

Jovanka Houska

# play the Caro-Kann

a complete chess opening repertoire against 1 e4



EVERYMAN CHESS

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*To my parents and Arne, who gave me the inspiration to pursue my dreams.*

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# Introduction

My own experience with the Caro-Kann began when I was a child. My father, a club player, decided it was about time I started playing something mainstream so he introduced me to the opening. In his own inimitable style he elatedly said: 'After 1 e4, play 1 ... c6 – it's a win!' However, it was, I must come clean, the Caro-Kann with little Houska twists: some actually very good ideas; others well, a little unique ...

After showing me the moves 2 d4 d5 3 exd5, he paused. Unable to contain the excitement in his voice, he animatedly stated: 'And now Black should play the very strong 3 ... Qxd5!' A few years later, I tried to persuade him that maybe it wasn't such a good thing to give the centre away so easily, but my father could not be swayed and continued on his mission to convince everyone to play this idea (even top grandmasters were not immune from such advice!). So after a while, I laid the Caro to rest, consigning it as a relic of the past, and began investigating other openings. However, my interest was reawakened in my late teens when I needed something simple but logical that could give me reasonable winning chances.

## History of the Opening

It was two German players, Horatio Caro and Marcus Kann, who introduced this defence during the second half of the nineteenth century. At the time, chess was very much in its 'Romantic' stage; a time when it was rude not to accept sacrifices, and gambits were all the rage. Unsurprisingly, the Caro-Kann did not find too many adherents but as the concepts of positional chess developed, people began appreciating the qualities of the opening: Black gets easy development of the pieces, clear plans with a solid pawn structure, and safe but active play. Today, the Caro has a grand heritage with many great players, including world champions – Botvinnik, Petrosian and most significantly Anatoly Karpov – using it with great success. Modern advocates of the Caro include distinguished grandmasters such as Dautov, Dreev, and Riazantsev, to name just a few. I fully advocate following the games of these players and shamelessly copying what they play! After all, why not play the opening like a top grandmaster?!

## Aims of the Caro-Kann

In the past, the Caro-Kann has been much maligned for being dry and boring, or simply a drawish opening. However, the fundamental aim of the opening is to achieve full development and then begin active play to challenge White's space advantage. There are many sides to the Caro and one should not lose sight that at times it can be very sharp as well as positional.

The whole premise of 1 ... c6 is very much based on the logic that is also behind the French Defence: with the first move Black gets ready to support the ... d7-d5 pawn advance. The advantage of 1 ... c6 is that Black does not block the light-squared bishop on c8, but there is also a disadvantage in that the important move ... c5 is not available to Black in most lines, at least not immediately. The centre is usually filled with too much tension for Black to be able to spend two tempi achieving ... c5, and Black must usually wait until he is fully developed before he can afford to expend another tempo in pushing the c6-pawn one square further. There is one exception to this and that is in the Advance Variation (Chapters 7-8), the justification being that White has already eased the high tension in the centre by advancing the e-pawn.

As I stated earlier, Black's main aim is to complete development before beginning any active operations (although of course there are some exceptions). However, when playing the opening, it is very

useful to keep in mind the following six factors. Some of them are clearly self-explanatory; others, I will explain how they should be applied to the Caro-Kann directly.

### **The Centre**

The centre is a very important feature of most openings and the Caro-Kann is no different. The nature of the centre is flexible and dependent on the variation chosen by White: at times it can be full of high tension, as in the Panov; relatively static, as in the Exchange Variation; or dynamic, as in an isolated queen's pawn (IQP) position. Black should always value the importance of the centre – especially the four centre squares e4, e5, d4 and d5 – as it is such an important part of the game.

### **Open Lines**

Again this is dependent on which variation is played, but as a very general point Black should be looking to contest the central files, paying special attention to the pawn breaks ... c5 and ... e5, which place pressure on the central square d4.

### **Piece Activity**

This one is pretty simple: keep the pieces as active as possible!

### **Pawn Structure**

Generally speaking Black has a good structure with pawns usually occupying light squares, the only disadvantage being that to begin with Black's structure does not control much space. One point to understand is that if Black exchanges his light-squared bishop for a knight, he should very much play on the dark squares and use the pawns as a light-square blockade.

### **Strong and Weak Squares**

As a very rough guide, Black's weakest point is the e5-square, as this is often utilized by a white knight to commence an attack. A strong square for Black, if the pawn has been exchanged, is the d5-square; if the d5-pawn remains then the c4- and e4-squares are potential strengths.

### **King safety**

This actually consists of more than the basic rule of getting your king castled as soon as possible. In fact, this concept is especially significant in cases where parties have castled on opposite sides. Here both White and Black should be acutely aware that in terms of defence *prevention is always better than cure*.

## **The Modern Approach to the Caro-Kann**

Since the introduction of computers, Black openings in general have taken some serious poundings and the Caro-Kann is no exception. It has traditionally been perceived as a relatively simple if a little passive system with Black only needing to know the underlying ideas. However, with the increasing amount of theory the situation has become much more complicated. White players, no longer content with simply playing a position as it is, have adopted two aggressive approaches: the first is to try to completely blast Black off the board; the second, to try to force Black to 'grovel' for the draw in a chanceless position. Unfortunately, it has become more and more necessary for players to have a deeper knowledge of the theory, so I would suggest that readers make a real effort to understand the moves and ideas in the sharp lines (Advance, Panov) and the Classical main lines, whilst simply learning some basic principles for the lines which are known to be less dangerous for Black. In the latter case, having a positional understanding

will count for much more than simply memorizing variations.

## **My approach to the Book**

I have very much tried to write this book exactly how I like books to be written – with plenty of explanation of ideas and basic principles, along with some new theory! On the whole I have tended to avoid lines where I feel Black only has the chance of playing for ‘two results’ (a loss or a draw) and instead chosen lines with ‘three results’ on offer. Sometimes this has led to me, following in my dad’s footsteps, adding little Houska twists. I have also steered away from very complicated positions where Black is material up but his king is stranded in the centre; in my experience those positions are nerve-racking to play and most of them should be deeply studied – not something everyone has time to do. I have used two computer engines to assist me in my analysis – the calm *Rybka 2.1* and the over-excitable *Fritz 9*.

I would like to give my thanks to Everyman Chess Publications, and in particular to Grandmaster John Emms for helping me immeasurably, giving his advice and providing me with a volume of material that I could not have done without.

Finally, to all Caro players out there: Good Luck!

Jovanka Houska,  
Harrow,  
February 2007

# Chapter One

## Main Line: Introduction and 11 Bf4

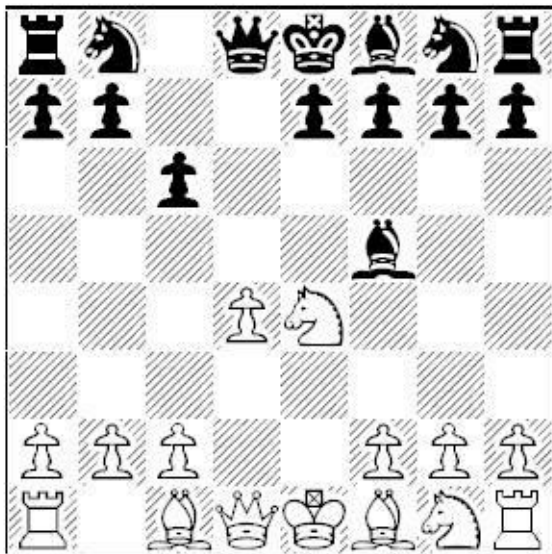
**1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3**

One of the advantages of 3 Nc3 is that Black has no useful move other than 3 ... dxe4, allowing the white knight to reach the central square e4 (3 ... g6 is a possibility but is more in the realm of the Modern Defence than this book). It is because of this factor that the 'Main Line' (3 Nc3) is probably the real test of the Caro-Kann. White neither goes all out for an attack, nor does he directly attempt to refute the whole opening. Instead he tries to seize as much space as he can, concentrates on the centre where he has superior chances, and uses the e5-square to restrain Black.

White has a similar move in 3 Nd2. Normally, and for the purposes of our repertoire, there is no difference between this and 3 Nc3, as Black can simply exchange pawns on e4. However, I do feel that the move 3 Nd2 allows Black some extra options: the main one is 3 ... g6 and, among others, there's the little-known move 3 ... Qb6.

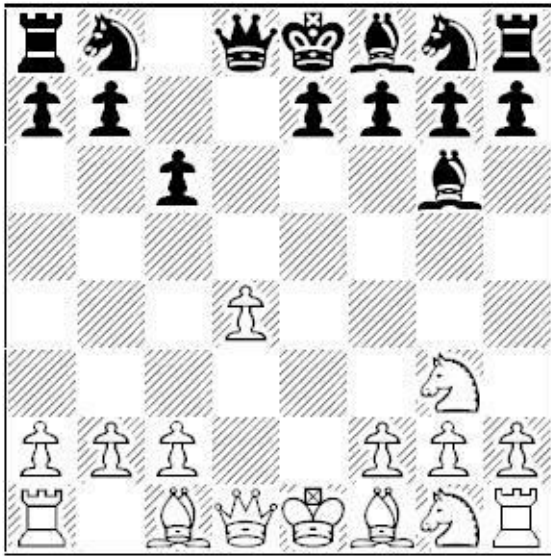
## The Capablanca Variation

**1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 dxe4 4 Nxe4 Bf5**



The Capablanca Variation (it's often referred to as the Classical Variation) is the simplest and most logical way to contest the centre. Black develops his bishop to a very natural square and at the same time challenges White's control of the e4-square. The downside to this move is that it gives White time to seize the initiative and grab some kingside space.

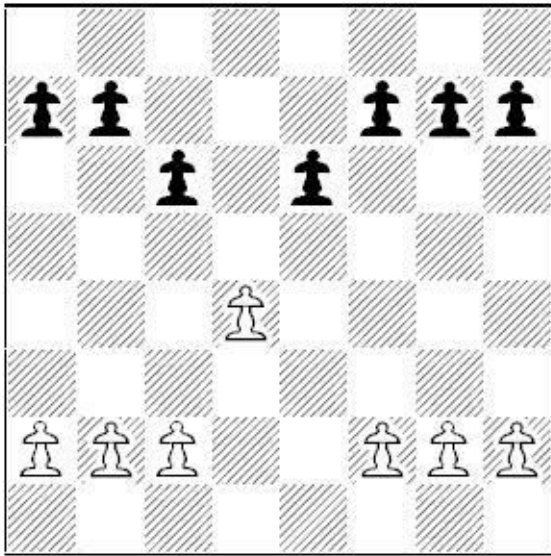
**5 Ng3 Bg6**



White has used various methods over the years in the search for an advantage, and there has been a steady evolution of this line. To begin with White attempted to obtain advantages through the greater space obtained by the presence of the d4-pawn, the two bishops, and freer development. It was not until later that more aggressive plans were formulated, in which White actively played for greater space and greater central control. It was the former World Champion Boris Spassky who devised a new idea of advancing the h-pawn to h5, cramping the black kingside, and for a while the Capablanca Variation became synonymous with an inferior endgame. However, the evolution was not at all one-sided and there were many advances for Black; as White became more aggressive, so did the second player.

### The Centre

As with many openings, controlling the centre is a very important part of both the Black and White strategy.



In the main line of the Capablanca Variation there is a continuous battle for all four squares: two of the squares – d5 and e4 – Black should aim to control, whilst d4 is a target and the e5-square something that Black should protect. This battle commences right from move three when White virtually forces

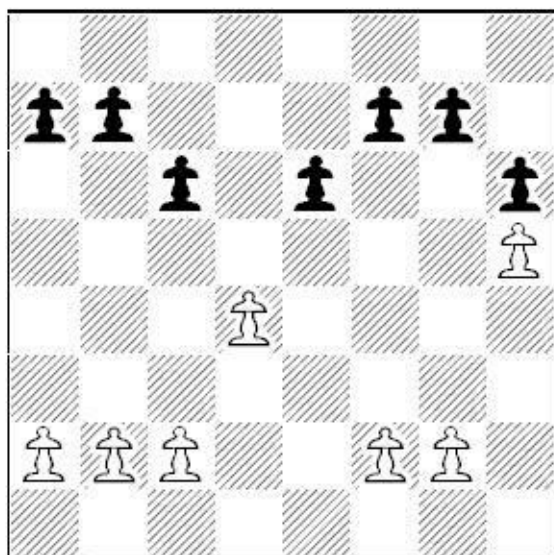
Black to release the central tension through exchanging pawns (otherwise White will obtain a strong pawn centre) and Black in return drives the knight away from the e4-square in a bid to control that square with his own pieces.

One of the most important squares for Black to control is d5, and he should be prepared to fight for it in radical ways; for example, by playing ... b7-b5. The d4-pawn is usually targeted with a well-timed ... c5 advance, but this is normally played when Black has developed his army completely. The e5-square is the perfect post for a white knight, which is why Black plays the defensive ... Nd7 and ... Qc7 to safeguard this square.

## The h-pawn: Curse or Blessing?

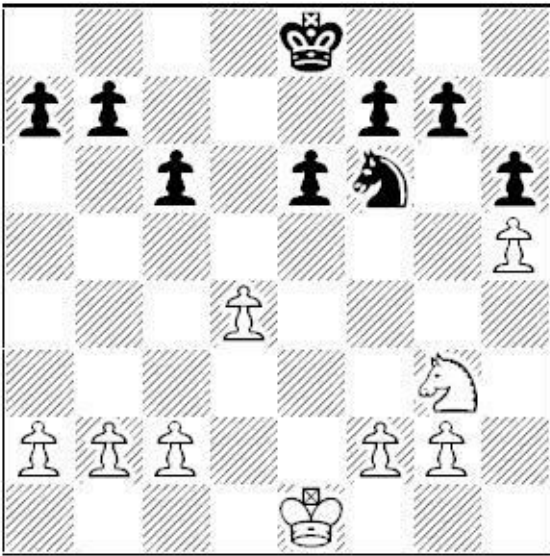
The most common way for White to search for an advantage is by gaining extra space with a quick h4-h5 followed by queenside castling, but there are also more aggressive plans solely directed at attacking the black king.

The advanced h-pawn is a double-edged sword for White. At times it is ‘man of the match’, giving White a winning position when the game may otherwise have been a draw; at other times it’s the curse of White’s position.



The h-pawn is used as a clamp on Black’s kingside pawn structure; it is also an excellent tool for attack as it single-handedly prevents Black’s kingside pawns from advancing in an effective way. When it is supported by its brothers on the g- and f-files in an endgame then the situation can become very grave indeed for Black. He should also steer clear of any dark-squared bishop endgames, as his kingside pawns – g7 and h6 in particular – will just be weak. It is Black’s aim to prevent White from making massive flank advances on the kingside by either striking in the centre with ... c5 or ... b5, or by keeping the white knight on g3, which leads us nicely to the subject of the ‘bad’ g3-knight ...

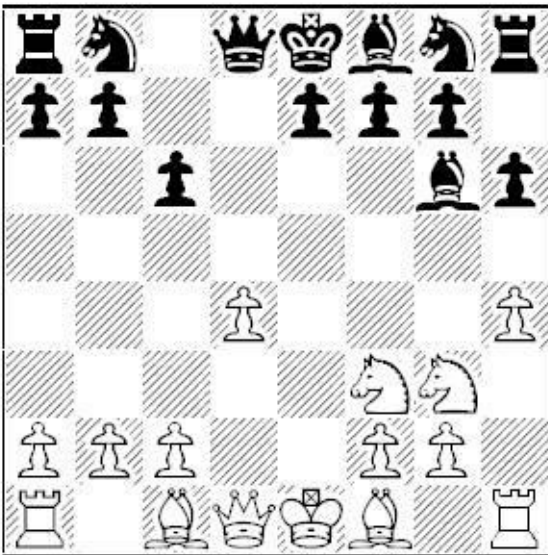
## Good piece/Bad piece



The knight on g3 is White's only bad piece. If White begins to drift or does not play Ne4 (or Ne2), then it may become doomed to passivity for the rest of the game, chained to the defence of the h-pawn or shut out by its counterpart on f6. Black, on the other hand, does not have any 'bad' pieces, but there are some soft spots in his position: the f7-pawn if Black castles queenside and the h6-pawn if he castles kingside. The h6-pawn is a dangerous weakness as it adds power to any future White pawn storm on the kingside (the most relevant to us because we will be castling short!).

Let's go back to the position after 5 ... Bg6:

**6 h4 h6 7 Nf3!**



An important move: White induces Black to play the defensive ... Nd7 to prevent the white knight on f3 landing on the power square e5.

7 f4 is rarely seen and should be met by logical moves, as demonstrated by Grandmaster Igor Rausis in the following game: 7 ... e6 (to prevent the immediate f5) 8 Nf3 Nd7 9 h5 Bh7 10 Bd3 Bxd3 11 Qxd3 Bd6 12 Bd2 Qc7 13 Ne5 Rd8 (13 ... Nxe5?! is a bit dodgy as the bishop has to return to f8 after 14 fxe5) 14 Qb3 Ngf6 15 0-0-0 0-0 16 Kb1 c5 and with the centre opening up, Black is doing well in a sharp position, R.Mamedov-I.Rausis, Abu Dhabi 2006.

7 ... Nd7

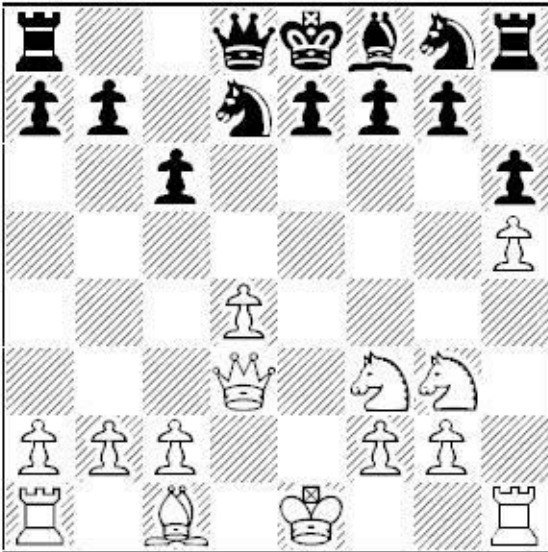
7 ... Nf6, allowing 8 Ne5, is also possible but I'm not a fan of this provocative variation.

**8 h5 Bh7 9 Bd3!**

White aims to castle queenside so it is wise to swap off Black's light-squared bishop.

**9 ... Bxd3 10 Qxd3**

After White captures the bishop, there are three main moves available to Black: 10 ... Nf6, 10 ... e6 and 10 ... Qc7. At first it was assumed that it was irrelevant which move Black chose as they all transpose to the same thing: Black would castle queenside and then undermine the white centre with a well-timed ... c7-c5 break.

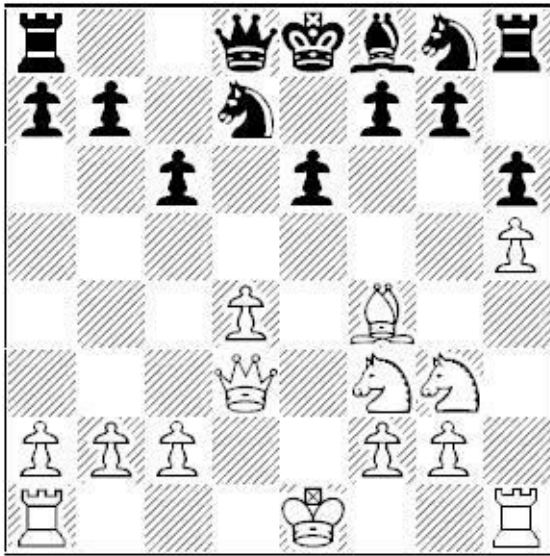


However, after a while it was discovered that Black need not castle queenside but could steer the game into sharper territory by castling short, whereupon each side would begin a race to hack the other side to pieces. To begin with, Caro players were obsessed with ... a7-a5 ideas (the great Danish Grandmaster Bent Larsen was one of the proponents). However, as White developed new and effective attacking ideas the focus again shifted to plans involving ... c7-c5, attacking the d4-pawn and aiming to utilize the c-file as Black does in the Sicilian. In response there have been two White plans: one of them has been to play Nf3-e5, securing a strong post for the f3-knight. The second one – far more dangerous – has been to simply move the ‘bad’ knight on g3 out of the way to e4 (or e2) and then to advance the g-pawn all the way to g5. In the beginning White went to great lengths to prepare the strong g2-g4 move by first playing a rook to g1. However, in recent years it has been discovered that in fact White need not bother preparing the move, and can instead sacrifice the pawn for a crushing attack on the g-file. For a while this idea knocked the wind out of Black's sails as far as castling kingside was concerned. However, after fiddling around with possibilities, a very interesting idea emerged: why not provoke White to play the pawn move c4 in order to give Black something to chew on? This is how an idea was born ...

**10 ... e6!**

This is the most flexible move here and the only one I will be recommending. Why do I like this move much more than the two alternatives? Because it opens the diagonal for the dark-squared bishop, which will prove to be very important.

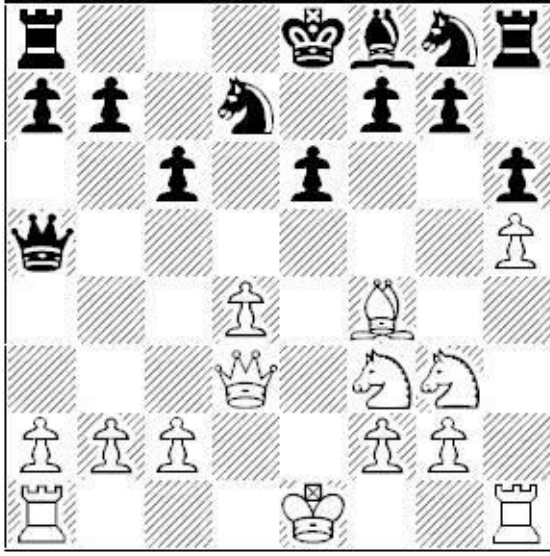
**11 Bf4**



White places his bishop on the most active square possible and at the same time gets ready to support a knight jump to e5. This move also has the advantage of not blocking the d-file, so that Black's move ... c6-c5 loses some strength (compare this with 11 Bd2, discussed in Chapter 2).

For a long time 11 Bf4 has been the most critical move against the Capablanca Variation. Black has to tread very carefully in this line to stay in the game: if he plays too passively then he faces suffering a long and joyless endgame in a cramped position; but play too recklessly and it can be all over before it has even started.

**11 ... Qa5+**



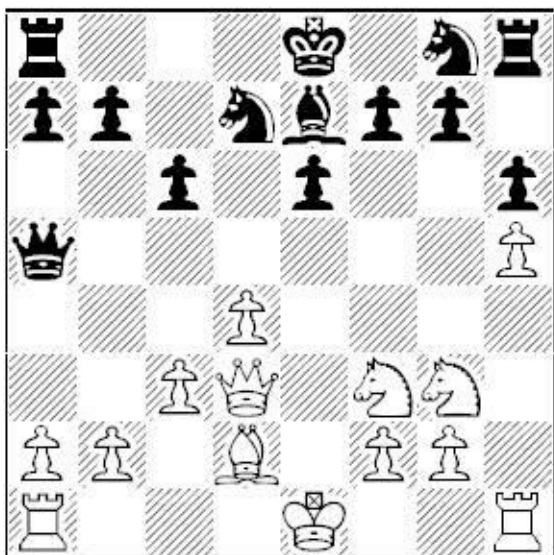
The most combative reply, leading to positions full of trickery and interesting play. The aims behind Black's idea are twofold. Firstly, Black wants to discourage White from castling queenside and, secondly, to provoke the advance of the c-pawn. Black will be aiming to castle kingside rather than queenside, and this plan is playable courtesy of the white pawn on c4 (see move 14), which gives the ... b7-b5 advance extra bite. Also, there are some situations where should White continue with a very quick Ne4 before Black has committed his king, it is very possible that Black can castle queenside, having tricked White into playing a less critical continuation in the traditional main line (i.e. c2-c4 rather than

Ne4 followed by g2-g3).

### 12 Bd2 Bb4!?

The most provocative approach: to retain any advantage White should avoid any simplification of the position, so he must either consent to Black's wish and push the c-pawn forward one square or play the interesting 13 Ne4, which is dealt with later in the chapter.

### 13 c3 Be7

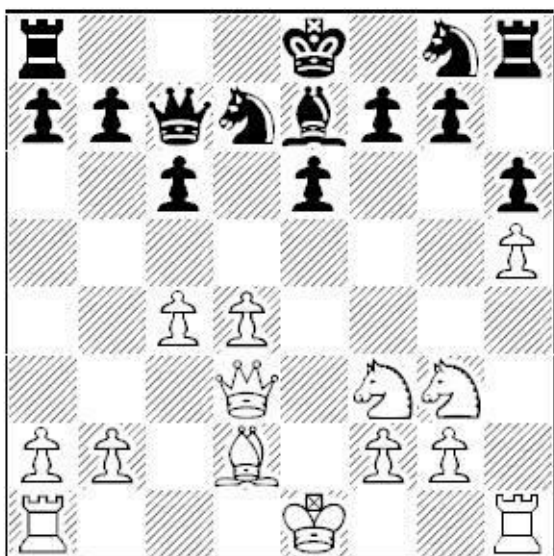


When the h-pawn has been pushed all the way to h5, normally the last thing White wishes to do is house his monarch on that side of the board, so he should chase the queen away in order to castle queenside.

### 14 c4

14 0-0 Ngf6 (attacking the h5 pawn straight away) 15 c4 is dealt with in Line B.

### 14 ... Qc7



White has three plans here: the immediate 15 d5, which sets out to refute the variation straight away; the critical option of castling queenside; and not-so-critical castling kingside. The latter two plans very much involve the same idea of centralizing the pieces and threatening Nf5 in some form or other. The differences can be seen in Black's approach to these moves.

White can now choose between the following three options:

**A: 15 d5**

**B: 15 0-0**

**C: 15 0-0-0**

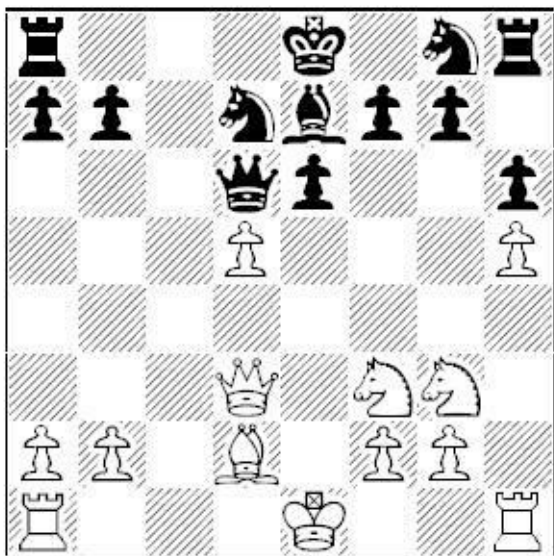
**A) 15 d5!?**

This line does look incredibly sharp, and for a while it was thought to be the refutation of Black's whole idea. However, the position quickly steers into an endgame with good chances for Black.

**15 ... cxd5!**

Previously it had been thought that Black could not allow the position to be opened with his king in the centre, so instead he had concentrated on getting the king into safety by castling queenside. However, the irony was that the king turned out to be poorly placed on c8, and indeed it came under immense fire. For the time being, it is actually safer on e8.

**16 cxd5 Qd6!**



The critical move! The d-pawn is pinned so White is unable to take on e6 immediately.

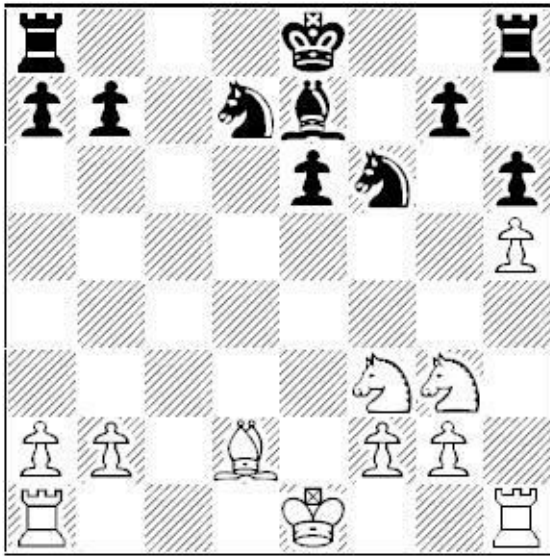
**17 0-0-0**

After 16 ... Qd6, four other moves have been tried and 17 ... Ngf6 is the answer to all of them:

a) 17 Bc3 Ngf6 18 0-0 transposes to 17 0-0-0.

b) 17 Qb3 Ngf6! (Black should just continue with his development, as the b7-pawn is poisoned: 18 Qxb7? 0-0 and Black will recover at least one pawn; the h5-pawn is difficult to defend, especially as White cannot castle queenside) 18 dxe6 Qxe6+ 19 Qxe6 fxe6.

This is a misleading position in the sense that upon first impressions it looks like White is doing quite well. Black has a weak pawn on e6 that looks ripe for the taking, and it appears only a matter of time before White has a very pleasant position. However, things are not as clear cut as that. The poor placement of the knight on g3 and the weak pawn on h5 are a burden to White; he cannot dedicate all his resources to the centre as he must always keep an eye out for the h5-pawn.

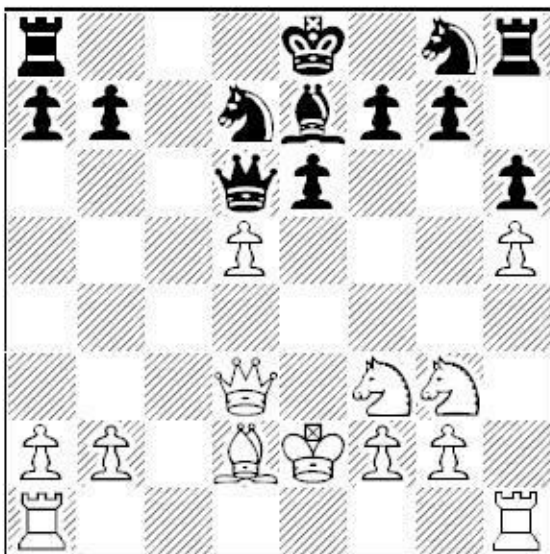


A couple of examples:

b1) 20 0-0-0 Bc5 (targeting the f2-pawn) 21 Rhf1 Rc8 22 Kb1 0-0 23 Bc3 Nd5 (Black improves his position as much as he can – small improvements usually turn into big ones!) 24 Bd4 N7f6 (keeping an eye on h5) 25 Ne5 Kh7 and Black was perfectly fine in E.Van Haastert-D.Fridman, Dutch League 2005.

b2) In the game C.Lutz-K.Landa, French League 2005, White did not fare so well: 20 Rc1 0-0 21 Nd4 was well met by 21 ... Bc5 22 Be3?! (the bishop is too passive here; 22 Bc3 Nd5 23 0-0 Nf4 24 Rcd1 Rad8 and Black has active play) 22 ... Nd5! 23 0-0 (23 Nxe6 is not possible: 23 ... Bxe3 24 Nxf8 Bxc1! and Black is better) 23 ... Nxe3 24 fxe3 Bb6 25 Kh2 Ne5! (Black relentlessly targets White's weaknesses, in this case the e3-pawn and White's exposed king) 26 Nxe6 Ng4+ 27 Kh3 Nf2+ 28 Kh2 Rf7 29 Nd4 Raf8 30 Kg1 Ng4. Black soon won the pawn back and had the better game because of the weak pawn on h5!

c) The strange-looking 17 Ke2 was played twice by Golubev against Ovetchkin:



17 ... Ngf6 18 dxe6 Qxd3+ 19 Kxd3 fxe6 20 Rac1 Bd6 21 Ne4 Nxe4 22 Kxe4 (advancing the king in such a manner can only be asking for trouble) 22 ... 0-0 23 Bc3? (White makes a decisive error) 23 ... Nc5+ 24 Kd4 Rf4+ 25 Ke3 Re4+ 26 Kd2 Bf4+ and Black picked up the exchange, M.Golubev-

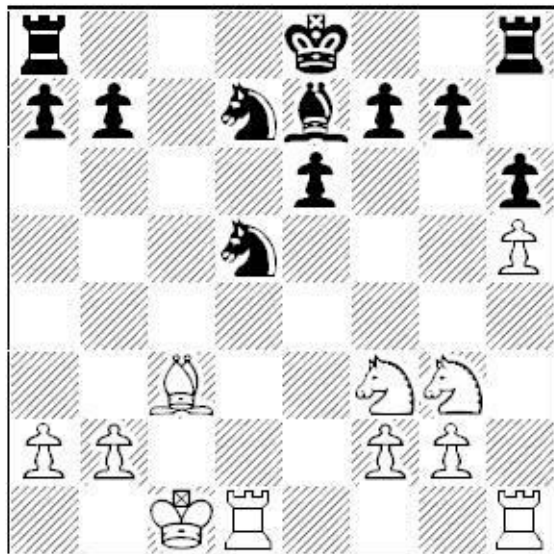
R.Ovetchkin, Internet (blitz) 2006.

d) 17 Qb5 Ngf6! (Black concentrates on developing his pieces) 18 dxe6 (the b7-pawn is poisoned and White gains nothing by capturing it except a whole heap of trouble: 18 Qxb7 0-0 19 0-0 Nc5 20 Qb5 Qxd5 21 Bc3 Rfb8 22 Qe2 Nxf5 and Black picks up a pawn) 18 ... Qxe6+ 19 Kf1 0-0 20 Re1 Qd5 21 Qxd5 Nxd5 22 Nf5 Bf6 23 Rh3 Rfe8 24 Rxe8+ and a draw was agreed in the game A.Berelovich-I.Khenkin, Belgian League 2005, although with the more active pieces it looks like Black has the better of things here.

**17 ... Ngf6**

Black now threatens to win a pawn by recapturing on d5 with the knight.

**18 Bc3 Qxd5 19 Qxd5 Nxd5**



Black trades off a wing pawn for a central pawn. Normally in the endgame a wing pawn is worth more than a central pawn whilst in the opening the reverse is true. However, all rules have exceptions and this is one of them.

**20 Bxg7**

With the rather rash-looking 20 Rxd5? White gives up the exchange in order to get active piece play, but the sacrifice proved unsound after 20 ... exd5 21 Bxg7 Rh7! (the only move – Black must defend the important h-pawn) 22 Nf5 Bf8! (the exchange of the bishops will effectively release the black rook from its cage) 23 Re1+ Kd8 24 Bxf8 Nxf8 25 Re7 Rc8+ 26 Kd2 Rc7 27 Rxc7 Kxc7 28 Ne5 Ne6 29 Ng4 Kc6, when Black was much better in J.Smeets-R.Ovetchkin, Moscow 2005.

**20 ... Rh7**

Black must defend the h6-pawn even if it means that the rook is out of play for a short while.

**21 Bd4**

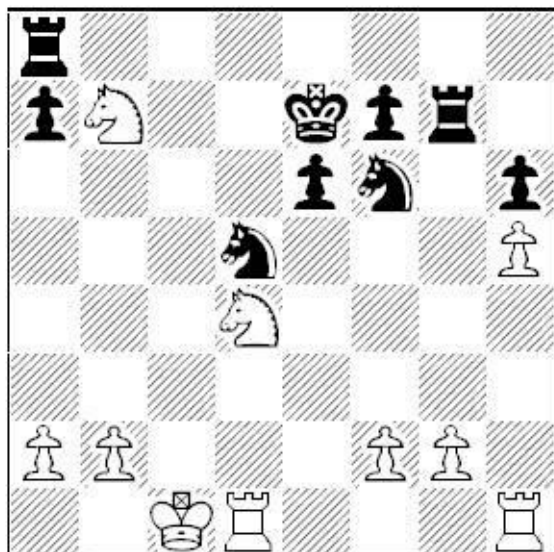
So now we have reached an endgame where both sides have some advantages to their position. White has a very strong bishop on d4 and technically speaking a better pawn formation. To counteract this Black must act quickly.

**21 ... N7f6**

Black's knight restricts the scope of White's bishop on d4 and knight on g3 but more importantly allows the rook to join the game via g7.

21 ... Bf6!?, exchanging White's strong bishop, is also possible: 22 Ne4 Bxd4 23 Nxd4 N7f6! (given an exclamation mark by Riazantsev) 24 Nxf6+ Nxf6 25 Nb5 Ke7 26 Nd6 Rg7 27 g3 Rg5 and the h-pawn

is very difficult to defend. 24 Nd6+ is not dangerous: 24 ... Ke7 ('!?' Riazantsev) 25 Nxb7 Rg7!



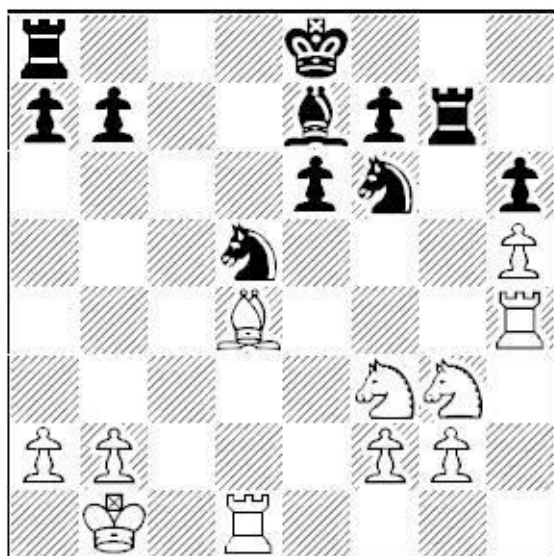
(the black rook on h7 should be activated as quickly as possible) 26 g3 Rg5! (attacking White's weak point) 27 Na5 Rc8+ 28 Kb1?! (28 Kd2! was better according to Riazantsev) and now Black has the little tactic 28 ... Nc3+!, ruining White's position: 29 bxc3 Rxa5 and Black later won in V.Yandemirov-A.Riazantsev, Voronezh (rapid) 2005.

With 21 ... N7f6 we are following the game E.Rodriguez Guerrero-I.Khenkin, Bajada de la Virgen 2005:

### 22 Rh4?!

White wishes to prevent the knight hopping into f4, harassing the g2-pawn, but I suspect that this move is inaccurate. It would have been better to play 22 Kb1, making way for the rook to go to c1 and then possibly c7. After 22 ... Rg7 23 Rc1 it should be equal.

### 22 ... Rg7 23 Kb1



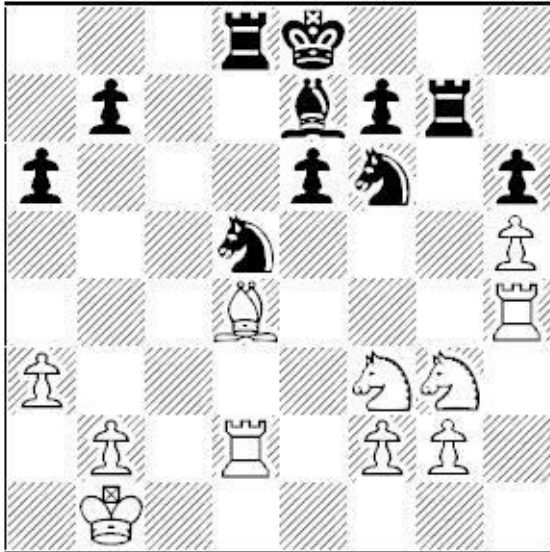
### 23 ... Rd8!

Bringing the rook into play whilst at the same time preventing the bishop from taking the a-pawn (24 Bxa7?? loses to 24 ... Nc3+).

### 24 Rd2?

Black's position is gathering momentum now. 24 Rc1, trying to get counterplay, looks a much better move. However, the kingside pawn weaknesses give Black a slight advantage. One possible line is 24 ... Rg4! 25 Rxc4 Nxc4 26 Ne5 Nb4 27 Nxc4 Rxd4 28 f3 Bg5 and Black is much better (mating ideas around the white king prevent White's rook from getting active).

**24 ... a6 25 a3**



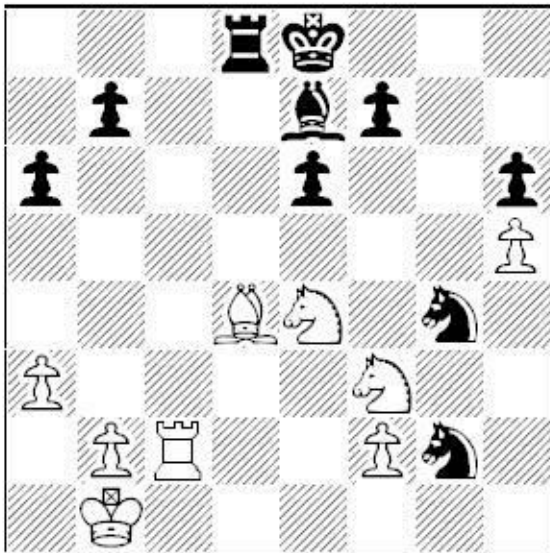
**25 ... Rg4!**

After the exchange of rooks Black's knights gain significant entry squares.

**26 Rxc4 Nxc4 27 Ne4 Nf4!**

Forking g2 and h5.

**28 Rc2 Nxc2**



Black is much better now.

**29 Bb6 Rd1+ 30 Ka2 f5!**

The central pawns begin to show some clout.

**31 Rc8+ Kf7 32 Nc5 Bxc5**

32 ... Rd6! looks a bit more convincing. The idea is that if White moves the knight on c5 then Black

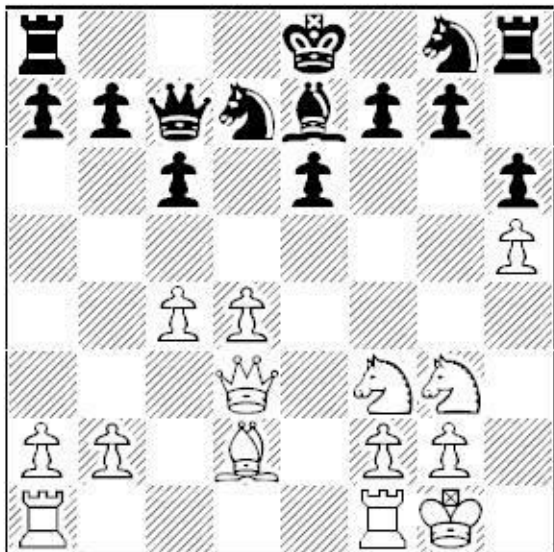
will invade with ... Rd3: 33 Bc7 Rc6 34 Nxb7 Nf4 35 Na5 Rc2 36 Kb3 Rxf2 and Black wins.

**33 Rc7+**

33 Bxc5 Rd7 and it is only a matter of time before the h5-pawn falls; 33 Rxc5 Kf6 34 Rc8 Rd3 and again the kingside pawns will simply drop off.

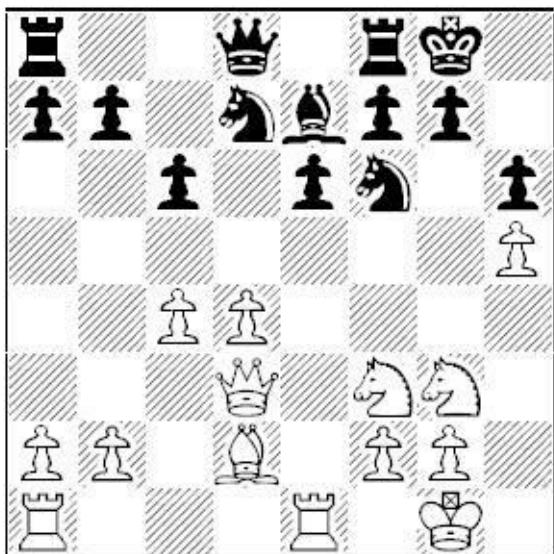
**33 ... Be7 34 Bc5 Rd3 35 Ne1?? Nxe1 0-1**

**B) 15 0-0**



Personally I find this idea of castling kingside very dubious; it seems to me on a practical level that the pawn on h5 will give White headaches for some time, as it will just become a target. In an endgame too (which is where White's superiority usually lies), the h5-pawn must be defended continuously and the king will be wrongly placed.

