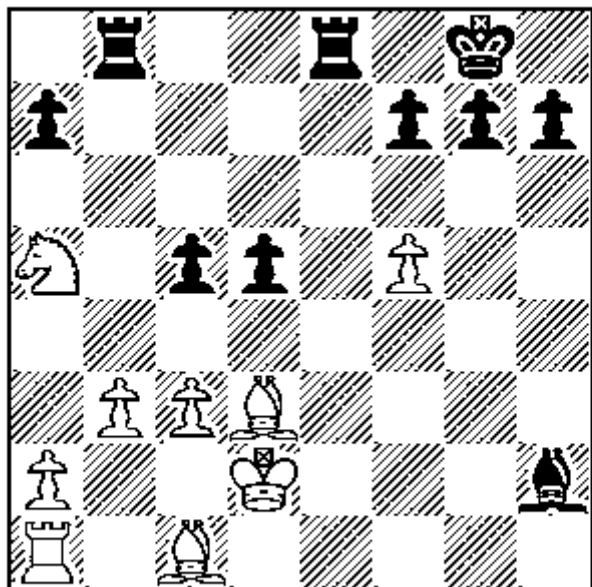
## 14 ... exf3+!?

Alternatively:

a) 14 ... Ng4 15 Kd2! (I originally thought that White should play 15 Nxb6?!, but after analysing it closer I feel confident in Black's chances to get an advantage) 15 ... exf3 16 Nxb6 f2 17 Rh1 Rxb6 18 Kc2 Ne5 and somehow this absolute mess should fizzle out to a draw with correct play.

b) 14 ... Nh3 15.Rh1 exf3+ 16 Qxf3 Rfe8+ 17 Kd2 Nf2 18 Qxf6 gxf6 19 Nxb6 Rxb6 20 Rg1 Rd6+ 21 Kc2 Re1 and we have a fascinating position, but I highly doubt either player has more than a draw here.

**15 gxf3 Rfe8+ 16 Kd2 Ne4+ 17 fxe4 Bxg1 18 Bd3 c6 19 Qf5 Qxf5 20 exf5 Bxh2 21 b3 d5 22 Na5 c5**



I like Black's position, although objectively I think White is fine, while it's quite difficult to play this position with either colour.

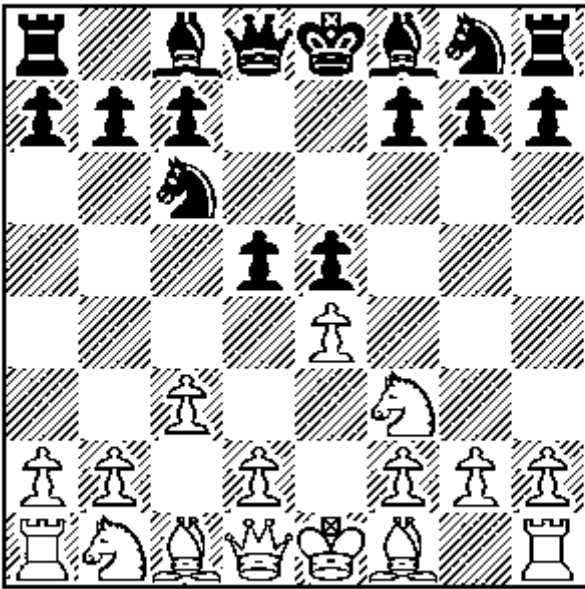
I have huge trust in the piece sacrifice I just recommended against the Ponziani, but since it's very demanding for both players, I felt it was best to also give an alternative variation.

Game 69

**Lu Shanglei-Ni Hua**

Danzhou 2015

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 c3 d5!**



This move is doing very well against the Ponziani right now, and I believe it will continue to do so. Black reacts immediately in the centre.

#### 4 Bb5

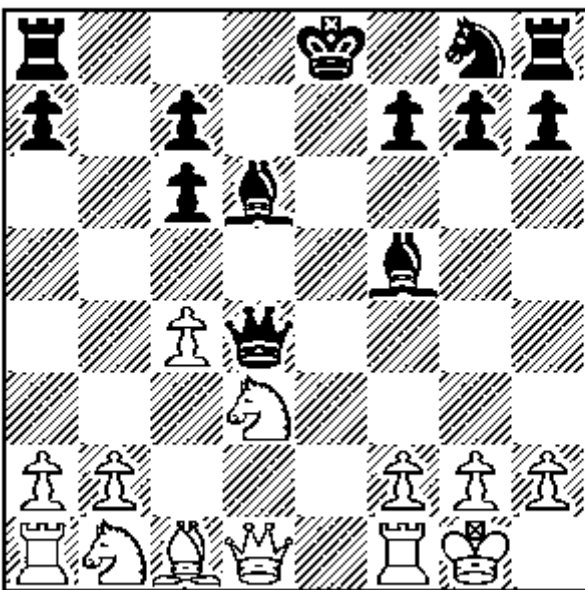
This is a critical continuation for the Ponziani, but White has been doing very badly of late with it. The Chinese prodigy GM Lu Shanglei has been giving it a few tries, but it seems like he's more keen on playing unorthodox positions than on getting an actual theoretical advantage.