White can also castle a move earlier, but it gives Black a second option: 14 0-0 Ngf6 15 c4 Qd8!? (this move prevents any of White's Nf5, Ne5 ideas) 16 Rfe1 0-0 and now:



a) 17 Rad1 a5! (planning ... Bb4 to exchange bishops so that Black neutralizes White's extra space) 18 Qe2 Bb4! 19 Ne5 Qc7 (Black must challenge White's control of the e5-square) 20 a3 Bxd2 21 Rxd2 a4! (preventing the advance of White's pawns, but more importantly fixing White's weakness on b2) 22

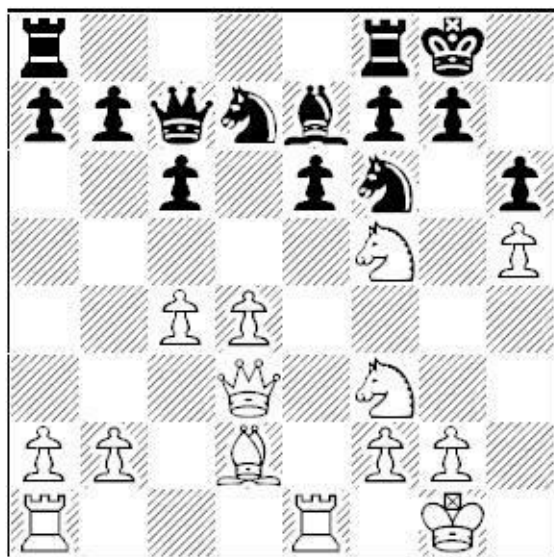
Rd3 Rad8 23 Qd1 Qa5 24 c5? (lacking any concrete plan, White makes a massive positional mistake; now Black has complete control over the d5-square) 24 ... Nxe5 25 Rxe5 Qb5 26 Ne4 Nxe4 27 Rxe4 Qxb2, and Black won a pawn and the game in F.Lopez Gracia-F.Levin, Barcelona 2005.

b) 17 Qe2 (White threatens Nf5) 17 ... Re8 18 Bc3 a5 (Black wants to exchange pieces to ease his spatial worries) 19 Ne5 Bb4! 20 Bxb4 axb4 (now Black will target the weak a2-pawn) 21 Qd2 c5! 22 dxc5? (Black is better after this move: he will easily win back the pawn and will have control of the d-file; White has two weaknesses to take care of: the old h5-pawn and now also the a2-pawn) 22 ... Nxe5 23 Qxd8 Rxd8 24 Rxe5 Nd7 25 Re3 Nxc5 26 a3 Rd2! 27 Rb1 bxa3 28 bxa3 Rc2 29 Rb4 Rd8 30 Re1 Rd4, and Black won a pawn and very soon the game in M.Palac-Z.Izoria, Warsaw 2005.

### 15 ... Ngf6 16 Rfe1

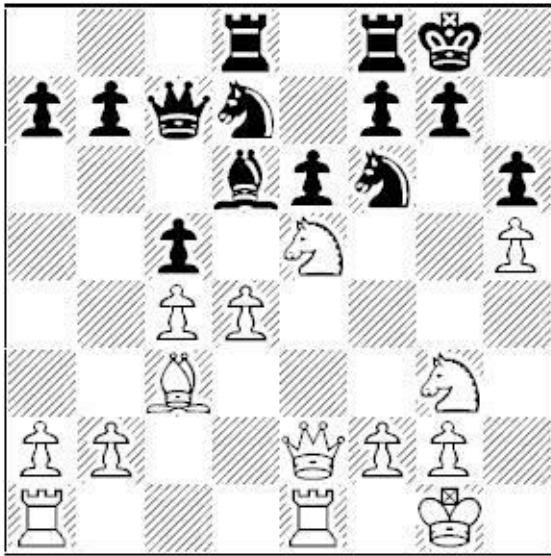
After 16 Qe2 0-0 17 Ne5, Black is more than fine with the simple strike 17 ... c5, e.g. 18 Nxd7 (18 Ng6? would lose after 18 ... fxe6 19 Qxe6+ Kh8 20 Qxe7 Rae8 and the queen is trapped) 18 ... Qxd7 19 dxc5 Bxc5 20 Bc3 Be7 21 Ne4 Nxe4 22 Qxe4 Rfd8 23 Qg4 Bf8 24 Rfd1 Qc6 25 b3.

### 16 ... 0-0 17 Nf5



The whole idea behind this line: White brings his bad knight into attacking mode.

17 Qe2 is a little slow: 17 ... Rad8 (17 ... Bd6 is an interesting alternative: 18 Ne5? c5 19 Nxd7 Nxd7 20 dxc5? Bxg3! 21 fxe3 Qxe3 22 b4 Nf6 23 Rf1 Qh4 24 Rf4 Qxh5 25 Qxh5 Nxh5 26 Rd4 Rfd8 and Black has a winning endgame, A.Demisnjuk-A.Riazantsev, Polyarniy Krug 2006) 18 Bc3 Bd6! 19 Ne5 c5!, undermining White's control of the e5-square:



a) 20 Nxd7?! was a dubious choice by Michael Adams: 20 ... Rxd7 (White has problems with his knight on g3) 21 d5 (21 dxc5 Bxg3 22 fxg3 Qxc5+ 23 Qe3 Qxe3+ 24 Rxe3 Nxb5 and Black is a pawn up with excellent winning prospects) 21 ... Bxg3 22 Bxf6 Bh2+ 23 Kh1 gxf6 24 g3 (24 dxe6 is bad for White after 24 ... Rd4 25 e7 Re8 26 g3 Bxg3! 27 fxg3 Qxg3, and Black threatens ... Rh4 mate) 24 ... exd5 25 Kxh2 d4 and Black was slightly better in M.Adams-A.Riazantsev Bastia (rapid) 2005.

b) 20 dxc5! Bxe5 21 Bxe5 Nxe5 22 Qxe5 Qxe5 23 Rxe5 Nd7 24 Re3 Nxc5 and Black has slightly better prospects because of the control of the d-file and the weak h5-pawn, J.Lopez Martinez-N.Borne, Banyoles 2006. Or 24 Ree1 Nxc5 25 Rad1 a5! (securing the c5 post) 26 Kf1 f5 (a fine little positional move, shutting the g3-knight out from the game and making the h5-pawn forever weak) 27 Ke2 Kf7 28 Ke3? (White falls for a nasty little trick) 28 ... f4+ 29 Kxf4 Nd3+ 30 Ke3 Nxe1 31 Rxe1 and Black later won in D.Baramidze-S.Ernst, Dieren 2006.

**17 ... Bd6 18 Nxd6 Qxd6 19 Qb3 a5**

Black plans to control the light squares with this move and the follow-up.

**20 Rad1 b5!?**

In typical fashion Black plays to undermine the c-pawn and secure the d5-square for the knight.

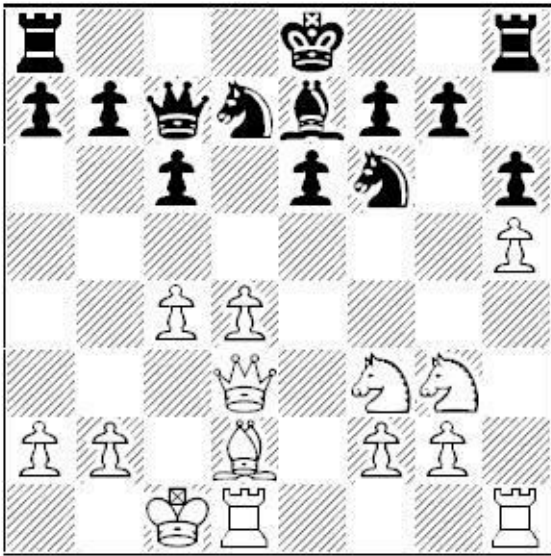
**21 Ne5**

21 cxb5 cxb5 22 Ne5 (if 22 Qxb5 Rfb8 23 Qc4 Rxb2 Black wins back the pawn with a superior position) 22 ... b4 23 Qf3 Rfc8 24 Nxd7 Nxd7 25 Bf4 Qd5 26 Qxd5 exd5 27 Re7 Nf6 is equal.

**21 ... bxc4 22 Qxc4 Rfc8 23 Qe2 Qd5 24 Bf4 Rd8 25 Rd3 Nxe5 26 Bxe5 Nd7 27 Rg3 Nxe5 28 dxe5**

... and a draw was agreed here in the game L.Dominguez-A.Dreev, Beersheba 2005.

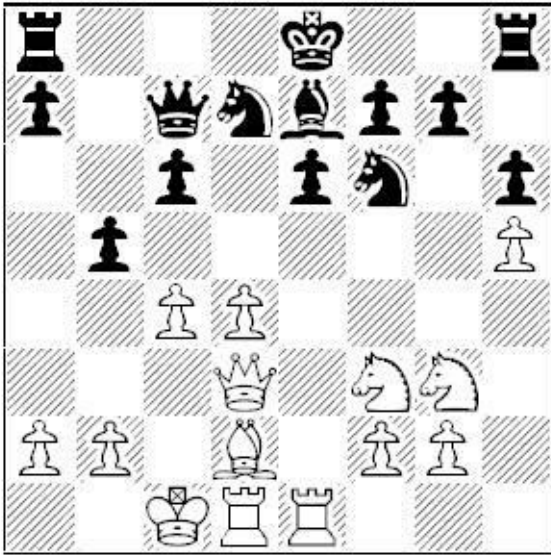
**C) 15 0-0-0 Ngf6**



This is the critical test of the whole variation beginning with 11 ... Qa5+. White is not dissuaded from castling queenside and instead continues with his standard plan of centralizing the pieces.

Black has two ideas at his disposal: he can continue solidly with ... 0-0-0 or more aggressively with ... 0-0, claiming that there have been three changes to the ‘usual’ ... 0-0 variation. Firstly, the dark-squared bishop is no longer on f4 supporting a potential knight hop into e5; secondly, White has played c2-c4 which gives Black a powerful queenside strike with ... b5; and thirdly, Black has the extra move ... Qc7.

### How to Fight in the Centre with ... b7-b5!



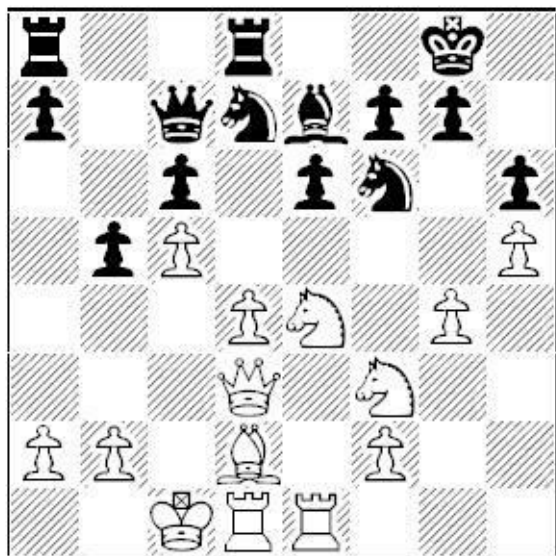
To reach this position, which arises in Line C1, White played **16 Rhe1** and Black has just answered with **16 ... b5!**. This is a very powerful idea – Black aims to induce a positional weakness in White’s camp (whether White pushes with c4-c5 or allows an exchange). It’s true that this weakness is a bit superficial for the time being, but it is a *permanent* positional weakening – pawns cannot move backwards! Despite appearances, Black will not be concentrating his forces on the queenside but instead aims to initially play in the centre, targeting the weak d4-pawn. However, Black should be very careful if

White plays a quick Kb1, as the pawn break may lose its power if the rook gets to the c-file rapidly.

## Dealing with White's g2-g4 Attack

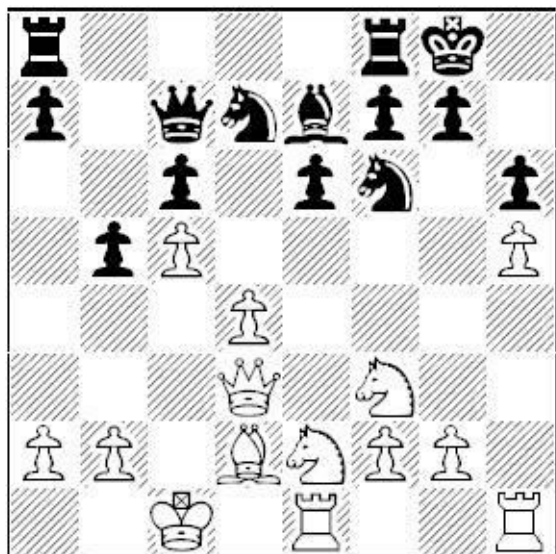
If White offers to sacrifice his g-pawn after g2-g4, when is it safe for Black to capture? The answer lies in whether Black can defend the knight with ... f7-f5 without losing the e6-pawn.

Here's an example where it's safe to capture:



White has just played the move **19 g2-g4**. Here it is safe to capture with **19 ... Nxd4**, as following **20 Rg1**, **20 ... f5** is possible (see Line C1).

In certain situations Black can prevent g2-g4:

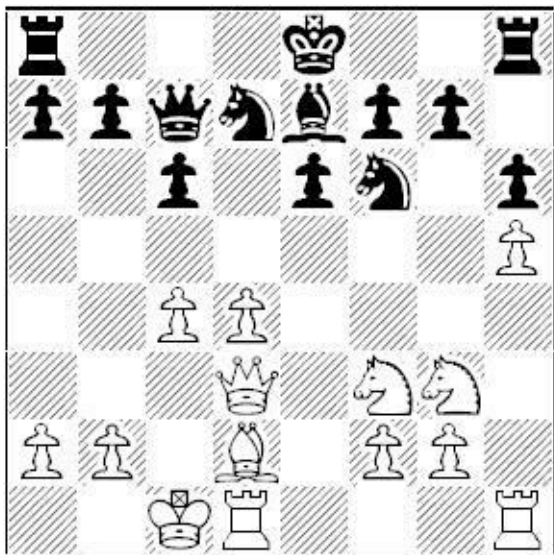


White has just played **18 Ng3-e2**, planning g4. Black can answer this with **18 ... Ng4!**. This is a very important idea in preventing the g2-g4 pawn advance – it allows the black knight on d7 to go to the d5-square and it is not easy for White to chase the g4-knight away.

## 'Improving' Moves and Transpositions

White can utilize many move orders and transpositions, but none that can trick Black out of playing his

chosen variation or force him into an inferior line. Nonetheless, you should still be aware of them. In the middlegame White has some moves – I call them ‘improving’ moves. White simply wants to improve his position before beginning aggressive play. These moves are: Qe2, improving the placing of the queen and removing it from any potential attacks on the d-file; Kb1, getting the king into safety; and Rhe1 or Rde1, centralizing the rooks. More often than not the order of these moves is insignificant, as they generally transpose into one another.



Returning to the position after 15 ... Ngf6, we will look at the following options for White:

- C1: 16 Rhe1**
- C2: 16 Rde1**
- C3: 16 Qe2**
- C4: 16 Ne4**
- C5: 16 Bc3?!**
- C6: 16 Kb1**

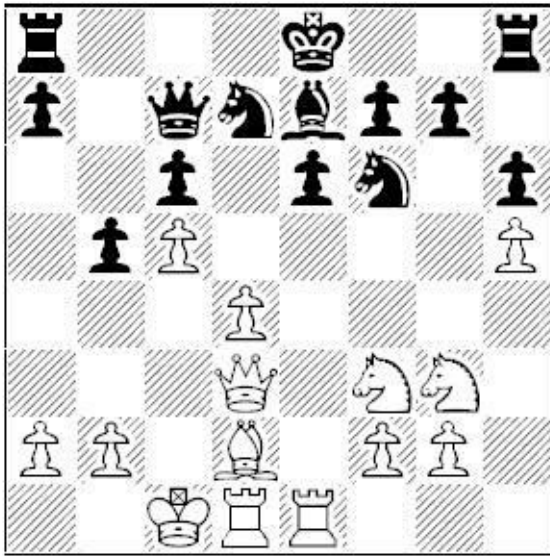
#### **C1) 16 Rhe1**

White centralizes his kingside rook in preparation for the possibilities of d4-d5, Ng3-f5 and Nf3-e5.

#### **16 ... b5!?**

This strike contains more power when Black’s king is uncastled because White cannot strike back so quickly on the kingside with a timely g2-g4, and it has enjoyed good results in practice. Basically, Black aims to secure the d5-square permanently for either a rook or a knight.

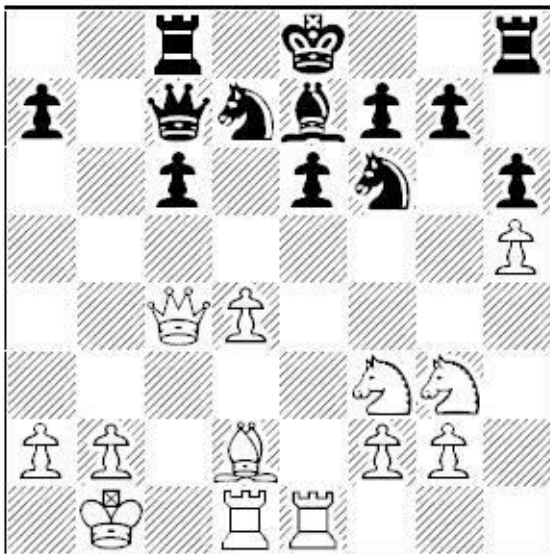
#### **17 c5**



17 Kb1!? is interesting and more dangerous than it appears, with White aiming to target the weak c-pawn. Play continues 17 ... bxc4 18 Qxc4 and now:

a) 18 ... Rb8? 19 Rc1! Qb7 20 Rc2 c5 21 dxc5 Bxc5 22 Bf4! Rd8 23 Rxe6+ fxe6 24 Qxe6+ Kf8 25 Nh4 and White was winning in B.Vuckovic-R.Vukic, Vrnjacka Banja 2006.

b) 18 ... Rc8! has the aim of playing ... c5 and opening the c-file for attacking purposes. For example:



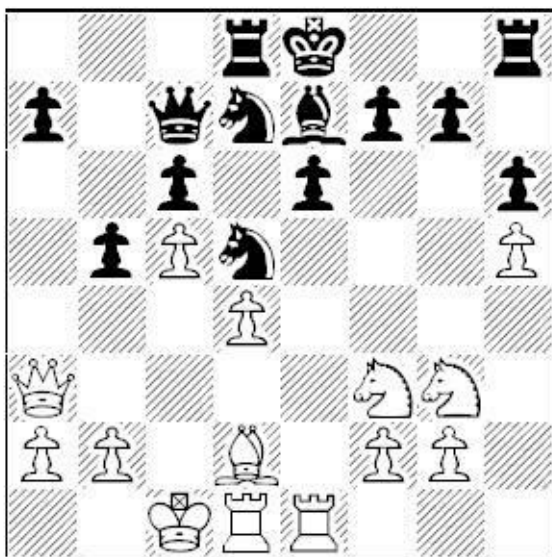
b1) 19 Ne4 (getting ready to push with g2-g4) 19 ... 0-0 20 Nxf6+ Nxf6 21 g4 c5! (striking back in the centre; 21 ... Nxc4 is too dangerous, as after 22 Rg1 f5 23 Qxe6+ White has a very powerful attack) 22 g5 hxg5 23 Bxg5 Qb7 (attacking the knight on f3 and handing control of the c-file to the rook) 24 Ne5 cxd4 25 Qxd4 Rfd8 (now Black contests the d-file) 26 Qh4? Rxd1+ 27 Rxd1 Ne4 and Black wins material after 28 Bxe7 Nc3+! 29 Kc1 Nxd1+ 30 Kxd1 Qd5+.

b2) 19 Bb4!? is interesting: 19 ... Bxb4 20 Qxb4 c5! 21 dxc5 0-0! (now that some more lines have been opened, Black should get his king into safety as quickly as possible) 22 Rc1 Nxc5! (it is perfectly safe to capture the pawn) 23 Rc4 Rfd8 24 Rec1 Rd5! (defending from the side) 25 Qa3 a5 (preventing any b2-b4 ideas) 26 Nd2 Nfd7 27 Nge4 Qf4 (Black is now threatening to win two pieces for the rook)

with ... Rxe2) 28 Nxc5 Qf5+ 29 Nde4 Rdx5 30 Rxc5 Rxc5 31 Rxc5 Nxc5 32 Qxc5 Qxe4+ 33 Kc1 Qxg2 and Black is a bit better.

**17 ... 0-0**

17 ... Rd8 is perhaps too ambitious after 18 Qa3! Nd5?!



and now:

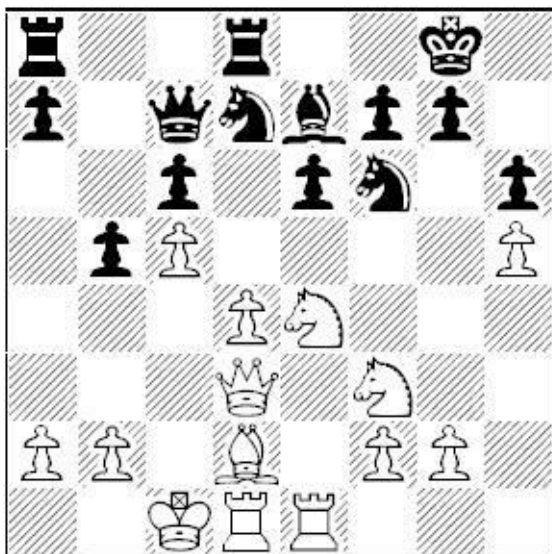
a) 19 Ne2? (this move is far too passive and hands Black the initiative) 19 ... Qb7 20 g4? a5 21 Ng3 N7b6 22 Ne4 Nc4 23 Qd3 a4, S.Karjakin-A.Riazantsev, Sochi 2006.

b) 19 Ba5!? does not win any material after 19 ... Qf4+ 20 Kb1 Rb8 21 Re4, but White does indeed have a promising position: 21 ... Qf6 22 Be1 (protecting the f2-pawn and allowing the knight to jump into e5) 22 ... 0-0 23 Ne5!, and it is difficult to find an adequate reply to this move.

**18 Nf5?**

Tempting but wrong. Instead there could follow:

a) 18 Ne4!? Rfd8.

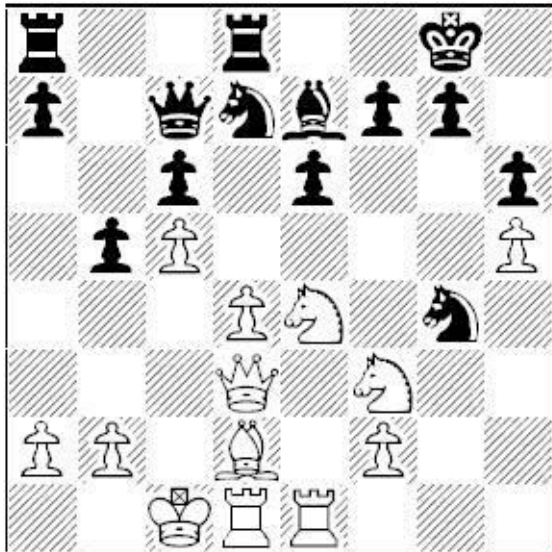


I wish to preserve the rook on a8 for some potential attacking ideas on the queenside. Now:

a1) 19 Nxf6+ Nxf6 20 Qe2 Ng4! is a key move to remember; Black prevents the extremely dangerous g2-g4 pawn storm in one fell swoop. In a similar position with the d-rook on e1, Scottish GM

Jonathan Rowson agrees with this idea – prevention is better than cure! 21 Kb1 (chasing away the knight with 21 Ng1 fails to 21 ... Rxd4; 21 Qe4 loses to 21 ... Nxf2) 21 ... Rd5! and now Black's plan is positional: to double on the d-file and pile the pressure on the backward d-pawn. After 22 Rh1 Rad8 Black has an edge.

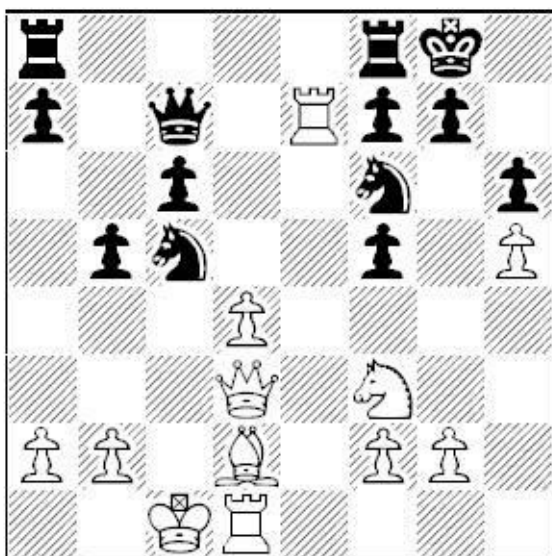
a2) 19 g4 Nxg4 (the safest and the best, otherwise g4-g5 looks unpleasant for Black)



20 Rg1 (20 Qb3 Ngf6 21 Nxf6+ Bxf6 and Black is okay) 20 ... f5 21 Qb3 Nf8 22 Ng3 Kh8 (White was threatening Nxf5) 23 Ne2 (White sacrifices another pawn to bring the bishop into play) 23 ... Bf6 24 Bf4 Qf7 25 Ne5 Bxe5 26 Bxe5 Nxe5 27 dxe5 Rd5! (the key move – do not let that rook get to d6!) 28 Rxd5 cxd5! 29 Qxb5 Qc7 30 Nf4 Rb8. Black picks up the c5-pawn and gets very nice play.

b) Occupying one of the key central squares leaves the c5-pawn irreparably weak: 18 Ne5 Nxe5 19 dxe5 Nd7! 20 Ne4 (20 Bxh6 blunders a piece after 20 ... Nxc5!) 20 ... Nxc5 21 Nxc5 Bxc5 22 g4 (trying to begin an attack) 22 ... Bxf2 23 Rf1 Qxe5 24 Bxh6 (24 Rxf2 is a massive blunder – 24 ... Qc5+ wins on the spot) 24 ... Rfd8 25 Qc2 Rxd1+ 26 Rxd1 Bc5 and Black is winning.

**18 ... exf5 19 Rxe7 Nxc5!**



Black wins a pawn.

## 20 Qe2 Ncd7 21 Nh4

This position occurred in P.Leko-A.Karpov, 1st matchgame, Miskolc (rapid) 2006.

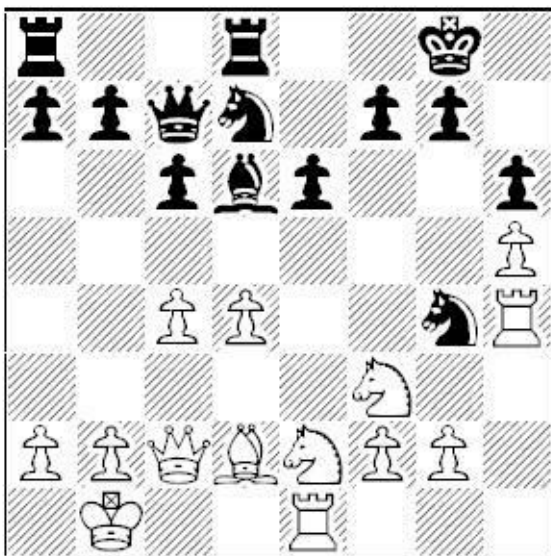
Here Karpov could have picked up the exchange with 21 ... Nd5! 22 Nxf5 Nxe7 23 Nxe7+ Kh8 24 Nf5 Nf6, when Black is doing very well. It is notable that in the rest of the match, the Hungarian GM never opened 1 e4 again!

## C2) 16 Rde1!?

This line runs hand in hand with the variation 16 Rhe1 (Line C1); the ideas are the same, the only difference being that White protects the h-pawn with the rook.

White can also play the 'improving' move 16 Kb1!? (see Line C6), which is designed to prevent ... b5 . However, I have included the following games in this section because Rde1 was played on the next move: 16 ... 0-0 17 Rde1 Rfd8 (targeting the white queen) 18 Qc2 Bd6 (Karpov tried 18 ... Nf8 in a later game but I actually prefer his earlier attempt; after 19 Ne4 Nxe4 20 Qxe4 c5 21 d5 White was slightly better in G.Vescovi-A.Karpov, 3rd matchgame, Guarulhos (rapid) 2006) 19 Ne2, and here 19 ... c5? 20 g4 cxd4 21 Nexd4 Bf4 22 g5 hxg5 23 h6 gave White a dangerous attack in G.Vescovi-A.Karpov, 1st matchgame, Guarulhos (rapid) 2006.

I think 19 ... Ng4! would have been stronger; for example, 20 Rh4



20 ... Ndf6! (20 ... Nxf2? is very bad: 21 Be3 Be7 22 Bxf2 and White wins) 21 c5 Be7 22 Bf4 Qa5! (now Black can start undermining the c5-pawn and begin opening files) 23 Nc3 b6 24 Bd2 Qa6! (removing the queen from any potential attack) 25 Ne4 Rd5 26 Nxf6+ Nxf6 and Black is better – White is forced to open lines against his own king and he has not yet got around to starting his own attack.

## 16 ... b5! 17 c5

With this move White prevents any lines opening against his king, but at the same time he gives Black a very nice outpost on d5.

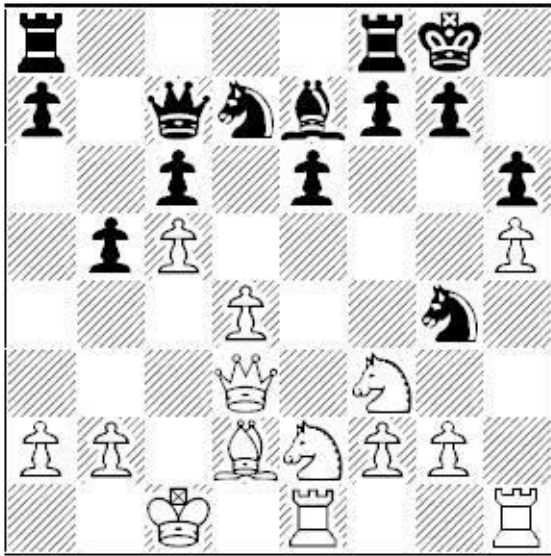
## 17 ... 0-0

17 ... 0-0-0 looks unwise with the pawn on b5, but is still worth considering because it is not easy for White to get at the black king.

## 18 Ne2

White's point is to launch a pawn storm against the black king; now the plan is g2-g4-g5.

## 18 ... Ng4!



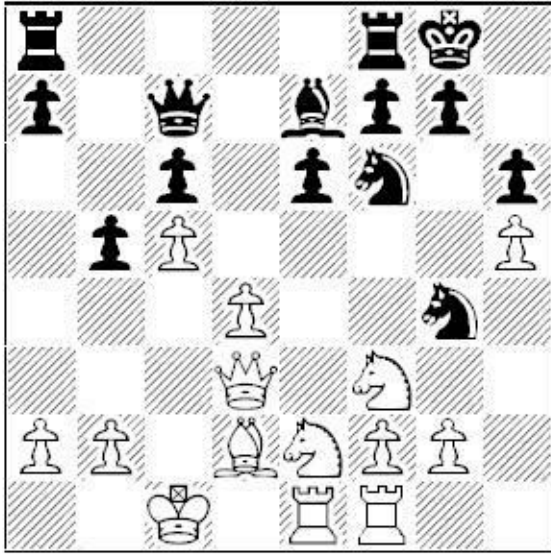
This is a common theme we've seen before and will see again: when White threatens g2-g4, Black prevents the advance with some prophylaxis whilst also allowing the d7-knight access to the d5-square via f6.

After 18 ... Rfe8? 19 g4! e5 20 Qf5 exd4 21 g5 hxg5 22 Bxg5 White has a very powerful attack, V.Anand-B.Macieja, German League 2006.

**19 Rhf1**

Or 19 Ref1 Rfd8 (threatening ... Nc5) 20 Qc2 Ndf6. Now White wants to move his knight and play f2-f3 and g2-g4 but it's not so easy; for example, 21 Ne1 Nd5 22 f3? Nge3. Instead 21 Rh4!? might be stronger, when the stakes quickly become quite high after 21 ... Rd5 22 Nf4 Rf5 and it feels like anything could happen. White could also consider 19 Be3!?

**19 ... Ndf6**



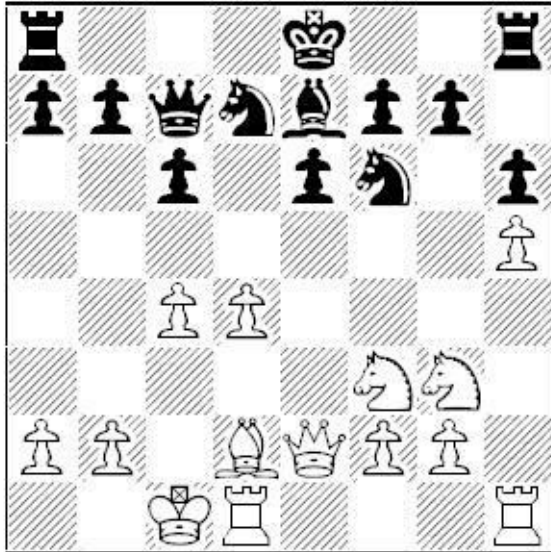
**20 Bf4?!**

It is not so easy for White to chase the knight from g4 and get on with the kingside attack, but it is a mistake to shift focus.

**20 ... Qa5 21 Qb3 Nd5 22 Bg3 Qb4**

Black is doing perfectly fine as the endgame will prove the d4-pawn to be weak.

### C3) 16 Qe2



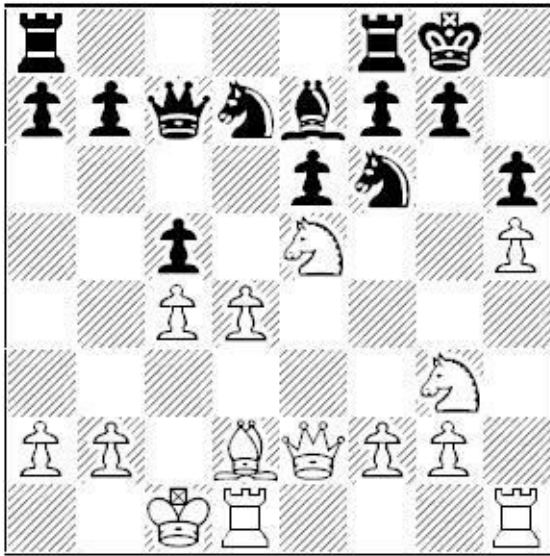
#### 16 ... 0-0

16 ... b5 is the aggressive way of handling the position, but it should be noted that the queen stands better on e2 than it does on d3: firstly, when Black develops a rook to d8 there are no discovered threats on the queen; secondly, the pawn push g2-g4 has extra venom, because now a knight on g4 cannot be defended by ... f5 as it leaves the e6-pawn en prise. After 17 c5 0-0 18 Ne4 b4 19 Nxf6+ Nxf6 20 g4! Black has big problems defending against g4-g5.

#### 17 Ne5

Waiting with 17 Kb1 leads to the same kind of play seen in Lines C1 and C2: 17 ... b5!? 18 c5 Rfd8 19 Ne4 Nxe4 20 Qxe4 Nf6 21 Qe2 Ng4!? (same idea!) 22 Rh3 (attempting to dislodge the knight from g4 with 22 Ne5 is answered by 22 ... Nxe5 23 Bf4 f6 24 dxe5 Bxc5 25 Rxd8+ Rxd8 26 Qg4 f5 27 Qg3, and Black is a pawn up) 22 ... Kf8! (avoiding any Bxh6 tricks) 23 Rg3 Nf6 24 Qe3 Rd5 25 Rxd5 Kxd5 26 Qxh6+ (26 Ne5 Rh8 27 Qg3+ Kh7 28 Qd3+ is a draw by repetition) 26 ... Kg8 27 Ne5 Rxe5 28 dxe5 Qxe5 and Black defends, and wins.

#### 17 ... c5!?



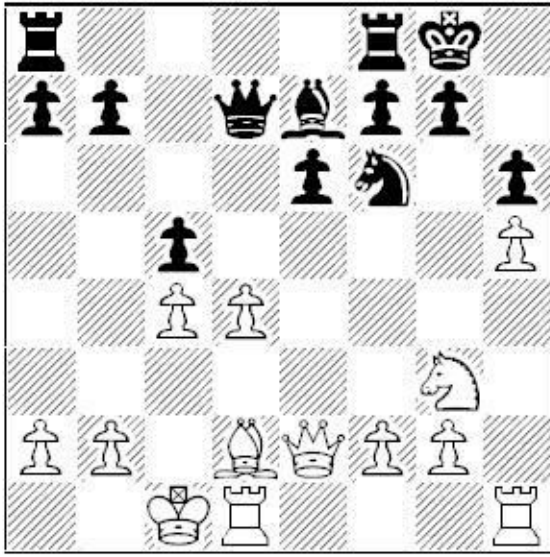
Challenging the centre right away. 17 ... Rfe8 18 Kb1 c5 19 Bf4 was agreed drawn in the grandmaster tussle P. Bobras-A. Riazantsev, Warsaw 2005.

**18 Ng6!?**

Or:

a) If White supports the centre with his bishop by playing 18 Bc3, Black should simply play on the open d- and c-files: 18 ... cxd4 19 Bxd4 Rfd8 20 Nxd7 Rxd7 21 Bxf6 Bxf6 22 Rxd7 Qxd7 23 Rd1 Qa4 24 Kb1 Rc8 and the assessment should read 'White is equal', because if anyone is struggling for equality it is White; his exposed king position and weak c-pawn may give him a number of problems in the future.

b) 18 Nxd7 Qxd7! (18 ... Nxd7 is not so good because of 19 d5! Qe5 – the only move – 20 dxe6 Qxe2 21 Nxe2 fxe6 22 Nf4 Ne5 and here it is Black's weaknesses that will begin to tell).



After 18 ... Qxd7:

b1) 19 Bc3 cxd4 20 Bxd4 Qc7 is equal.

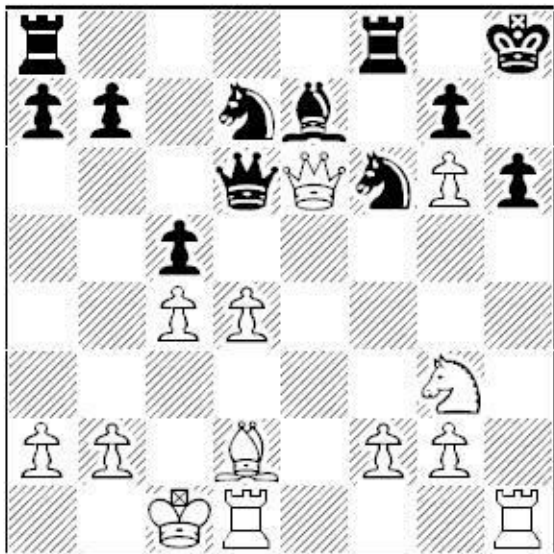
b2) 19 d5?! exd5 20 Qf3 (with the aim of playing Nf5 followed by a sacrifice on h6) 20 ... Qa4! 21 cxd5 (Black wins easily after the attacking 21 Nf5?: 21 ... Qxc4+ 22 Kb1 Rfe8 23 Nxe7+ Rxe7 24 Bxh6 Qe4 25 Qxe4 Nxe4 26 Be3 d4) 21 ... Qxa2 22 Nf5 Rfe8 23 Bc3 Bd8 24 Qg3?? Qa1+ 25 Kc2 Re2+ 26

Rd2 (26 Kd3 Qa6 is a sweet little checkmate) 26 ... Rxd2+ 27 Bxd2 Qa4+ 28 Kc1 Ne8 and White's king is more in danger than Black's.

b3) 19 dxc5 should be met by 19 ... Qc7, guarding the bishop on e7 so that the knight cannot jump into f5 (19 ... Qc6?! 20 Nf5! Bxc5 21 Nxe6+ gxh6 22 Bxh6 Rfd8 23 Qe5 Rxd1+ 24 Rxd1 Ne8 is very unclear).

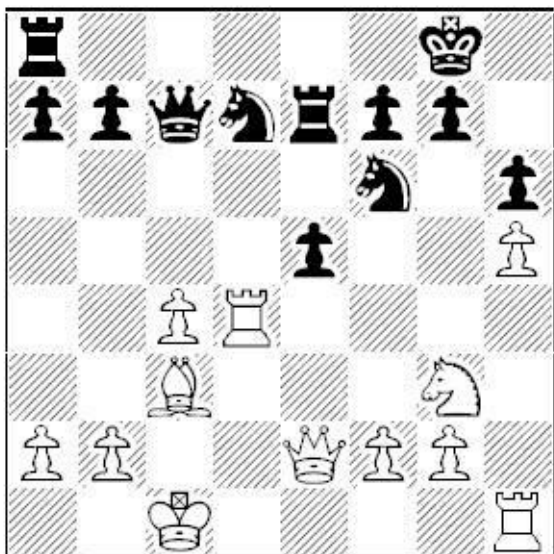
### 18 ... Rfe8

The knight on g6 is immune: 18 ... fxg6? 19 Qxe6+ Kh8 20 hxg6! threatens a piece sacrifice on h6 followed by mate. For example, 20 ... Qd6



21 Rxh6+!! gxh6 22 g7+! Kh7 (22 ... Kxg7? 23 Nf5+ wins the queen) 23 gxf8Q Rxf8 24 Qf5+ Kg7 25 Bc3 (with the poisonous threat of dxc5) 25 ... Qb6 26 dxc5 Nxc5 27 Re1! (targeting the bishop on e7) 27 ... Kf7 (or 27 ... Bd8 28 Nh5+ Kf7 29 Bxf6 Qxf6 30 Qh7+) 28 Nh5 Ncd7 29 Bxf6 Nxf6 30 Nf4 (with the threat of 31 Qg6 mate) 30 ... Rg8 31 Nd5 and it's all over for Black.

### 19 Nxe7+ Rxe7 20 Bc3 cxd4! 21 Rxd4 e5



Forcing back the dangerous white rook and blocking the a1-h8 diagonal. The flipside to this move is that Black concedes the f5-square to the white knight, something that is usually not recommended. However, as Neil McDonald states, 'the secret to playing the Caro-Kann well is knowing when to loosen

influence over one square in order to increase control over another'. This is exactly the situation here: Black wishes to bring his 'defensive' knight into the attack by playing it to c5, where it will control one of the key central squares e4, so in order to gain control he concedes the f5-square to White.

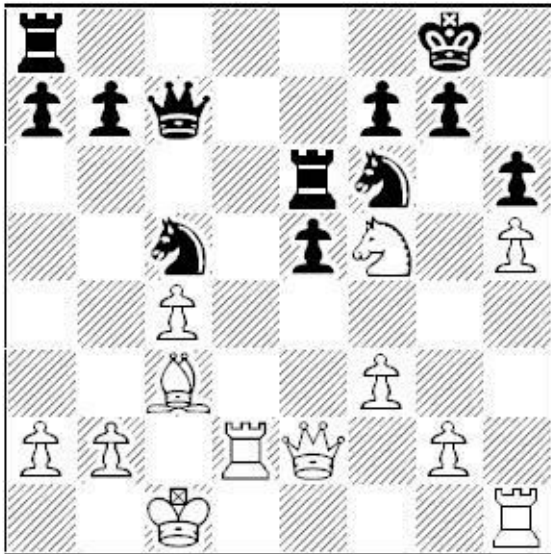
### 22 Rd2

Playing 22 Nf5? immediately is a mistake: 22 ... exd4 23 Nxe7+ (23 Qxe7 Qf4+ loses a piece) 23 ... Kf8 24 Bb4 (or 24 Bxd4 Re8 and Black wins after 25 Re1 Qd6 or 25 Nd5 Nxd5 26 Bxg7+ Kxg7 27 Qxe8 Qxc4+) 24 ... Nc5 25 Nd5 (25 Nf5? drops a piece after 25 ... Qf4+) 25 ... Nxd5 26 cxd5 a5 27 Ba3 Rd8 28 Re1 Kg8. Black will win the pawn on d5 and will easily stand better.

### 22 ... Re6

The rook activates itself in preparation for an attack on the white king.

### 23 Nf5 Nc5 24 f3



### 24 ... Na4

24 ... b5!? is another interesting try. For example, 25 cxb5 a6!? (Black clears the queenside to create open files to attack down) 26 bxa6 Na4 27 Rc2 Nxc3 28 Rxc3 Qa7 29 Kb1 Rxa6 30 a3 Ra5 with compensation.

### 25 Bb4 e4

Opening the e-file; all of a sudden the white position looks a little less secure.

### 26 Nd4 e3!? 27 Rdd1 Re5 28 Nc2 Qb6

29 ... Bd6 was threatened.

### 29 Rd6 Qc7 30 Rhd1 Nxh5!

32 ... Nf4 is suddenly a very big threat.

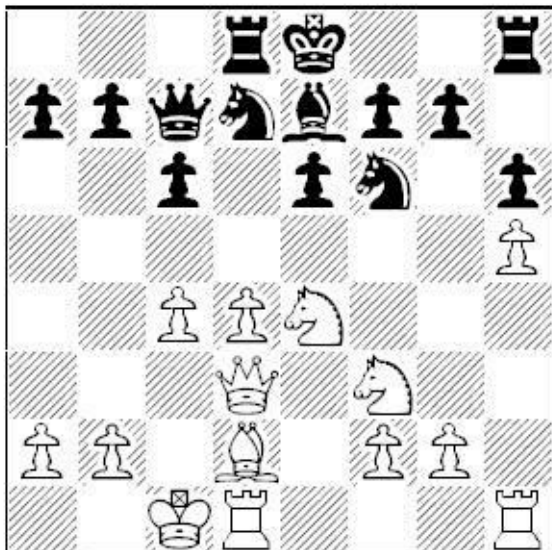
### 31 Nxe3 Rae8 32 Qc2 Rxe3 33 Qxa4 Qxc4+ 34 Kb1 a6

Although the position is still very complicated, Black does not stand worse. Both sides have active rooks but Black has one plus that will help him in the latter stages of the game – he is a pawn up!

## C4) 16 Ne4

Now that the knight has come directly to e4 and White has not spent time on making 'little' moves to improve the position, it is not so wise for Black to castle directly into a brewing storm. I like the approach used by Dautov in his game against Carmelle, which aims to resolve the issues in the centre before castling.

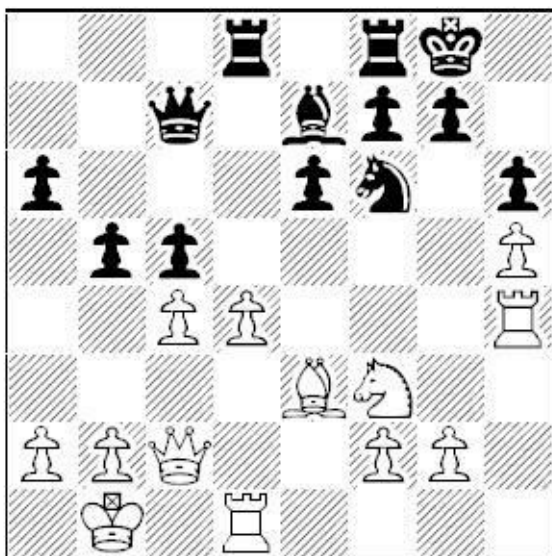
## 16 ... Rd8



Black leaves his king in the centre and instead concentrates on the strategic break ... c7-c5.

### 17 Kb1

17 Nxf6+ was played in H.Bohm-Y.Seirawan, Wijk aan Zee 1980: 17 ... Nxf6 18 Qc2 0-0 19 Rh4 (planning Bf4 and the pawn push g2-g4; 19 Rdg1!? Ng4 prevents any possible g2-g4 ideas and forces White to lose time defending the f2 pawn – 20 Bc3 is met by 20 ... c5!) 19 ... c5! (this strategic break gives Black a tiny edge) 20 Be3 a6 21 Kb1?! b5!



22 cxb5 axb5 23 dxc5 Rxd1+ 24 Qxd1 Bxc5 25 Qc2 Rc8 26 Bxc5 Qxc5 27 Qxc5 Rxc5 28 b4!? (again we have an endgame where White would be okay if it wasn't for the h5-pawn! 28 g4? is met by 28 ... Rc4) 28 ... Rd5! 29 Kb2 e5 30 Kc3 Kf8 31 Nd2 Ke7 32 g3 Ke6 33 Ne4 Rd4! and Black went on to win.

17 Rdg1 can be answered by 17 ... c5!, a very important pawn break. White intends to launch a quick kingside attack, so Black must play actively to distract White from this.

### 17 ... c5 18 Bc3

18 d5?! is not as dangerous as it appears: 18 ... exd5 19 cxd5 Nxe4! 20 Qxe4 Nf6 21 Qc4 Rxd5 22

Bc3 Rxd1+ 23 Rxd1 0-0 and Black is a pawn up.

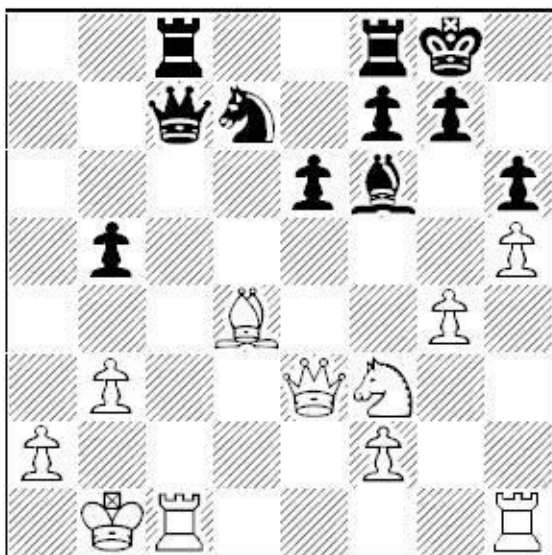
**18 ... cxd4 19 Bxd4 0-0 20 b3 a6**

Getting ready to play ... b7-b5, softening up White's queenside.

**21 Qe3 b5! 22 Nxf6+ Bxf6 23 cxb5 axb5 24 g4**

White must begin active operations on the kingside, otherwise he will be crushed.

**24 ... Rc8 25 Rc1**



**25 ... Qa5**

This is simpler than 25 ... Qd6, as played in L.Carmeille-R.Dautov, German League 2005: 26 Rhd1 Rxc1+ 27 Qxc1 Qd5 28 Bxf6 Qe4+ 29 Qc2 Nxf6 30 Qxe4 Nxe4 (Black has a preferable position, but White makes a massive blunder, probably in time trouble) 31 Nd4?? Nc3+ 0-1.

**26 g5 hxg5 27 h6 Rxc1+ 28 Qxc1 Ra8 29 Qc2 gxh6 30 Rxh6 Bxd4 31 Nxd4 Qe1+ 32 Kb2 Nf8!**

Defending against Qh7+. Black has the better prospects in this position: his pieces are more active, and the chances are the white king will be more exposed than its counterpart. Black will aim to centralize his queen (to e5) and rook (d- or c-file), and should try and should restrict the white pieces to defending the f2-pawn. Placing a knight on g6 will also cover the h8-square from any checkmates that White would be threatening.

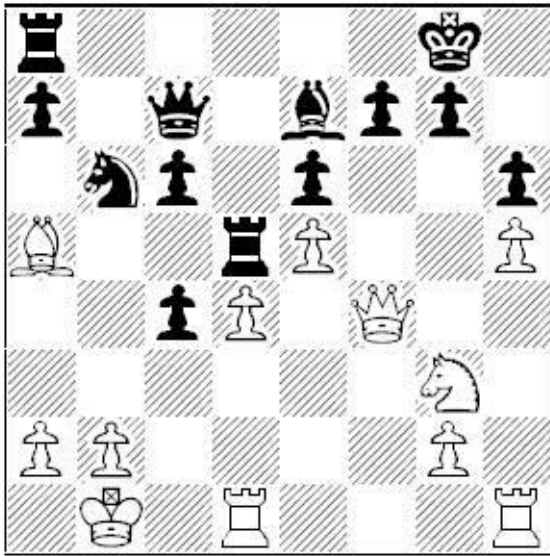
**C5) 16 Bc3?!**

This is a very good idea when both sides have castled queenside – White gets ready to support the knight hopping onto e5 and begins to clear the d-file for the rook. However, 16 Bc3?! has one considerable drawback: Black has not committed himself to castling on either side of the board, which means he can strike immediately with ... b7-b5, closing the long diagonal permanently and making the bishop on c3 redundant.

**16 ... b5! 17 c5**

17 Kb1 does not work out well for White as the bishop on c3 interferes with any plan of attacking the c6-pawn. 17 ... 0-0 18 Ne5 Rfd8! 19 f4 Nxe5 20 fxe5 bxc4 and now:

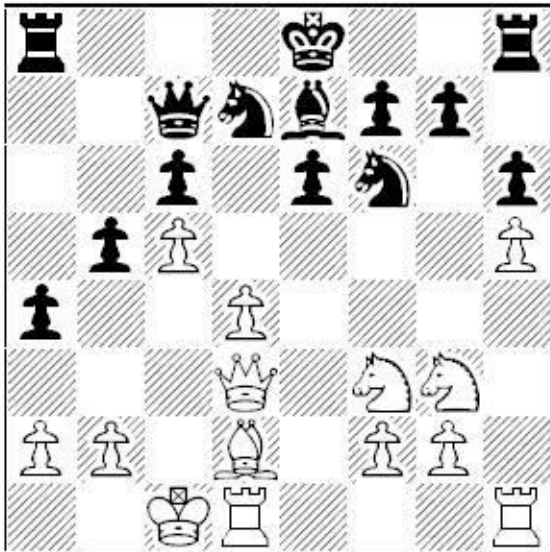
a) 21 Qd2 Nd5 22 Ba5 Nb6 23 Qf4 Rd5!,



and in the game R.Britton-Z.Gyimesi, Liverpool 2006, White made a dreadful oversight 24 Ne4?!, which lost a piece after 24 ... Rxa5. Instead the game could have continued 24 Bc3 Rb5! (with the idea of playing ... Nd5) 25 Ka1 Nd5! 26 Qd2 Nxc3 27 Qxc3 Rab8 28 Rb1, when 28 ... Rb3!! 29 axb3 Bb4! is a neat little winning idea – White must give up his queen in order to avoid checkmate.

b) 21 Qxc4 Nd5! (Black should centralize the knight immediately) 22 Rd3 Rab8 (grabbing the b-file) 23 Ne4 Ba3 (forcing White to further weaken his king; all Black needs to do now is play for ... a7-a5-a4) 24 b3 a5 25 g4 Bb4! 26 Bxb4 Rxb4 27 Qc5 Rb5 28 Qc4 a4 29 Qxa4? (surprisingly this loses to a little knight manoeuvre) 29 ... Nb6 30 Qa3 Nc4! 31 Qc1 Nxe5 32 Rd2 Nf3 33 Rg2 Ng5 34 Nxf3 Rxf3!. Black has fended off any kingside attack and can look forward to picking at the d4-pawn and exploiting all the weak squares around the white king.

**17 ... a5! 18 Bd2 a4**

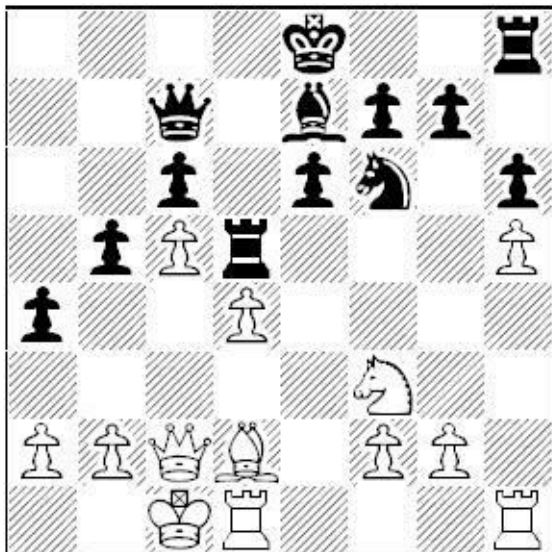


Black plays very aggressively to exploit the fact that White has wasted time playing his bishop to c3 and then moving it back to d2.

**19 Ne4 Rd8 20 Nxf6+ Nxf6 21 Qc2 Rd5!**

Black continues with forceful and correct chess. Not only does he improve the placing of his rook

but now the white rook on h1 will have to defend the h5-pawn for the time being.



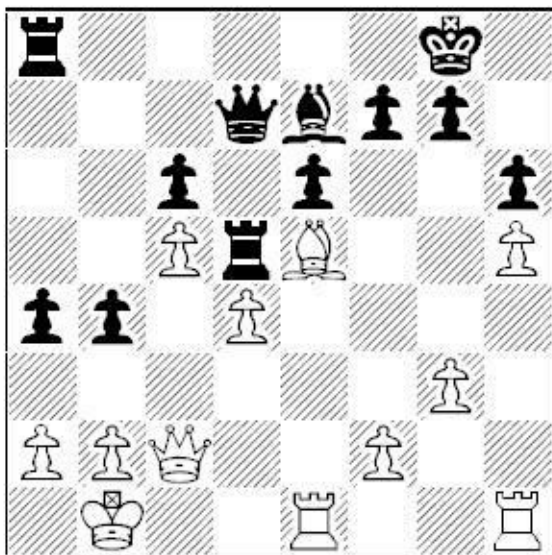
## 22 Kb1 Ng4

22 ... Rxh5 23 Rxh5 Nxh5 24 Ne5 Nf6 25 f4 Nd5 26 Re1 Bf6 27 f5 0-0 28 fxe6 Bxe5 29 Rxe5 fxe6 30 Rxe6 Rf1+ 31 Be1 Qf4 32 Re8+ Kf7 33 Re4 Qf5 ended in a Black victory in Deep Fritz/Deep Shredder 9.02-V.Kosyrev, Playchess 2005.

## 23 g3 0-0

Black has the better prospects. White's kingside attack was stopped before it even began and White is tied down to the defence of the d4-pawn. The game could continue:

## 24 Bf4 Qd7 25 Rde1 Ra8 26 Ne5 Nxe5 27 Bxe5 b4!

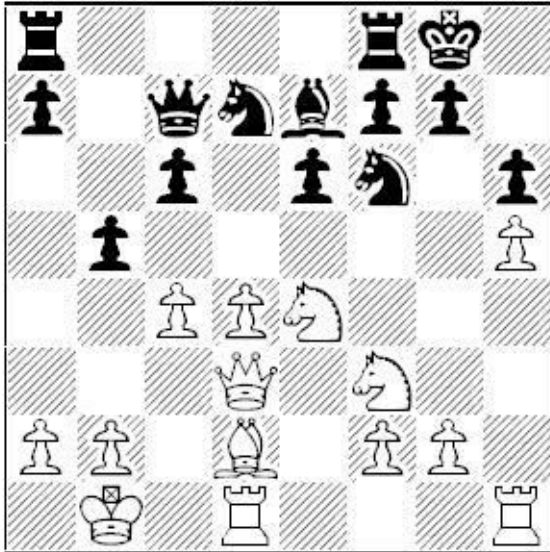


## 28 g4?

Allowing Black some pretty attacking chances but the position is already difficult: 28 Qc4 b3 29 a3 Rd8 and White has problems with his back rank; for example, 30 Qxa4? Bxc5 or 30 Ka1 f6! 31 Bf4 Rxd4 32 Qxe6+ Qxe6 33 Rxe6 Rd1+.

28 ... b3! 29 axb3 f6! 30 Bf4 Rxd4 31 Bxh6 axb3! 32 Qg6 Rxd4! 33 Qxd4 Qd3+ 34 Kc1 Ra1 mate

## C6) 16 Kb1 0-0 17 Ne4 b5!?



Black is not afraid of sacrificing a pawn to open lines against the enemy king.

**18 Nxf6+**

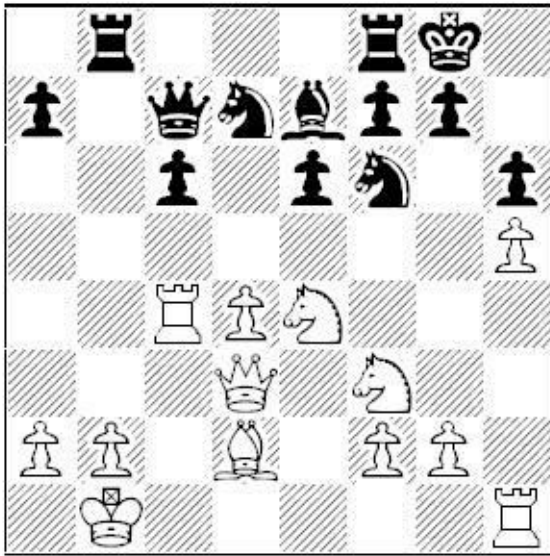
Alternatively:

a) Exchanging pawns only seems to help Black: 18 cxb5?! cxb5 19 Nxf6+ (or 19 Rc1 Qb7! – targeting the white knight – 20 Nxf6+ Nxf6 21 Ne5 Rac8 and Black is doing very well, with a very nice outpost on d5 for the knight and with White's isolated d4-pawn an easy point to attack) 19 ... Nxf6 20 Qxb5 (accepting the pawn offer is very risky) 20 ... Rab8 21 Qa6 Ne4! (bringing the knight into the action with tempo) 22 Ba5 Qf4 23 Rhf1 Ba3 24 b3 Qf5 25 Qd3 Qd5 26 Ne5 Rfc8 27 Be1 Rc7 28 f3 Nd6 29 g4 a5 and Black has a dangerous attack.

b) 18 Rc1! and now:

b1) 18 ... b4, closing the b-file, gives White the initiative after 19 Nxf6+ Nxf6 20 Qe2! (White improves the position of the queen and at the same time gets ready to push with a quick g2-g4; 20 Ne5 is met by 20 ... c5!, and 20 d5? by 20 ... Rfd8!) 20 ... a5 21 g4 a4 22 g5 hxg5 23 h6 b3 24 a3 and White is better.

b2) Black should enter into the complications and capture the pawn with 18 ... bxc4!, even though the c6-pawn is weak. In return Black has a lovely outpost on d5 and the b-file to attack down. 19 Rxc4 Rab8! and now:



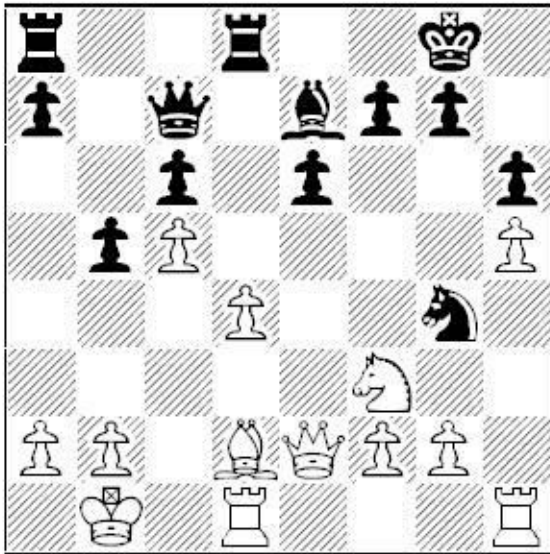
b21) 20 Rhc1 Qb6 21 b3 Nxe4 22 Qxe4 Qb5 23 Qxc6 Qf5+ 24 R4c2 Nf6 25 Qa6 Ne4 26 Be3 and Black has sufficient compensation for the pawn: the h-pawn is weak and the open files on the queenside give him plenty of chances to attack.

b22) 20 Nxf6+ is also possible although less effective: 20 ... Nxf6 21 Rhc1 Nxf5 22 Rxc6 (22 g4 Nf4 23 Qe4 Qb7 24 b3 Nd5 25 Rxc6? a5! 26 Bxa5? Ra8 27 Qe1 – 27 Bd2?? Rxa2 28 Kxa2 Ra8+ 29 Kb2 Ba3+ 30 Kc2 Qxc6+ wins for Black – 27 ... Qb5 and Black is much better) 22 ... Qb7 23 b3 Rfc8 and the position is level.

**18 ... Nxf6 19 c5**

19 Rc1 bxc4 20 Qxc4 Rac8 21 Ne5 c5 22 Qb5 Bd6 23 Nd3 c4 24 Rc2 Qb6 and Black is doing well; or 19 Ne5 Rfd8 20 Bf4 bxc4 21 Qxc4 Bd6 22 Rc1 Nd5 23 Bg3 Rac8 24 Nxc6 Bxg3 25 fxg3 Qxg3 and the game is roughly level.

**19 ... Rfd8 20 Qe2 Ng4!?**

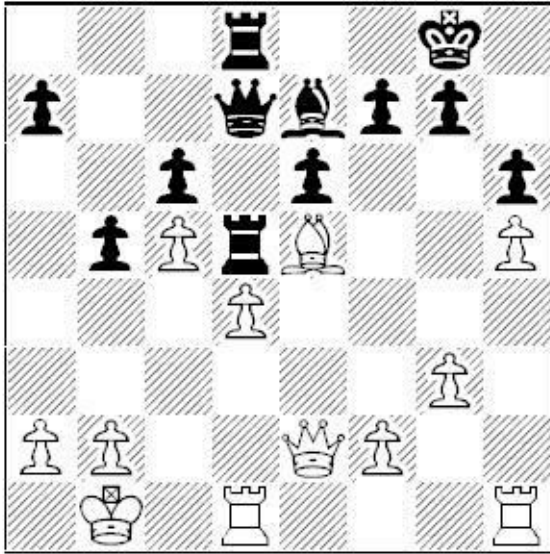


**21 g3**

This is not a bad move per se; however, the idea behind the move is wrong. 21 Ne1! is the critical test of Black's idea: 21 ... Rxd4 22 Nc2 Rxd2! (Black sacrifices the exchange; in return his knight gets a

stronghold on d5 and White will have a difficult task defending the c5-pawn) 23 Rxd2 Nf6 24 Qe3 (Black is doing well after 24 g4 Bxc5 25 g5 hxg5 26 h6 gxh6 27 Rxh6 Qf4) 24 ... a5 25 Rhd1 Nd5 26 Qd4 e5 27 Qe4 Bxc5 and in this position Black has more than enough compensation for the exchange.

**21 ... Rd5 22 Bf4 Qd7 23 Ne5? Nxe5 24 Bxe5 Rd8**

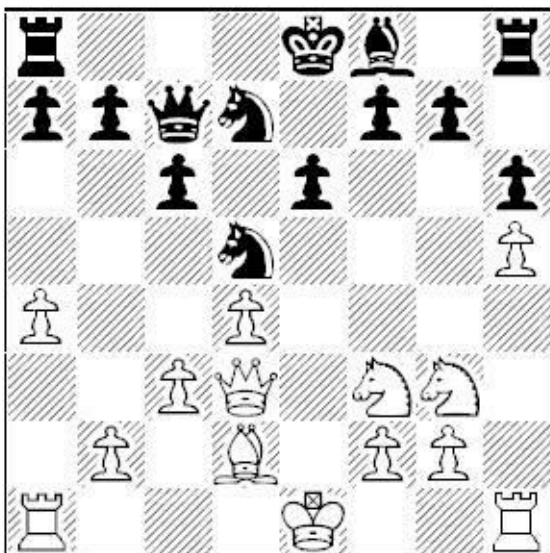


The pressure is overwhelming and Black now wins a pawn. The game J.Hickman-J.Houska, Hastings 2006/07, concluded 25 g4 f6 26 Bg3 e5 27 f4 exf4 28 Bxf4 Bxc5 29 Bxh6 gxh6 30 Qe4 Qh7 0-1.

### Sidelines: 12 c3 and 13 Ne4!?

**1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 dxe4 4 Nxe4 Bf5 5 Ng3 Bg6 6 h4 h6 7 Nf3 Nd7 8 h5 Bh7 9 Bd3 Bxd3 10 Qxd3 e6 11 Bf4 Qa5+ 12 Bd2**

12 c3, voluntarily abandoning ideas of castling queenside, does not challenge Black at all: 12 ... Ngf6 13 a4! (attempting to exploit the exposed position of the black queen on a5, but the problem here is that should White advance the c-pawn he will create a big hole on b4 that Black can make use of) 13 ... Nd5! 14 Bd2 Qc7



and now:

a) 15 Rh4?! makes no sense here: 15 ... Be7 16 Rg4? N7f6! (Black chases away the white rook; 17 Rxc7 loses the exchange after 17 ... Bf8) 17 Rh4 Bd6 and White has problems completing his development.

b) 15 0-0 Bd6 16 Ne4 N5f6 17 Nxd6+ Qxd6 18 Rfe1 Nxe5 (Black is now a pawn up without many risks) 19 Qf5 (or 19 Ne5 Nxe5 20 Rxe5 Nf6 21 Qg3 Rg8 and Black is not in any real danger, e.g. 22 b4 0-0-0 23 b5 Nd7 24 Rg5 Qxc3 25 Rxc3) 19 ... Nhf6 20 Bf4 Qe7 21 Qh3 Nd5 22 Bg3 0-0 23 Qh2 Qf6 with an edge for Black, S.Kasperski-W.Sapis, correspondence 1993.

### 12 ... Bb4 13 Ne4!?

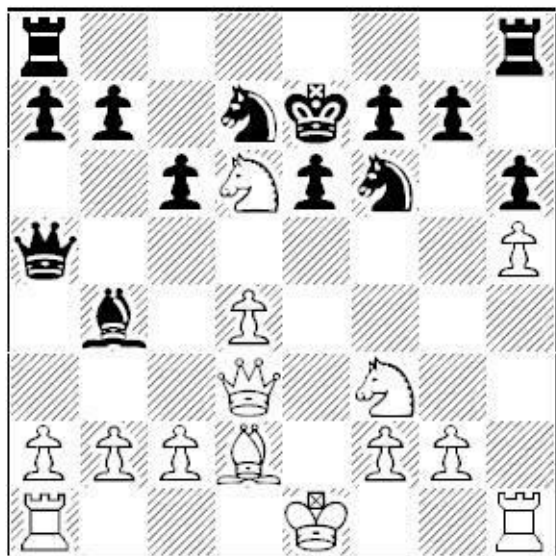
This tempting idea is not as strong as it first appears.

### 13 ... Ngf6!?

Allowing White to play Nd6+, forcing the black king to move to e7. Why does Black allow this check? There are many answers: there are not enough white pieces to attack the king; nor are they coordinated well enough; and Black's pieces with the obvious exception of the king are very harmoniously placed.

The key to playing the black side of this position is to think in terms of *centralization*.

### 14 Nd6+ Ke7

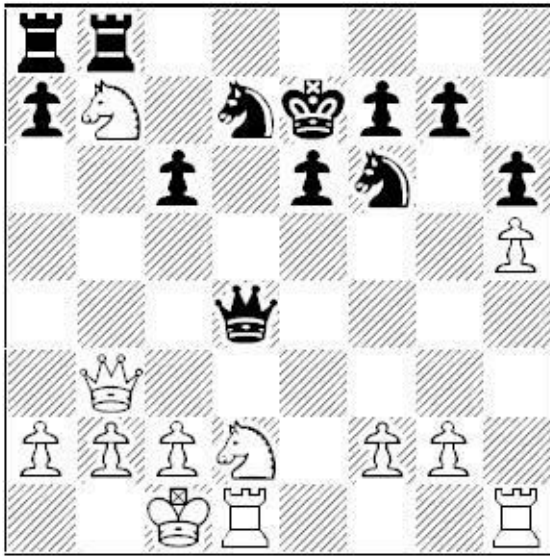


### 15 Nc4

White refrains from taking the b7-pawn in order to keep the tension. The alternative is 15 Nxb7 Bxd2+ 16 Nxd2 (16 Qxd2 is not so great, as after 16 ... Qb5 White must return the pawn with an inferior position: 17 Nc5 Nxc5 18 dxc5 Rhd8) 16 ... Qb4 and now:

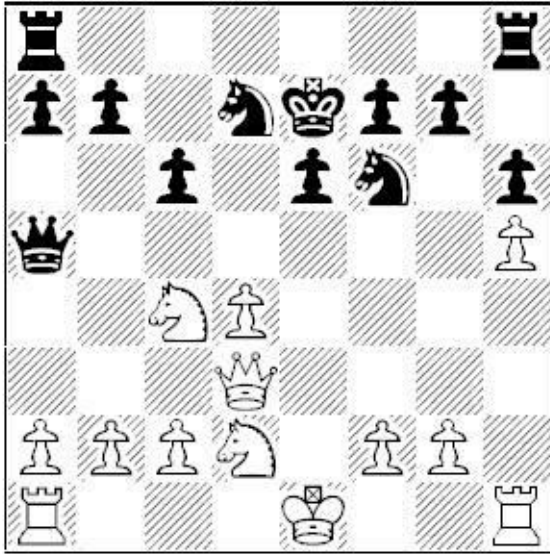
a) 17 Qa3?! Qxa3 18 bxa3 Rab8! and Black will follow through with ... c6-c5 to open lines against the weak c2-pawn. Although White remains material ahead, it is in name only. White's queenside pawn structure is shattered, he has weak pawns on c2, a2, a3 and of course h5, and on top of this he is also behind in development. Black is better following 19 Rb1 c5 20 dxc5 Rhc8 21 Ke2 Rc7 22 Na5 Rxb1 23 Rxb1 Rxc5.

b) 17 Qb3 (White returns the pawn) 17 ... Qxd4 18 0-0-0 Rhb8! was played in I.Morovic Fernandez-A.Karpov, Cap d'Agde (rapid) 2002.



19 Qa3+ c5 20 Na5 Rc8 21 Ndc4 Qf4+ (only now are we diverging from the above-mentioned game, which continued with 21 ... Qxf2 and a draw was shortly agreed) 22 Kb1 Kf8 23 Nd6 Rcb8 with equal chances. Black has regained the pawn, has an open b-file he would like to attack down, has the strong square d5 for his knight, and his queen is actively placed on f4.

**15 ... Bxd2+ 16 Nfxd2**



**16 ... Qc7 17 0-0-0**

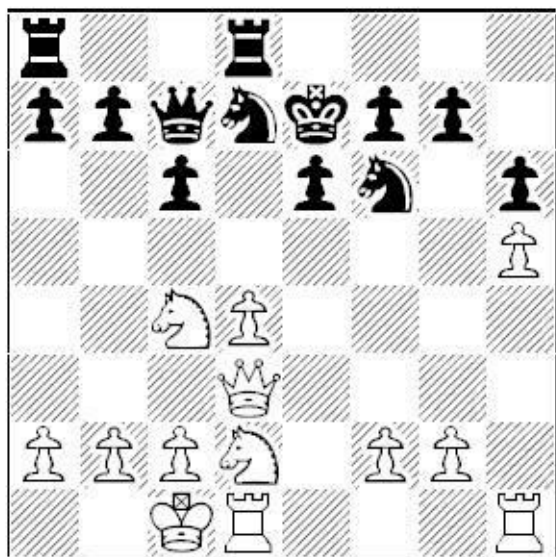
White has alternatives here:

a) 17 Ne4 Nxe4 18 Qxe4 Rhd8! (the concepts of centralization and king safety rolled into one) 19 0-0-0 Kf8 20 f4 (or 20 Qh7 Qf4+ 21 Kb1 Nf6 22 Qh8+ Ng8 with an edge for Black) 20 ... Nf6 21 Qf3 c5! (hitting at the centre immediately) 22 dxc5 Qxc5 23 Ne5 Nd5 24 Kb1 Kg8 25 a3 b5! (Black now has a target) 26 g4 (B.Macieja-P.Czarnota, Poland Ch. 2006) and now instead of 26 ... Rac8, as played in the game, better was the immediate 26 ... b4 27 a4 Rab8 with an attack: 28 g5? Nc3+ 29 bxc3 bxc3+ and White will be checkmated.

b) 17 Nf3 Rhd8! 18 0-0-0 c5 (this is standard play from Black) 19 Kb1 Kf8 20 Qe2 Rac8 21 Nce5 cxd4 22 Rxd4 Nxe5 23 Rxd8+ Rxd8 24 Nxe5 Rd5 (Black has the advantage here: he controls the d-file

and the pawn on h5 is a liability) 25 f4 Nd7 26 Nd3 Nc5 27 Nxc5 Qxc5 and Black stands much better. White's kingside pawns will eventually drop off, as happened in the game F.Pierrot-F.Peralta, Argentina 2006.

**17 ... Rhd8!**



Centralization! Black prepares to challenge for control of the d-file once it has been opened.

**18 Qa3+**

18 Kb1 was played in R.Ekstroem-R.Dautov, Swiss League 2004. According to Dautov, this poses no threat to Black at all: 18 ... c5! 19 Nf3 Kf8 (the king artificially castles and heads to g8) 20 Qe2 Nb6!? 21 dxc5 Qxc5 22 Nxb6 axb6!? (the idea behind this ambitious move is to gain control of the d-file) 23 Ne5 Rd5! (the point: Black gains control of the d-file because 24 Rxd5? drops a pawn after 24 ... Qxd5 25 a3 Qxg2) 24 f4 Rad8 25 a3?! (giving Black a target to attack) 25 ... b5! and Black was better.

**18 ... c5**

The only way Black can meet this check.

**19 Nb3 b6**

Supporting the c5-pawn

**20 dxc5 Nxc5**

20 ... bxc5 is a newer and less drawish idea, aimed at keeping the knight on b3 bad: 21 Nd6 Kf8 22 Na5 Kg8 23 Rd2 Nb6 24 Rhd1 Nfd5 and Black will place his rook on the b-file, advance the c-pawn and force White onto the defensive, A.Petrushin-A.Lastin, Voronezh 2005.

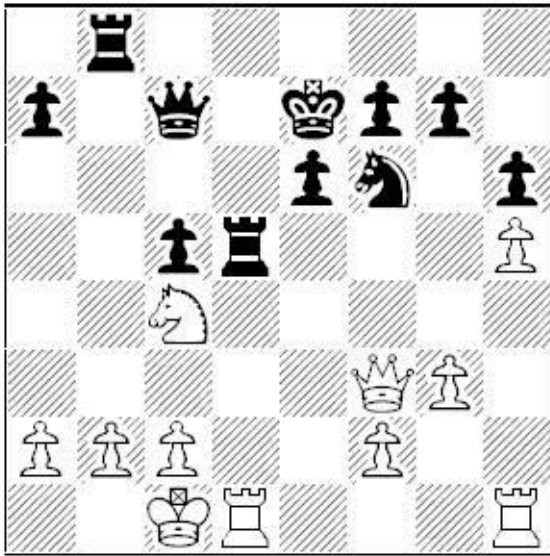
**21 Nxc5 bxc5**

The position is firmly equal. Both sides have one exposed pawn and neither can really break open the position. We are following the game D.Jakovenko-I.Khenkin, Moscow 2004:

**22 g3 Rab8 23 Qf3**

White should probably accept that he has no advantage and play for equality with 23 Rxd8 Rxd8 24 Qf3 Rd5 25 Ne3.

**23 ... Rd5!**



Again we see the theme, *centralization!*

**24 Qe2 Kf8 25 f4**

25 Rxd5 exd5 26 Qe5 Qb7 27 Nd6 Qb6 28 Re1 looks distinctly better than the game continuation.

**25 ... Qb7 26 b3 Rbd8**

Now Black has possession of the d-file and the better position.

**27 g4 Rd4! 28 Ne5?**

28 g5 does not help White either after the strong 28 ... Qe4! 29 Qxe4 Nxe4 30 Rxd4 Rxd4 31 gxh6 gxh6 32 Re1 Nf6 33 Re5 Nd7 34 Re3 Rxf4, and Black is winning.

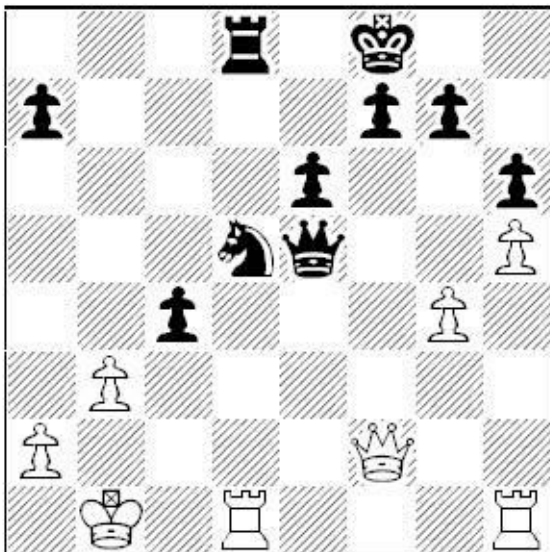
**28 ... Qb4**

Black accesses the dark squares around White's king. These weak squares cost White the game.

**29 Kb2 Nd5 30 Qf3 Rxf4**

Suddenly White's position has collapsed completely.

**31 Qg3 c4!, 32 c3 Rf2+! 33 Qxf2 Qxc3+ 34 Kb1 Qxe5**



**35 Rde1 Nc3+ 36 Kc2 Qa5 37 Ra1 Ne4 0-1**

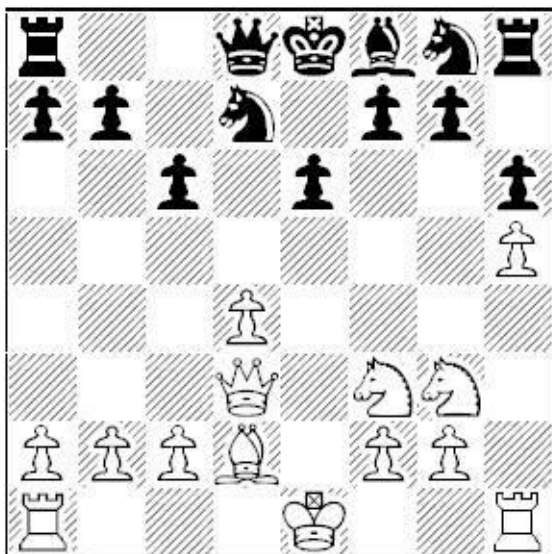
## Summary

For any Caro player this will certainly be the chapter most often referred to. After 14 ... Qc7 all systems for Black are satisfactory. After the quick 15 d5?! the endgame is pleasant for Black. With 15 0-0 the h5-pawn proves to be nothing more than a weakness. In the main lines after 15 0-0-0 Black has the sharp counter ... b7-b5!, offering very interesting play. The battle is fought in the centre over the impact of the d5-square. Black should remember that White has the dangerous kingside strike g2-g4, so he should prevent this when appropriate with ... Nf6-g4!.

# Chapter Two

## Main Line: 11 Bd2

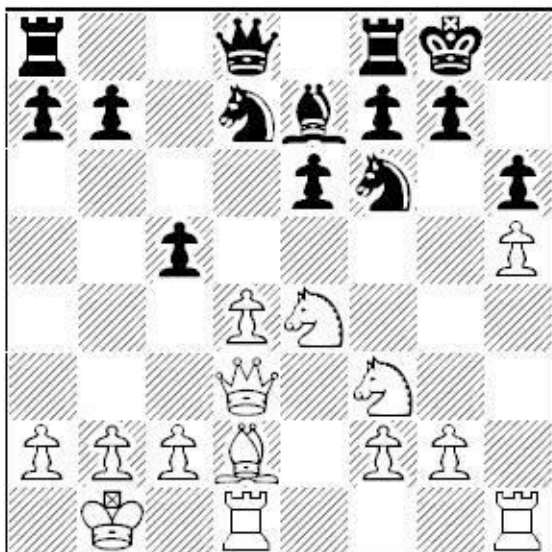
1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 dxe4 4 Nxe4 Bf5 5 Ng3 Bg6 6 h4 h6 7 Nf3 Nd7 8 h5 Bh7 9 Bd3 Bxd3 10 Qxd3 e6 11 Bd2



It was at one stage thought that 11 Bd2 and 11 Bf4 more or less led to the same thing, but this is only true in the old main lines with Black castling queenside. Because we will be adopting the same sharp approach as in the 11 Bf4 lines, i.e. with kingside castling, there will be some fundamental differences.

## When to play ... c6-c5

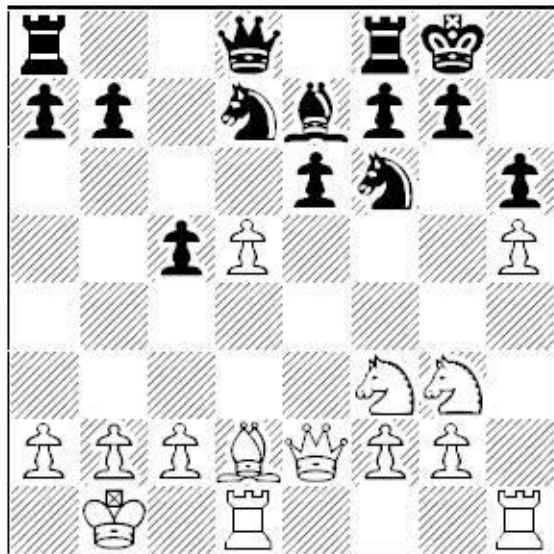
There is no pawn on c4, so securing the d5-square with ... b7-b5 is not as effective; instead Black aims for the ... c6-c5 advance, highlighting the disadvantage of playing Bd2 – the d-file is blocked.



This is an example, taken from Line A1, of when it's correct to play ... c6-c5. The white knight has moved from g3 to e4 and so can no longer threaten to jump into f5 (see below).

## Jobava's Stunning Sacrifice

Black should under no circumstances let the g3-knight jump into f5, so he should be wary of the pawn sacrifice d4-d5, enabling the knight to reach this dangerous square.



Here White has just answered 14 ... c5 with 15 d5!!, a brilliant sacrifice first played by GM Jobava (see Line A2 for details).

As with 11 Bf4, White has the same transpositional 'improving moves' Qe2, Kb1 and Rde1 (or Rhe1). The most important thing is to concentrate on White's plans rather than the precise move order: the c2-c4 plan, centralization and the immediate kingside attack.

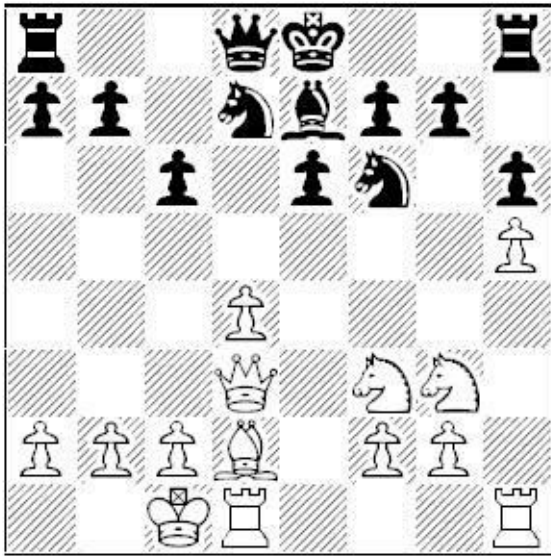
## Looking at the Theory

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 dxe4 4 Nxe4 Bf5 5 Ng3 Bg6 6 h4 h6 7 Nf3 Nd7 8 h5 Bh7 9 Bd3 Bxd3 10 Qxd3 e6 11 Bd2 Ngf6

In effect, Black has the same idea as in the previous chapter of castling kingside. The only differences are that Black cannot provoke c2-c4 so easily and his queen is on d8, not c7.

12 0-0-0 Be7

12 ... Qc7 transposes to the old lines where Black castles queenside, which is away from the territory of this book. A word of warning: the move ... Qc7 is too committal should Black have ideas of castling kingside, as sometimes the queen is needed on d8 to jump to d5, hitting the a-pawn and at the same time going to e4 in order to facilitate a queen exchange.



After 12 ... Be7, White's three main moves are:

- A: 13 Kb1**
- B: 13 Qe2**
- C: 13 Ne4**

Alternatively:

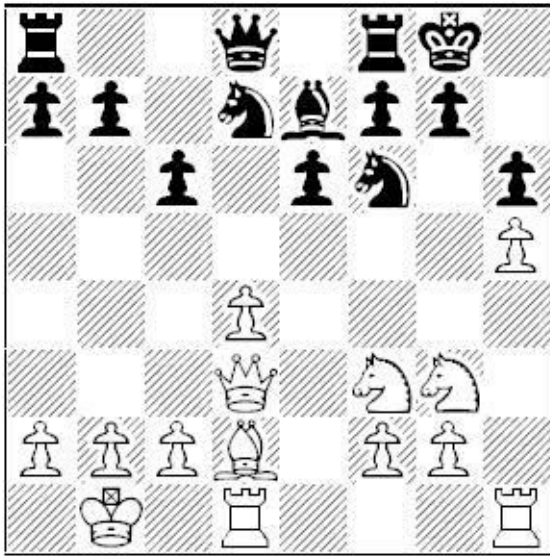
a) 13 Rhe1 0-0 14 Kb1 c5! (14 ... Qb6 is not very good because of 15 Nf5) 15 Bc1 Rc8 16 Qe2 cxd4 17 Nxd4 Qb6 18 f4 Bc5 19 Nb3 Bf2 20 Be3 Bxe3 21 Qxe3 Qxe3 22 Rxe3 and Black is equal, V.Malakhov-I.Khenkin, Koszalin 1999.

b) 13 c4?! b5! (by now you should be familiar with this motif) 14 cxb5 (14 c5? just blundered a pawn to 14 ... Nxc5! in A.Mehdi-J.Houska, Gibraltar 2004) 14 ... cxb5 15 Qxb5 Rb8 16 Qa6 Rb6 17 Qa4 0-0 18 Kb1 Qb8 19 b3 and Black has good compensation for the pawn.