4 exd5?! is not critical since after 4 ... Qxd5 the queen cannot be kicked with Nc3, but the main move is the cute 4 Qa4 and we will cover this in our next game.

#### 4 ... dxe4! 5 Nxe5 Qd5 6 Qa4

The main move, but it's probably going to fade away after this game.

A few weeks after this loss Lu Shanglei instead went for 6 Bxc6+ bxc6 7 d4, hoping that the structural weaknesses on the queenside would be a bigger deal than Black's bishop-pair, and after 7 ... exd3 8 0-0 Bd6 9 c4 Qd4 10 Nxd3 Black played solidly with 10 ... Bf5.



Soon the queens were traded which led to a well-played draw, although I still prefer Black's bishop-pair. Black could also be more ambitious with 10 ... Be6, perhaps followed by capturing the c4-pawn or maybe even ... 0-0-0.

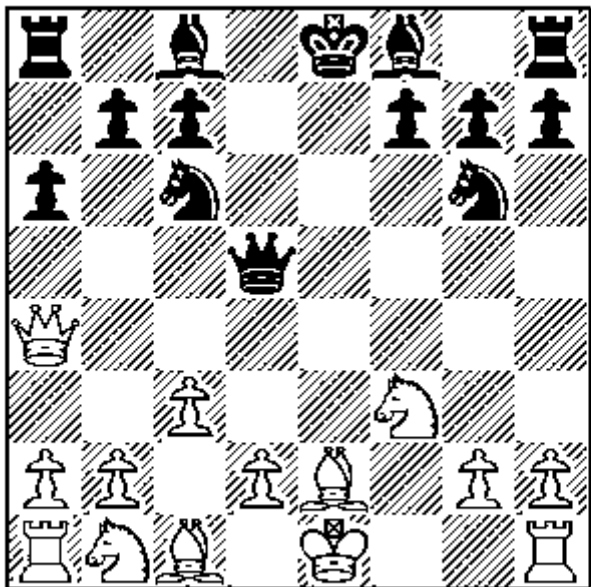
**6 ... Nge7 7 f4**

7 Nxc6 has also been tested quite a bit, but 7 ... Nxc6 8 0-0 Bd7 followed by ... 0-0-0 is just terrific for Black. White has bad development and nothing to show for it.

**7 ... exf3 8 Nxf3 a6 9 Be2**

9 Bc4 can safely be met with 9 ... Qe4+ 10 Kf2 Qf5! when White has to watch out for both ... b5 and sudden ... g5-g4 lunges.

**9 ... Ng6**



I like Black's position here. He has played solidly and actively in the centre, and White is nowhere near an advantage.

**10 Qb3?!**

This seems to lead to an inferior endgame. I think it's time to play 10 0-0 Bd6 11 d4 when White might be able to equalize, but Black is clearly the more comfortable.

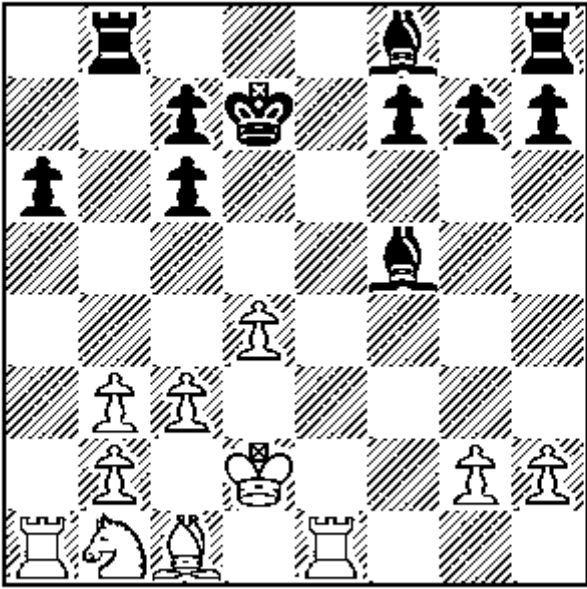
**10 ... Qxb3 11 axb3 Nf4!**

Suddenly White finds his e2-bishop harassed.

**12 Bb5**

12 Bf1 invites 12 ... Bf5 followed by ... Nd3 which at least picks up the bishop-pair with some advantage.

**12 ... Rb8 13 Bxc6+ bxc6 14 d4 Nd3+! 15 Kd2 Bf5 16 Ne1 Nxe1 17 Rxe1+ Kd7**



White hasn't been able to develop his pieces yet and we are 17 moves into the game! As if that wasn't enough, Black has a strong bishop-pair as well.

**18 Rf1 g6 19 Kd1 Bd6 20 h3 Rhe8 21 Nd2 Re7 22 Nc4 Bd3 23 Rf6 Rxb3 24 Nxd6 cxd6**

Black has picked up a pawn, but White hopes that the opposite-coloured bishops will give him some drawing chances.

**25 Ra5 Be2+ 26 Kc2 Bc4 27 Kd1 d5 28 Rc5 Rb6 29 b4 Bb3+ 30 Kd2 Kc7 31 b5?**

This is way too ambitious. White should probably just stay solid with 31 Kd3 followed by Bf4, when he might be able to draw after all.

**31 ... axb5 32 Ba3 Re8 33 Rxf7+ Kb8 34 Bc1 Ra6 35 Kd3 Ka8 36 c4 Bxc4+ 37 Kc3 Rb8 38 Bf4 b4+ 39 Kb2 Rb7 0-1**

Game 70

**R.Ovetchkin-A.Hamatgaleev**

Pskov 1998

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 c3 d5 4 Qa4**

This is the main line these days and quite provocative as well. White develops his queen early, but it does threaten the pawn on e5, which is not easy to defend comfortably.

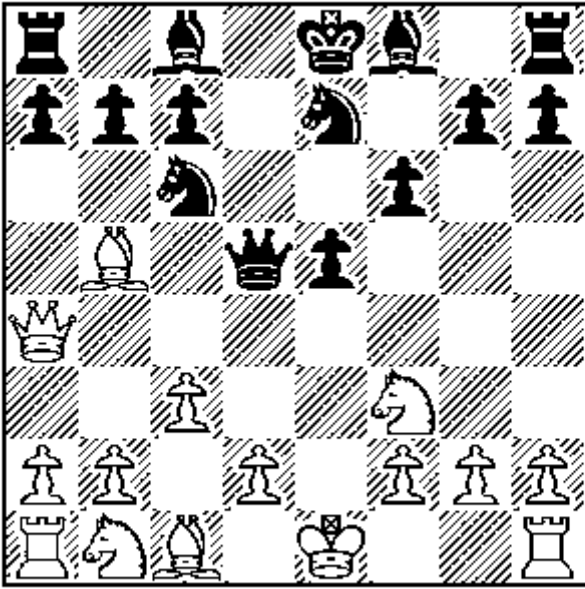
**4 ... f6!**

It's as simple as that. The pawn is protected and it seems like neither of White's critical tries give him anything. Instead, if Black plays accurately, it is White who has to think about equality.

**5 Bb5**

Lately grandmasters like Nepomniachtchi and Morozevich have tried 5 d3, but this is more of a try to avoid theory and play unexplored lines. 5 ... Nge7 6 Be2 Be6 7 0-0 Qd7 8 Nbd2 was seen in A.Morozevich-F.Vallejo Pons, Dubai (blitz) 2014, where I like Black's sensible, developing moves in the centre. Now Black could even consider 8 ... g5!? followed by developing some initiative on the kingside with ... g4.

**5 ... Nge7 6 exd5 Qxd5**



At this point White has a choice.

### 7 d4

More common is the immediate 7 0-0, but Black can continue in the same manner with 7 ... e4! when White risks having a backward pawn on d2 for a while:

a) 8 Ne1 was played in P.Soderberg-C.Cederstam Barsk, Stockholm 2014, when Black should have preferred 8 ... Bd7 followed by ... 0-0-0 and ... a6, while White has not yet developed his pieces.

b) 8 c4 is very anti-positional, but it might be White's best try. After all, he hasn't played very positionally so far. The best reply seems to be 8 ... Qd7! (8 ... Qd6 allows some unexpected counterplay after 9 c5! Qxc5 10 d4, and why 8 ... Qd7 would be better than 8 ... Qd8 will soon become clear) 9 Ne1 (the idea is shown after 9 Bxc6? Nxc6 10 Re1 f5 11 d3, which would have been very strong had the black queen been on d8, but here Black has 11 ... Nb4! which is very awkward for White) 9 ... a6 10 Nc3 Rb8 11 Bxc6 Qxc6 12 Qxc6+ Nxc6 13 Nxe4 Bf5 and since Black has the bishop pair and the d-file to work with, I have strong belief in his compensation. Black is at least not worse.

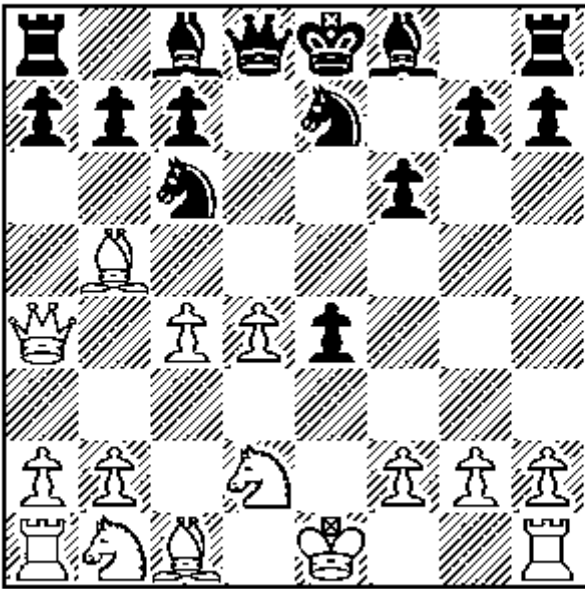
c) White has usually tried 8 Nd4, but 8 ... Bd7 9 Nxc6 Nxc6 10 Re1 0-0-0 is already very favourable for Black.