### **A) 13 Kb1**

This move has a lot of prophylaxis behind it. The main and most simple purpose is to get the white king into safety and protect the a-pawn from any threat. Another point is that White has not committed himself to any particular plan.

**13 ... 0-0**



Now we will look at:

**A1: 14 Ne4**

**A2: 14 Qe2**

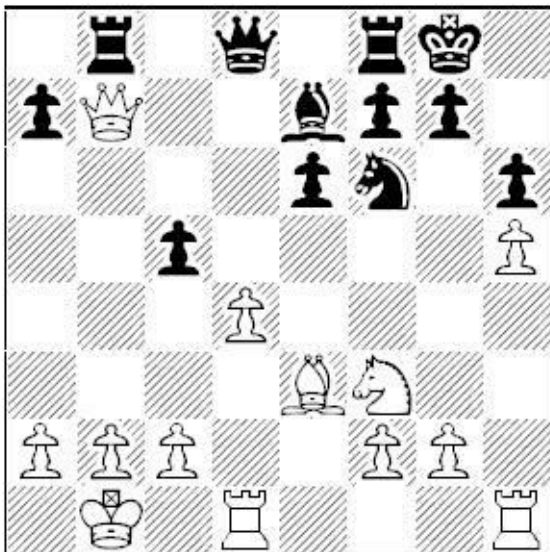
**A1) 14 Ne4 c5!?**

Played by esteemed players such as Evgeny Bareev and Igor Khenkin, 14 ... c5 sets out to directly undermine the d4-pawn, open the c-file for attack (Sicilian Defence style!) and also loosen White's control over the e5-square.

**15 dxc5**

This is not the only move:

a) 15 Be3 was effectively neutralized in the game A.Beliavsky-Z.Gyimesi, Bled Olympiad 2002, after 15 ... Nxe4 16 Qxe4 Nf6 17 Qxb7 (White takes a very risky approach) 17 ... Rb8



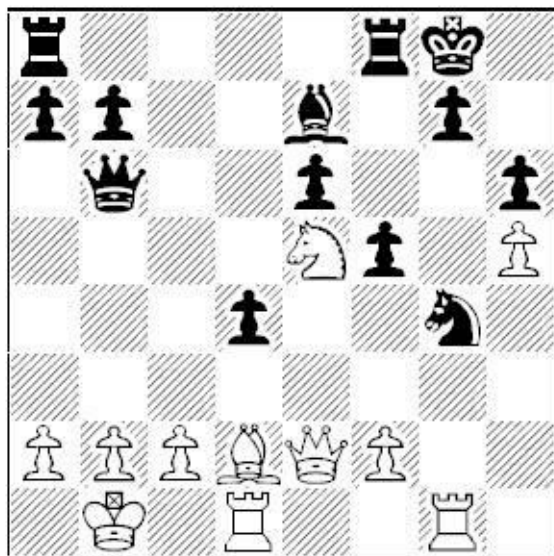
18 Qa6! (18 Qxa7? simply loses after 18 ... Ra8 19 Qb7 Qa5! when White's king is defenceless against the heavy artillery: 20 Qxe7 loses to 20 ... Qxa2+ 21 Kc1 Ne4 – blocking the king's escape route

- 22 Nd2 Qa1+ 23 Nb1 Rfb8 24 b3 Ra2 and checkmate is coming) 18 ... Nd5 19 Bd2 cxd4 (opening up more lines) 20 Nxd4 Bf6 21 Nb3 Qc7 and Black had a very strong attack. Following 22 Rhe1 Rfc8 23 Rc1 Nb6, the knight was heading to c4.

b) 15 Nxf6+ Nxf6 and now:

b1) 16 Qe2 cxd4 17 Bc3 Rc8 (Black should return the d-pawn and concentrate on activating his pieces) 18 Bxd4 (18 Rxd4? allows Black to push White around with 18 ... Nd5! 19 Bd2 Bf6 20 Rg4 Qb6, when Black has an active game with threats on the queenside) 18 ... Qc7 19 Rhg1 (19 g4 Nxg4 20 Rhg1 Nf6 21 Rg2 Kh8 is good for Black) 19 ... Rfd8 20 g4 Nh7 21 c3 Bc5, and now both 22 Bxc5 Qxc5 and 22 Be5 Rxd1+ 23 Rxd1 Qc6 are level.

b2) 16 g4!? is an interesting try for the initiative: 16 ... Nxg4 17 Rhg1 f5 (17 ... Nxf2? would be a big mistake after 18 Qe2 Nxd1 19 Bxh6 Bf6 20 Bxg7! and Black has major problems) 18 Qe2 Qb6 19 Ne5 cxd4

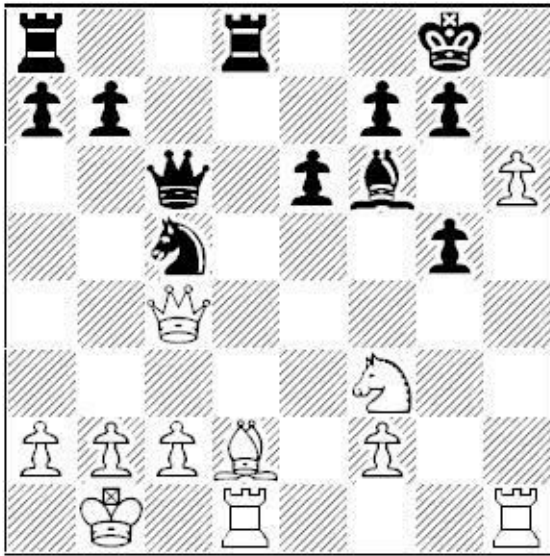


20 Nxg4 f5 21 Rxg4 Bf6! and now 22 Bxh6 is not possible, as Black is better after 22 ... Qxb2+ 23 Kxb2 d3+. Going back, if White takes the exchange with 20 Nd7 then Black should play 20 ... Qa6 (it is important to get the queens off otherwise White will have a strong initiative) 21 Qxa6 bxa6 22 Nxf8 Kxf8! (bringing the king closer to the action) 23 f3 Ne3! (Black wants to establish a strong pawn on e3 to tie one of White's rooks down) 24 Rde1 Rb8 25 b3 f4 and Black is not worse: the strong knight is a headache for White, who doesn't have enough space to be able to manoeuvre the two rooks.

**15 ... Nxc5!**

15 ... Qc7 carries considerable risk. The game J.Carpentier-E.Janosi, correspondence 2002, demonstrated some of the dangerous threats White has: 16 g4 Nxg4 17 Rhg1 f5 18 Nd4 Qe5 19 c6 fxe4 20 Qe2 Nxf2 21 Bxh6 and White won a stunning game.

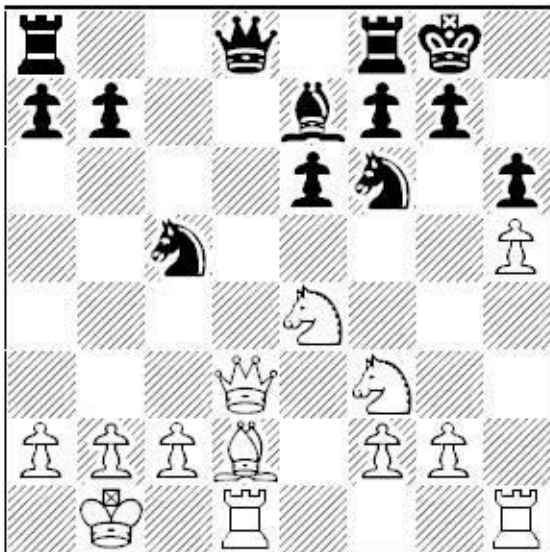
Maybe Black can improve with 16 ... Rfd8!? 17 Qc4 Nxc5 18 Nxf6+ Bxf6 19 g5 hxg5 20 h6 Qc6!, targeting the knight on f3:



a) 21 N<sub>x</sub>g5 g<sub>x</sub>h6 22 R<sub>x</sub>h6 R<sub>x</sub>d2! 23 R<sub>x</sub>d2 B<sub>x</sub>g5 24 Q<sub>g</sub>4 N<sub>e</sub>4! 25 R<sub>d</sub>4 (or 25 R<sub>d</sub>1 R<sub>c</sub>8 26 c3 Q<sub>b</sub>5 27 R<sub>d</sub>h1 R<sub>c</sub>4 28 R<sub>h</sub>8+ K<sub>g</sub>7 29 R<sub>1</sub>h7+ K<sub>f</sub>6 30 Q<sub>f</sub>3+ Q<sub>f</sub>5) 25 ... R<sub>c</sub>8, intending 26 c4 Q<sub>x</sub>c4!.

b) 21 h7+ K<sub>h</sub>8 22 N<sub>x</sub>g5 B<sub>x</sub>g5 23 B<sub>x</sub>g5 R<sub>x</sub>d1+ 24 R<sub>x</sub>d1 Q<sub>f</sub>3 25 R<sub>d</sub>4 R<sub>c</sub>8 with equal chances in this endgame. The thing to note is that should White continue with the disgusting-looking 26 b4, trying to win a piece, 26 ... b5 27 Q<sub>x</sub>b5 Q<sub>x</sub>f2 28 Q<sub>c</sub>4 a5! 29 b<sub>x</sub>c5 R<sub>b</sub>8+ 30 K<sub>c</sub>1 Q<sub>g</sub>1+ 31 K<sub>d</sub>2 wins back the piece and leaves the white king exposed.

Going back, 16 N<sub>x</sub>f6+ does not offer much hope for an advantage: 16 ... N<sub>x</sub>f6 17 Q<sub>e</sub>2 R<sub>a</sub>c8 18 N<sub>e</sub>5 Q<sub>x</sub>c5 19 B<sub>c</sub>1 R<sub>f</sub>d8 20 g4! (protecting the h-pawn; attacking on the flank would be very risky for White as the centre is still very much in a fluid state) 20 ... R<sub>x</sub>d1 (exchanging a pair of rooks neutralizes any potential kingside attack White may be planning) 21 R<sub>x</sub>d1 B<sub>d</sub>6 22 N<sub>d</sub>3 Q<sub>b</sub>5 23 N<sub>f</sub>4 Q<sub>b</sub>6 ½-½ A.Greet-J.Houska, Hastings 2006/07.



### 16 N<sub>x</sub>c5

Or:

a) 16 N<sub>x</sub>f6+ B<sub>x</sub>f6 17 Q<sub>b</sub>5 Q<sub>c</sub>7 18 B<sub>e</sub>3 (18 g4 N<sub>e</sub>4) 18 ... R<sub>a</sub>c8 19 B<sub>x</sub>c5 Q<sub>x</sub>c5 20 Q<sub>x</sub>c5 R<sub>x</sub>c5, and here H.Hoefer-C.Dunn, correspondence 2002, continued 21 c3 R<sub>d</sub>8 22 K<sub>c</sub>2 and the game was shortly

drawn. Should White play 21 Rd7, Black can answer 21 ... Rb5 22 b3 Rd8 with equality.

b) Exchanging queens does not offer White anything at all: 16 Qxd8 Rfxd8 17 Nxf6+ Bxf6 18 Be3 Na4 19 c3 Rxd1+ 20 Rxd1 Bxc3 (J.Ritscher-D.Palo, German League 2003) 21 bxc3 Nxc3+ 22 Kc2 Nxd1 23 Kxd1 Rd8+ and with a rook and two pawns for two pieces, Black has the better game; a rook combined with pawns on different wings generally works better than two minor pieces.

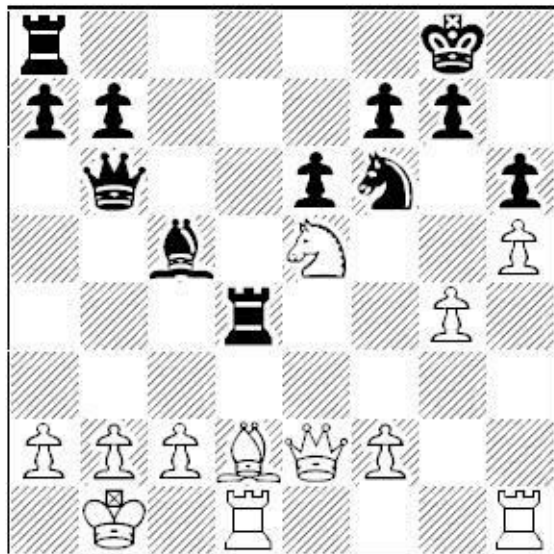
**16 ... Bxc5 17 Qe2**

Defending the f2-pawn.

**17 ... Qb6 18 Ne5 Rfd8**

Centralizing the rook and contesting the d-file.

**19 g4 Rd4**



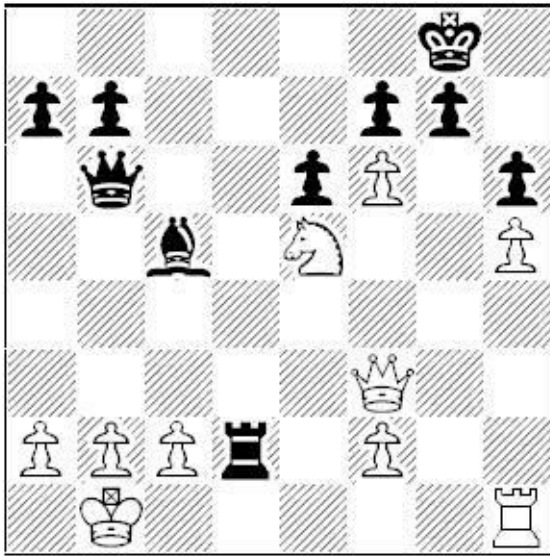
This is a very interesting but double-edged position. White is commencing a wing attack as quickly as possible whilst Black must strive hard to get active play in the centre.

**20 Qf3**

20 g5 is met by 20 ... Re4 21 Qf3 Rxe5 22 gxf6 Bd4 23 Bc3 (Black wins a pawn after 23 c3? Rf5 24 Qe4 Bxf6 and White's attack has dissolved away) 23 ... Bxc3 24 Qxc3 Rc5 25 Qe3 Rf5 26 fxg7 Qxe3 27 fxe3 Kxg7 28 Rd7 b5 with an equal endgame.

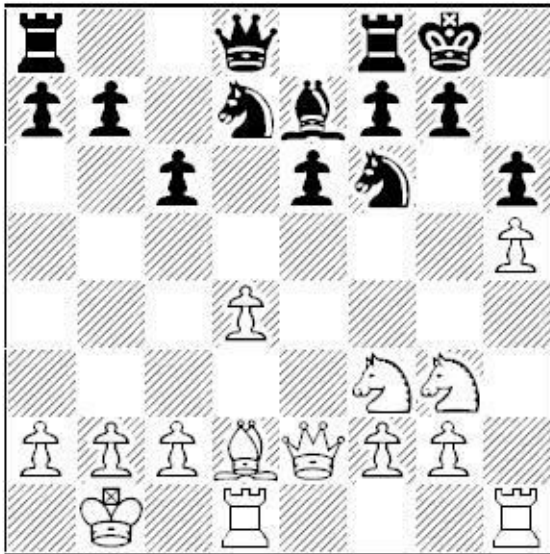
**20 ... Rad8 21 g5 Rxd2 22 Rxd2 Rxd2 23 gxf6**

We have been following the game J.Bratko-E.Dizdarevic, Ljubljana 2005.



Black could have played 23 ... Bd4 24 Nc4 Qb4 25 Rg1 Bxf6 26 Kc1 (26 Qxf6 fails to 26 ... Rd1+) 26 ... Bd4 with an initiative. 27 Nxd2? would be very weak, losing to 27 ... Qxb2+ 28 Kd1 Qa1+ 29 Ke2 Qxg1.

## A2) 14 Qe2

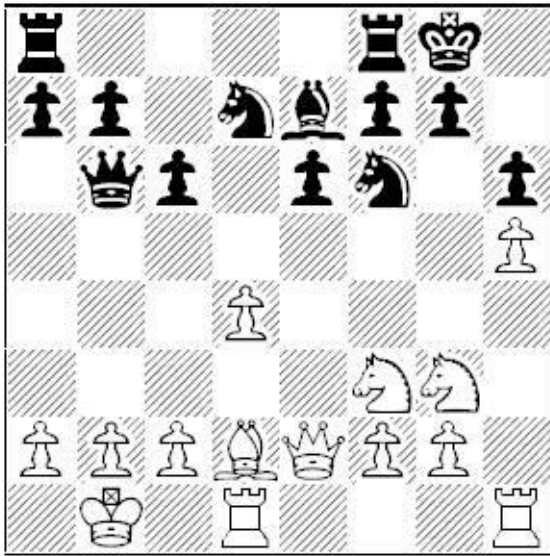


## 14 ... Qb6!?

Black prepares to develop sensibly by centralizing the two rooks before hitting out with the ... c5 break.

14 ... c5 was the traditional method of dealing with this system, but Jobava's stunning novelty against Bareev has more or less consigned this to the doldrums: 15 d5!! Nxd5! (15 ... exd5? 16 Bxh6 gxh6 17 Nf5 Re8 18 Nxh6+ Kf8 19 Ng5 Qb6 20 Qf3 Ne5 21 Qg3 and White has a powerful attack, B.Jobava-E.Bareev, Rethymnon 2003) 16 Ne4 with the dangerous threat of g2-g4-g5.

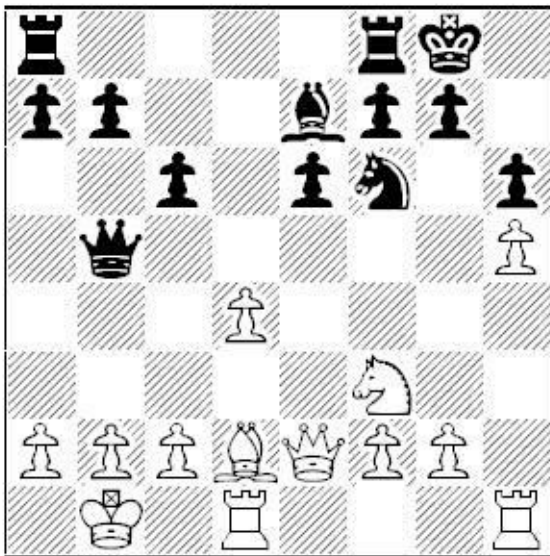
Returning to 14 ... Qb6:



### 15 c4

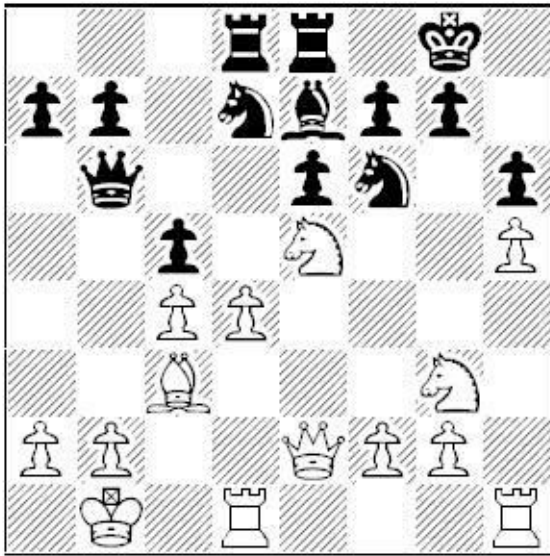
Alternatively:

- a) 15 Ne5? is bad: 15 ... Rad8 16 Ne4 Nxe5 17 dxe5 Nxe4 18 Qxe4 Qxf2 picks up a pawn.
- b) Playing a very quick 15 Ne4 is dangerous for Black: 15 ... Nxe4 16 Qxe4 Nf6 17 Qe2 Qb5!?



This is probably the safest route to equality, Black accepting the doubled pawns so that he can eliminate any potential dangers of a kingside attack. These doubled pawns are not necessarily bad, as they can be a useful tool in undermining White's protection of the d4-pawn, and the b5-pawn secures the d5-square for Black: 18 Qxb5 (or 18 c4 Qf5+ 19 Ka1 Rad8 20 Bc3 Bd6 21 Rhg1 Qe4!) 18 ... cxb5 19 Ne5 Rfd8 20 Bc1 Rd5 21 f3 was played in Y.Shen-Xu Yuanyuan, Wuxi 2005. Black is okay here. Play may continue along the lines of 21 ... Rad8 22 c3 a6 23 Be3 Bd6 24 Bf4 Bb8 when there are no dangers for Black.

**15 ... Rfe8 16 Ne5 Rad8 17 Bc3 c5**



Now that the black rooks have been centralized, it is time to break in the centre.

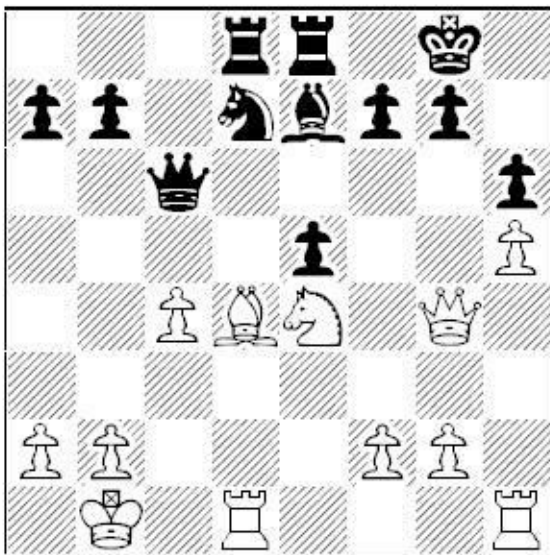
**18 Nxd7 Nxd7**

18 ... Rxd7 is also possible. After 19 dxc5 Qxc5 20 Bxf6 Rxd1+ 21 Rxd1 Bxf6 22 Ne4 White's edge is minimal.

**19 Ne4 cxd4 20 Bxd4**

20 Rxd4 can be met by 20 ... Nc5! with the threat of 21 ... Na4! (only 20 ... Nf6 had been played before, in D.Stellwagen-J.Timman, Amsterdam 2005). For example: 21 Qg4? Na4!; 21 Rxd8 Rxd8 22 Qg4 Bf8 23 Nf6+ Kh8 and White's pieces are all tangled up; or 21 Nxc5 Bxc5 22 Rg4 e5 and I prefer Black, whose pieces are more harmoniously placed.

**20 ... Qc6 21 Qg4 e5!**



Black must defend actively. The highly passive 21 ... Bf8? 22 Bf6 gives White a very easy attack after 22 ... Rc8 23 Rh3. In Xu Yuhua-A.Ushenina, Ekaterinburg 2006, Black made a massive blunder with 23 ... Qxc4?!, when 24 Rc3 Qb5 25 Rxd7! won on the spot.

**22 Bc3**

After 22 Be3!? Kh8! (the threat was Bxh6 followed by Rxd7), I suspect that Black has the better

chances.

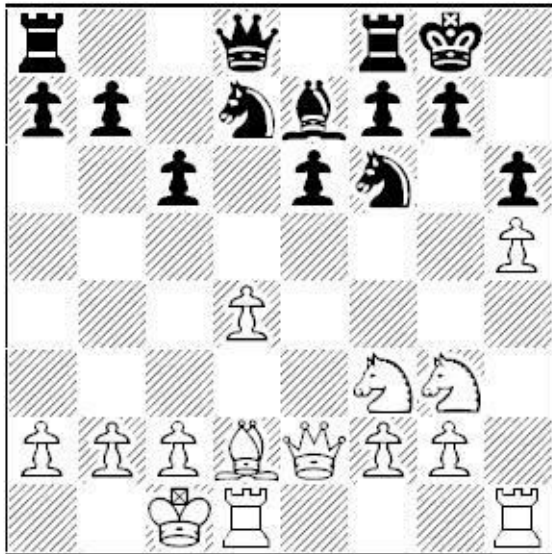
**22 ... Nf6 23 Nxf6+ Bxf6 24 Rxd8**

... and a draw was agreed in Ye Jiangchuan-Z.Izoria, Calvia Olympiad 2004. After 24 Rxd8 Rxd8 25 Re1 b5 26 cxb5 Qxb5 I think that Black's position is easier to play: White's king is more vulnerable than Black's and the h5-pawn is more of a weakness than a strength.

## B) 13 Qe2

When played in conjunction with Kb1, this move simply transposes into the previous line. However there is an independent idea behind this move, which is to support a future Ne5.

**13 ... 0-0**



## 14 Ne5

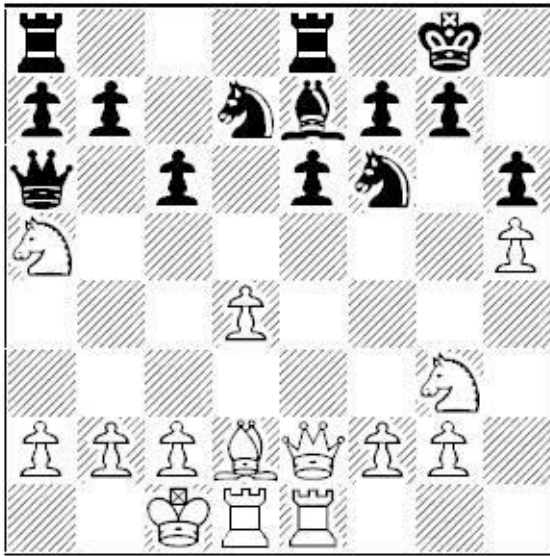
White can try to exploit the pressure on the e-file with 14 Rhe1 Qb6 (the simplest) and now:

a) 15 Nf5 is not so dangerous: 15 ... exf5 16 Qxe7 Rfe8 17 Qd6 Re4! (getting ready to double up on the e-file) with a further branch:

a1) If White plays 18 Re3 Black can take advantage of several loosely placed pawns with 18 ... c5. If 19 Qxb6 axb6 the a2-pawn must be defended, the h5-pawn is en prise and Black is also threatening to play ... Ng4 attacking both the rook and the f2-pawn simultaneously: 20 Kb1 Ng4 21 Rb3 Nxf2 22 Rf1 Re2 23 dxc5 Ne4! 24 Bf4 Nexc5 and Black is much better.

a2) 18 Rxe4 fxe4 19 Ne5 Nxe5 20 dxe5 Ne8 21 Qb4 Qxf2 22 Qxe4 Rd8 and the position is equal.

b) 15 Ne5 Rfe8 16 Nc4 (16 f4 should be met by 16 ... c5! 17 f5 Nf8 18 Be3 Rac8, which is equal; Black should note that a move like Kb1 would be a blunder after ... Nd5!, threatening the bishop and a fork with ... Nc3+) 16 ... Qa6 17 Na5



17 ... b5! (Black should only swap queens when it is in his interests to do so, and here with White's pieces a little awkwardly situated it is best for Black to keep the queens on to continue the attack) 18 Kb1 c5! (opening the c-file for the attack) 19 dxc5 Nxc5 20 Nb3 Nxb3 21 axb3 Qb6 22 Bc3 a5 (now the a-file should be opened; Black has a very promising position indeed) 23 Ne4 Nxe4 24 Qxe4 b4!/? (24 ... a4 was played in A.Naiditsch-B.Jobava, Dortmund 2006; although Black had the better position, White still had active chances) 25 Bd4 Qa6 (Black adopts the caveman approach – play for mate!) 26 Qg4 Bf8 27 Be5 (27 Re3 a4! 28 bxa4 Qxa4 29 b3 Qa2+ 30 Kc1 Rec8 31 Rd2 Qa1+ 32 Bxa1 Rxa1+ 33 Kb2 Rca8 and mate is unstoppable) 27 ... a4 28 bxa4 Qxa4 29 b3 Qa2+ 30 Kc1 Rec8 31 Rd2 Qxb3 and Black is winning!

### 14 ... c5!

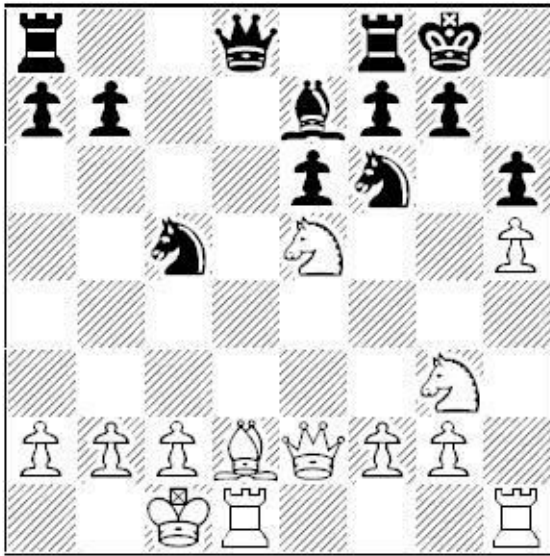
Opening an important file near White's king, something normally seen in the Sicilian!

### 15 dxc5

Or 15 Ng6 Re8 16 Nxe7+ Qxe7 17 dxc5 Qxc5 18 Bc3 Rac8 19 Kb1 (E.Korbut-A.Ushenina, Ekaterinburg 2006). Instead of trading queens with 19 ... Qc4, as happened in the game, I like 19 ... Qc6!, preventing the 'bad' knight on g3 reaching e4.

### 15 ... Nxc5!

15 ... Bxc5 is also possible but contains less life than the main text: 16 Nxd7 Qxd7 17 Ne4 (again 17 Bxh6 does not work after 17 ... Qa4, when Black wins the a-pawn with a crushing position) 17 ... Nxe4 18 Qxe4 Qc7 19 Qg4 Bxf2 20 Bxh6 Qg3! and Black is fine.



**16 Ng4**

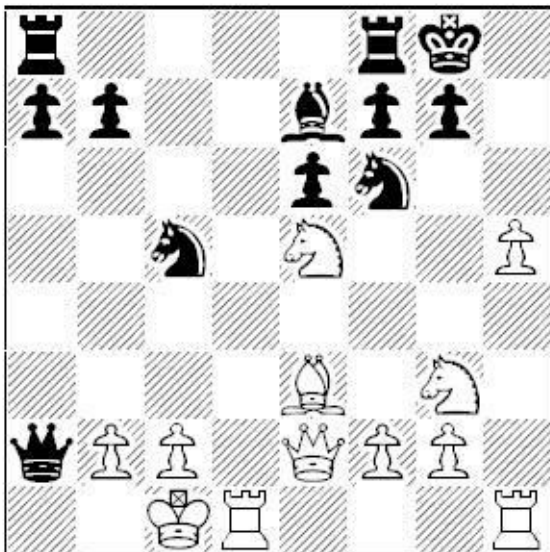
Or:

a) 16 Kb1 Qc7 and now:

a1) 17 Bf4 is met by 17 ... Rfd8! 18 Qf3 (18 Nf5?? exf5 19 Ng6 Bd6 20 Rxd6 Rxd6 21 Qe7 Qc6 22 Bxd6 Nce4 and Black wins a piece; 18 Ng6? Bd6 and Black takes control over the d-file; or 18 c4 Bd6 19 Rhe1 b5! and the b-pawn is immune because the knight will go to d5) 18 ... Rxd1+ 19 Rxd1 Rd8 and Black is equal, J.Van Mil-L.Koster, Dutch League 1994.

a2) 17 Rhe1 Rfd8! 18 f4 Na4 19 Qb5 Nc5 20 Qe2 Rac8! (Black repeats moves either because he is short on time or maybe just to tease White a little and find out his frame of mind) 21 Bc1 Na4 22 Rxd8+ Rxd8 23 Ne4 Qb6 24 Ka1 Nxe4 25 Qxe4 Bb4 26 Rf1 Rd4! with a clear advantage, F.Sanz Alonso-J.Magem Badals, Seville 1993. Black's play is very instructive: he combines threats to White's king with pressure in the centre.

b) 16 Bxh6 Qa5! is more than good for Black: 17 Be3 Qxa2 ...



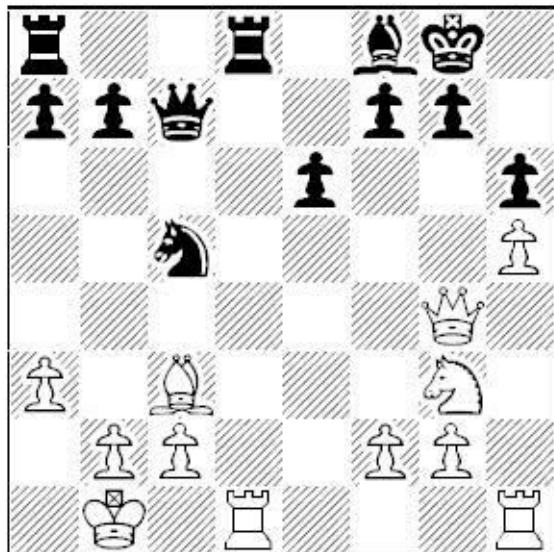
... and White's King is in danger ( ... Rac8 followed by ... Nb3+ is one very unpleasant threat).

**16 ... Qc7 17 Kb1**

The sacrifices on h6 just do not work: 17 Nxb6+?! gxf6 18 Bxf6 Rfd8 19 Qe3 Ng4; 17 Bxf6?! gxf6 18 Nxf6+ Kh7 19 Ng4 Qf4+ and White has nothing to show for the piece.

After 17 Kb1 Black is slightly better because of the open c-file. Let's follow the game Xie Jun-L.Brunner, Bern 1995:

**17 ... Rfd8 18 Bc3 Nxb4 19 Qxb4 Bf8 20 a3?!**



Making a weakness on the queenside that Black can target; this move simply makes White's defensive task harder. After 20 Rxd8 Rxd8 21 Rd1 Na4! White must either concede the d-file (22 Bd2) or accept a very weak pawn structure (22 Rxd8 Nxc3+ 23 bxc3 Qxd8). Black is better in either case.

**20 ... b5 21 Qe2 Qc6 22 f3?!**

White does not challenge Black at all and plays purely in a defensive manner.

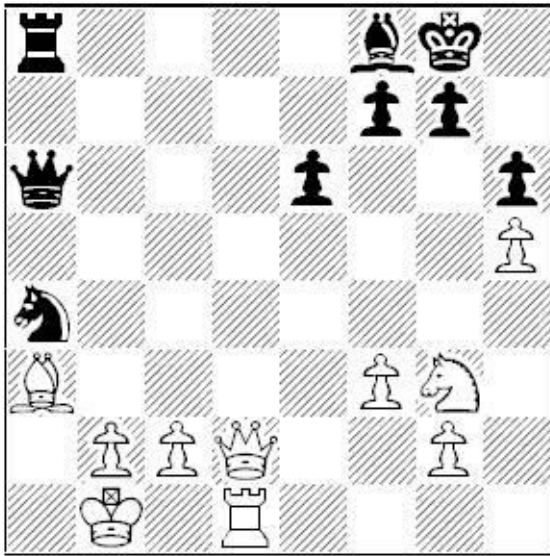
**22 ... Rxd1+ 23 Rxd1 a5!**

Now it's impossible to prevent the opening of files on the queenside.

**24 Qd2**

24 Qe1 is probably more stubborn mainly because the rook can defend the bishop from d3: 24 ... b4 25 axb4 axb4 26 Bxb4 Qa6 27 Ba3 Na4 28 Rd3 (this possibility shows the difference between 24 Qe1 and the text) 28 ... Nb6!, intending ... Nc4.

**24 ... b4! 25 axb4 axb4 26 Bxb4 Qa6 27 Ba3 Na4!**



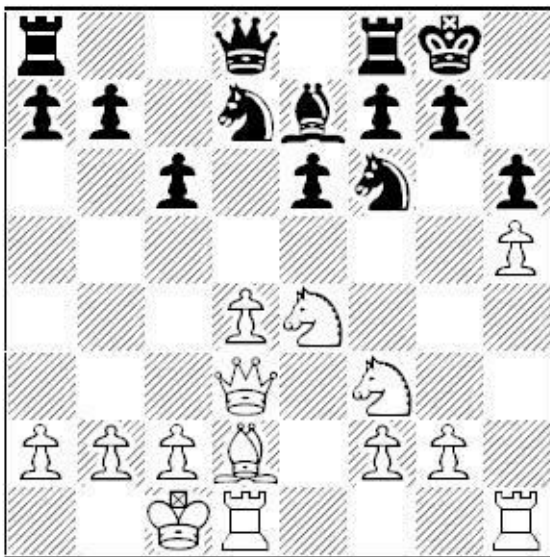
Now it's all over: 28 Bxf8 is met by 28 ... Nc3+! followed by mate.

**28 Qd4 Bxa3 29 bxa3 Qb5+ 30 Qb4 Nc3+ 0-1**

### C) 13 Ne4

This is the main line and probably the most critical test for the whole variation. 13 Ne4 does not waste time centralizing or 'improving' the placement of the pieces. Right from the beginning White has plans of starting a quick kingside attack.

**13 ... 0-0**



Rising to the challenge, but there is another option if Black is in a more peaceful mood: 13 ... Nxe4 14 Qxe4 Nf6 15 Qe2 Qd5 16 c4 Qe4 17 Qxe4 Nxe4 18 Be3 and White has a slight advantage, although Black should be able to hold the position with active play.

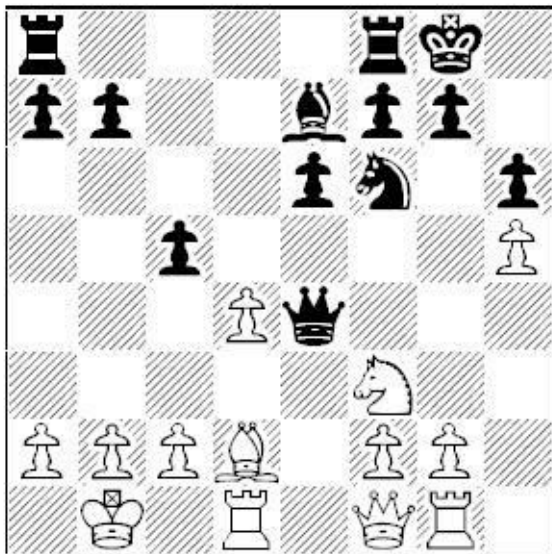
**14 Nxf6+**

White has some alternatives in this position:

a) 14 Kb1 demonstrates the downside to playing a quick Ne4 followed by a little 'improving move': he allows Black the option of playing ... c6-c5 very rapidly – we saw earlier how White had ideas of

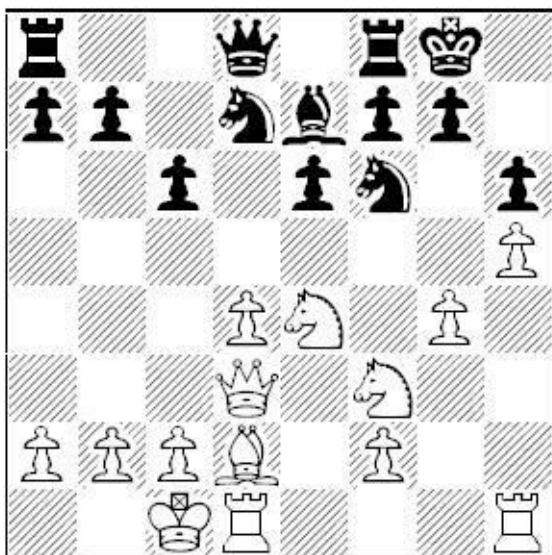
sacrificing the d-pawn with d4-d5 in order to gain the f5-square for the knight. After 14 ... c5! Black should seek to open the central lines immediately to make it difficult for White to commence a flank attack (see Line A1 for this transposition).

b) 14 Rhg1?! supports g2-g4 but is too slow. Black can now reach a good version of the endgame mentioned in the previous note (after 13 ... Nxe4) since we have the same position but with the moves ... 0-0 and Rg1 added, plus White does not have c2-c4 thrown in: 14 ... Nxe4 15 Qxe4 Nf6 16 Qe2 Qd5 17 Kb1 Qe4 (17 ... Qxh5 is a little risky after 18 g4 Nxg4 19 Rg2, when White will double on the g-file and begin to harass Black) 18 Qf1? (this move is too passive; 18 Qxe4 Nxe4 19 Be3 Rfd8 20 g4 Rac8 – preparing to break free with ... c6-c5 – 21 Ne5 c5 22 f3 Nf6 and Black is very comfortable) 18 ... c5! (Black immediately starts operations towards the white king)



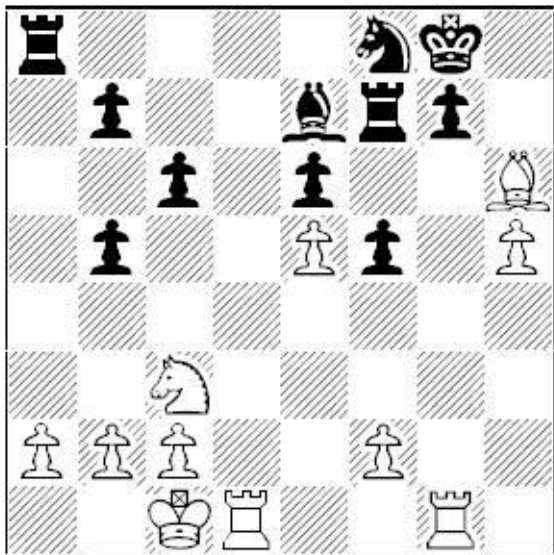
19 Re1 Qd5 20 Re5 Qc6 (by keeping an eye on the f3-knight, Black prevents White from pushing on with his intended attack) 21 Re3 Rad8 22 g4 cxd4 23 Rd3 Ne4 (Black protects the important g5-square rather than holding on to his extra pawn) 24 Nxd4 Nxd2+ 25 Rxd2 Qb6 26 c3 Bf6 27 Qd1 and Black was slightly better in C.Weiss-A.Riazantsev, Oberwart 2004.

c) The critical test of the line is 14 g4.



In *ChessBase Magazine* Dautov gives this move a dubious mark: 14 ... Nxg4! 15 Rhg1 (15 Rdg1?!)

f5 16 Qb3 Rf7 17 Ne1 Nf8 18 Qxb7, M.Himdan-M.Mchedlishvili, Abu Dhabi 2003, and now 18 ... c5! is very strong) 15 ... f5! (as Black can play ... f7-f5 without immediately losing the e6-pawn, he is fine) 16 Qb3 Rf7 17 Nc3 (17 Ng3?! Nf8 18 Ne5 Nxe5 19 dxe5 Qd5 was better for Black in A.Bitalzadeh-I.Khenkin, Almelo 2004; 17 Qxe6 Nf8 18 Qb3 fxe4 19 Rxc4 exf3 leaves Black a piece up and winning – White has some activity but not much else) 17 ... Nf8 18 Ne5 Nxe5 19 dxe5 Qb6 20 Qxb6 axb6 21 Bxh6 b5 (threatening ... b4)



22 Bg5?! (calmly defending the a2-pawn would have been much better: 22 Kb1! Bc5 23 Rd2 Kh7 24 Bg5 b4 25 Nd1 b5 is equal, with Black targeting the backward a2-pawn) 22 ... Bc5! (Black improves his position with tempo) 23 Rg2 Nd7! 24 Bf4 b4 and Black later won in B.Heberla-R.Dautov, European Ch., Warsaw 2005.

#### 14 ... Nxf6 15 Ne5

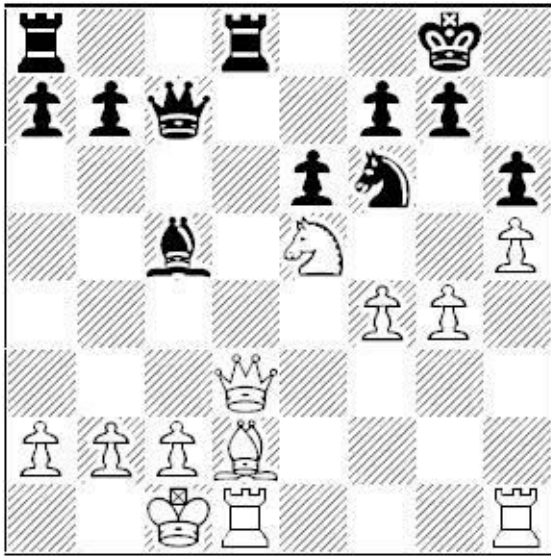
The main line. Non-critical alternatives are 15 Qe2 Qd5 16 c4 Qf5 and 15 Kb1 c5, when Black is doing well.

#### 15 ... c5 16 dxc5 Qc7 17 Qe2

Or:

a) 17 Bc3 Qxc5 18 Qd4 (after 18 Qe2 Rfd8! Black has no worries) 18 ... Qc7 19 Qc4 Rfc8 20 Qxc7 Rxc7 21 Bd4 b5 22 Kb1 Nd5 23 Nd3 and Black had equal prospects in R.Mamedov-Z.Izoria, Batumi 2001.

b) 17 f4 Bxc5! (this is better than 17 ... Qxc5 18 g4 Rfd8 19 Qb3 Qd5 20 Qxd5, when the endgame is equal) 18 g4 Rfd8 when White attacks on the flank while Black should look to strike back in the centre:



b1) 19 Qc3? Ne4! wins.