### 7 ... e4!

Surprisingly, this isn't the most common move but it seems to give Black a very good initiative.

### 8 Nfd2

White usually tries 8 c4 Qd8 9 Nfd2 and here everything would be wonderful for Black if it wasn't for the pin on the a4-e8 diagonal.



As such, let's get out of it with 9 ... Kf7!. I always love a king move in the opening, but in this case it's also strong. Black gets the d4-pawn and suddenly the queen on a4 and the bishop on b5 look rather silly.

**8 ... Qg5!**

White is unable to defend his kingside properly.

**9 Kf1**

9 Rg1 a6! is very comfortable for Black as well.

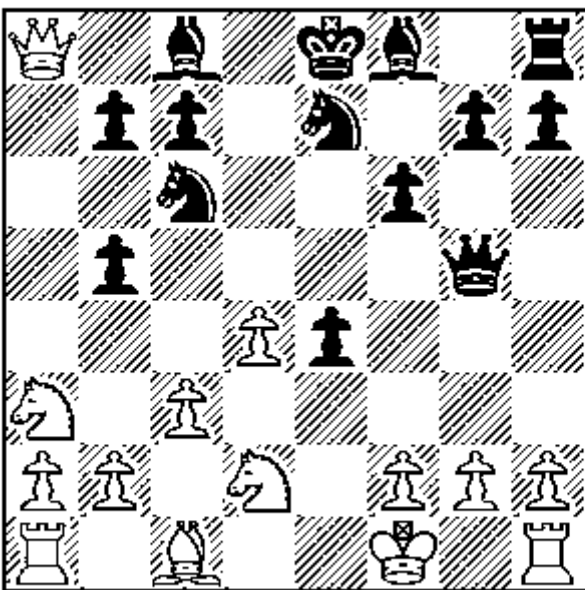
**9 ... a6 10 Na3?!**

10 Be2 would be better, but Black is clearly in the driver's seat after 10 ... Bg4.

**10 ... axb5!**

A very strong exchange sacrifice, which gives Black a clear initiative.

**11 Qxa8**



**11 ... Qg4**

11 ... Qf5! looks even better when the queen on a8 is trapped for now. White has to deal with the threat of ... Nd5 and ... Nb6 somehow.

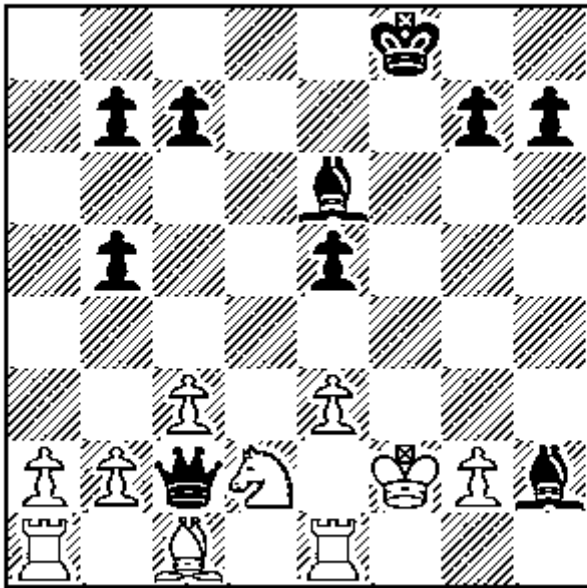
**12 Nc2 Nd5 13 Ne3**

This resource wouldn't have been possible had the black queen been on f5 instead.

**13 ... Nxe3+ 14 fxe3 Bd6**

Black's attack is extremely strong. The rest of the game isn't perfect, but Black maintained a much better position and eventually managed to clinch the full point.

**15 Nxe4 Qd1+ 16 Kf2 Qc2+ 17 Nd2 0-0 18 Re1 Bxh2 19 Qa3 Be6 20 Qc5 Ne5 21 dxe5 fxe5+ 22 Qxf8+ Kxf8**



White has two rooks for a queen and a pawn, but he is horribly under-developed and uncoordinated. Black could have demonstrated better technique, but all in all it was a very convincing game by Hamatgaleev.

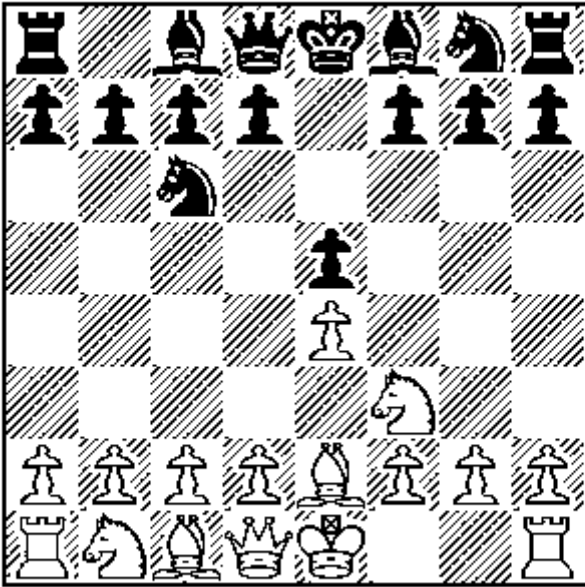
**23 Rh1 Qf5+ 24 Nf3 e4 25 Rxh2 exf3 26 e4 Qxe4 27 gxf3 Qc2+ 28 Kg3 Qd1 29 b3 Kf7 30 Bb2 Qd6+ 31 Kg2 Qd2+ 32 Kg1 Qe3+ 33 Rf2 Bh3 34 Rd1 Qf4 35 Rdd2 Qg3+ 36 Kh1 g5 37 Rde2 Kg6 38 c4 bxc4 39 bxc4 Qh4 40 Kg1 Qg3+ 41 Kh1 Qh4 42 Kg1 Qxc4 43 Re7 h5 44 Rfe2 h4 45 a3 Qf4 46 R7e3 Qg3+ 47 Kh1 Bf1 48 Be5 Qh3+ 49 Rh2 Qd7 50 Rf2 Bc4 51 Kh2 Bd5 52 Rg2 Qf5 53 Bxc7 Bxf3 54 Rd2 g4 55 Rd6+ Kf7 56 Rdd3 Bc6 57 Kg1 Qc5 0-1**

Game 71

**T.Haub-C.Bauer**

Vandouvre 2004

**1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Be2**



White aims for a Philidor position with reversed colours and Black can't really do anything to prevent it. Luckily for us, this is usually played by players who just want to get a position and play chess. That's why it has been regularly employed by Jobava, with good results.

**3 ... Nf6 4 d3 d5**

I don't want to back down from seizing the centre.

**5 Nbd2**

White could play a reversed Antoshin Philidor with 5 exd5 Nxd5 6 0-0 as well, but Black seems to do fine with just regular development: 6 ... Be7 7 c4 Nb6 8 Nc3 0-0 9 Re1 Re8 and Black has a solid position. We can go ... Bf5, ... Qd7 and play on the d-file.

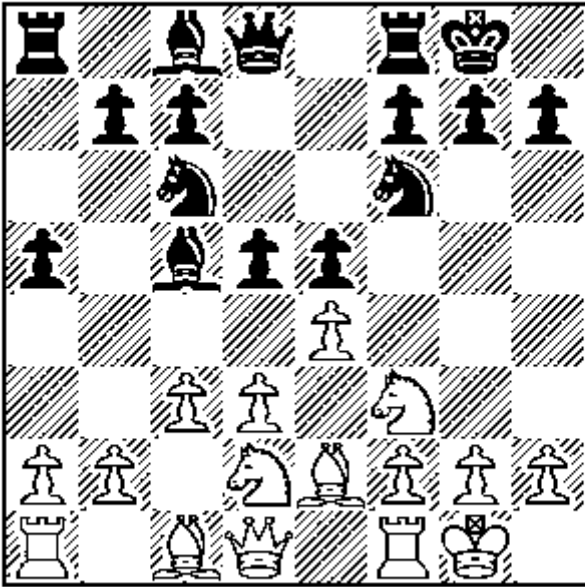
**5 ... Bc5**

The most active square for the bishop.

**6 0-0**

Jobava usually starts with the immediate 6 c3, but after 6 ... a5 (preventing b4) 7 a4 0-0 8 0-0 we transpose to our main game anyway. In one important game with Caruana, he did play the interesting 6 c3 a5 7 Qa4, but it's not much of a challenge: 7 ... 0-0 8 b4 Bd6 and now Jobava really should have gone for 9 b5! (9 0-0? b5! was a fantastic tactical idea by Caruana.) 9 ... Ne7 10 0-0 Ng6 when ... Nf4 is coming and I like Black's position, although the game is complicated.

**6 ... 0-0 7 c3 a5!**

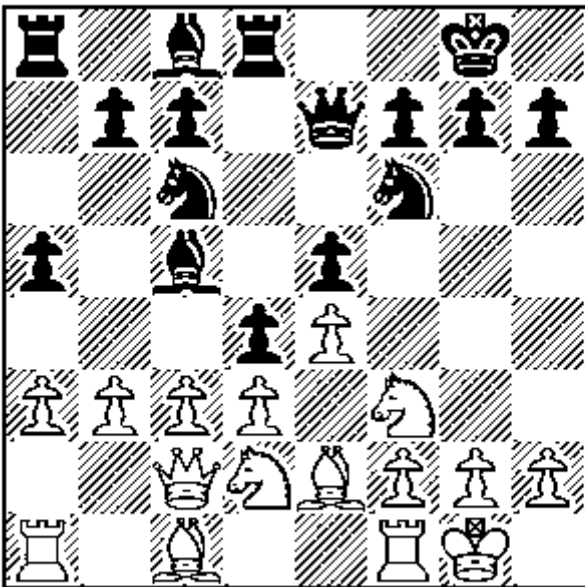


Black prevents b2-b4, but the a-pawn could also be used to cramp White on the queenside.