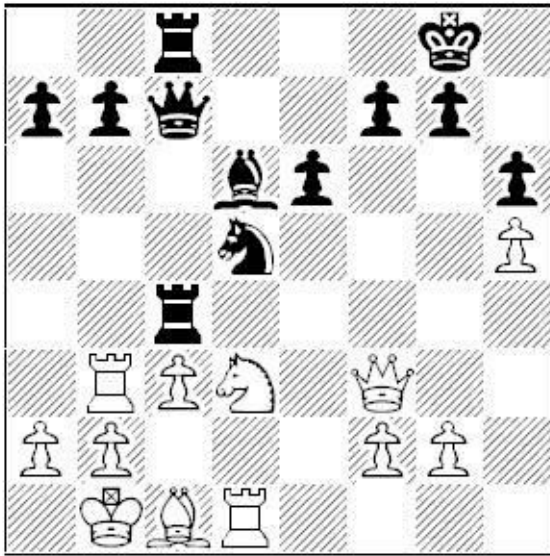
b2) 19 Qe2 Rac8 20 c3 Nd5 (moving out of the way of g4-g5) 21 g5 hxg5 22 h6 (22 fxg5 Be3 23 Bxe3 Qxe5 and Black exchanges into an equal endgame) 22 ... Nxf4 23 Bxf4 gxf4 24 hxg7 Be3+ 25 Kc2 Rxd1 26 Qxd1 Qxe5 27 Rh8+ Kxg7 28 Rxc8. With two pawns for the piece Black should be fine, although he must be very careful as his king is rather exposed. However, White must also be aware that if he tries too hard to win, Black will simply start pushing his f-pawn.

b3) 19 Qb3 Bd4! (Black centralizes his bishop to attack the white knight on e5 but he also has ideas of playing ... Qb6, forcing the exchange of queens should White's kingside attack get too hot to handle) 20 g5 hxg5 21 fxg5 Bxe5 22 gxf6 Bxf6 23 h6 Qb6!. Black gets to exchange queens and neutralizes any danger that currently exists on the kingside.

### 17 ... Qxc5 18 Kb1

A.Milher-A.Sanchez Rodenas, correspondence 2001, continued 18 Rh3 Rfd8 19 Rg3 Rd5! (an excellent move: Black centralizes his rooks with tempo) 20 Ng4 (20 Bxh6 does not quite work: 20 ... Rxe5 21 Rxc7+ Kh8 22 Qf3 Rc8 23 c3 Rf5 24 Qxb7 Nd5 and Black is winning) 20 ... Nxc4 21 Qxc4 Bf6 22 Qf3 (22 Bxh6 is bad because of 22 ... Rxd1+ 23 Kxd1 Qxf2 24 Bxg7 Rd8+ 25 Rd3 Rxd3+ 26 cxd3 Bxg7 27 h6 Qxb2 and Black wins) 22 ... Be5 23 Rg4 Rad8!. Black is now threatening 24 ... Bxb2+, which forces White to defend passively.

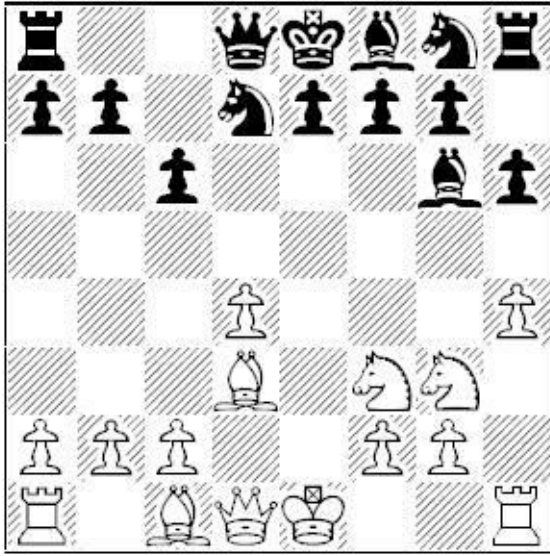
**18 ... Rac8 19 Bc1 Bd6 20 Nd3 Qb5 21 Nf4 Qb6 22 Rh3 Rc6 23 Rb3 Qc7 24 Nd3 Rc8 25 c3 Rc4 26 Qf3 Nd5**



Black has inched forward with ease to reach a very nice position. The game M.Tissir-H.Hamdouchi, Rabat 2001, continued 27 g3 b6 28 g4 Qc6 29 Qe2 a5 30 Ne5 Bxe5 31 Qxe5 a4 32 Ra3 Rxc4 and Black won very easily.

### Playing with the Pawn on h4

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 dxe4 4 Nxe4 Bf5 5 Ng3 Bg6 6 h4 h6 7 Nf3 Nd7 8 Bd3



This line is less common than 8 h5. By not playing h4-h5, White hopes to obtain a strong kingside attack with g2-g5 without the possible weakness of the h5-pawn. However, the downside to this strategy is that Black is no longer bothered by the clamping effect of the h-pawn, which makes the queenside castling lines much more attractive.

8 ... Bxd3 9 Qxd3 e6 10 Bd2

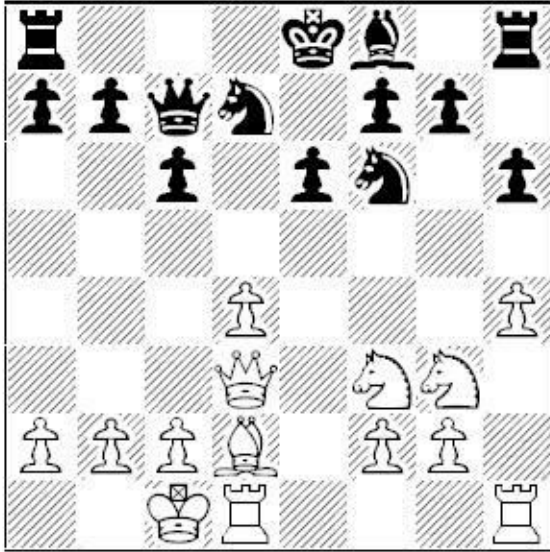
10 Bf4 Qa5+ 11 Bd2 Qc7 transposes to the main text.

10 ... Ngf6 11 0-0-0

11 c4 was played by Inna Gaponenko against me in Plovdiv, 2003. The game continued 11 ... Bd6 12 Ne4 Nxe4 13 Qxe4 Nf6 14 Qe2 Qe7 (planning to exchange bishops with ... Bb4, which will benefit

Black) 15 a3 Rd8 16 b4 0-0 17 Ne5 a5 18 g4 Bc7! 19 g5 Rxd4!! 20 gxf6 Qxf6 21 f4 Qf5 22 0-0-0? (22 Be3 Bxe5 23 fxe5 Re4 gives Black three pawns for the piece and an excellent attack) 22 ... Re4 23 Qd3 Rxe5 24 Qd7 Re4 25 Qxc7 Rxc4+ 26 Kb2 and now instead of 26 ... Qc2+, I could have finished the game off more rapidly with 26 ... Rc2+ 27 Kb3 (27 Ka1 Qd5 wins) 27 ... b5 28 bxa5 Qd3+ and mate follows.

**11 ... Qc7**



**12 Ne4**

Black has the same plan in the following lines. The basic idea is to castle queenside and then push for ... c6-c5 – with the pawn on h4 White does not have the same kingside grip he enjoys when the pawn is on h5:

a) 12 Kb1 0-0-0 13 c4 c5 14 Bc3 cxd4 15 Nxd4 a6 16 Nf3 Bc5 17 Qe2 Rhe8 18 h5. Black's position is very nice as he is a tempo up on the traditional lines with queenside castling.

b) 12 Qe2 (normally the idea behind this move is to support the knight on e5) 12 ... 0-0-0 13 Ne5 Nb6 14 Ba5 Rd5 15 Bxb6 axb6 16 c4 Ra5 17 Kb1 Bd6 18 f4 Rd8 19 Rd3 Kb8 20 Rhd1 b5 21 c5 Bf8 22 f5 exf5 23 Nxf5 Ra4! 24 Rf1 h5 with equal chances, R.Zelcic-V.Tukmakov, Kastel Stari 1997.

**12 ... 0-0-0 13 g3 Nxe4 14 Qxe4 Bd6 15 Rhe1**

15 c4 c5 16 Bc3 cxd4 17 Nxd4 a6 is equal – Black should double up on the d-file.

**15 ... Nf6 16 Qe2 c5 17 c4 cxd4 18 Nxd4 a6 19 Nb3 Qc6 20 Kb1 Bc7 21 Rc1 Rd7 22 Bc3 Rhd8**

Black has played excellently, and has now seized control of the d-file.

**23 Bxf6 gxf6 24 Qe3 a5 25 Rc2 a4 26 Nc1 h5 27 Qh6 Qf3 28 Qe3 Qf5 29 Qe4 Qc5 30 Ree2 f5 31 Qf3 f4 32 g4 hxg4 33 Qxg4 Rd1 34 a3 Qd4 35 c5 Qd3 36 Ka2 Qd5+**

Black is close to winning but bails out for a draw as White is much higher rated.

**37 Kb1 Qd3 38 Ka2 Qd5+ 39 Kb1 Qd3 40 Ka2**

½-½ A.Skripchenko-V.Solovjova, Sochi 2006.

## Summary

After 8 h5 and 11 Bd2 Black should castle kingside. In this case plans involving c2-c4 are not dangerous in light of ... b7-b5!. Against other ideas Black should challenge the centre with ... c6-c5, placing his rooks on the c- and d-files. However, Black should be mindful of any d4-d5 pawn sacrifices trying to get control of the f5-square.

# Chapter Three

## Main Line: 6 Bc4 and Early Deviations

Here we will look at White's alternatives to the main lines discussed in the previous two chapters. This includes sixth-move options such as 6 N1e2 and 6 Bc4, as well as earlier deviations.

### Blackmar-Diemer Gambit

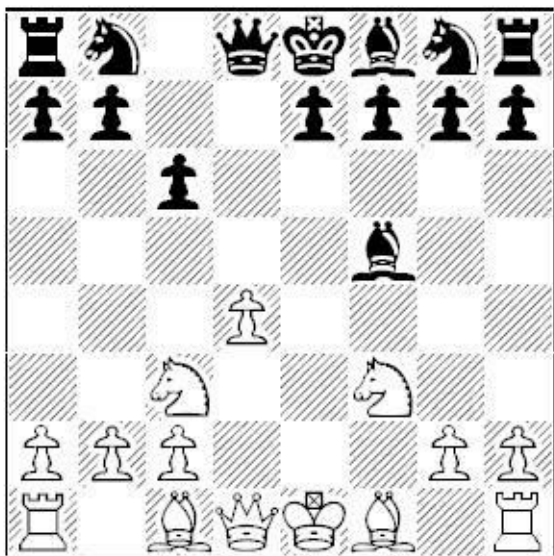
**1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 dxe4 4 f3**

The Blackmar-Diemer Gambit, which usually arises via the move order 1 d4 d5 2 e4 dxe4 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 f3, is probably one of the few gambits to have a massive following. White sacrifices a pawn to get fast development and to gain attacking prospects down the f-file. It seems to me that, having made no positional concessions, Black can obtain a simple Caro-style position except with no white f-pawn. If White is going to play this way, then he should just go all out for an attack with no regard for material.

**4 ... exf3!**

The best recipe for dealing with these gambits is just to accept the material and hold on.

**5 Nxf3 Bf5!**



The most natural-looking move, and the best in my opinion; the light-squared bishop is an excellent defender of the kingside.

**6 Bc4**

6 Bd3 (White wants to get rid of the important f5-bishop) 6 ... Bxd3 7 Qxd3 e6 8 0-0 Nf6 9 Bg5 (9 Bf4 does not pose a threat to Black at all: 9 ... Be7 10 Rae1 0-0 11 Ne5 Nbd7 12 Rf3 c5! and by undermining the knight on e5 Black secures an advantage) 9 ... Be7 10 Rae1 0-0 11 Ne5 Nbd7 12 Nc4 Nd5 13 Bxe7 Qxe7 and Black had the advantage in M.Hirtreiter-D.Law, correspondence 1993.

**6 ... Nf6 7 Ne5**

The alternative is 7 0-0 e6 and now:

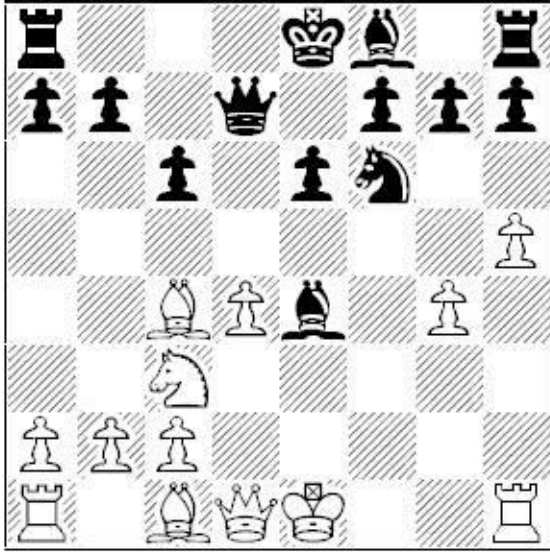
a) After the quiet 8 Bg5 Be7 9 Qe2 0-0 10 Rae1 Nbd7 White has very little to show for the pawn; e.g. 11 Bd3 Bxd3 12 Qxd3 Qb6 and Black is better.

b) 8 Ne5 Bg6! (White has one little trick: 8 ... Bd6 9 Nxf7! wins after 9 ... Kxf7 10 Rxf5) 9 g4? (very rash and very desperate) 9 ... Nbd7! 10 Nxd7 hxd7 11 g5 Qc7 (threatening mate on h2) 12 Bf4 Bd6 13 gxf6 Bxf4 14 fxg7 Be3+! 0-1 A.Rodriguez-E.Bricard, Toulouse 1998.

**7 ... e6 8 g4!? Bg6 9 h4**

This has been played in a few correspondence games. Here's some analysis:

**9 ... Nbd7 10 Nxd7 Qxd7 11 h5 Be4!**



**12 Rf1**

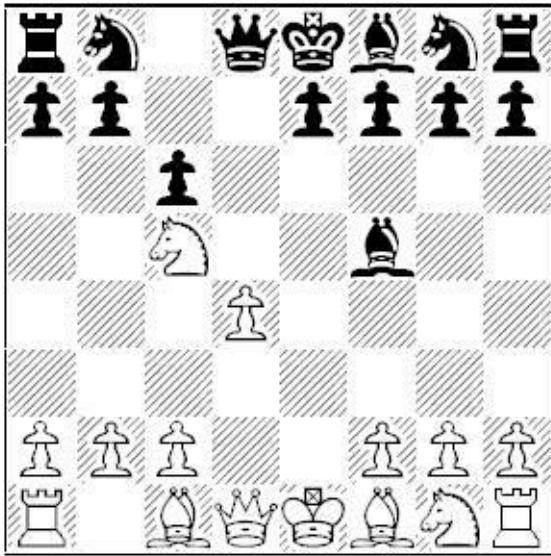
Or 12 Nxe4 Nxe4 13 Qd3 f5! (maintaining the strong knight on e4) 14 gxf5 exf5 15 Be3 0-0-0 16 0-0-0 Kb8 (protecting the a7-pawn against any d5 idea) 17 Qb3 (17 Rhg1 Bd6 18 Rg2 Rhe8 and Black is better, e.g. 19 Rf1 Ng3 20 Rxd3 Bxd3 21 Bg5 f4 and it looks like it's all over for White) 17 ... Bd6 18 Be6 Qc7 19 Bxf5 Ng3!.

**12 ... Bb4 13 h6 Rg8 14 hxg7 Nd5 15 Bd2 Bxc3 16 Bxc3 Nxc3 17 bxc3 Rxd7**

... and Black is winning.

## 5th Move Alternatives

**1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 dxe4 4 Nxe4 Bf5 5 Nc5**



As Fischer famously said, ‘a move to break the monotony’, but in real terms the only reason for White to play 5 Nc5 is to avoid theory.

After 5 Bd3 Black should definitely take the pawn with 5 ... Qxd4; for example, 6 Nf3 Qd8 7 Qe2 Nf6! 8 Nxf6+ gxf6 9 Bxf5 Qa5+! and Black recovers the piece. However, an alternative is 5 ... Nd7 6 Nf3 Ngf6 7 Nxf6+ Nxf6 8 Bxf5 Qa5+, and Black is fine.

White achieves nothing after 5 Qf3 Bg6 6 Bd3 Nd7 7 Ne2 Ngf6.

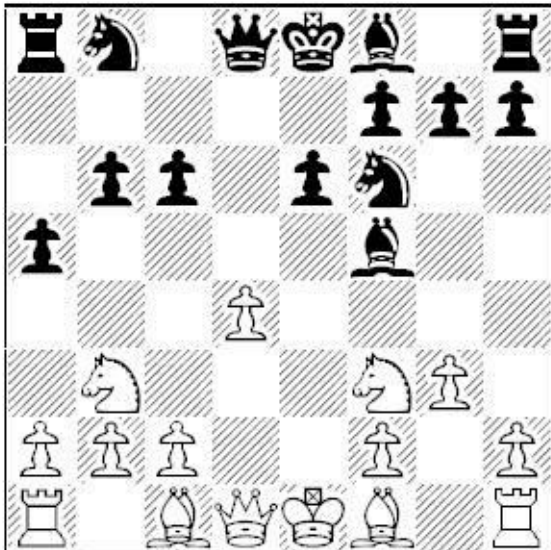
### 5 ... b6

The simplest for Black. White hopes that in provoking this slight weakness he will have secured additional pressure on the long h1-a8 diagonal.

### 6 Nb3 e6 7 Nf3

7 Bd3 is again too simple – White’s main idea should be to fianchetto the bishop. 7 ... Bxd3 8 Qxd3 Nf6 9 Bf4 (9 Nf3 Be7 10 0-0 0-0 11 Bf4 Qc8 12 Ne5 Nbd7 13 Rad1 Rd8 14 Qe2 Nd5 15 Bg3 Nxe5 16 Bxe5 Bd6 was equal in S.Smagin-V.Epishin, St Petersburg 1998) 9 ... Bd6 10 Bg3 Qc7 11 Nf3 Nbd7 (M.Godena-J.Dorfman, Escaldes 1998) and the so-called weakness of c6 is not really showing!

### 7 ... Nf6 8 g3 a5!?



A promising sideline played by both Korchnoi and the German GM Doettling,

### 9 Bg2

After 9 a4 Be7 10 Bg2 Nd5!, unless White wants to concede an outpost on b4 then the knight on d5 is virtually untouchable: 11 0-0 0-0 12 c3 Nd7 13 Qe2 Ra7 14 Nbd2 Rc7 15 Nc4 h6 16 Ne3 Bh7 17 Re1 N7f6 18 Nc4 Be4 19 Ncd2 was equal in Z.Jovanovic-F.Doettling, Patras 1999.

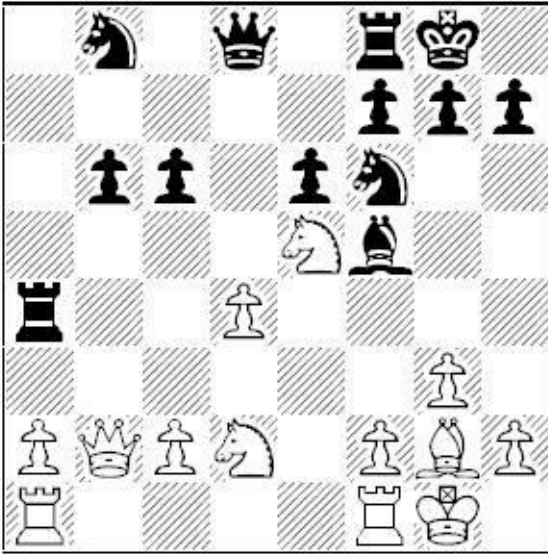
### 9 ... a4! 10 Nbd2 a3!

The point – Black disrupts White’s queenside pawn structure. The great thing is that Black can get away with this kind of play, because White has spent so many moves playing around with his knight.

### 11 0-0 axb2 12 Bxb2 Ba3 13 Qc1

13 Bxa3 Rxa3 ended in a draw by repetition after 14 Nc4 Ra4 15 Nb2 Ra3 16 Nc4 Ra4 17 Nb2 Ra3 18 Nc4 in E.Paetz-T.Grabuzova, European Women’s Ch., Chisinau 2005.

### 13 ... Bxb2 14 Qxb2 0-0 15 Ne5 Ra4!



Black plays as actively as possible.

### 16 c4 c5!

With this moves Black secures the b4- and d4-squares.

### 17 Nb3

Or 17 dxc5 bxc5 18 Qb3 Rb4 19 Qe3 Nfd7 20 Ndf3 Nxe5 21 Nxe5 Qd4 and Black is fine.

### 17 ... Qc7 18 Qe2 Nbd7 19 Rfd1 Bg6 20 Nxd7 Nxd7 21 Rac1 Nf6 22 h3

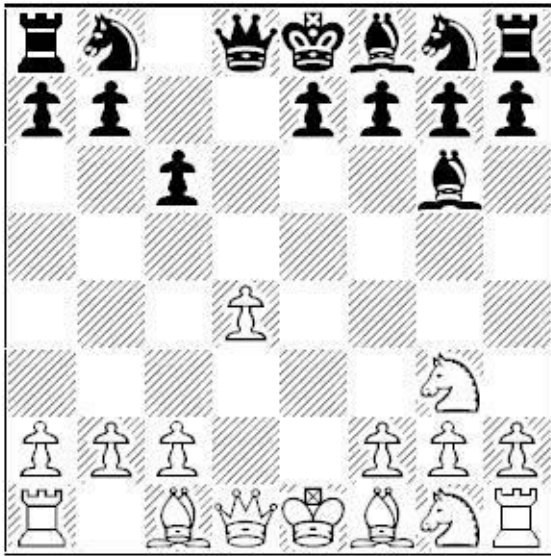
22 d5 would be a mistake, as after 22 ... Bh5 Black forces White to close the long diagonal. Black is better after 23 f3 exd5 24 cxd5 Qd6.

### 22 ... h6 23 dxc5 bxc5 24 Rd2 Rc8 25 Qe3

... and Black had the better position in R.Berzinsh-V.Korchnoi, Port Erin 2004. He will simply target the weak a-pawn, whilst White is purely on the defensive.

## 6th Move Alternatives

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 dxe4 4 Nxe4 Bf5 5 Ng3 Bg6



As alternatives to 6 h4, we will look at the following:

- A: 6 Nf3**
- B: 6 f4**
- C: 6 N1e2**
- D: 6 Bc4**

6 Nh3 is also possible, and after 6 ... e6 7 Nf4 we transpose to Line C1.

**A) 6 Nf3 Nd7!**

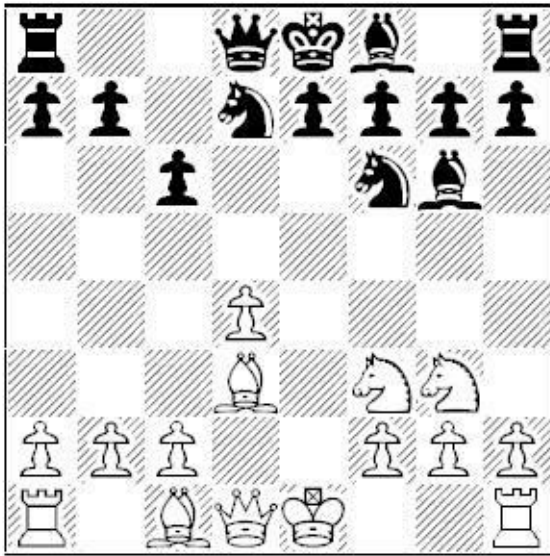
Preventing the knight from going to e5.

**7 Bd3**

White sets his hopes of getting an advantage based on the greater freedom for his pieces. However, White lacks sufficient coordination to breach Black's position.

7 h4 h6 transposes to main lines (see Chapters 1-2).

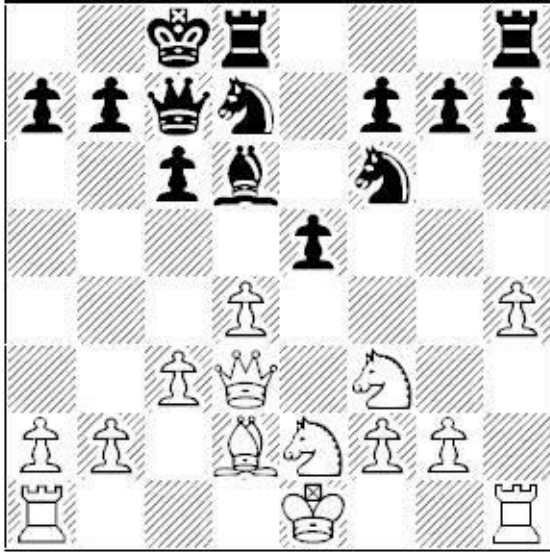
**7 ... Ngf6**



It is clear that the bishop on g6 will be exchanged; the only question is where this will take place. In general, if Black castles kingside then he often exchanges on d3 (but not always – see the main text); if instead he has plans to castle queenside then the bishop can be left where it is. Whilst I have to admit that play is relatively quiet, the good thing is that Black's ideas are fairly straightforward and consistent.

**8 0-0**

8 h4 is illogical as the bishop is in no danger: 8 ... e6 9 c3? (White is playing too quietly) 9 ... Bd6 10 Ne2 Qc7 11 Qc2 0-0-0 (Black is planning ... e6-e5, opening files against White's king) 12 Bd2 Bxd3! 13 Qxd3 e5!?



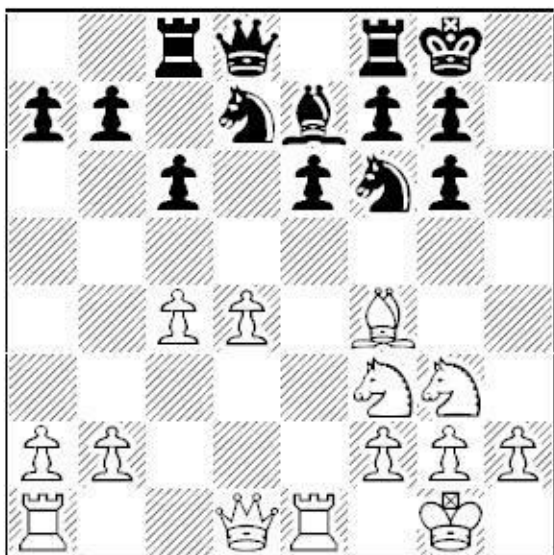
14 dxe5? (White makes a big error by opening up the centre for Black; it was better to keep the position closed with 14 Ng5 Nb6 15 0-0-0 Kb8, when Black has a pleasant position) 14 ... Bxe5 15 Nxe5? Nxe5 16 Qf5+ (White was counting on this move, but ... ) 16 ... Qd7! 17 Qxd7+ Rxd7 (White is much worse) 18 Nf4? Neg4! 19 Rd1 Re8+ 20 Be3 Nxe3 21 fxe3 Rxe3+ 22 Ne2 Rde7 23 Rd2 Ne4 and Black was winning in S.Khoo-A.Hagesaether, London (rapid) 2006.

**8 ... e6 9 Re1 Be7 10 c4 0-0 11 Bxg6 hxg6 12 Bf4**

12 Bd2?!, with the idea of placing the bishop on c3, is very passive: 12 ... b5! (an excellent move:

Black secures the d5-square for his pieces) 13 Rc1 bxc4 14 Rxc4 c5 15 Ne5? (White should really have played 15 dxc5) 15 ... Rc8! 16 Bg5 (16 dxc5 Bxc5 17 Nxd7 Qxd7 and Black has an edge due to his better piece placement) 16 ... Nb6 17 Rc1 c4! 18 Re2 Qd5 19 Rec2 Rfd8 20 Ne2 was played in J.Vrchocka-E.Dizdarevic, Pula 2005. Black has really improved his position: he has more space, the pawn on c4 is a giant clamp, and White's pawn on d4 is an easy target.

**12 ... Rc8**



Preparing ... b7-b5 by defending the c-pawn against any Nf3-e5 ideas. Black may also have ideas of playing ... c6-c5.

In practice Black has often played 12 ... Re8 here, e.g. 13 Re2 c5 14 Rd2 Qb6 15 Be3 Rad8 16 h3 cxd4 17 Bxd4 Bc5 18 b4 Bxd4 19 Rxd4 Ne5! 20 c5 Rxd4 21 Qxd4 Nxf3+ 22 gxf3 Qc6 23 Ne4 e5 1/2-1/2 G.Kuzmin-A.Kharitonov, Leningrad 1991.

**13 Rc1**

13 Ne5 Qb6 14 Rb1 Nxe5 15 dxe5 Rfd8 16 Qe2 Nd7 and Black is in good health; 13 Qd3 Qa5 14 a3 b5!? 15 b4 bxc4 16 Qxc4 Qd5 17 Qc2 a5 and again Black is doing well; or 13 h3 b5 14 Rc1 bxc4 15 Rxc4 Nb6 16 Rc1 Nbd5 17 Bd2 c5, which is equal.

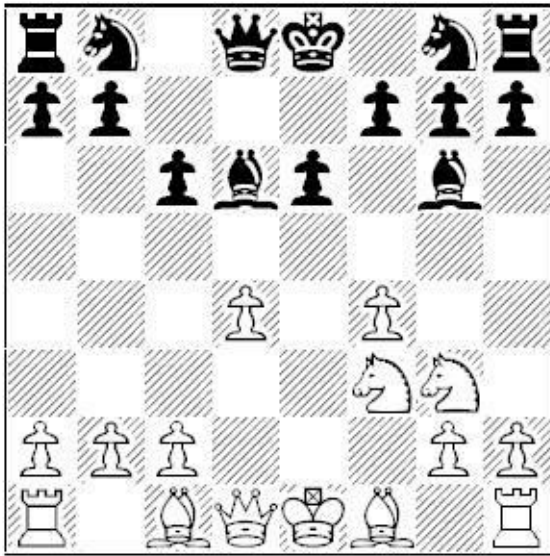
**13 ... Qa5 14 a3 b5!? 15 Ne5 Rfd8 16 Qf3 Nxe5 17 dxe5 Nd7 18 Ne4 bxc4 19 Nd6 Bxd6 20 exd6 Qd5 21 Red1 Qxf3 22 gxf3 Nb6 23 Be3**

... and Black has the advantage after 23 ... c5! 24 Bf4 f6 25 Bg3 g5 26 f4 g4 27 Rc2 Kf7.

**B) 6 f4**

This move is a speciality of IM Kofidis, but has even been played by GM Judit Polgar on occasion. The main advantages to this aggressive system are that White has a massive grip on the important e5-square and he can play for the dangerous pawn thrust f4-f5, when the knight on g3 will spring into life. However, there are some drawbacks: firstly, Black's natural break ... c6-c5 will be more powerful than normal as the g1-a7 diagonal has been weakened; secondly, from a positional viewpoint White has voluntarily given himself a bad bishop on c1.

**6 ... e6 7 Nf3 Bd6!**



With the aim of developing the g8-knight to e7, guarding the f5-square.

### 8 Bd3

Exchanging Black's most active piece. In J.Polgar-A.Khalifman, FIDE World Ch., Las Vegas 1999, White preserved the light-squared bishop: 8 Be2 Ne7 9 Ne5 Bxe5 10 fxe5 c5! (the centre must be broken up otherwise White will have a very nice space advantage along with the two bishops) 11 dxc5 Qxd1+ 12 Bxd1 Na6! (preventing b2-b4) 13 0-0 Nxc5 14 Bf3 Nc6!. Black has already equalised here: he is not lagging behind in development and the two black knights are doing an excellent job of controlling squares and attacking White's isolated pawn on e5.

8 Ne5 has hardly been played before but is a principled move: 8 ... Ne7 9 Be2 transposes to 8 Be2, whilst 9 h4 is not too much of a threat as the bishop has the square f5 to go to.

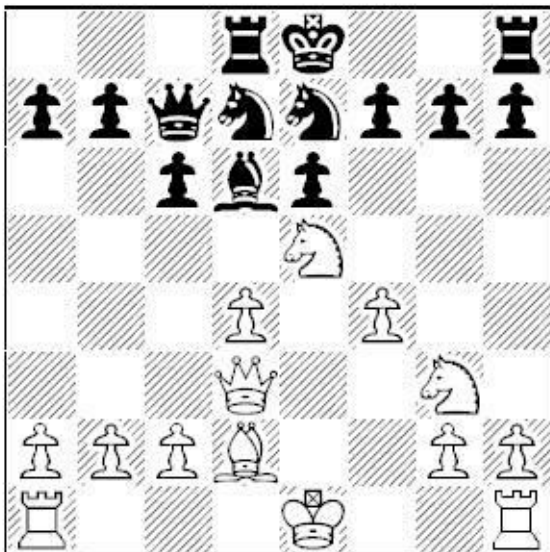
### 8 ... Ne7!

It is important not to allow White to play f4-f5 easily.

### 9 Qe2 Nd7

Black should develop calmly.

### 10 Bd2 Bxd3 11 Qxd3 Qc7 12 Ne5 Rd8!



With X-ray threats against the white queen.

### 13 Qe2 c5!

The battle for the e5-square has begun. Black begins to loosen White's control of this critical square by striking at the centre, whilst White on the other hand must do everything possible to maintain it otherwise his dark squares will become weak.

### 14 Ne4?! 0-0!?

This move prevents any tactics on f7. White must now do something about the pawn on d4. He initiates a series of exchanges to try and solve some of the problems he faces, but from now on the initiative lies with Black.

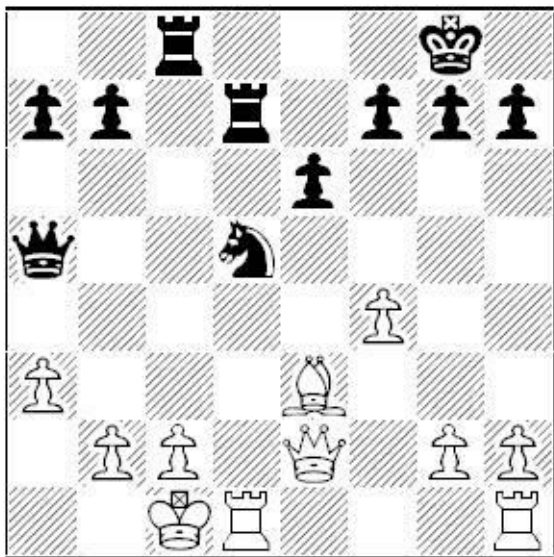
### 15 Nxd6

After 15 c3 cxd4 16 cxd4 Nf5 the d-pawn is nothing more than a nuisance for White.

### 15 ... Qxd6 16 Nxd7 Rxd7 17 dxc5 Qxc5 18 0-0-0 Nd5!

Centralizing the knight.

### 19 Be3 Qa5 20 a3 Rc8

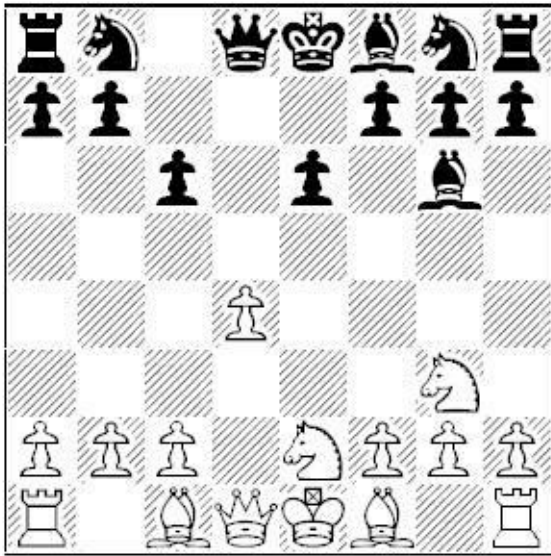


(A.Kofidis-S.Atalik, Panormo 1998) Black has a very pleasant position. He will double rooks on the c-file and play ... b7-b5-b4, attacking the white king. White is simply struggling to hold everything together.

### C) 6 N1e2

The basic idea behind this move is to transfer the knight to f4. White then either plays for the advantage of the two bishops or advances the h-pawn (White exploits the fact that after Nf4 Black cannot play ... h6). This second plan is the most dangerous and it is this that Black must take measures against.

### 6 ... e6

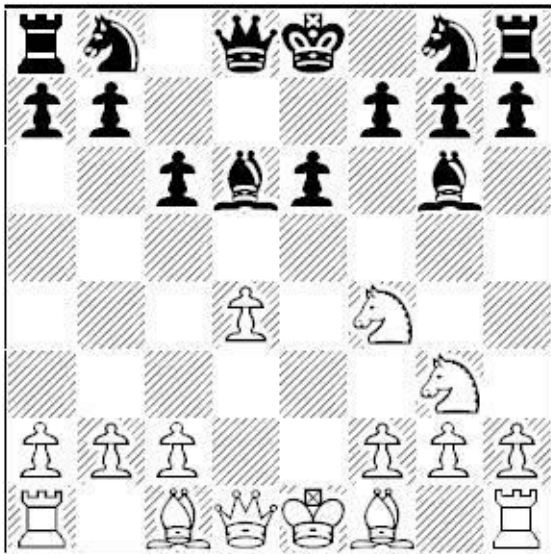


Black gets ready to meet Nf4 with ... Bd6.  
Now we will look at:

**C1: 7 Nf4**

**C2: 7 h4**

**C1) 7 Nf4 Bd6!**



Getting ready to meet h4 with ... Qc7.

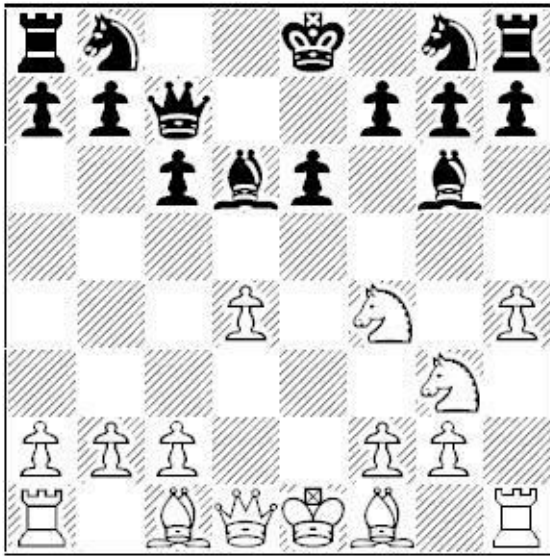
**8 Nxc6**

White has other options here:

a) 8 Bc4 transposes to 6 Bc4 lines (D1 and D2).

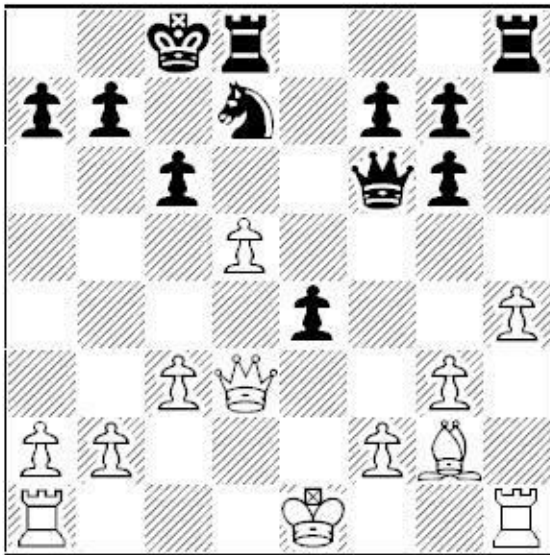
b) If White attacks the g7-pawn with 8 Ngh5, Black replies 8 ... Bxh5 9 Nxh5 g6 10 Nf4 Ne7 (the knight heads to f5, discouraging White from playing c2-c4) 11 g3 Nd7 12 Bg2 Nf5 13 c3 0-0 14 0-0 Re8 15 Nd3 a5 16 a4 Qc7 17 Qc2 and the position was equal in E.Sedina-L.Brunner, Swiss League 1999.

c) If White goes on the attack with 8 h4 Black should immediately counter with 8 ... Qc7!:



c1) 9 h5 Bxc2! 10 Qg4 Ne7!. Black ignores the threat to the g7-pawn, which cannot be taken because of 11 Qxg7 (11 Bc4 Nd7 and Black is slightly better) 11 ... Rg8! 12 Qh6 Rg4 (chasing the white pieces back) 13 Nfe2 Na6 (Black gets ready to castle queenside and threatens to play ... Nb4) 14 Qd2 Nb4 (now the threat is ... Nd3+) 15 Nc3 Bxg3 16 fxg3 Bf5 and Black is winning.

c2) 9 Nxc6 hxg6 10 Ne4 Bf4! (Black gets rid of White's bishop pair) 11 Bxf4 Qxf4 12 Qd3 Nf6 13 Nxf6+ Qxf6 14 g3 Nd7 15 Bg2 0-0-0!. This is a good choice: by castling queenside Black forces White to play some defensive moves in order to get castled himself. Castling kingside is reckless, as after 16 0-0 g5 Black has a ready-made attack. But neither can White castle queenside as this leaves the f2-pawn en prise. In S.Garcia Morales-Z.Izoria, Manresa 2004, White took time out to play 16 c3, supporting the d-pawn, but now Black continued 16 ... e5! 17 d5 e4!!

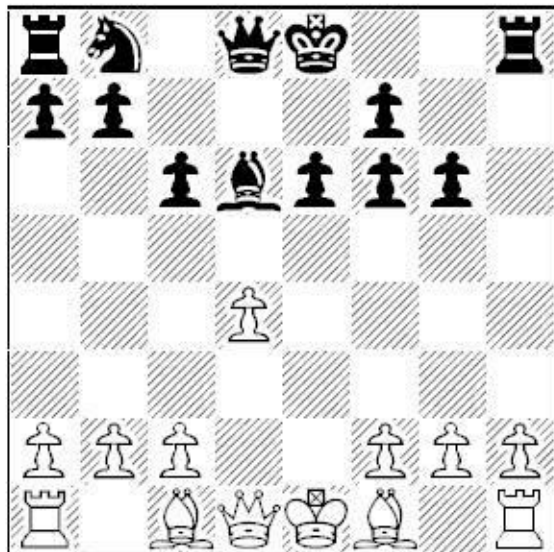


18 Qe3 (the e-pawn is taboo: 18 Bxe4 Nc5 and Black wins) 18 ... cxd5 19 Qxa7 Ne5! (the knight immediately enters the game with some dangerous threats) 20 0-0-0 Nd3+ 21 Rxd3 (21 Kb1? Qxf2 and Black wins) 21 ... exd3 22 c4 Rhe8! 23 cxd5 Re2 24 Qa8+ Kc7 25 d6+ Kxd6 and White resigned, as after 26 Qxb7 Qxf2 27 Qc6+ Ke7 28 Qb7+ Kf8 he has no more checks.

**8 ... hxg6 9 Ne4 Nf6! 10 Nxf6+**

Black is unafraid of playing with two knights versus two bishops. He has plenty of activity (threats against d4 and h2) so it is not very easy for White to coordinate his pieces very well in this semi-closed position: 10 Nxd6+ Qxd6 11 h3 Nbd7 12 c3 0-0-0 13 Be3 (13 Bd2?! is too passive: 13 ... Nb6 14 Be2 e5 and with the white king in the centre, Black correctly opens up lines; White now has major problems managing to both defend the d4-pawn and develop his pieces) 13 ... Nd5 14 Qf3 Nxe3 15 Qxe3 and Black was slightly better in T.Fogarasi-R.Zelcic, Austrian League 2005.

**10 ... gxf6!**



David Bronstein and Bent Larsen were very fond of this diamond pawn formation. The point is that Black has one more pawn in the centre than White. Let's follow the game T.Gara-M.Pavlovic, Reykjavik 2006:

**11 Be3?!**

This is dubious in light of what happened in the game. 11 Qf3 is stronger, while 11 c3 was played against me in B.Lalic-J.Houska, Hastings 2006/07. I continued with 11 ... Nd7 12 g3 Qc7, but perhaps 11 ... Qa5! is more to the point, making it difficult for White to achieve the optimal defensive set-up with g2-g3 followed by Bf1-g2 (the idea is that 12 g3? would be a mistake after 12 ... Qd5 13 Rg1 Rxb2 and Black has won a pawn). Instead there could follow 12 Qb3 (White drives the queen back from a5 but impedes the advance of his queenside pawns, which in turn makes queenside castling for Black more attractive) 12 ... Qc7 13 g3 Nd7 14 Bg2 0-0-0 15 0-0 g5! (with the intention of playing ... g4, fixing the pawn on h2) 16 c4 g4 17 c5 Bf8! (getting ready to exchange the dangerous dark-squared bishop with ... Bh6) 18 a4 (or 18 Bf4 e5 19 dxe5 fxe5 20 Be3 Nxc5) 18 ... Bh6 19 a5 Bxc1 20 Rfxc1 a6 21 f3 gxf3 22 Qxf3 f5. Black has solidified his position on the queenside and can now look forward to some pleasant attacking possibilities on the other wing.