### 8 a4

White prevents ... a4 forever, while also trying to seize some light squares like c4 and b5. He also has:

a) Another common approach is to play 8 b3, when I like the following set-up: 8 ... Qe7! (preparing ... Rd8) 9 a3 Rd8 10 Qc2 and now it's a good time to play 10 ... d4!.



Black will obtain a good structure with pressure along the d-file. If White goes 11 c4 we will have a kind of reversed Benoni structure where White is struggling for counterplay since b3-b4 is impossible to achieve.

b) 8 Nxe5 is nothing to be afraid of: 8 ... Nxe5 9 d4 Nxe4 10 Nxe4 dxe4 11 dxc5 Nd3 and Black seems to maintain a pull.

### 8 ... Re8

Playing for the same set-up as above with 8 ... Qe7 is playable but less appealing, since White can play 9 exd5! Nxd5 10 Re1 with pressure along the e-file. This would not be possible had White played b2-b3 as the c3-pawn would be weak.

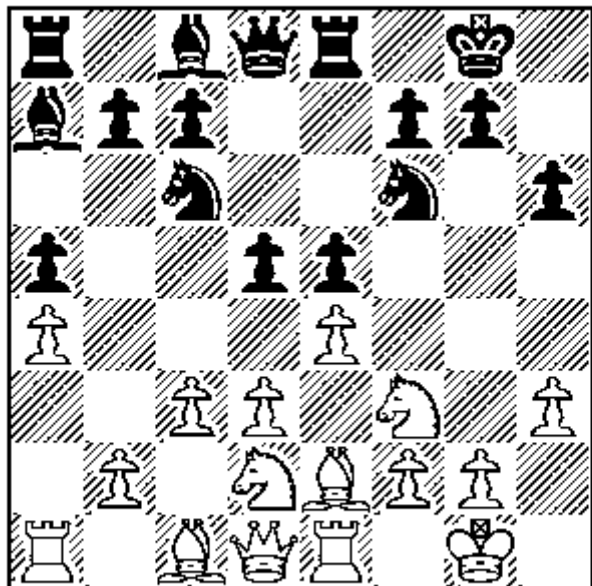
### 9 h3

This is the idea employed by Jobava as well. White prepares Re1 and Bf1 without being bothered by ... Ng4.

### 9 ... Ba7

A useful move, preventing all kind of tricks with Nxe5 followed by d3-d4 or exd5 followed by Ne4 with tempo. I'm not so sure whether it was really necessary at this point, though. The immediate 9 ... h6 looks like a possible improvement, although it doesn't change much.

### 10 Re1 h6



Black wants to play ... Be6 and ... Qd7, and Ng5 is now prevented.

### 11 Bf1

I was curious as to whether White could try to play Nd2-f1-g3 before playing Bf1, but after 11 Qc2 (defending e4) 11 ... Be6 12 Nf1 Black has the strong 12 ... d4! followed by ... Nf6-d7-c5 when White is bothered by the weaknesses on the queenside that appeared when the knight went to the kingside.

### 11 ... Be6

It's not so easy to find a plan for White now.

### 12 b3

This doesn't work out well for White, but it's hard to propose anything else. 12 exd5 Bxd5 is obviously very comfortable for Black as well.

### 12 ... Qd7 13 Bb2 Rad8 14 Qb1

This is certainly creative, but it doesn't seem to work.

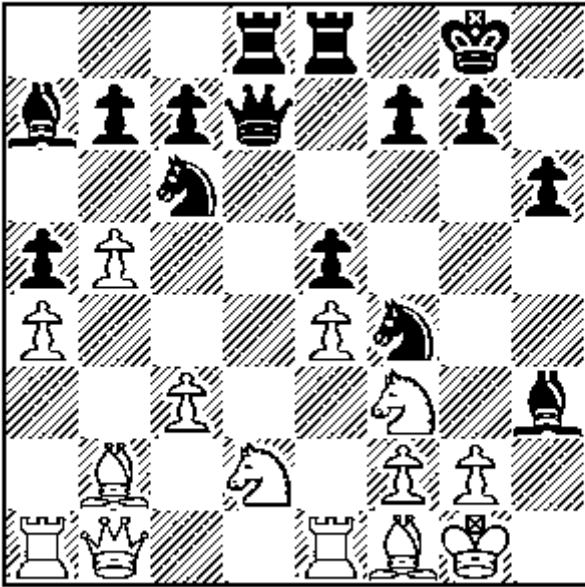
### 14 ... Nh5!

Black's plan is clear. His pieces are all centralized and active.

### 15 b4 dxe4 16 dxe4?

White really had to go for 16 Nxe4 when his position looks playable, although I prefer Black after 16 ... axb4 17 cxb4 f6 followed by ... Nf4 and ... Nd4.

### 16 ... Nf4 17 b5 Bxh3!!



A wonderful strike.

**18 gxh3 Nxh3+ 19 Kh2**

19 Bxh3 Qxh3 followed by ... Re6 and ... Rg6 will quickly lead to mate.

**19 ... Nf4**

Another strong move was 19 ... Nxf2! followed by ... Qg4.

**20 bxc6 Qg4**

Black has sacrificed two pieces, but just look at White's pieces. Black's attack is clearly decisive.