**11 ... Qb6!**

Forcing the white queen onto a passive square.

**12 Qc1 Nd7 13 Be2**

13 d5? loses a pawn after 13 ... Qa5+ 14 Qd2 Qxd2+ 15 Kxd2 cxd5.

**13 ... f5**

The diamond pawn formation is very dangerous: it controls many squares, advances very easily, and works well with the open h-file.

**14 h3 0-0-0 15 c3 Qc7 16 Qc2 Nf6 17 Bg5 Be7 18 Bxf6 Bxf6 19 Bd3 c5!**

Black breaks up White's pawn structure completely, but actually the aim of this is to access the dark squares where Black's army can penetrate.

**20 dxc5 e5! 21 c6 e4! 22 cxb7+ Kb8 23 Be2 e3!**

Black is relentlessly pursuing his objective of opening up the dark squares.

**24 Bf3 exf2+ 25 Kf1 Bh4 26 Rd1 Qe5**

Threatening ... Qe1+ and mate.

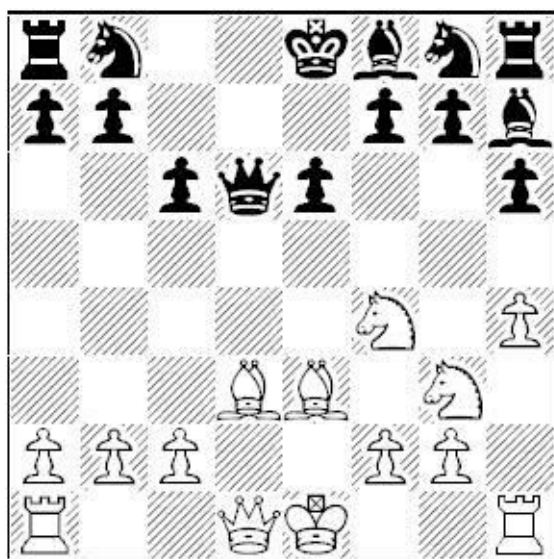
**27 Be2 Rxd1+ 28 Qxd1 Rd8 29 Qa4 Rd2 30 Qc4 Rd1+ 0-1**

**C2) 7 h4 h6 8 Nf4 Bh7 9 Bd3?!**

This move is the young Ukrainian Grandmaster Volokitin's idea, based on a sharp but unsound sacrifice.

9 Bc4 transposes to Line D. 9 c3 is a less aggressive set-up: 9 ... Nf6 10 Bd3 Bd6 11 Ngh5 Bxf4 12 Nxf4 Bxd3 13 Nxd3 Qd5! (a typical way to activate the queen in this line) 14 f3 Nbd7 15 Bf4 0-0 is equal, V.Kupreichik-V.Korchnoi, Val Maubuee op 1990.

**9 ... Qxd4 10 Be3 Qd6**



**11 Nxe6!?**

White opens up the d- and e-files to attack the black king. 11 Bxh7 Rxh7 is better for Black.

**11 ... Qxe6**

This is stronger than 11 ... Bxd3?! 12 Nxf8 Qb4+ 13 Qd2. For example: 13 ... Qxd2+ 14 Kxd2 Bxc2 (14 ... Ba6 15 Rhe1) 15 Rhe1 and White is better; or 13 ... Qxb2 14 Rd1 Qxc2 15 Qxd3 Qxd3 16 Rxd3 Kxf8 17 Bc5+ Ke8 18 Nf5 Nd7 19 Nxg7+ Kd8 20 Bd4 with good compensation.

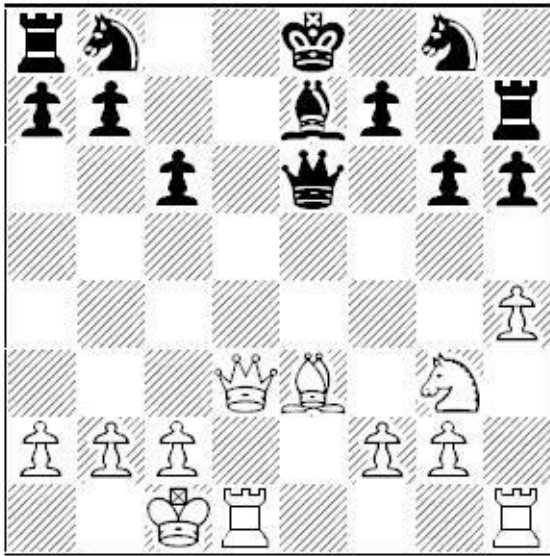
**12 Bxh7 Rxh7 13 Qd3!**

White doesn't have enough after 13 0-0 Nd7 14 Re1 0-0-0 15 Bxa7 Qf6.

**13 ... g6!**

In A.Volokitin-I.Khenkin, German League 2003, Black played 13 ... Nf6?! and was soon forced to give up the exchange: 14 0-0-0 Nbd7 15 Bd4 0-0-0 16 Bxf6! Qxf6 17 Qxh7 Ba3 (17 ... g6 has been recommended as a better alternative) 18 c3 g6 19 Kb1 Rh8 20 Ne4 Qe5 21 Qxf7 Qxe4+ 22 Ka1 Qe7 23 Qxg6 Bc5 24 Rhe1 Qf6 25 Qg4 Qf7 26 Re5 Bb6 27 h5 Kc7 28 Rf5 Qe6 29 Qg6 Qe2 30 Qd6+ 1-0.

**14 0-0-0 Be7**



### 15 h5

Or 15 Rhe1 Qxa2! 16 c3 Qa1+ 17 Kc2 Qa6 18 Qd4 (18 Qd2 Qa4+ 19 Kb1 Na6 20 Qd7+ Kf8; 18 c4 Qa5 covers the d8-square) 18 ... c5 (18 ... Nf6? 19 Bg5) 19 Qd5 (19 Qxc5 Qa4+ 20 Kc1 Qxd1+! 21 Rxd1 Bxc5 22 Bxc5 Nf6 wins) 19 ... Qa4+ 20 Kb1 Nc6 21 Qd7+ Kf8 22 Qxb7 Rb8 and Black is winning.

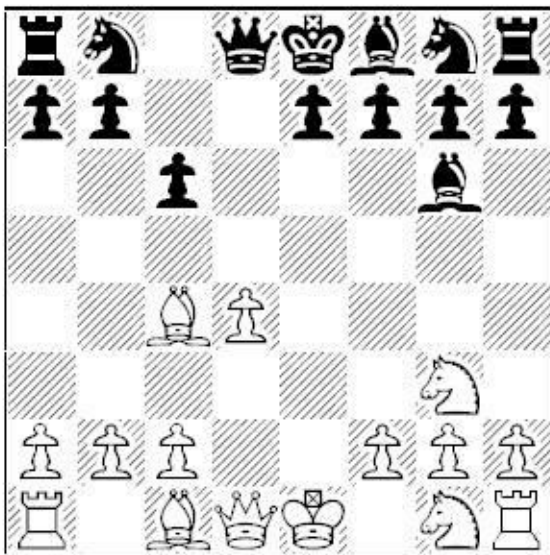
### 15 ... Nd7 16 hxg6 fxg6 17 Kb1

17 Rhe1 is met by 17 ... 0-0-0.

### 17 ... 0-0-0 18 Bxa7 Nb6 19 Qc3 Nc4

... and Black is better.

## D) 6 Bc4



This is a more sophisticated version of the Nge2-f4 idea. With the bishop on c4 White discourages ... e5, which is sometimes a problem should White play a very quick Ne2-f4. When facing 6 Bc4 Black must be prepared to concede the bishop pair, and in this event he must adopt an effective light-square blockade since the light-squared bishop is White's main trump card.

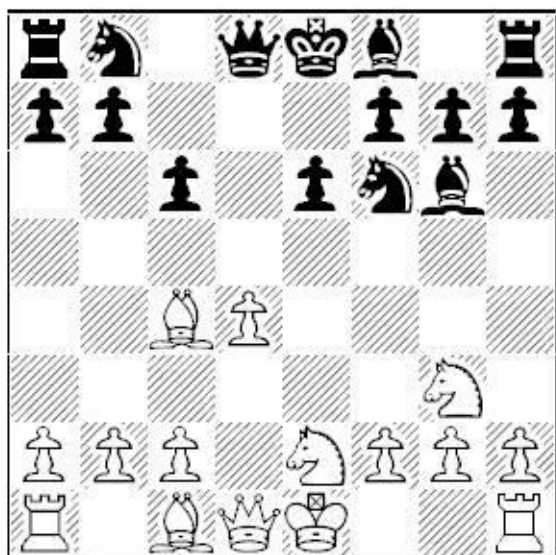
### 6 ... e6 7 N1e2

7 Nf3 has been played by a few strong GMs. 7 ... Nd7 and now:

a) 8 Qe2 Ngf6 9 0-0 Be7 10 Re1 0-0 11 Bb3 a5 12 a4 Re8 13 Bd2 Nd5 14 Rad1 Qb6 and Black had a good position in B.Nikitinyh-A.Zontakh, St Petersburg 2005.

b) 8 0-0 Ngf6 9 Re1 Qc7 10 c3 Bd6 11 Bg5 0-0 12 Bxf6 (White exchanges the bishop for the knight in order to seize control of the e5-square) 12 ... Nxf6 13 Ne5 c5! (Black undermines White's control of e5) 14 Nxc6 hxc6 15 dxc5 Bxc5 16 Qe2 Qf4 (threatening ... Bxf2+ winning a pawn) 17 Bb3 Ng4 18 Rf1 (K.Hoennekes-I.Khenkin, Bad Wiessee 2002) and here Black could have won a pawn with 18 ... Nxe2 19 Kxe2 Qh4+ 20 Kg1 Qxg3.

7 ... Nf6



Now we will consider:

**D1: 8 Nf4 Bd6 9 Bb3**

**D2: 8 Nf4 Bd6 9 c3**

**D3: 8 0-0 with f2-f4**

**D4: 8 h4**

**D1) 8 Nf4 Bd6**

Note: as a general rule, *Nf4* should almost always be met with ... *Bd6*!

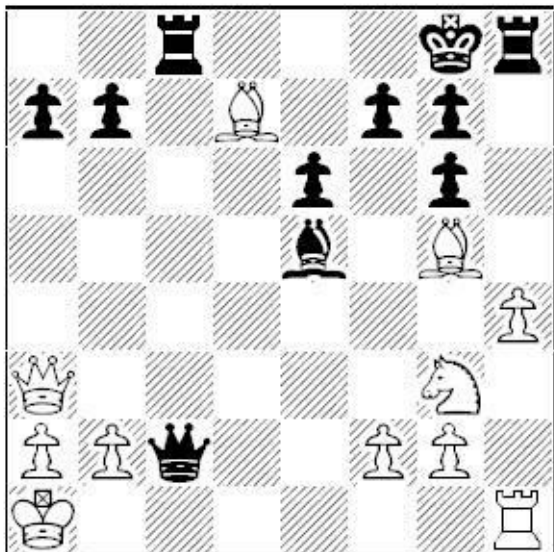
**9 Bb3**

At first sight this move seems a little incomprehensible, but the point is to defend the c2-pawn so that White can support the f4-knight with Qf3.

I don't believe in the move 9 h4?! at all, as it can be met simply with 9 ... Qc7! – the whole point of 8 ... Bd6. Now 10 Qf3? drops a pawn to 10 ... Bxc2!, but after 10 Nxc6 hxc6 White is lumbered with a weak pawn on h4. Play continues 11 Qf3 Nbd7 12 Bg5 c5! (to make it difficult for White to castle queenside) and now:

a) 13 0-0-0 does not quite work: 13 ... cxd4 14 Bb5 (White prefers to improve the placing of his pieces before recapturing the pawn; 14 Rxd4 Be5 15 Bf4 0-0-0 16 Bb5 Bxf4+ 17 Rxf4 Ne5 and Black is much better) 14 ... Rc8 15 Kb1 Kf8! (castling would play into White's hands, while 15 ... Qxc2+ is just downright bad because the pin on the d7-knight makes the f6-knight a little loose: 16 Ka1 Qc7 17 Rc1 Qd8 18 Ne4 Be7 19 Rxc8 Qxc8 20 Rc1 and White has an irresistible attack) 16 Rxd4? (White must

defend the c2-pawn) 16 ... Qxc2+ 17 Ka1 Be5! 18 Qa3+ Kg8 19 Rxd7 Nxd7 20 Bxd7

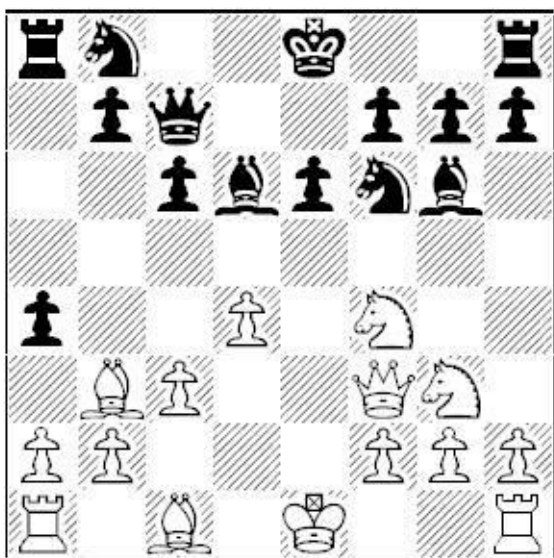


20 ... Rxh4!! (this deflection tactic is just crushing) 21 Rb1 Rd4 0-1 N.McDonald-S.Nagle, Budapest 2004 (mate follows after 22 Bxc8 Rd1).

b) 13 dxc5 Qxc5 (the problem for White is that Black is threatening to play 14 ... Qe5+, picking up the b2-pawn, and the c2-pawn is a little loose) 14 Bxf6 Nxf6 15 Bb3 0-0-0 16 c3 (16 0-0-0? Rxh4 17 Rxh4 Qg5+ 18 Kb1 Qxh4 and Black is just a pawn up) 16 ... Bxg3 17 Qxg3 Rh5 (the situation with the white king is becoming dire) 18 0-0 Rdh8 (the h4-pawn cannot be defended and Black is completely winning) 19 Qf3 Rxh4 20 g3 Rh2 21 Bc2 g5 22 Be4 g4 23 Qf4 Qh5 and mate is unstoppable, S.Tiviakov-A.Dreev, Ubeda 1999.

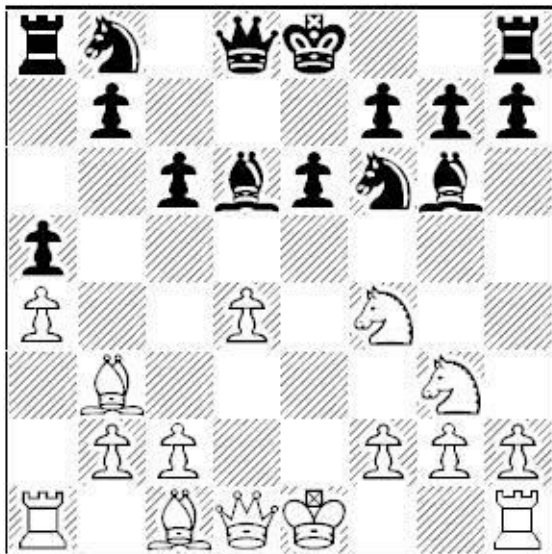
**9 ... a5 10 a4**

Should White avoid weakening the b4-square and choose the more solid 10 c3, Black continues 10 ... Qc7 11 Qf3 a4!, seizing space and securing the b4-square anyway!

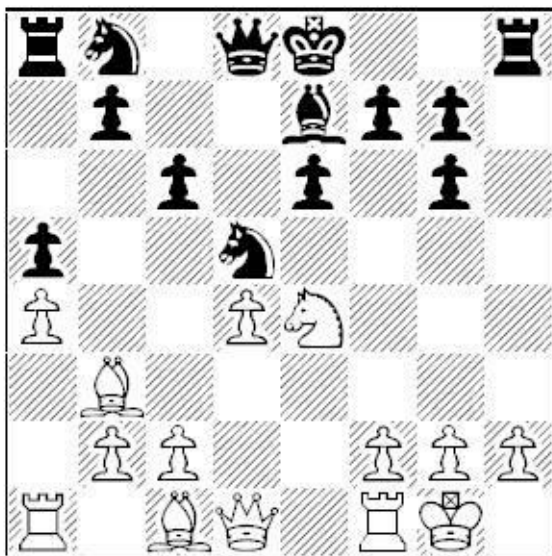


12 Nxc6 hxc6 13 Bc2 Nbd7 14 0-0 Nd5 (centralizing the knight as well as threatening ... Bf4 exchanging the dark-squared bishops) 15 c4 Nb4 16 Bb1 c5! 17 d5 (17 Be3 cxd4 18 Bxd4 Ne5! – attacking the c-pawn – 19 Qe2 Qxc4 20 Qxc4 Nxc4 21 Rc1 Na5 22 Bxg7 Rh7 23 Bc3 Nd5 and White must give up the bishop pair: retreating the bishop fails after 24 Bd2 a3!, as opening the long diagonal is

even more poisonous given the rook on a1 has no squares!) 17 ... exd5 18 Re1+ Kf8 19 a3 Nc6 20 cxd5 Nd4 and even though Black has not castled he has an excellent position. His knight is situated on the extremely strong square d4; he has attacking potential down the h-file; and all the while White is behind in development.



10 ... Nd5 11 Nxc6 hxg6 12 Ne4 Be7 13 0-0



13 ... Qc7

13 ... Nd7 14 Qf3 N7f6 15 Ng5 Qc7 16 g3 was level in Z.Hracek-V.Tukmakov, Koszalin 1999.

14 h3 Nd7 15 Qf3 N7f6 16 Nxf6+ Bxf6

Black has a solid position: his knight on d5 is more than a good match for White's two bishops.

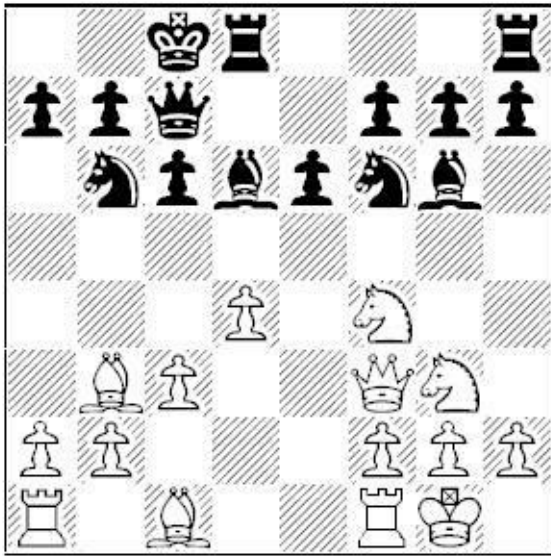
D2) 8 Nf4 Bd6 9 c3

An alternative method of safeguarding the c-pawn.

9 ... Qc7 10 Qf3 Nbd7 11 0-0 Nb6

Playing towards d5.

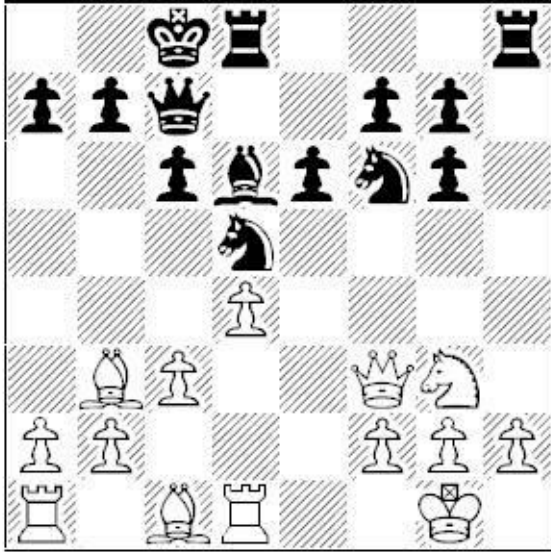
12 Bb3 0-0-0!



Black quite rightly adopts an aggressive approach to the position. White's bishop is in the way of its pawns, which are needed to orchestrate a quick attack. This means that Black has the time to play ... Nbd5 forcing White to decide what to do with the knight on f4, which in turn allows Black (after an exchange on g6) to play on the h-file. Note that the most vulnerable point on the kingside is the pawn on h2.

**13 a4**

Or 13 Rd1 (centralizing the rook) 13 ... Nbd5! 14 Nxc6 (14 Nxd5 exd5! 15 Bg5 h5 16 h4 Bxc3 17 Qxc3 Qxc3 18 fxg3 Rd6 is good for Black; if allowed to he will play ... Ne4 with a beautiful outpost for the knight as well as the e-file for the rook) 14 ... hxg6 and now the possibilities are:



a) 15 h3?! Nf4! (Black improves the position of the knight; the idea is ... g5 followed by ... g4) 16 Ne4 Nxe4 17 Qxe4 g5 18 Bxf4 Bxf4 19 Rd3 Rh4 and Black had a superb position in P.Popovic-L.Nisipeanu, French League 1999.

b) 15 Bg5 Bf4 16 Bxf4 Nxf4 17 a4 Rh4 18 Nf1 Rdh8 and in this position Black has a strong initiative down the h-file.

c) Chasing the knight away is also possible, but it will simply relocate to another strong square in f5! 15 c4 Ne7 16 c5 Bxc3 17 fxg3 Nf5 18 Bf4 is not frightening, as White has had to give Black the strong

d5-square in order to gain the bishop pair. Now 18 ... Qe7 19 Qc3 Nd5! 20 Qa5?? would be a bad blunder after 20 ... Nxf4 21 gxf4 Qh4 and Black wins – 22 h3 Ne3 23 Re1 Nxe2! 24 Kxe2 Qxh3+ 25 Kf2 Qh2+ and mate is coming.

**13 ... Nbd5! 14 Nxe6 hxg6 15 a5 a6 16 Bxd5 Nxd5 17 c4 Nb4!**

W.Zundel-W.Dahm, correspondence 2002, continued 17 ... Nf6, but I prefer the text.

**18 Qc3 Qe7**

Supporting the advance of the g-pawn and playing for mate.

**19 h3 Rh4!**

All Black wants to do is to blast open the h-file with ... g6-g5-g4.

**20 Be3 g5 21 Ra4 f5! 22 Ne2**

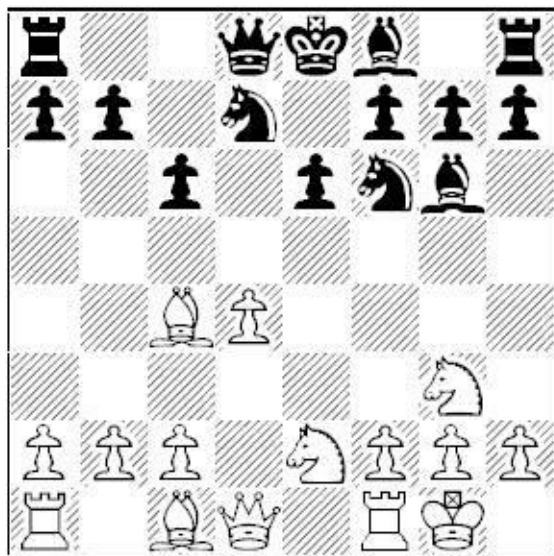
22 c5 Bxe3! 23 fxe3? does not work: 23 ... Nd5 24 Qb3 Rh7 and White is helpless against Black's attack.

**22 ... f4 23 c5 Nd5 24 cxd6 Qxd6 25 Qa3 fxe3 26 Qxd6 Rxd6 27 fxe3 Nxe3 28 Rf7 Rd7**

... and Black is a pawn up with the superior position.

### D3) 8 0-0 Nbd7!

This is safer than 8 ... Bd6, which leads to massive complications after the continuation 9 f4 Qd7 10 Bd3 Bxd3 11 Qxd3 g6 12 f5!.

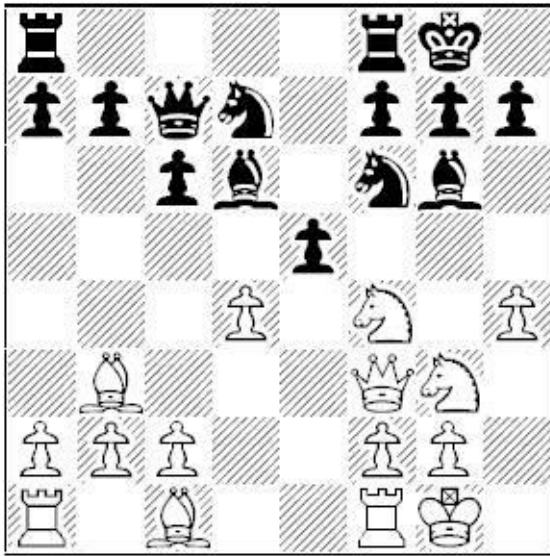


### 9 f4

This is a very enterprising move. White has the aggressive idea of playing f4-f5, aiming to open the f-file and to get the knight to the dangerous attacking square f5. Black's plan is to prevent this from happening. From a positional point of view, f2-f4 is a little suspect, as it makes White's dark-squared bishop bad. Black can exploit this a little bit by playing ... Bf5; if White should capture the bishop then Black would have fixed the f4-pawn and at the same time secured the e4-square.

Two alternatives for White:

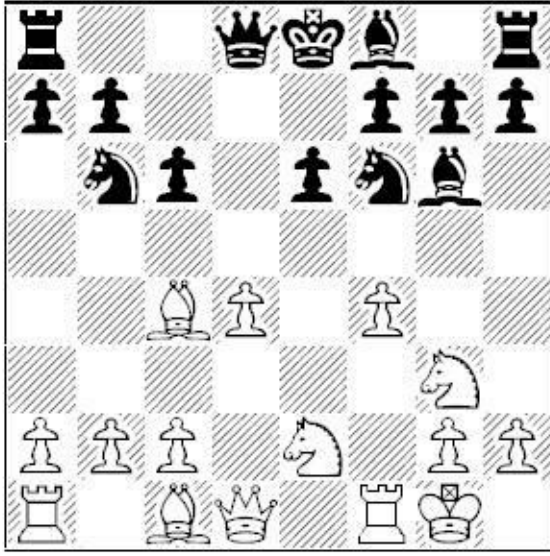
a) A.Morozevich-P.Schlosser, German League 1999, continued 9 Bb3 Bd6 10 Nf4 0-0. 11 h4 (in this quiet position Morozevich attempts to stir up complications, but ... ) 11 ... Qc7 12 Qf3 e5! (Black challenges the centre)



13 Nxg6 hxg6 14 c3 Rae8 15 Ne2 c5 16 Bg5 a6 (getting ready to support a ... c5-c4 push) 17 Rad1 c4 18 Bc2 e4! (Black seizes space and shuts out the bishop on c2) 19 Qh3 Nd5 20 f3? (in desperation White tries to break free of the central bind, but this creates a weakness on e3) 20 ... N7f6 21 Rde1, and after 21 ... e3 it is difficult to see how White can continue.

b) 9 Nf4 Nd5 10 Re1 N7b6! (chasing away the bishop first allows Black to develop more actively) 11 Bb3 Bd6 12 Nfe2 a5 13 a4 Bc7 14 Bd2 0-0 and it is easier to play Black. He can target the d4-pawn, double on the d-file and break with ... c6-c5. White's pieces on the other hand lack some coordination and, even worse, direction.

**9 ... Nb6!**



Chasing the bishop back. 9 ... Bd6 allows White's main idea of opening up the position for his bishops: 10 f5! exf5 11 Nxf5 Bxf5 12 Rxf5 Qc7 13 Bf4 0-0 14 Bxd6 Qxd6 15 Ng3 with some similarities to a King's Gambit position!

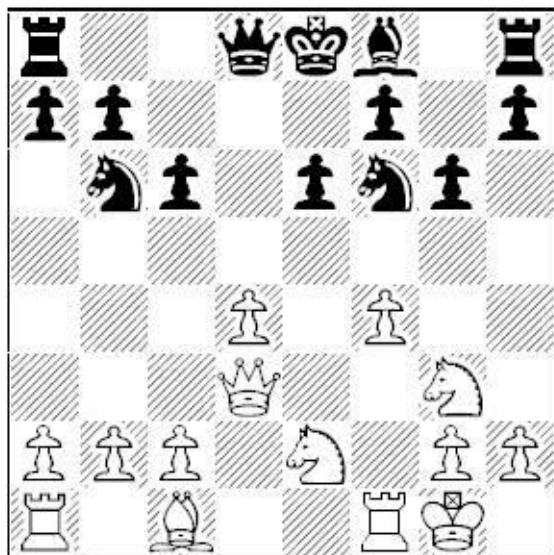
**10 Bd3!**

The bishop is out of play after 10 Bb3. Black continues 10 ... Qd7, preventing f4-f5, and now:  
 a) 11 a4 Nbd5 (it is unclear whether it's necessary to fix the pawn on a4, especially since c2-c4 is

not really threatened as it just weakens squares) 12 Bd2 Be7 13 Qe1 0-0 14 c4 Nc7 (now Black must secure the b4-square and target the d4-pawn) 15 Rd1 Rad8 16 Bb4 Na6 17 Bc3 and Black had a satisfactory position in I.Bugarcic-P.Antanaskovic, Petrovac 2004.

b) 11 c4 Be7 12 Kh1?! (this move is too cautious) 12 ... h5!? (Black begins active operations to evict the knight from the g3-square) 13 f5 exf5 (this is better than 13 ... Bxf5 14 Nxf5 exf5 15 Bg5 g6 16 Nc3 with equal chances, M.Crosa-G.Milos, Sao Paulo 2003) 14 Bc2 Ne4! (guarding the f5-pawn) 15 Nxe4 fxe4 16 Nf4 Bf5 17 Nxh5? (a mistake, although after 17 Qe2 Qxd4 18 Nxh5 Be6 19 Bxe4 0-0-0 Black is winning) 17 ... 0-0-0! and White has big problems with his king.

**10 ... Bxd3 11 Qxd3 g6!**



Preventing f4-f5. Results-wise, Black has an amazing record in this line.

**12 b3**

After the sacrifice 12 f5 White does not get enough compensation for the piece: 12 ... gxf5 13 Nxf5 exf5 14 Bg5 Be7 (defending the knight) 15 Ng3 (15 Rae1!? Nfd5 16 Qxf5 f6 17 Bh6 Qd7 parries all the threats) 15 ... Rg8! (utilizing all Black's pieces in the defence of his king) 16 Rxf5 (16 Nxf5 Rxc5 17 Nxe7 is strongly met by 17 ... Kxe7! 18 Qe3+ Ne4 19 Qxe4+ Kf8 and the king has escaped) 16 ... Rg6! (this is the idea: the rook protects the knight and provides shelter for the black king) 17 Re1 Kf8 18 Nh5. Here 18 ... Nfd5 was better than 18 ... Nbd5 19 c4, which eventually led to a draw in M.Khachian-K.Asrian, Yerevan 1999.

**12 ... Nbd5 13 c4 Ne7 14 Bb2 Bg7 15 Rad1 0-0**

White's central advantage is not relevant because he hardly can advance.

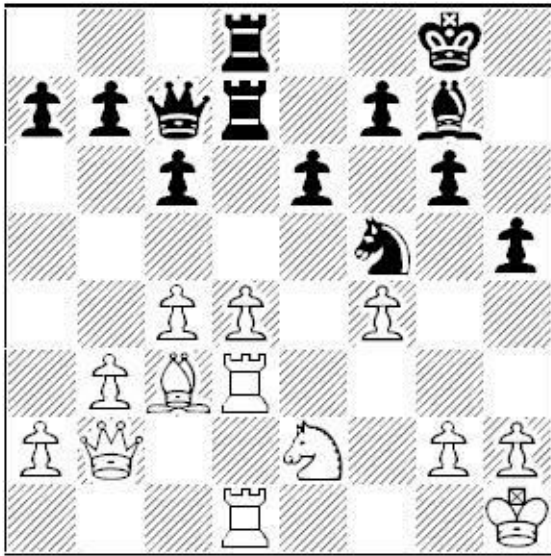
**16 Ne4**

16 Nc3 Qa5 17 a3 Rad8 18 b4 (from now on White has to prevent ... b7-b5, attacking c4) 18 ... Qc7 19 Qf3 Rd7 20 Rd2 Rfd8 21 Rfd1 Nc8 and Black will target the c4-pawn, C.Garcia Fernandez-J.Magem Badals, Pamplona 2003.

**16 ... Nxe4 17 Qxe4 Qa5 18 Qc2 Rfd8 19 Rd3 Rd7**

Black gets ready to target the d4-pawn.

**20 Bc3 Qc7 21 Rfd1 Rad8 22 Kh1 Nf5 23 Qb2 h5!**



Securing the f5-square. Black's position is preferable: he has heavy pressure on the d4-pawn and, whilst White has more space, he is purely on the defensive and can do nothing active.

**24 Qa3 b6 25 Qc1 Qb7 26 Qd2?**

This move allows a whole series of tactics down the d-file.

**26 ... Kh7**

Black makes a series of little improvements to his position before striking with ... c6-c5.

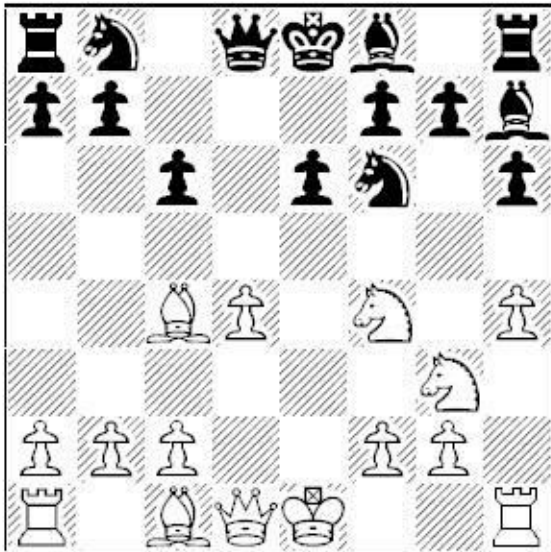
**27 Kg1 Rd6 28 Kf2 c5**

28 ... Bxd4+ 29 Nxd4 c5 30 Kg1 Nxd4 31 Bxd4 Rxd4 was winning for Black.

**29 d5 exd5 30 Rxd5 Rxd5 31 cxd5 Nd4 32 Nxd4 Rxd5**

... and Black was winning in H.Westerinen-K.Rasmussen, Malaga 2003.

**D4) 8 h4 h6 9 Nf4 Bh7**



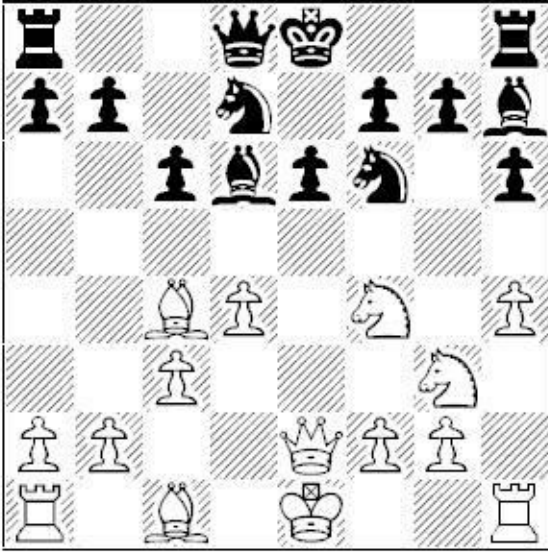
This position can be reached in a variety of ways: a quick N1e2 followed by h2-h4; or h2-h4 first, followed by Bc4 and N1e2. White intends to focus on the vulnerable e6 point and has ideas of sacrificing a piece there, or targeting the g7-pawn through Ngh5.

## 10 0-0

Alternatively:

a) 10 c3 is met by 10 ... Nd5!, closing the diagonal and thus preventing any sacrifices happening on e6.

b) 10 Qe2 Bd6! 11 c3 (11 Bxe6? is a big blunder: after 11 ... 0-0! White cannot retreat the bishop without an unpleasant pin happening on the e-file) 11 ... Nbd7 and now:



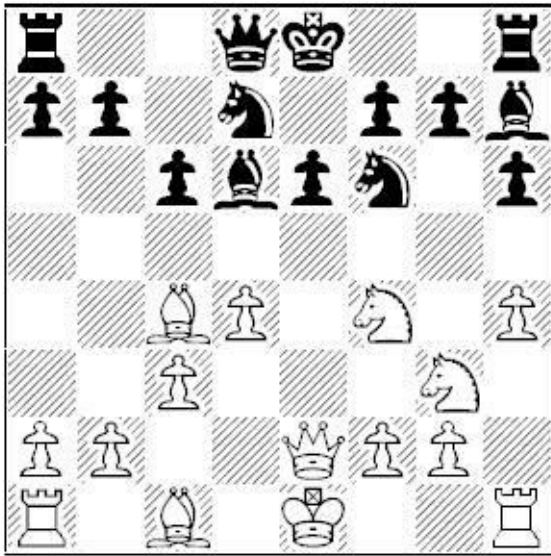
b1) 12 Ngh5?! is too ambitious: 12 ... 0-0! 13 Rh3?! (this is another overoptimistic move; 13 Be3 e5! – this counter-strike is very strong – 14 dxe5 Nxe5 15 0-0-0 is not dangerous for Black) 13 ... Qc7 14 g4?! (continuing the wrong plan) 14 ... e5! (the most principled reply – always counter a flank attack in the centre) 15 Nxf6+ Nxf6 16 dxe5 Bxe5 17 Nd3 Rfe8 18 Be3 (D.Chuprov-M.Turov, St Petersburg 1999) and now after 18 ... Bxd3 19 Bxd3 Nd5 Black is threatening ... Nf4, or ... Bf4 targeting the soft e3 point.

b2) 12 Bxe6 fxe6 13 Nxe6 Qe7 14 Nf5! Bxf5 15 Nxg7+ Kf7 16 Nxf5 Qxe2+ 17 Kxe2 Bf8! (defending the pawn on h6) 18 h5 Ke6 19 Nh4 Rg8 (19 ... Nxh5? loses a piece to 20 Ng6 Rg8 21 Nxf8+) 20 Ng6 Bd6 21 Bxh6 Nxh5 22 Rxh5 Rxg6. The situation is pretty unclear but I think Black's chances are preferable.

c) 10 Ngh5!? (planning to tie Black's dark-squared bishop to the defence of the g7-pawn) 10 ... Nbd7 11 c3 Nxh5 12 Nxh5 Nf6 (eliminating the troublesome knight) 13 Bf4 Nxh5 14 Qxh5 Bd6 15 Be3 (15 Bxe6 does not work: 15 ... Bg6! and Black wins a piece) 15 ... Qf6 and Black had no problems in R.Zelcic-A.Dreev, Neum (blitz) 2000.

## 10 ... Bd6

The natural 10 ... Nd5? is a big mistake: 11 Bxd5! cxd5 12 Qh5! (suddenly it is very difficult to meet the threat of Nxe6!) 12 ... g6 (or 12 ... Qb6 13 Re1!) 13 Qe5 Rg8 14 c4! (putting pressure on the d5-pawn) 14 ... Nc6 15 Qe3 Be7 16 Qb3 (16 cxd5! exd5 17 Qb3 was stronger) 16 ... Qd7 17 cxd5 exd5 18 Nxd5 Na5 19 Qf3 and White was completely winning in the game R.Skytte-A.Hagesaether, Aarhus 2005.

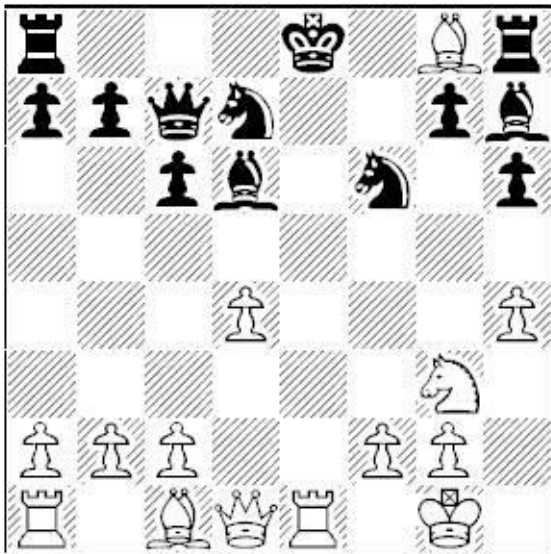


### 11 Nxe6

11 Ngh5?! leads to nothing once Black has castled: 11 ... 0-0 12 Re1 Re8 (Black's idea is to play ... e6-e5 at the right time) 13 c3 Nbd7 14 Bd2 e5 15 Qb3 Rf8 and Black was much better because of the h4 weakness in J.Bellon-Y.Seirawan, Las Palmas 1981.

Black also enjoyed a clear advantage after 11 Re1 0-0 12 c3 Re8 13 Qf3 Nbd7 14 Be3 Nd5 15 h5 Qf6 16 Nge2 N5b6 17 Bb3 e5 in A.Longson-B.Lalic, British League 2000.

**11 ... fxe6 12 Bxe6 Qc7 13 Re1 Nbd7! 14 Bg8+**



### 14 ... Kd8

14 ... Kf8 is also possible but more complicated: 15 Bxh7 Rxh7 16 Nf5 g6!! (it is this wonderful move by Mikhail Botvinnik that gives Black a good game) 17 Bxh6+ Kg8 18 Nxd6 Qxd6 19 Bg5 Re7 20 Qd3 Kg7, M.Tal-M.Botvinnik, World Championship (Game 9), Moscow 1960.

**15 Bxh7 Rxh7 16 Qf3 Bxg3!**

Eliminating the strong knight on g3, which threatened to come to f5.

**17 fxg3 Qd6 18 Bf4 Qd5!**

Black is playing with fire after 18 ... Qxd4+, despite what the computer suggests.

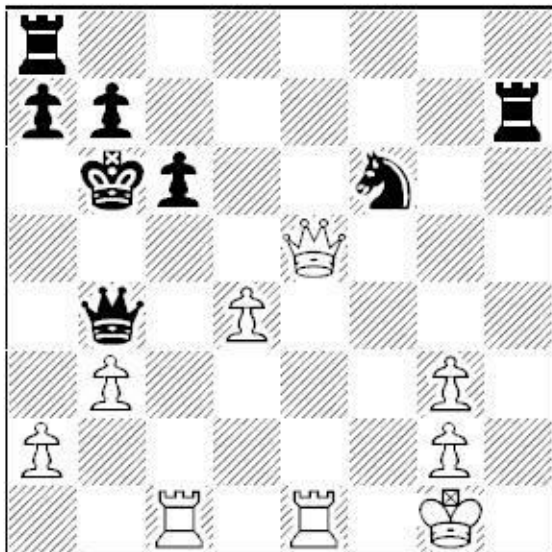
**19 Qe3 g5 20 hxg5 hxg5 21 Bxg5 Kc7**

Black is prepared to give back the piece in order to get a big initiative.

**22 c4 Qxc4 23 Bxf6 Nxf6 24 Qe5+ Kb6 25 b3**

25 Qxf6 Rg8 26 Qd6 is White's best defence: 26 ... Rh1+ 27 Kf2 Qc2+ 28 Kf3 Qd3+ 29 Kf2 Qd2+ 30 Re2 Rf8+! (deflecting the queen from the d4-square) 31 Qxf8 Qxd4+ 32 Re3 Qxb2+ 33 Kf3 Rxa1 34 Qd8+ Ka6 35 Qd3+ b5 and Black has an advantage.

**25 ... Qc3 26 Rac1 Qb4**



**27 Rc4**

Or 27 Qxf6 Rg8 and White has major problems dealing with the idea of ... Rh1+ followed by ... Rf8.

**27 ... Qa5 28 Rc5 Qd2 29 Re2 Qd3 30 Rc1 Nd5 31 a4 Re7 32 Qxd5 cxd5 33 Rxe7 Qxd4+**

... and White resigned, Z. Hagarova-J.Houska, European Women's Ch., Chisinau 2005.

## Summary

After 6 Bc4 there are two main plans for White, involving either h2-h4 or f2-f4. Against the h4 line it is important to remember that Black must answer Nf4 with ... Bd6!, getting ready to exchange the dangerous knight. The 8 0-0 and 9 f4 line is very rare. It is not advisable for Black to allow f4-f5; instead he should play ... Nb6, hitting the c4-bishop and forcing it to either go out of play to b3, or to d3. In the latter case Black exchanges bishops and then blockades with ... g6!.

If White chooses to play 6 Nf3 without h2-h4, this can be met with logical moves and also poses no problems. Black just develops normally, castles kingside, centralizes the rooks and finally breaks up the centre with ... b5, ... c5 or ... e5.

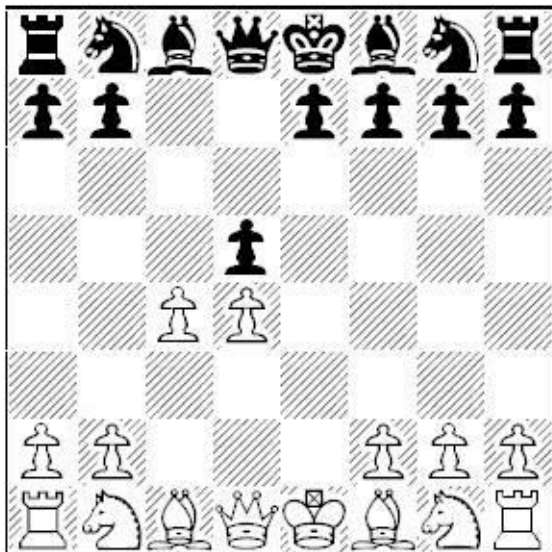
Against 5 Nc5, the solid 5 ... b6 gives Black comfortable play. After the knight retreats to b3, Black can harass it again by pushing the a-pawn – the idea is to mess up White's pawn structure.

Finally, Black should accept the Blackmar-Diemer Gambit (4 f3) and play ... Bf5, intending a solid Caro-Kann pawn formation. Black should be wary of any tricks on f7.

# Chapter Four

## Panov-Botvinnik Attack: Introduction and 6 Nf3

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 c4

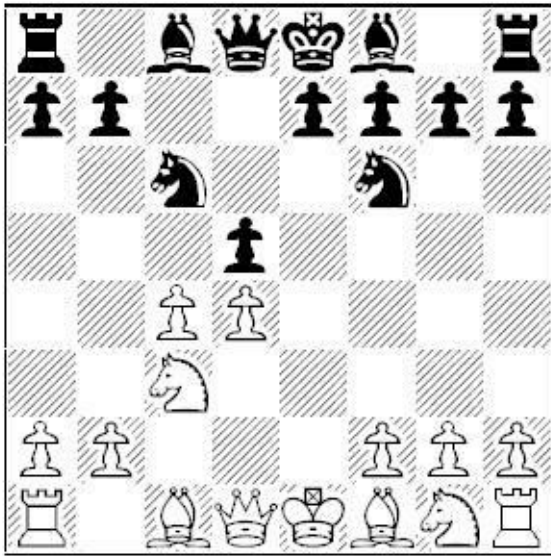


### Activity versus Structure

The Panov-Botvinnik Attack is one of the most popular and sharpest lines of the Caro-Kann. Right from the beginning White plays for a direct attack against the black king, with a healthy disregard for positional elements. With his fourth move, White places Black under pressure by challenging the d5-pawn, and this is indicative of how White will continue to play the rest of the game. White is often prepared to accept long-term structural weaknesses in return for free and easy development, active piece play and open files, which all combined together give Black a tough time in the middlegame. But the aim of this book is to steer you safely through all the potential problems Black may face! During these stages there is a massive battle between the two forces over which advantage will prevail: White, with the dynamic yet fluid initiative, and Black with the long-term positional advantage.

White's aims are pretty direct: he will continuously strive for the initiative and exploit any attacking ideas against the black king that may come his way. Black, on the other hand, usually adopts a temporarily defensive attitude: think in terms of 'you punch and I block'. This is not meant to be negative, for when Black successfully beats back the initiative, at the risk of sounding like a preacher, he will reap the rewards till kingdom comes. The ruined pawn structure that opened files of attack in the middlegame is simply weak and ineffectual in the latter stages of the game. It's exactly because of this high risk/high gain strategy that White will try to avoid exchanging pieces (which will alleviate any space issues Black may have) or take the position into an endgame. White's goal is simply to mate or win material, nothing less.

4 ... Nf6 5 Nc3 Nc6



Right from the fourth move, we can see that White has conducted himself aggressively by placing pressure on the d5-pawn. However, rather than supporting the pawn by playing 5 ... e6, with 5 ... Nc6 – my choice – Black first concerns himself with developing his pieces. This is ambitious but also quite a risky approach since the centre is unsupported here.

White has two main plans here:

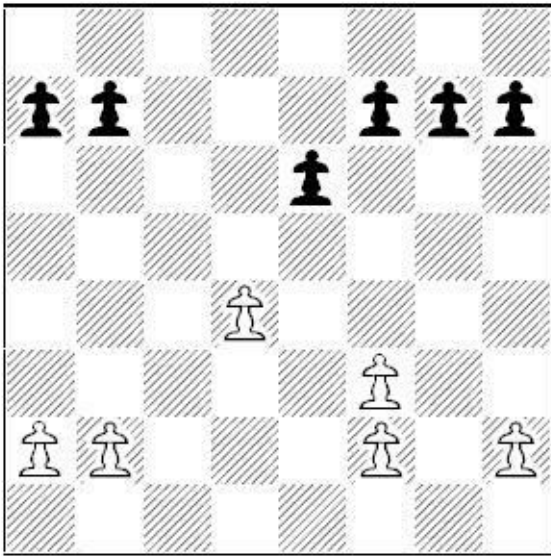
- 1) To complete development with 6 Nf3 (the Four Knights Variation)
- 2) To place pressure on the d5-pawn with 6 Bg5.

In this chapter we will look at 6 Nf3, while Chapter 5 is devoted to 6 Bg5. There are a whole host of pawn structures that arise from each of the variations. Some of them are interlinked, others completely independent.

## The Four Knights Variation: Pawn Structures and Tabiyas

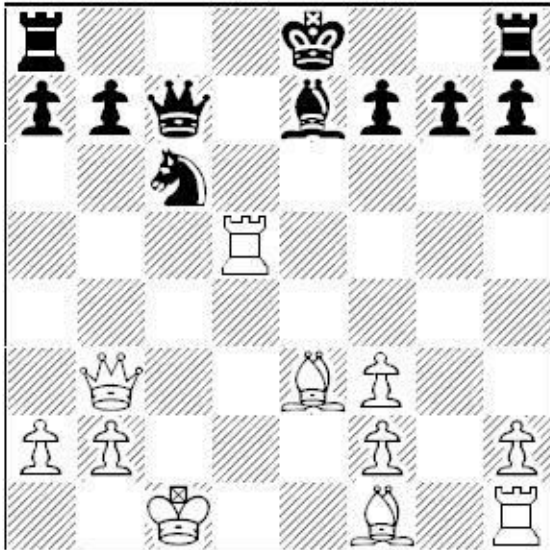
Pawn structures are one of the most important subjects of chess. Often just by studying the location of the pawns, one can determine where to begin an attack, where to place the pieces and which type of position to aim for. The Panov-Botvinnik Attack is usually synonymous with the isolated queen's pawn (IQP) position, but this is not strictly the case all the time. In this chapter we shall encounter other types of pawn structure, some closely related, that arise from the Panov.

### 1) The 10 Be3 e6 Tabiya



The diagram above shows the pawn structure reached in the variation 1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 c4 Nf6 5 Nc3 Nc6 6 Nf3 Bg4 7 cxd5 Nxd5 8 Qb3 Bxf3 9 gxf3 Nb6 10 Be3 e6. White's structure on the kingside couldn't be much weaker. The pawns on h2, f2 and g2 cannot be easily defended, nor can they progress in a strong manner. Just imagine if only the rooks and pawns were left on the board – White would have problems actively defending the pawns.

Let us focus in the centre where White has an IQP. In this position this pawn has no useful purpose – it just blocks the bishop on e3. It is therefore necessary for White to get rid of this pawn by advancing it to d5. If White does not do this quickly, then Black should establish a blockade on d5 and in some lines may well stand better.

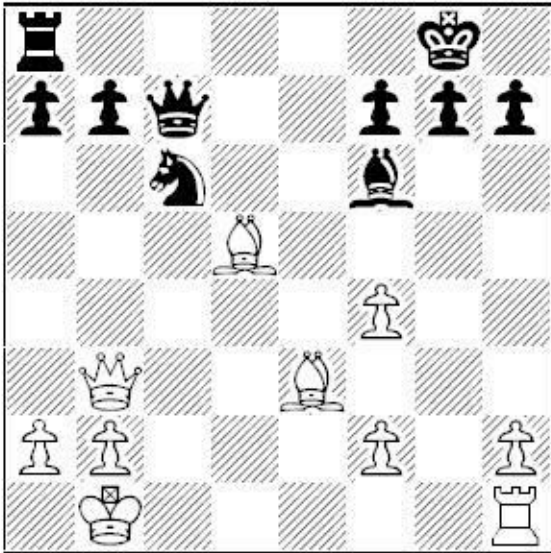


The situation changes once more when the d-pawn is exchanged. The black king must find a safe haven, and with White's two bishops pointing at the queenside, the natural option is to castle kingside. At first sight this seems a little scary; White does have an open g-file after all. However, this is where White's bad pawn structure comes in handy (as far as Black is concerned). These kingside pawns just have no venom and the heavy pieces cannot break through by themselves!

In fact, White's most dangerous plan is to occupy the central files and induce a queenside weakness.

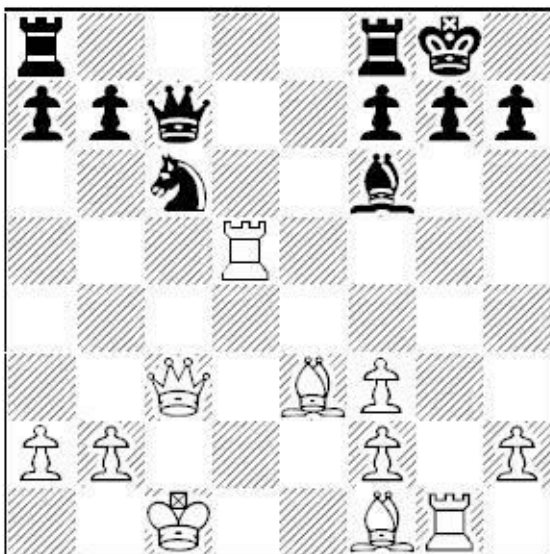
Black must counteract this plan by challenging the centre as soon as possible and placing the dark-squared bishop on f6. This is an excellent square for the bishop, controlling the long diagonal. Even if White wins a pawn by exchanging the knight on c6 (f3-f4, Bg2 and Bxc6), Black will often have enormous pressure on the b-file and control of the dark squares.

## Ideal Positions



This position is from the game S.Collins-A.Ormsby, Port Erin 2003, and it's an ideal one for White. Black has not adequately challenged White's control of the centre. He has allowed the light-squared bishop to occupy an excellent central position, targeting both the f7-pawn and the knight on c6. After **19 Rc1!**, placing pressure on the knight on c6 (but not 19 Rd1 – there is nothing on the d-file to contest), the black position is very difficult.

Here's an example of a good position for Black, and a little trick:



Black has just played the brilliant move **16 ... Be7-f6!!**. This position demonstrates the perils for White of following an incorrect plan. The open c-file can be a deadly source of tactics for Black. Not only that, White has inadequately taken care of his h2-pawn so he will soon be facing a worse position a pawn down (see Line A21 for the analysis).

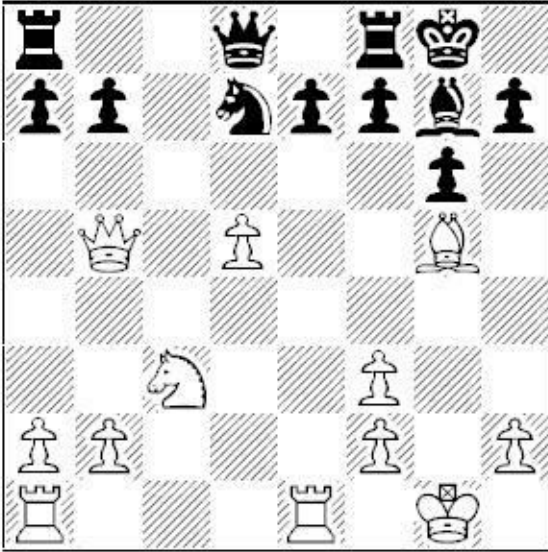
In conclusion we can say:

a) White weaknesses are h2, f2 and f3.

b) The ideal positioning of the white pieces is: centralized rooks on d1 and c1, with the bishops provoking weaknesses on the queenside, where Black may be vulnerable.

## 2) The Tabiya arising from the 10 d5 Nd4 11 Bb5+ Variation

As with the previous tabiya, the battle continues to be between initiative and long-term gain, with White's main problem being his weak kingside.

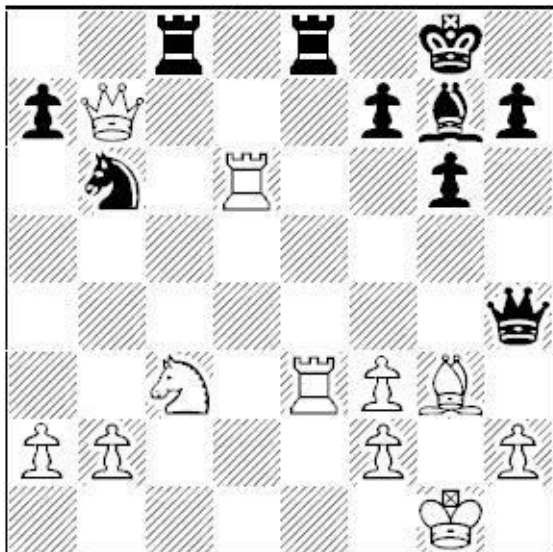


Looking at just the pawn structures, we see that White has not only more pawn islands but also a total of four (!) weak pawns: d5, f3, f2 and h2. However, these poor positional factors are counterbalanced by dynamic considerations. These weaknesses may be painfully apparent in an ending, but the position is far from that stage yet. In fact, right now Black is under some heavy dynamic pressure, and the 'weak' central pawn on d5 is more than adequately supported. Furthermore, not only does this pawn cramp Black, it is also intensifies pressure on e7. To add to this Black must consider the defence of the b7-pawn. These are the difficulties that have traditionally upset commentators, but things are not as dark for Black as many people have thought. Previously annotators were so focused on Black's problems that they forgot his strong counterbalancing ideas.

### The e-file Blockade

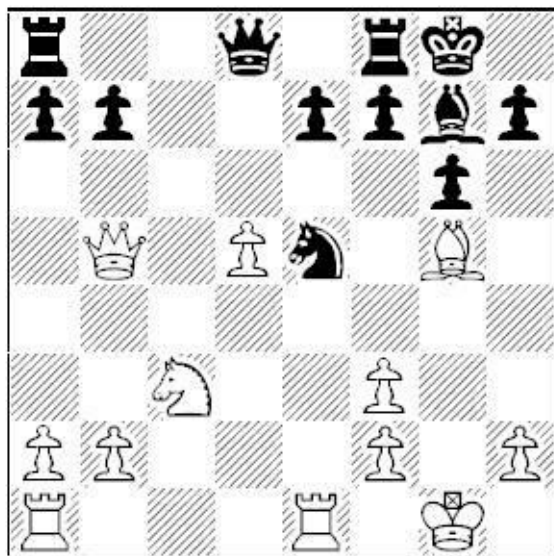
If Black can blockade the d5-pawn, protect the e7-pawn and control the c-file, then he will easily stand better. In all honesty, though, Black can only achieve all of this if White sits and does nothing. Generally, though, Black should simply block the e-file, usually with a knight on e5, and ensure that White cannot chase the horse away. Black must at all times remember he holds an ace up his sleeve in that White has a very poor kingside pawn structure. Not only is the white king exposed, which is a factor for counterplay, but in themselves these pawns are very weak. If the f-file were to open, suddenly the perils of White's king position would become apparent. Black should not be afraid of White capturing the b7-pawn as long as the e7-pawn cannot be captured on the next move, because Black will have ... Rb8 winning back the b2-pawn. As a general rule, it is not beneficial for White to open lines for the black rooks; activity will only help Black immensely.

## Ideal Positions



This position, occurring in the game M.Dvoretsky-F.Izeta Txabarri, Terrassa 1996, is an ideal one for White. Black has played the position too slowly, allowing White to capture on b7 for free, and now he does not have enough counterplay for the pawn.

The critical position arises after 16 ... Ne5.



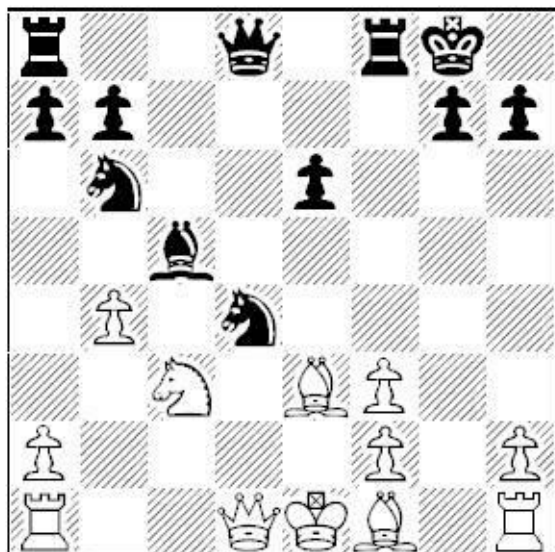
Black must do all he can within his powers to support the important knight on e5. For more on this position, see Line B1.

### 3) Complications after 10 d5 Nd4 11 Qd1

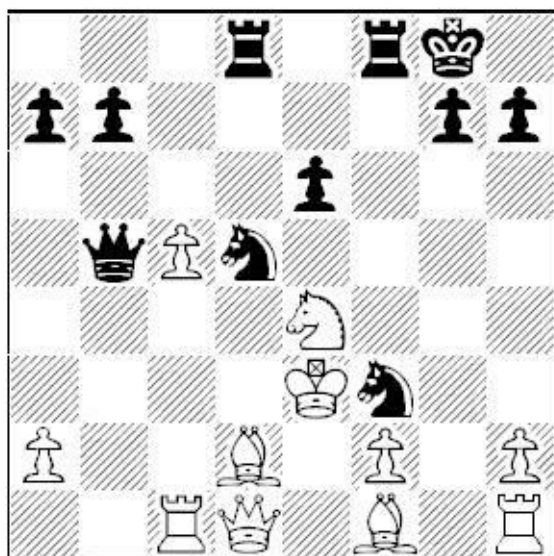
1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 c4 Nf6 5 Nc3 Nc6 6 Nf3 Bg4 7 cxd5 Nxd5 8 Qb3 Bxf3 9 gxf3 Nb6 10 d5 Nd4 11 Qd1

This line is one of the wildest we shall see in the whole of the Panov-Botvinnik variation. The good news is that, as Karpov puts it, ‘the chances of Black equalizing in this line are greater than White’s chances of obtaining an advantage.’ As the game is predominantly of a tactical nature, it’s more important to concentrate on tactical motifs.

## Black sacrifices a piece for a dangerous attack



The position above (taken from Line B2 – Black has just played 14 ... 0-0) sees the kind of sacrifice available to Black. He ignores the fact that his bishop is under attack and instead concentrates on using the open f-file to keep the white king in the centre. This attack is very dangerous. Fast forward a few moves to see an example of how White's king got caught in a mid-board checkmate:



Black's final move in the game S.Lalic-J.Wilson, Lloyds Bank Masters, London 1987, was 20 ... Nb6-d5 mate!

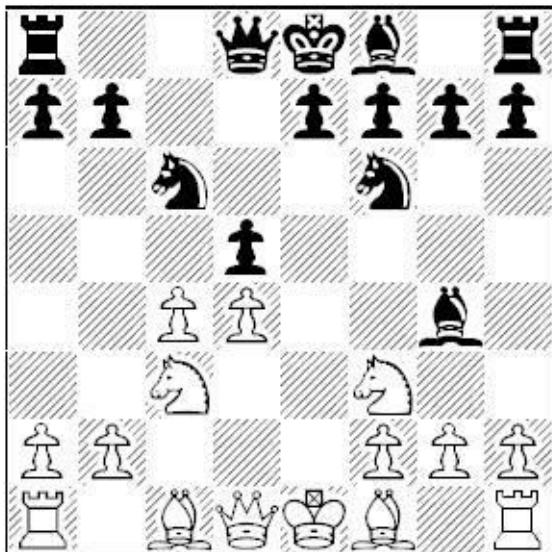
Let's move on to the theory of this variation:

## 7th move Sidelines

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 c4 Nf6 5 Nc3

5 Nf3 is known as Vallicella's Caro-Kann trap – Black has to watch out for one big trick. Best is simply to play 5 ... Nc6, transposing to the main line after 6 Nc3, but 5 ... Bg4? would be a mistake after 6 c5! Nc6 7 Bb5. The point is that Black has big difficulties defending the c6 point; for example, 7 ... e6 8 Qa4 Qc7 9 Ne5 Rc8 10 Bf4 and White is winning!

## 5 ... Nc6 6 Nf3 Bg4



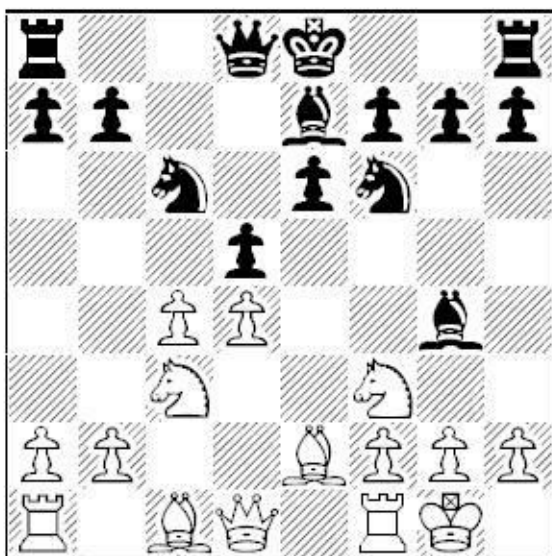
The majority of this chapter is devoted to 7 cxd5, but first let's look at White's alternatives to the main line.

### 7 Be3

7 Be2 is too forgiving – White allows Black to develop his light-squared bishop without forcing him to make any concessions. This passive approach grants Black an easy and straightforward game:

a) 7 ... dxc4?! is too reckless. White can commence attacking operations immediately with 8 d5! Bxf3 9 Bxf3 Ne5 10 0-0 and has some dangerous threats after 10 ... g6 11 Qa4+ Nfd7 12 d6! (as Black is still two moves away from castling, White strikes immediately): 12 ... Nxf3+ 13 gxf3 e6 14 Nb5 with a much better position for White, A.Burtasova-I.Dolgikh, Protvino 2001.

b) 7 ... e6! (supporting d5 is the best idea here) 8 0-0 (8 c5 Be7 9 0-0 0-0 10 Be3 transposes to the note to White's 8th move) 8 ... Be7 and now:

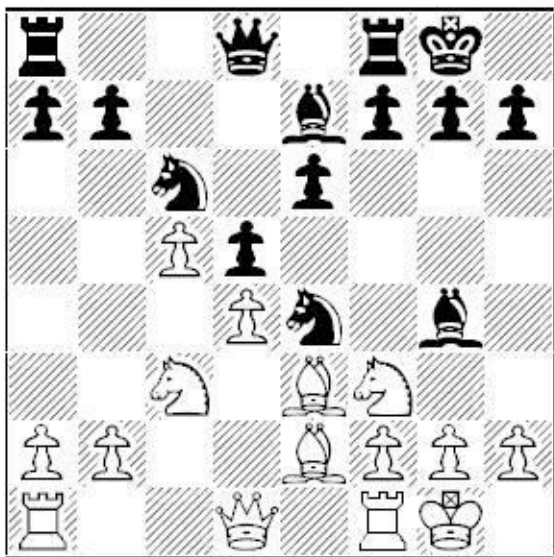


b1) Should White try and target the d5- and b7-pawns with 9 h3 Bh5 10 Qb3?, Black can simply wreck the white pawn structure with 10 ... Bxf3 11 Bxf3 Nxd4! 12 Qa4+ b5! (instead of 12 ... Qd7, as played in H.Rudnik-W.Bauer, Dresden 2004) 13 cxb5 Nxf3+ 14 gxf3 0-0 and Black has the advantage.

b2) 9 Be3 0-0 10 Ne5 also promises White little: 10 ... Bxe2 11 Qxe2 dxc4! (giving White an isolated pawn) 12 Nxc6 bxc6 13 Qxc4 Qc7! (a more aggressive move than 13 ... Qd7, as played in N.De Firmian-L.Christiansen, US Ch.1994) 14 Rac1 Rab8 (Black takes control of the b-file and targets the b2-pawn) 15 b3 Ng4! (threatening mate on h2; White is forced to make a weakness now) 16 g3 Qa5!. Black continues with active play – he is threatening ... Qh5 with mating ideas. Taking the pawn on c6 would be a costly mistake: 17 Qxc6 Rfc8 18 Qf3 Qh5 19 h4 Ba3! 20 Rc2 Qg6! and Black wins.

**7 ... e6 8 Be2**

8 c5 can be met by 8 ... Be7 9 Be2 0-0 10 0-0 Ne4.



With the light-squared bishop developed on g4, Black has a very good version of variations we'll see in Chapter 5. For example: 11 Rc1 f5 12 Ne5 Nxe5 13 dxe5 Nxc3 14 Rxc3 and Black has no problems; or 11 Qc2 f5! (with the threat of ... f4, winning the pawn on d4) 12 Rad1 with equality.

**8 ... dxc4!**

Black saddles White with an isolated queen's pawn. White's position is made even more tricky by the fact that it is difficult for him to untangle himself easily.

**9 Bxc4 Be7 10 0-0**

If White must resort to such extreme measures as 10 h3 Bh5 11 0-0 0-0 12 g4?, the opening cannot be measured as a success: 12 ... Bg6 13 Ne5 Rc8 14 Bb3 Qa5 15 f4 Rfd8 (Black's play is very simple – he develops his pieces to their most active locations and at the same time continues to use the d4-pawn as a target) 16 Nxc6 bxc6 17 Qf3 c5 and with the white kingside so over-extended, Black had all the chances in R.Jones-G.Lee, British League 2005.

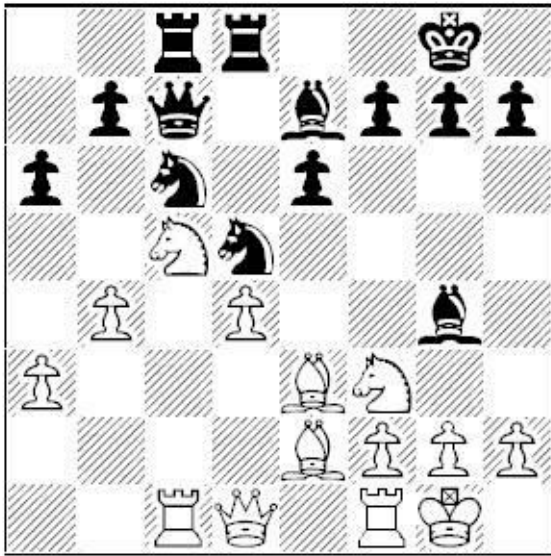
**10 ... 0-0 11 a3**

11 Be2 Rc8 12 Rc1 a6 13 Qa4 is level. With Black's light-squared bishop so actively placed, it is difficult for White to continue with dynamic play. With this in mind, the d-pawn is more of a liability than an asset.

**11 ... Rc8 12 Be2 a6 13 Rc1 Qd6 14 Na4**

White correctly tries to utilize the strong square on c5, but Black easily repulses this idea.

**14 ... Nd5 15 Nc5 Qc7 16 b4 Rfd8!**



Centralizing!

**17 Nd2 Bxc5 18 dxc5 Bf5 19 Qb3?**

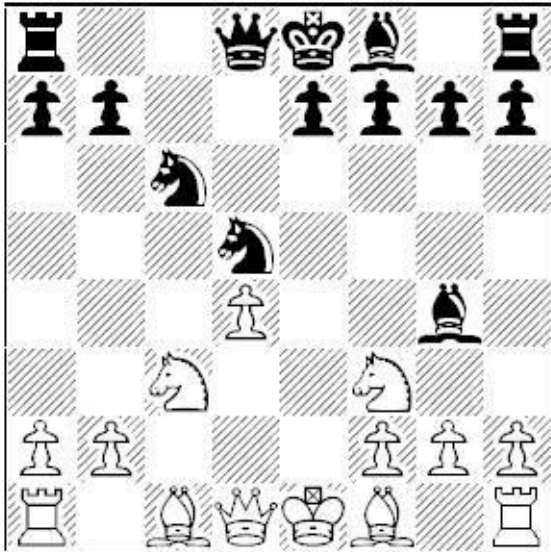
A bad mistake: White allows a tactical trick that gives Black the initiative.

**19 ... Nd4! 20 Bxd4 Nf4 21 Bf3 Rxd4 22 Nc4 Rd3 23 Rc3 Rcd8**

Suddenly the black pieces are very active. I.Sofronie-I.Nikolaidis, Kalithea 2006, concluded 24 Rd1 Rxd1+ 25 Bxd1 Be4 26 Ne3 Qe5 27 g3 Nh3+ 28 Kf1 Rd2 29 f4 Nxf4! 30 Ke1 Rxh2 0-1.

## 7 cxd5 Nxd5

**1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 c4 Nf6 5 Nc3 Nc6 6 Nf3 Bg4 7 cxd5 Nxd5**



## 8 Qb3

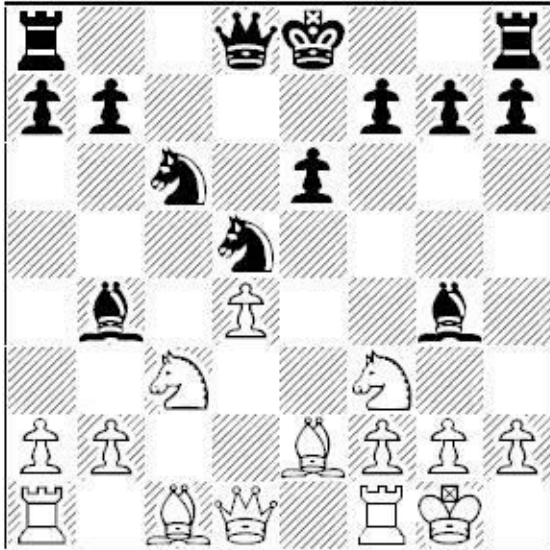
Alternatively:

a) After 8 Bc4 e6 9 0-0 Be7 10 h3 Bh5 (G.Kuzmin-V.Bagirov, Leningrad 1977) Black has an improved version of a typical IQP, as the 'bad' bishop is at its best location, placing pressure on the d4-pawn.

b) 8 Bb5 Rc8 (defending the knight) 9 h3 Bxf3 10 Qxf3 e6 11 0-0 a6 (chasing the bishop) 12 Bxc6+

(12 Ba4 b5 13 Nxd5 was played in V.Dobrov-A.Dreev, Moscow 2005, and now Black could have won a pawn with 13 ... Nxd4 14 Qd1 Qxd5 15 Bb3 Qd7 16 Be3 Bc5 17 Rc1 Nxb3 18 Qxb3 Bxe3 19 Rxc8+ Qxc8 20 Qxe3 0-0) 12 ... Rxc6 13 Nxd5 Qxd5 14 Qxd5 exd5 15 Re1+ Re6 16 Bf4 Kd7 and this position is completely equal, S.Joksic-M.Vukic, Yugoslav Ch. 1976.

c) 8 Be2 is a favourite of the Israeli GM Mikhalevski, who claims that White is doing rather well after this move: 8 ... e6 9 0-0 and here I like the active 9 ... Bb4!? (instead of the oft-recommended 9 ... Be7).

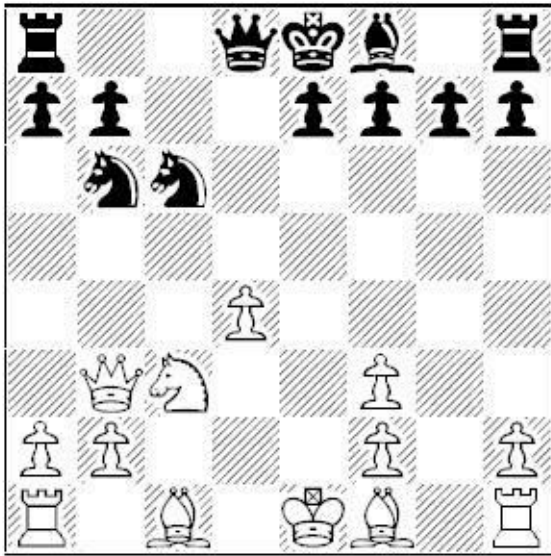


For example, 10 Ne4 0-0 11 Ng3 (White tries to justify the knight's position on g3 but this looks a little dubious) 11 ... Qb6 12 h3 (if White tries to play defensively with 12 Be3 Bd6 13 Qd2 Rac8 14 Rac1 Rfd8, I like Black's position very much: White's previous moves seem a little purposeless whilst Black has a concrete plan of centralizing his pieces and targeting the d-pawn) 12 ... Bxf3 13 Bxf3 Rfd8 14 Be3 Rd7 (Black attacks White's only weakness – the d-pawn) 15 Qe2 Be7 (planning to put the bishop on the long diagonal) 16 Rad1 Bf6 17 Be4 g6 18 Qd2 Rad8 19 a3? (White cracks and is swiftly punished, but it was already difficult to find a satisfactory plan) 19 ... Nxe3 20 fxe3 Bxd4!! 21 Rde1 (or 21 exd4 Rxd4 and White must give up material) 21 ... Bxb2 22 Qf2 Bxa3 23 Bc2 f5 and White's position was hopeless in P.Valden-A.Kostouros, Ikaros 2003.

**8 ... Bxf3 9 gxf3**

9 Qxb7?? would be a terrible mistake after 9 ... Ndb4 10 gxf3 Rb8, trapping the queen.

**9 ... Nb6!?**



Black defends the b7-pawn and removes the knight from attack. The real purpose of this move is to avoid the long endgame that follows after 9 ... e6 10 Qxb7 Nxd4 11 Bb5+ Nxb5 12 Qc6+ Ke7 13 Qxb5 Qd7 14 Nxd5+ Qxd5 15 Qxd5 exd5.

Now we will look at:

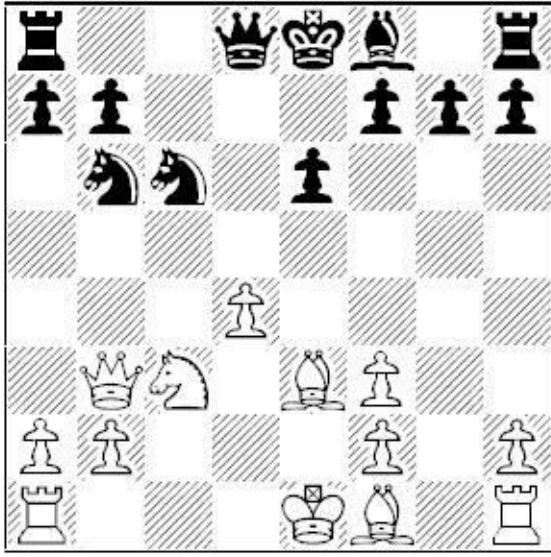
**A: 10 Be3**

**B: 10 d5**

**A) 10 Be3**

This is the most popular response. White does not want to enter into the massive complications and instead concentrates on getting a pleasant position with a space advantage and the bishop pair.

**10 ... e6**



White has two responses here:

**A1: 11 Rg1**

**A2: 11 0-0-0**

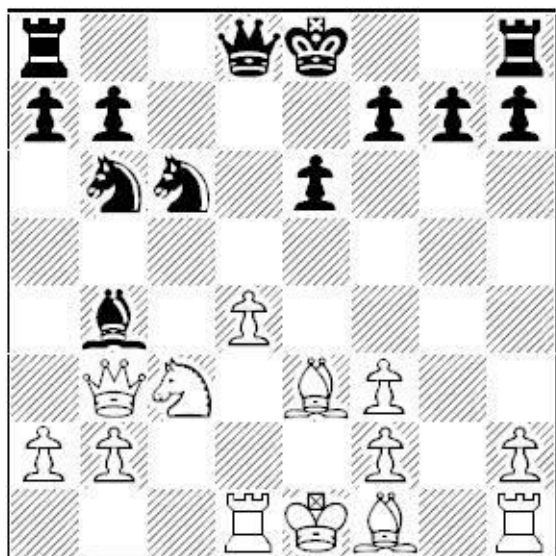
Alternatives are less important:

**11 Rd1?!**

This is far too passive. It allows Black to prevent the advance of the d4-pawn permanently, rendering the bishop pair ineffective.

The immediate 11 d5 is not effective: 11 ... exd5 12 Bxb6 axb6 13 0-0-0 Bc5 14 Rxd5 Qc7 (White does not have the necessary piece coordination to exploit the exposed position of Black's king) 15 Ne4 0-0! (Black rightly decides to ignore protecting his material and instead concentrates on getting his king to safety before exploiting the open lines against White's king) 16 Nxc5 bxc5 17 Rxc5 Qe7 (now it is White whose king is under pressure) 18 Qe3 Qd6 19 Bc4 Rfe8 20 Rd5 Qc7 21 Qc3 Ne7 22 Rc5? (blundering in a worse position) 22 ... Qxc5 23 Bxf7+ Kxf7 24 Qxc5 Rac8 and Black won in F.Velikhanli-L.Bergez, Geneva 2001.

**11 ... Bb4!**



Black prevents d4-d5.

**12 a3**

12 Bd3 Qh4! 13 Be4 0-0 14 a3 Bxc3+ 15 Qxc3 Nd5! (Black has successfully blockaded the d-pawn; all that is left is to take control of the open c-file and probe for more weaknesses) 16 Bxd5 exd5 17 Qc5 Rfe8 18 Rd3 Rad8 19 Kd2 and Black eventually won in S.Hansson-S.Lalic, European Women's Team Ch., Gothenburg 2005.

**12 ... Ba5**

Black should maintain the pin for as long as possible so that he can establish a blockade.

**13 Bd3**

If White tries to break the pin by playing 13 Qc2, planning b2-b4, Black simply replies 13 ... Nd5!.

**13 ... Rc8 14 0-0**

Black was also doing well after 14 Rg1 0-0 15 Kf1 Bxc3 16 bxc3 g6 in M.Marin-J.Magem Badals, Berga 1995.

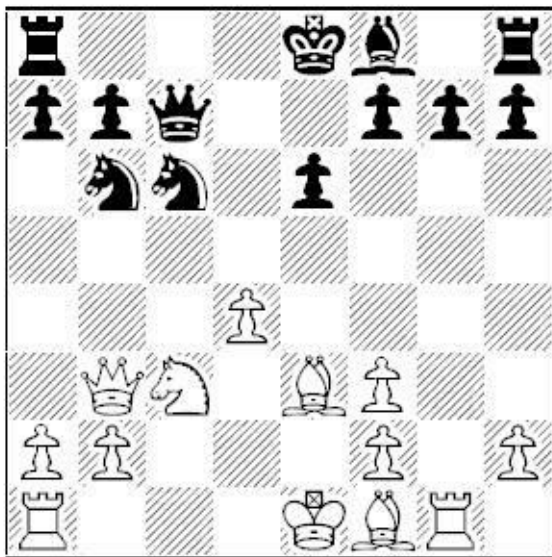
**14 ... 0-0**

Black has no problems.

## A1) 11 Rg1

White tries to hinder Black's development whilst activating his rook, but this allows Black to begin a blockade of d5.

**11 ... Qc7!?**



Not a well-known move but an interesting one nonetheless. Black has future ideas of targeting the weak h2-pawn. But more importantly Black intends to get his king into safety by castling queenside and at the same time preventing the d-pawn advancing to d5. Re-emphasizing my thoughts from earlier, it is very important to blockade the d5-square because:

- 1) The d-pawn is a static weakness.
- 2) It blunts the dark-squared bishop.

In summary, White's attack is restricted by this pawn. By controlling the d5-square Black makes sure that he maintains equality and can hope for more.

**12 0-0-0**

12 d5 doesn't work: 12 ... Nxd5 13 Nxd5 exd5 14 Qxd5? Bb4+! 15 Bd2 Qe7+ 16 Be2 Rd8 and Black wins; 15 Ke2 is stronger, but after 15 ... g6 16 f4 Rd8 17 Qe4+ Be7 the positioning of White's king is awkward to say the least!

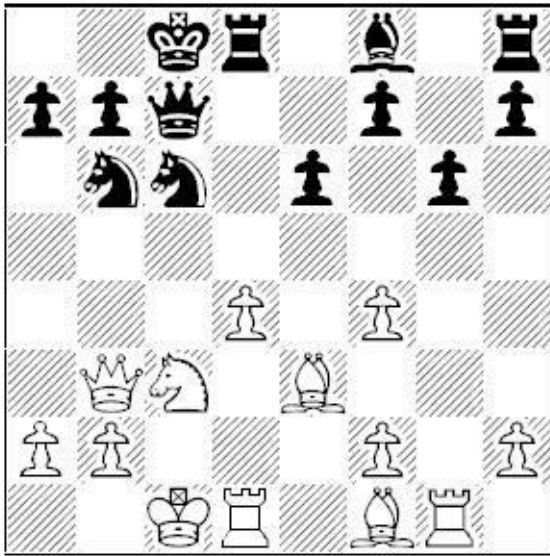
**12 ... 0-0-0 13 Kb1**

White moves his king away from any potential danger and at the same time gets ready to put his rook on to the c-file. Alternatively:

a) 13 d5 Nxd5 14 Nxd5 exd5 15 Kb1 d4 16 Bd2 and Black has no problems.

b) 13 Nb5 is met by 13 ... Nxd4+! (this is the crucial difference between 11 ... Qd6 and 11 ... Qc7) 14 Qc3 Nxb5 15 Rxd8+ Kxd8 16 Bxb5 Nd5 17 Qxc7+ Kxc7 18 Bd4 f6 with an edge for Black.

c) 13 f4 g6 (again indirectly controlling the d5-square, this time by preventing the pawn push to f5)



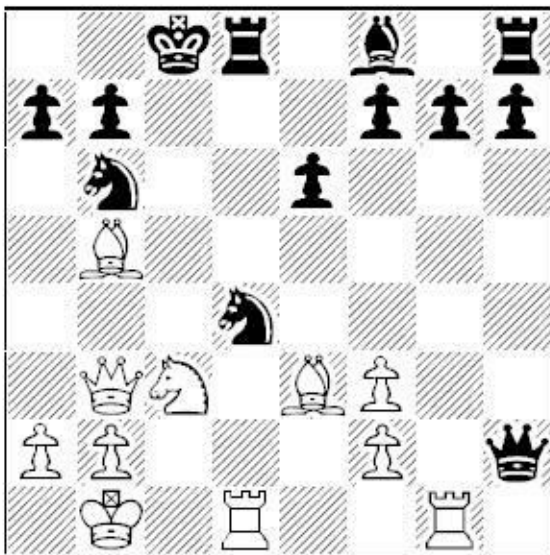
14 Kb1 Kb8 15 Bg2 Na5 16 Qb5 Nac4! 17 Rc1 Bg7 18 Rgd1 (Black wins a pawn after 18 Na4? Bxd4 19 Nxb6 Qxb6; or 18 Ne2 a6! 19 Qb3 Rc8 20 Rc2 Qd6 and Black is doing fine) 18 ... Qd7 is equal: White's structural weaknesses counteract any potential power of the two bishops.

**13 ... Qxh2!**

Unusually Black should be greedy and grab the offered material, although the idea behind 13 ... Qxh2 is quite sophisticated, not just materialistic ...