**21 Re3 Re6 22 Nd4 Qh4+ 23 Kg1 exd4 24 cxd4 Rg6+ 25 Rg3 Rxd3+ 26 fxd3 Qxd3+ 27 Kh1 Qh4+ 28 Kg1 Rxd4 0-1**

### Very Unusual Openings

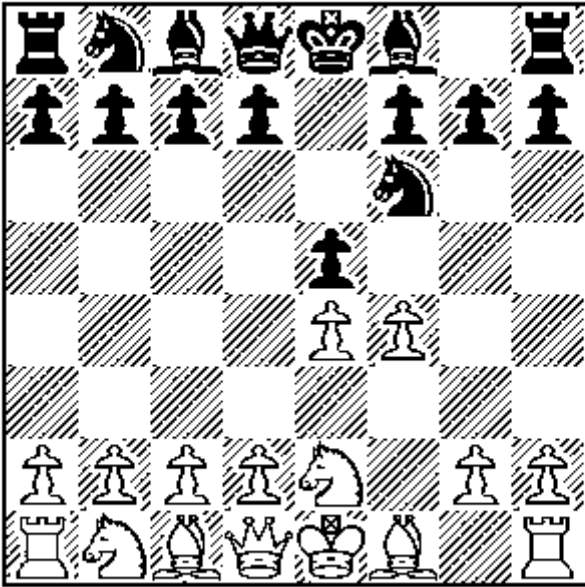
Finally, I will very briefly cover some strange lines, mostly for the sake of completeness. There's not much you have to remember, but each line has the right to exist.

### The Alapin Opening

**1 e4 e5 2 Ne2**

This is called the Alapin Variation and it's not that bad, although it has never received attention from any strong players.

**2 ... Nf6 3 f4**



This is the move that makes the variation stand out. It has been successfully employed by GM Jose Cubas and Sweden's Josef Ask, which shows that the variation carries some venom, but normal moves should give Black a good position.

**3 ... exf4! 4 Nxf4**

4 e5? Ne4 is actually losing immediately for White since ... Qh4 cannot be prevented.

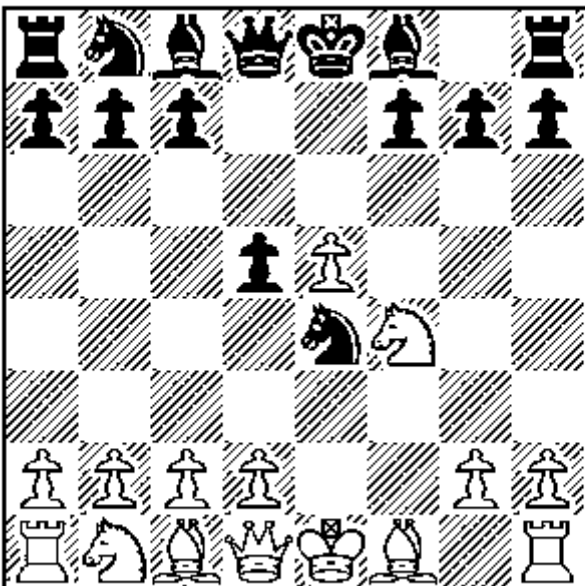
**4 ... d5!**

Naturally, Black takes over the centre when White plays strange opening moves.

**5 e5**

5 exd5 Bd6 followed by ... 0-0 is very comfortable for Black.

**5 ... Ne4**



**6 g3**

Alternatively:

a) 6 d3 Qh4+ 7 g3 Nxc3 8 Ng2 Qh5 9 Qxh5 Nxh5 is good for Black.

b) 6 Qf3 looks playable, but White was quickly losing in M.Raddatz-K.SeECK, Bad Segeberg 2000, after 6 ... Bc5 7 Be2 Nc6 8 Bb5 0-0.

**6 ... Nc6 7 d4 h5!**

This will be followed by ... h4 with a very dangerous attack.

## The Portuguese Variation

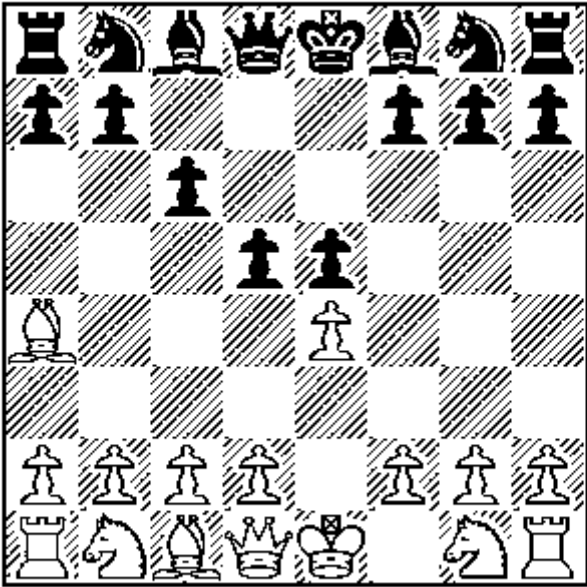
**1 e4 e5 2 Bb5**

This is the Portuguese variation, which is an inverted Pseudo-Trompowsky where White wants to play for a few tricks, but Black doesn't have much to worry about.

**2 ... c6!**

Immediately putting the question to the bishop. Black should probably refrain from 2 ... Nf6 when 3 d4! actually gives White interesting play.

**3 Ba4 d5!**



A very rare move, but it's based on solid principles. Black should attack in the centre when White plays strange developing moves.

**4 Nc3**

Probably White's best try, but I have a strong novelty that seems to give Black a comfortable advantage.

The key idea is, of course, that 4 exd5 Qxd5 is uncomfortable for White, especially since 5 Nf3? Qe4+! drops the bishop on a4.

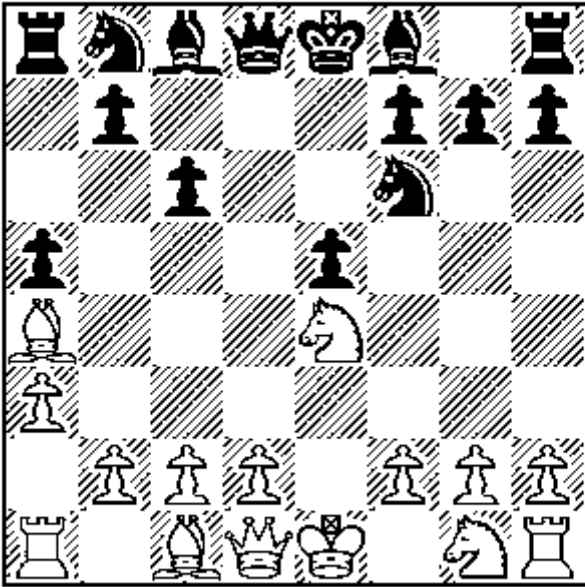
**4 ... a5!**

Black wants to make the bishop on a4 as uncomfortable as possible. Now ... b5 is a serious threat.

**5 a3 dxe4!**

I don't like closing the centre with ... d4, since White will be able to develop some initiative on the kingside, but this way Black makes sure that we get the initiative.

**6 Nxe4 Nf6**



White has nothing better than ...

**7 Nxf6+ Qxf6 8 Ne2**

... but now Black gets a very good position:

**8 ... Bc5 9 0-0 0-0 10 d3 Bg4!**

Black is actively placed and it's not too clear what White's bishop is doing on a4.

### Scholar's Mate

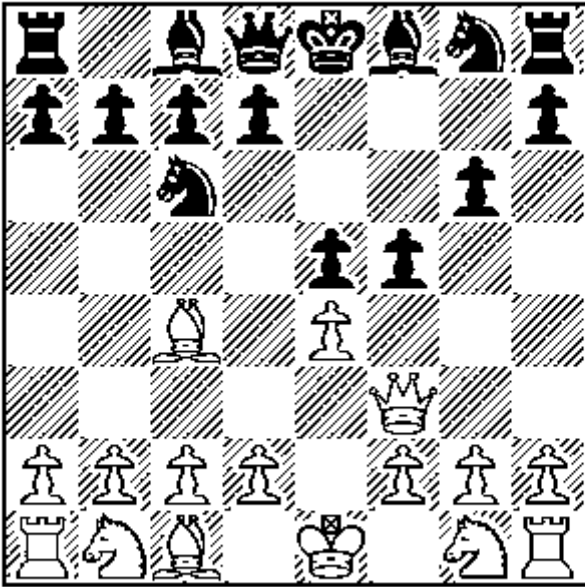
**1 e4 e5 2 Qh5**

White wants to finish this game quickly, which might be successful against an inexperienced chess player. Amongst the top players, it is well-known that Hikaru Nakamura had a brief flirtation with this variation in 2005, but it hasn't been popular ever since.

**2 ... Nc6**

I'm very interested in 2 ... Nf6!? 3 Qxe5+ Be7, which seems to give Black very good compensation if White plays routinely. However, White seems to have the strong 4 Qf4! when I'm not sure that Black has quite enough.

**3 Bc4 g6 4 Qf3 f5!?**



A fascinating move that should really throw White out of book. Objectively I don't think this is the best continuation, but the resulting positions are very appealing and White must tread carefully. In a practical game this is very likely to shock your opponent.

**5 d3**

Alternatively, 5 exf5 Nd4 6 Qg3!? Qf6! 7 Bd3 d5 8 Ne2 (8 fxg6? e4 is just winning for Black) 8 ... Bd6 and Black has a very strong centre.

**5 ... Nf6 6 Ne2**

Now Black can try to create something on the kingside.

**6 ... f4! 7 d4 Qe7**

Black will expand while developing with ... g5, ... Bg7, ... d6 and then ... g4.

## Conclusion

Amongst the variations covered in this chapter, I would say that the g3 set-ups are the most serious. I face them quite frequently in practice and it is a good idea to remember some of the nuances, since Black really does have to play accurately to completely equalize. I believe I've delivered two heavy blows against the Ponziani, and right now it looks very doubtful if it will ever be more than just a surprise weapon. The other variations in this chapter are at all not common and they're mostly here for the sake of completeness.

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