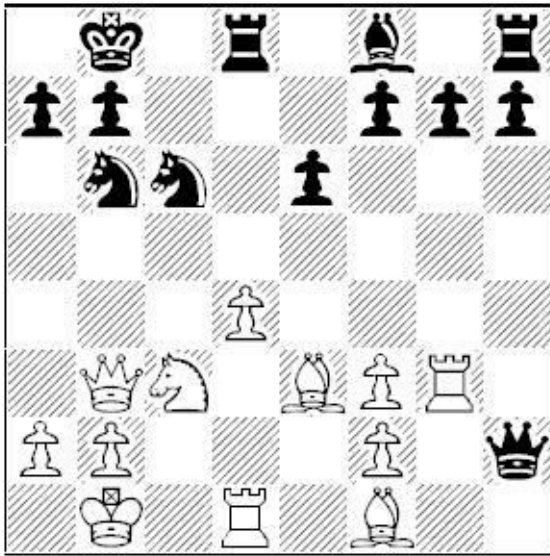
**14 Rg3**

In an ideal world White wants to play Bb5 followed by Rc1, placing lots of pressure on the c6-knight. White has won many fine games when Black has neglected to take this idea seriously. However, 14 Bb5? can be met by 14 ... Nxd4!! (this is the point of 13 ... Qxh2!)



15 Bxd4 Rxd4! 16 Rxd4 Qxg1+ 17 Rd1 (or 17 Nd1 Qg6+ 18 Ka1 Be7 and Black is just a pawn up) 17 ... Qg5 (17 ... Qg6+ allows White to transfer his bishop to the more dangerous square e4: 18 Bd3 Qh5 19 Be4) 18 Ne4 Qf4 19 Qc2+ Qc7 20 Qd2 Kb8 21 Rc1 Qe7 and Black has defended against all of White's threats.

**14 ... Kb8**



Getting the king to safety. Black should not be afraid of giving the pawn on g7 away, as he can attack the weak f3-pawn. 14 ... Qh5 is also possible; for example, 15 Rg5 Qh4 16 f4 Bd6 17 Rxc7 Qf6 18 Rg1 Kb8 19 f5 Qxf5+ 20 Bd3 Qa5 21 Rg7 Rhf8 22 Rh1 h5 23 Nb5 Nd5 24 Be4 Be7 25 Rxh5 Qe1+ 0-1 A.Sofrigin-M.Ezat, Winterthur 2001.

**15 Nb5**

Or:

a) 15 Bf4+ is not dangerous after 15 ... Bd6! 16 Bxd6+ Rxd6, when the d4- and f2-pawns are weak: 17 Rxc7 Rd7 18 d5 exd5 19 Na4 Nxa4 20 Qxa4 h5 21 Bb5 Qxf2 22 Bxc6 bxc6 23 Qxc6 Rc7 24 Qa4 Rd8 and Black should win.

b) After 15 Bb5 Na5 Black need not fear 16 Bf4+ as there are no good discovered attacks: 16 ... Ka8 17 Qc2 Rc8! (White was threatening 18 Bc7) 18 Qe4 Nbc4 19 Qe2 (19 Rxc7?? Qxf2) 19 ... Qh4 20 Bg5 Qh5 21 d5 Bb4!. Now 22 dxe6 fails to a neat little tactic: 22 ... Nxb2 23 Qxb2 Bxc3 24 Qe2 fxe6 and wins.

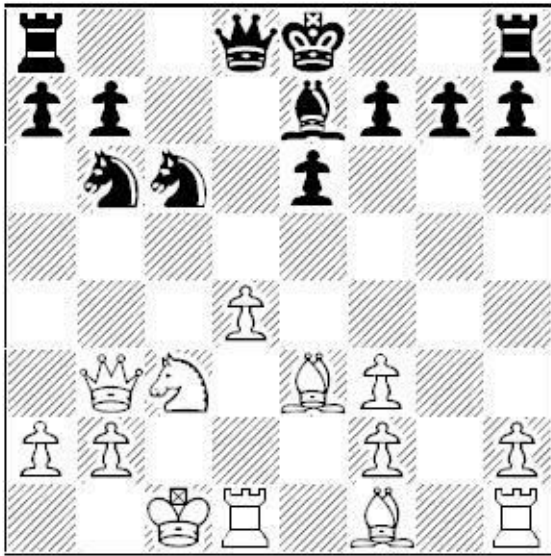
**15 ... Nd5 16 Rh3 Qg1 17 Be2 Qg6+ 18 Bd3 Qf6 19 Rg1 Nf4 20 Bxf4+ Qxf4**

Black is much better here.

## A2) 11 0-0-0

This move has overtaken 11 Rg1 in popularity, chiefly because in this variation. Black is helpless to prevent the d4-d5 pawn advance, and as a result his approach to the position changes. Instead of castling queenside, his king will seek solace on the kingside where it is relatively safe. Unlike in the previous variation the pawn on h2 is protected, so undertaking a similar plan with ... Qc7 would be misguided.

**11 ... Be7**



Now White can play either of the following:

**A21: 12 Rg1**

**A22: 12 d5!**

12 Kb1 0-0 13 d5 exd5 14 Nxd5 Nxd5 15 Qxd5 Bf6! 16 Bc4 Qc7 (B.Abramovic-M.Matulovic, Yugoslavia 1984) is fine for Black. He has placed his bishop on its optimum diagonal, and all that remains is to centralize the rooks on d8 and c8. In addition, White must take time out to defend the h2-pawn.

**A21) 12 Rg1**

This really doesn't make much sense, as the best plan for White is to centralize his rooks on the c- and d-files. As mentioned earlier, the black king is pretty safe on g8 as there are no pawn breakthroughs and the situation in the centre is still pretty much unresolved.

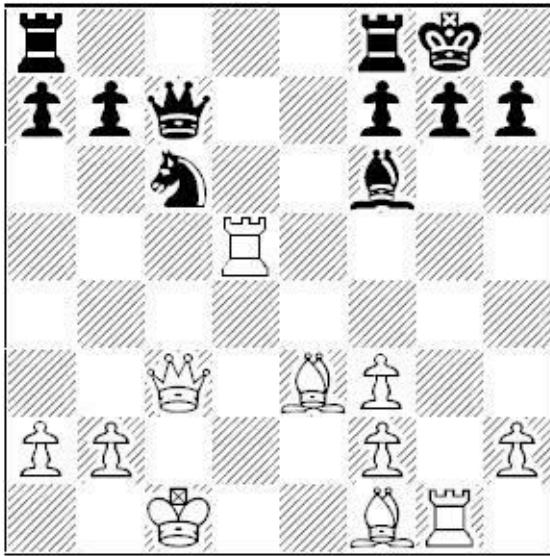
**12 ... 0-0**

This is what Black wanted to play anyway!

**13 d5 Nxd5 14 Nxd5 exd5 15 Rxd5 Qc7! 16 Qc3**

16 Kb1 Qxh2! (when the king stands safe, be greedy!) 17 Rg2 Qh1 18 Rd1 Rad8! (developing with tempo; White stands seriously worse here) 19 Rc1 Bf6 20 Bc5 Rd2! 21 Ba3 (after 21 Bxf8 Rxb2+ 22 Qxb2 Bxb2 23 Kxb2 Kxf8 Black has too many pawns for the two rooks to deal with) 21 ... Qh5 22 Bc4?? Qf5+ 23 Ka1 Nd4 and White cannot prevent ... Nc2 coming, J.Nunn-M.Chandler, Bristol 1981.

**16 ... Bf6!!**



A brilliant move, based on tactical considerations on the c-file.

### 17 Qxf6

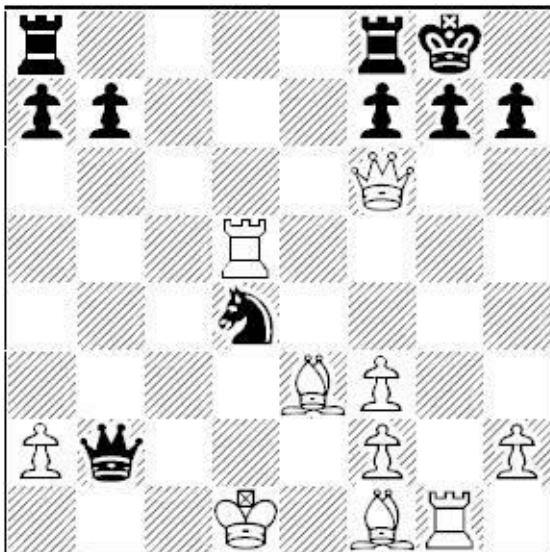
Analysis shows that the bishop cannot be taken, and in practice White has declined the offer:

a) 17 Bd4 led to a quick win for Black in J.Rudd-R.Martyn, British League 2007: 17 ... Qxh2 18 Rxc7+ Bxc7 19 Bxc7 Rfc8 20 Rg5 Qf4+ 21 Qe3 Ne5+ 22 Kd1 Rd8+ 23 Kc2 Qa4+ 24 b3 Qxa2+ 25 Kc3 Qa1+ 26 Kc2 Qd1+ 27 Kc3 Rac8+ 28 Bc4 Rd3+ 29 Kb4 Rxc4+ 30 bxc4 Qb3+ 31 Kc5 b6 mate.

b) 17 Qc4 (better, but still good for Black) 17 ... Rad8 18 Rh5 (18 Rxd8 Rxd8 19 Be2 Qxh2 and Black is simply a pawn up) 18 ... g6 19 f4 Bd4! (centralizing his bishop and provoking exchanges that will only favour Black) 20 Be2 Qe7 21 Rh3 Qf6 (putting pressure on the b2-pawn; White is in serious trouble) 22 Qb5 a6 23 Qh5 Qg7 24 Qh4 Bxb2+ 25 Kb1 Ba3 26 Bc1 Bxc1 27 Rxc1 Rd2 0-1 was J.Ehlvest-L.Oll, Riga 1995.

### 17 ... Nd4+! 18 Kd2 Qc2+ 19 Ke1 Qb1+ 20 Kd2 Qxb2+ 21 Kd1

21 Kd3 loses immediately after 21 ... Qc2+ 22 Kxd4 Qb2+.



### 21 ... Qb1+!

21 ... Qa1+ would be a grave mistake as it allows 22 Bc1.

**22 Kd2 Qxa2+ 23 Kd1 Qa4+ 24 Ke1**

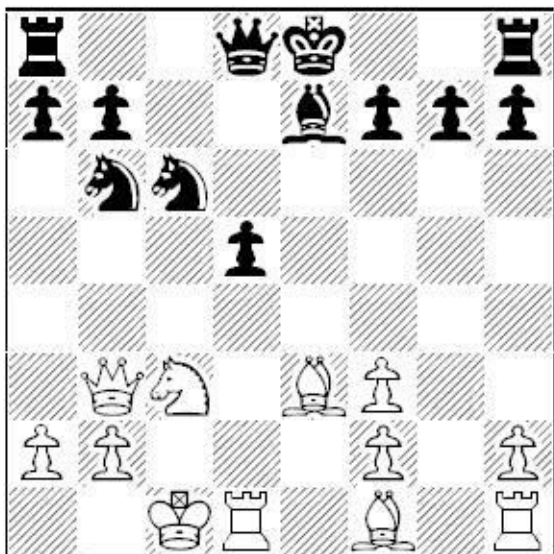
24 Kd2 Qc2+ 25 Ke1 Qb1+ 26 Kd2 Qb2+ 27 Kd1 Qa1+ 28 Kd2 Nb3+ picks up the queen.

**24 ... Qa1+**

Black wins the queen on f6 after 25 Kd2 Nb3+.

### A22) 12 d5! exd5

12 ... Nxd5? is no good: 13 Qxb7 Rc8 14 Bb5 Qc7 15 Qxc7 Rxc7 16 Nxd5 exd5 17 Kb1 and Black has problems, M.Chandler-M.Hermann, Bochum 1981.

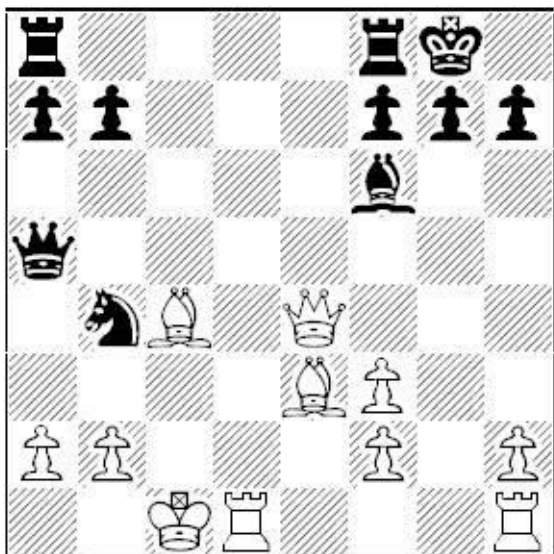


### 13 Nxd5

Alternatively:

a) 13 Rg1 0-0 transposes to Line A21.

b) 13 Bb5 0-0 14 Nxd5 (or 14 Bxb6 Qxb6 15 Nxd5 Qc5+ – protecting the bishop – 16 Kb1 Rad8! and Black is fine) 14 ... Nxd5 15 Qxd5 Nb4 is Karpov and Podgaet's convincing recommendation, whereupon after 16 Qe4 (16 Qxd8 Rfxd8 17 Rxd8+ Rxd8 18 a3 a6 is completely equal) 16 ... Qa5 17 Bc4 Bf6 Black's pieces are dangerously congregated around White's king.

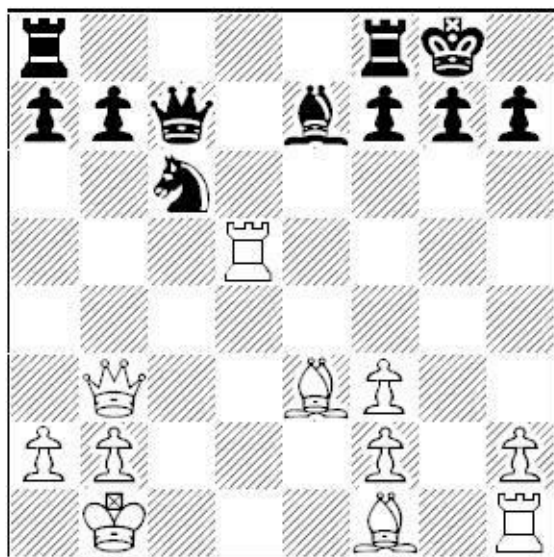


For example, 18 a3 Qc7 (pinning the bishop and getting ready to meet axb4 with ... b7-b5!) 19 Bf4 Na2+ (a very computer-like move) 20 Kc2 (Black has the advantage after 20 Kb1 Qb6 21 Be5 Rae8 – he will win the bishop and continue his attack on the dark squares) 20 ... Qb6 21 Be5 Bxe5 22 Qxe5 Rac8 23 Qd4 Qxd4 24 Rxd4 b5 and Black is a bit better.

c) 13 Bxb6 doesn't give White any advantage in the ending: 13 ... Qxb6 14 Qxb6 axb6 15 Nxd5 Rxa2 16 Kb1 Ra5 17 Bb5 Kf8! 18 Nxe7 Kxe7 19 Rhe1+ Kf6 20 Rd6+ Kg5 21 Rg1+ Kf4 ½-½ V.Potkin-P.Kazakov, Moscow 1998. White's pawn weaknesses are becoming apparent, and they give Black enough counterplay to ensure the draw.

### 13 ... Nxd5 14 Rxd5 Qc7 15 Kb1 0-0

This is the key position of the whole variation. If we take stock we see that, as the kings have castled on opposite wings, both sides must play dynamically. White is the possessor of the initiative as his pieces are well centralized. His ideal scenario would not be a raging attack down the g-file (and he would be misguided should he choose to follow that plan), but to have the rooks on the c- and d-files, provoking Black to make concessions on the queenside.



Black, on the other hand, would firstly love to challenge the rook on the d-file and then place his bishop on f6; the bishop's position is so strong here that often Black can even afford to abandon the b7-pawn so as to grab all the dark squares. However, whether he can do that or not depends entirely on how White approaches the position. Should White play aimlessly then Black has the time to do as he wishes, but should White play accurately then Black must solve any problems in a more direct manner.

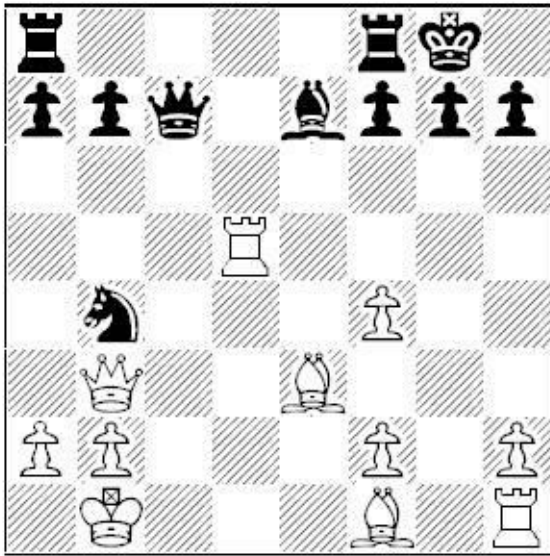
### 16 f4

The main move, although others have been tried:

a) 16 Be2 Rfd8 (White must be mindful of the loose pawn on h2) 17 Rhd1 Rxd5 18 Rxd5 Rd8 and Black was equal in Y.Rantanen-J.Partanen, Tampere 1989. After 19 f4 Rxd5 20 Qxd5 Black should continue with 20 ... Bf6.

b) 16 Bd3 Nb4! 17 Rh5 Nxd3 18 Qxd3 g6 19 Rc1 Qb8 20 Bh6 Rd8 21 Qc3 Bf8 22 Bxf8 Rxf8 (A.Kharlov-D.Yevseev, Kazan 2001) and Black has easily fended off White's attack to reach an equal position. White must also ensure that his initiative doesn't disappear into a worse endgame – remember he has a lousy pawn structure.

### 16 ... Nb4!



Black must take active measures or else be squashed in the centre.

**17 Rd4 Rfd8!**

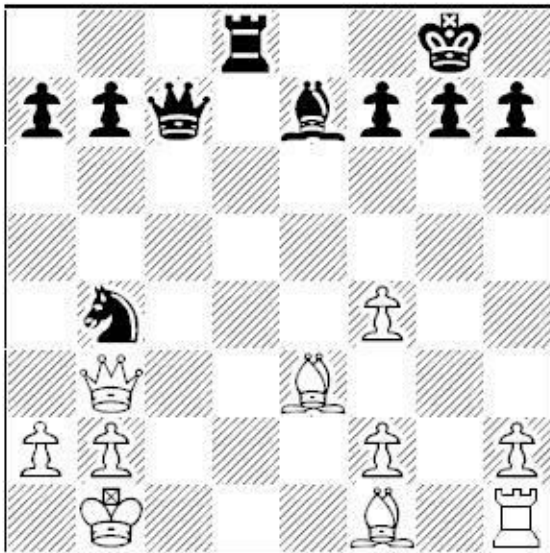
17 ... Nc6 18 Rd1 Bf6 19 Bg2 Rfd8 20 Be4 Rxd1+ 21 Rxd1 Rd8 was slightly better for White in V.Anand-T.Karolyi, Frunze 1987.

**18 Rxd8+**

18 Rg1 Qa5 19 Bd3 Nxd3 20 Rxd3 Rxd3 21 Qxd3 Bf6 22 Qb3 was slightly better for Black (mainly because the kingside pawns are such easy targets) in E.Kallmeyer-D.Gutsche, correspondence 1999.

18 Bg2? drops a pawn to 18 ... Rxd4 19 Bxd4 Qxf4. Now 20 Bxb7? would be a blunder: 20 ... Qf5+ 21 Ka1 Rd8 22 Bxa7 Nc2+ 23 Kb1 Nd4+ wins easily.

**18 ... Rxd8**



**19 Bc4**

19 Be2 is a bit passive: 19 ... Qd7 20 Rc1 a5 21 a3 a4 22 Qc4 Nd5 23 Rd1 b5 (Black intends to play ... b5-b4, opening lines against the white king) 24 Qc2 h6 25 Bf3 Qe6 26 f5 Qe5 27 Bd4 Qf4 28 Qe4 Qxe4+ 29 Bxe4 Nf4 30 Rd2 Nh3!, targeting the weak f2-pawn and intending to meet 31 f3? with 31 ... b4.

**19 ... Bf8**

19 ... Bd6 allows White to take control of the d-file with 20 Rd1.

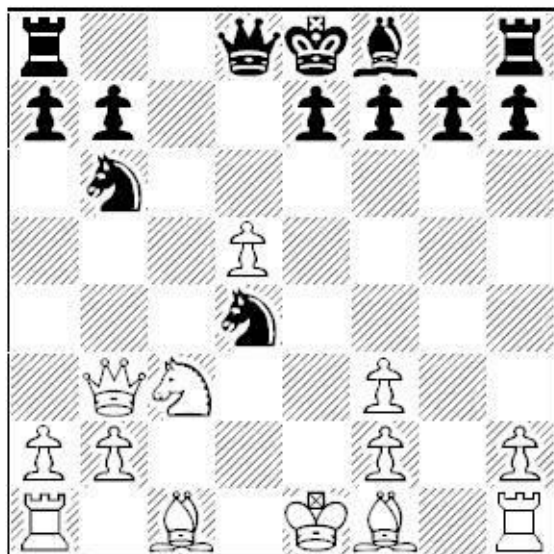
**20 Rc1 Qd7 21 a3 Nc6 22 Qb5**

22 Bb5 would be a mistake after 22 ... Qf5+ 23 Ka1 Nd4 24 Bxd4 Rxd4, when the pawns are ripe for the taking.

**22 ... a6 23 Qb6 Be7 24 Bxa6 bxa6 25 Qxc6 Qd3+ 26 Qc2 Qb5 27 Qc4 Qb7 28 Qc6 Qb3 29 Qc7 Bf6 30 Qc2 Qb5**

Black has enough compensation for the pawn since he has a strong bishop on f6, an open b-file to attack down, and White's kingside weaknesses remain. The extra b-pawn would only begin to count in an endgame, so in general Black should avoid exchanging queens.

**B) 10 d5 Nd4**



White has two options here:

**B1:** Playing actively with **11 Bb5+**

**B2:** Retreating with **11 Qd1**

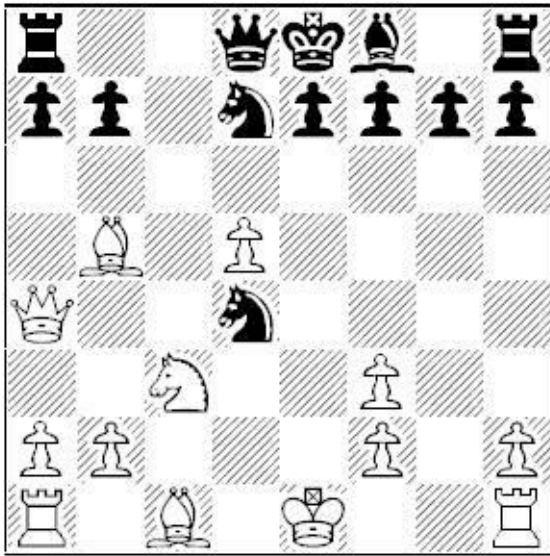
**B1) 11 Bb5+**

This is the most critical continuation.

**11 ... Nd7**

Forced, as after the dubious 11 ... Nxb5? 12 Nxb5 a6 13 Nc3 it is difficult for Black to complete development.

**12 Qa4**



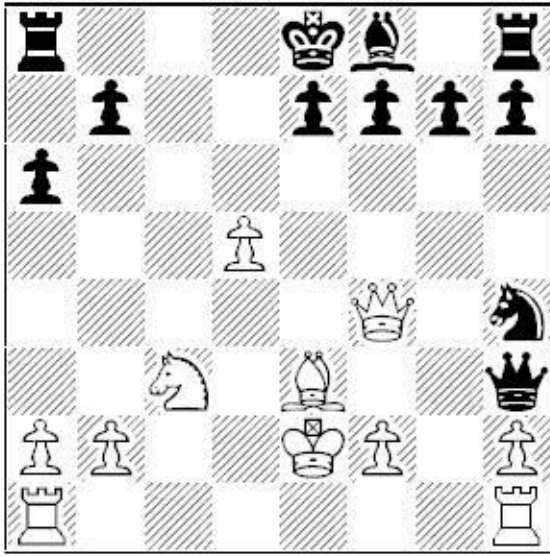
12 Qd1 leaves White in a poor state after 12 ... Nxb5 13 Nxb5 Qa5+ 14 Nc3 e5!. Not only has White lost the initiative but he also has no good place to castle.

**12 ... Nxb5!**

This move is safer than the overly ambitious 12 ... Nxf3+:

a) 13 Ke2 Nfe5 14 Bf4 a6 15 Bxd7+ Nxd7 16 Rac1 b5 17 Qe4 Nf6 18 Qf3 b4 19 Ne4 Nxd5 20 Nd6+ exd6 21 Qxd5 (S.Arkipov-J.Brandics, Kecskemet 1990) and now Black could have played 21 ... Be7 when he is pretty safe.

b) 13 Kf1! a6! (13 ... Nfe5 14 Bf4 a6, and now either 15 Bxe5!? axb5 16 Qxb5 Ra5 17 Qe2, S.Vokarev-A.Shevelev, Linares 2001, or 15 Bxd7+ Nxd7 16 Re1, and Black will have trouble developing) 14 Bxd7+ Qxd7 15 Qf4 Qh3+ 16 Ke2 Nh4 17 Be3



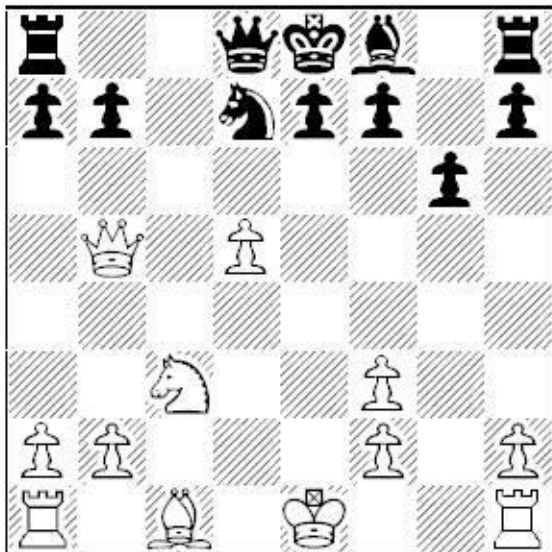
17 ... Rd8 (17 ... Ng6? 18 Qa4+ Qd7 19 Qxd7+ Kxd7 20 Na4 and White will penetrate the black position) 18 Rac1 Ng2 19 Qa4+ Qd7 20 Bb6 Qxa4 21 Nxa4 and White has everything he could ask for the pawn.

12 ... e5? virtually loses after 13 dxe6! Nxe6, and now the stunning 14 Bg5!! was winning for White in V.Bologan-J.Borges Mateos, Linares 1999.

### 13 Qxb5

13 Nxb5?! gives White nothing: 13 ... a6 14 Nc3 g6 15 Qd4 Nf6 16 Bg5 Bg7 17 0-0-0 0-0 18 d6!  
(this is better than 18 Qh4 Qd6 19 Bh6 Rac8 20 Bxg7 Kxg7 21 Kb1, when the attack belonged to Black in P.Vavra-T.Schubert, German League 2002; look at how useless White's kingside pawns are in creating any threats – even the open g-file brings White no joy) 18 ... exd6 19 Qxd6 and the position is level although Black does have the better long-term prospects.

### 13 ... g6!



Black must develop his pieces quickly before White starts creating active threats, namely against the vulnerable e7-pawn. Alternatives are weaker:

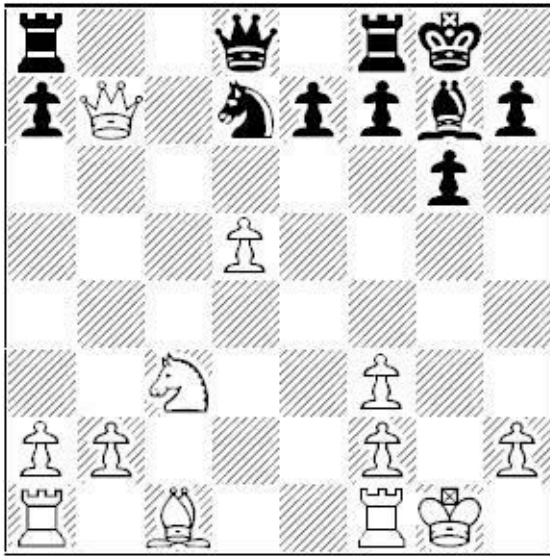
a) 13 ... Qc7 wastes an important tempo that should be spent on developing: 14 0-0 a6 (14 ... g6? 15 Re1 Bg7 16 Bg5 and with the rook bearing down the e-file it is virtually impossible for Black to continue his development without giving up material) 15 Qd3 Qd6 (trying to prevent any d6 ideas) 16 Ne4 Qg6+ 17 Kh1 and White is better.

b) 13 ... Qb6? loses a pawn after 14 Be3 Qxb5 15 Nxb5 Kd8 16 Nxa7.

c) 13 ... e5? is also unsatisfactory after 14 dxe6 fxe6 15 Be3 Qc7 16 Rc1 a6 17 Qb3, when White has a big advantage.

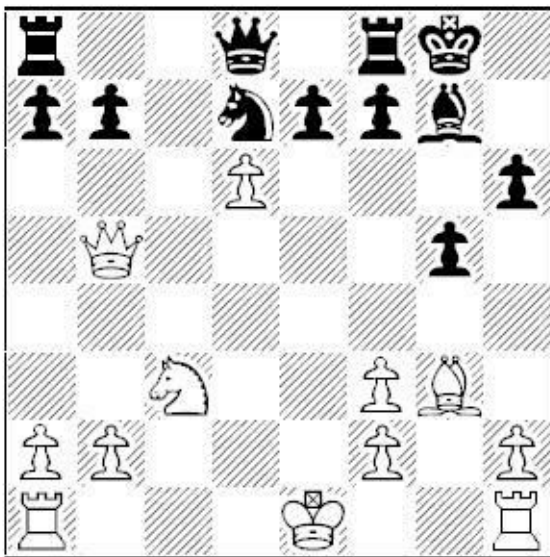
### 14 0-0

Endorsed by the renowned trainer IM Mark Dvoretsky, whose simple idea was to target Black's weak e7 point whilst at the same time centralizing White's position. Previously players had entered into complications: 14 Qxb7?! Bg7 15 0-0 (15 Bf4, preventing Black from playing ... Rb8, does not give White anything after 15 ... 0-0 16 Bc7 Qc8 17 Qxc8 Rfxc8 18 Ba5 Rc5 19 Bb4 Bxc3+! 20 Bxc3 Rxd5; not only has Black recovered the pawn, he also has a very slight advantage because of White's weak pawn structure) 15 ... 0-0 and Black has more than sufficient compensation for the pawn.



White cannot afford the initiative passing into Black's hands. For example, 16 Kg2 Bxc3! (this is a common idea to regain the pawn) 17 bxc3 Nc5! 18 Qb2?! (18 Qb5 Qxd5 19 Be3 Rfc8 20 Rfd1 Qf5 21 Rab1, as suggested by Szuhaneck, looks to me to be more promising for Black than for White) 18 ... Qxd5 19 c4 Qh5 20 Rd1 Ne6 21 Rd5 Qh4 22 c5 Rfd8 and Black is much better, L.Vajda-R.Szuhaneck, Baile Herculane 1999.

14 Bg5 is a little hasty: 14 ... h6! 15 Bh4 Bg7 16 d6 g5 17 Bg3 (17 dxe7? only helps Black, and following 17 ... Qxe7+ 18 Kf1 0-0-0 19 Bg3 Ne5! 20 Re1 Rhe8 Black is better – he will get his king to safety and the knight on e5 is immune to danger) 17 ... 0-0 and now:



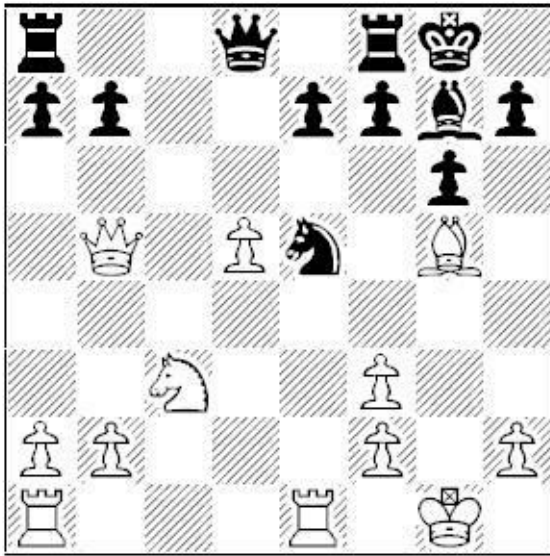
a) 18 h4 Rc8 is assessed by Balashov and Kozlov as unclear, but I think Black has a nice position.

b) 18 0-0-0 e6 (forced, as White was threatening to win a piece with dxe7) 19 h4 Rc8 leads to a very sharp position with equal chances. 20 Qd3? would be very bad after 20 ... Qa5! 21 Kb1 Bxc3 22 bxc3 Rxc3, when Black has a pleasant attack.

**14 ... Bg7 15 Re1**

According to Dvoretzky, a good move. This plan is certainly the most challenging for Black.

**15 ... 0-0 16 Bg5 Ne5!**



This move has been played several times but has been assessed as dubious. However I feel that it has been Black's follow-up play, rather than the move itself, that is incorrect. After all, 16 ... Ne5 is a very natural move. Black improves the placing of his knight, protects the weak e7-pawn and at the same time forces White to defend against the threat ... Nxf3.

Here's a summary of Black's other tries:

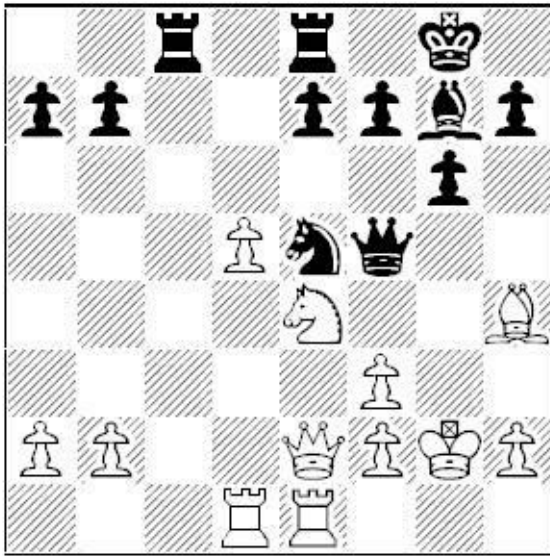
a) 16 ... Nf6? just loses a pawn after 17 Qxb7.

b) For a long time 16 ... Bf6 was considered very promising for Black, but in light of the game M.Marín-L.Fressinet 1999, Sitges 1999, this move is now considered dubious after Marín's convincing riposte: 17 Bxf6 exf6 (Black has presented White with a passed pawn and although he plans to blockade it, this is not too successful; 17 ... Nxf6 drops a pawn, and White is better after 18 Qxb7 Re8 19 Rad1 Rb8 20 Qxa7 Rxb2 21 Qd4 Rb7 22 a4) 18 Re3! Ne5 19 Rd1 Qc8 20 d6 Rd8 21 Nd5! Nxf3+ 22 Kf1 (22 Rxf3? loses to 22 ... Qg4+) 22 ... Nxh2+ 23 Ke1 Kg7 24 Nxf6! and White is winning.

c) 16 ... Re8 is dubious after 17 d6 f6 18 Nd5! (18 Bf4 leads to nothing: 18 ... exd6 19 Bxd6 Ne5 20 Bxe5 fxe5 21 Rad1 Qg5+ and Black is the one doing well) 18 ... exd6 19 Rxe8+ Qxe8 20 Nc7 (A.Stripunsky-E.Gersov, New York 2000) and now the best defence for Black is 20 ... Qc8 21 Nxa8 fxe5, but this position is still advantageous for White.

### 17 Re3!

17 Kg2 is not as strong: 17 ... Re8 18 Rad1 (or 18 f4 Qc8 19 fxe5 Qg4+ 20 Kf1 – 20 Kh1 Qf3+ leads to a draw by repetition – 20 ... Qxg5 21 Qe2 Rac8, placing the rook on the open file; the threat is now ... Qh4, hitting h2 and intending to bring the rook into the attack via c4) 18 ... Qc8! (defending the pawn and transferring the queen to the kingside) 19 Bh4 Qf5 20 Qe2 Rac8 21 Ne4

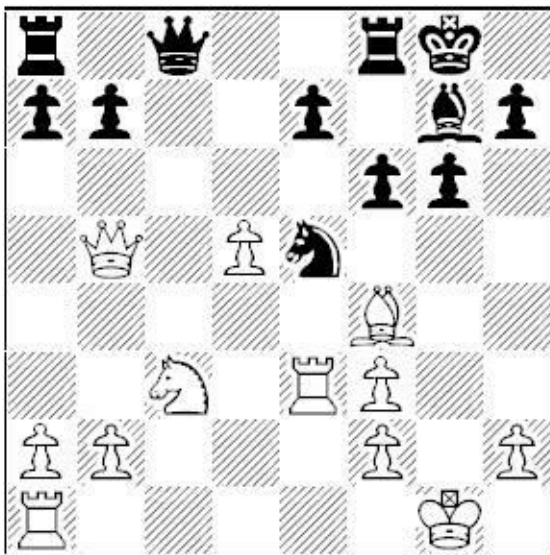


(V.Werner-H.Metz, German League 1997) and now instead of the passive 21 ... Nd7, better was 21 ... Qh5! 22 Bg3 Nc4 23 b3 Nb6!, transferring the knight to b6 where it attacks the weak d-pawn. Remember, if White were to exchange the d-pawn for the e-pawn then he would have eliminated Black's only major weakness and Black would be fine.

**17 ... f6!?**

Black shuts in the g7-bishop in order to support the all-important knight on e5. The natural follow up 17 ... Re8? 18 Bf4 Nd7 19 Qxb7 Nb6 20 Rd1 Rc8 21 d6! (21 Qxa7?! Nc4 22 Re2 Nxb2 is equal) 21 ... exd6 22 Rxd6 Qh4 23 Bg3 left White a clear pawn ahead in M.Dvoretsky-F.Izeta Txabarri, Terrassa 1996.

**18 Bf4 Qc8!**



Black defends the pawn whilst at the same time eyeing the light squares around White's king.

**19 Bg3**

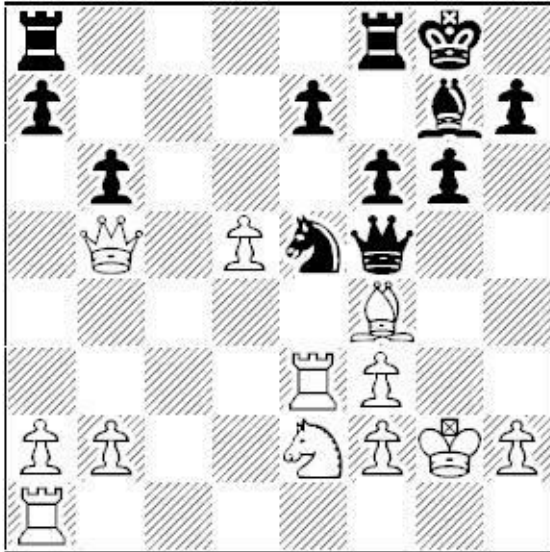
Or:

a) 19 Qb3 (White attempts to make use of the a2-g8 diagonal) 19 ... Kh8 20 Ne2 (with the aim of transferring the knight to the outpost e6; 20 Ne4 Qf5 21 Bxe5 fxe5 22 Qxb7 is equal) 20 ... Qd7 21 Nd4

Rfc8! 22 Bxe5 fxe5 23 Ne6 Bf6 24 Re4 a5! (preventing the rook from making a nuisance of itself on the queenside and getting ready to seize space) 25 a4 Rab8 26 Qd3 b5 (the position is only slightly better for White) 27 Qd2 Kg8 28 Kg2 (28 Qxa5? Qxd5 wins a piece) 28 ... bxa4 29 Rxa4 Rb6 30 Qd1 Rxb2 31 Rxa5 Bh4 32 Ra7 Qb5 and the position remains very complicated.

b) 19 Bxe5 was played in S.Berndt-D.Fuhrmann, German League 1997: 19 ... fxe5 20 Ne4 and now instead of the defensive 20 ... Rb8 Black should play actively with 20 ... a6! 21 Qb3 Kh8 22 d6 (or 22 Rd1 b5! – seizing space – 23 d6 exd6 24 Nxd6 Qd7 – there are no good discovered attacks – 25 Qd5 Ra7 and Black is okay) 22 ... exd6 23 Nxd6 Qd7 24 Rd1 b5 25 Rc3 Rf4 with an advantage for Black.

c) 19 Kg2 Qf5 20 Ne2 b6 (now that the e-pawn will be en prise if White takes on b7, Black must prevent this)



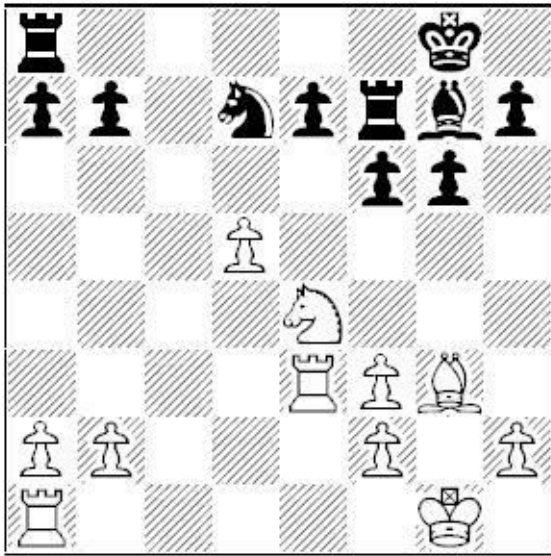
21 Rc1 Rac8 22 Rxc8 Rxc8 with a level position. Now 23 Bg3 Rc5 24 Qe8+ Bf8 25 Nd4 Qd7 26 Qxd7 Nxd7 27 Nc6 Kf7 28 Nd8+ Kg8 29 Nc6 leads to a draw, but there are plenty of pitfalls awaiting either side.

### 19 ... Rf7

The idea behind this move is that Black prepares to defend the e7-pawn horizontally with ... Rf7 so that he can exchange queens with ... Qd7.

19 ... g5? was played in O.Korneev-L.Moreda, Malaga 2001. The game continued 20 Bxe5 fxe5 21 Qb4 Rf7 22 Rd1 a5 23 Qg4 Qxg4+ 24 fxg4 and Black was saddled with a bad bishop in the ending.

### 20 Ne4 Qd7 21 Qxd7 Nxd7



This is an equal endgame. Black will target the d5-pawn and threatens ... f5-f4. Note that 22 Rc1? is bad because of 22 ... f5 23 Ng5 f4 24 Nxf7 fxe3 25 Ng5 (25 Rc7?? e2 26 Rc1 Kxf7) 25 ... Bxb2! 26 Rb1 (26 Rc7?? would of course be terrible, because of 26 ... e2!) 26 ... Bf6 27 Ne4 exf2+ 28 Kxf2 b6, leaving Black a pawn up.

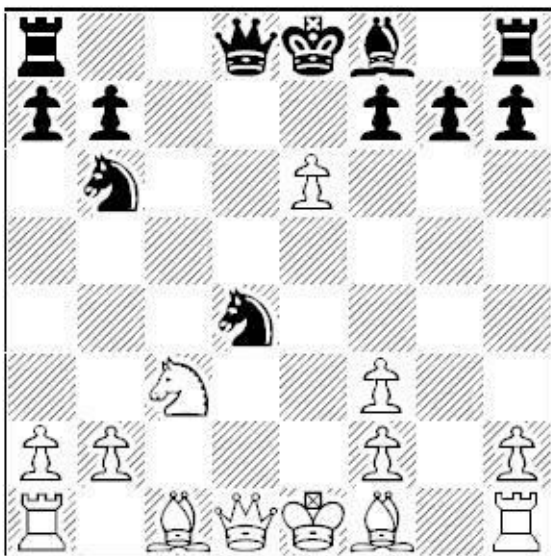
## B2) 11 Qd1

After this natural move, Black is more or less forced to take the game into tactical chaos, but as it is Black who is attacking, it is White who must be very careful.

### 11 ... e5!

The timid 11 ... Nf5 allows White to take control: 12 Bb5+ Nd7 13 0-0 g6 14 Re1 (aiming at the weak e7-pawn) 14 ... Bg7 15 Bg5 f6 16 d6 fxe6 17 dxe7 Qc7 18 Nd5 Qd6 19 Re6 Qc5 20 Nf6+! Kf7 21 Qxd7 Nxe7 22 Bc4 Kf8 (V.Cortinas Marti-F.Bedevia Rodriguez, correspondence 1996) and here White missed a win with 23 Rae1.

### 12 dxe6



### 12 ... fxe6

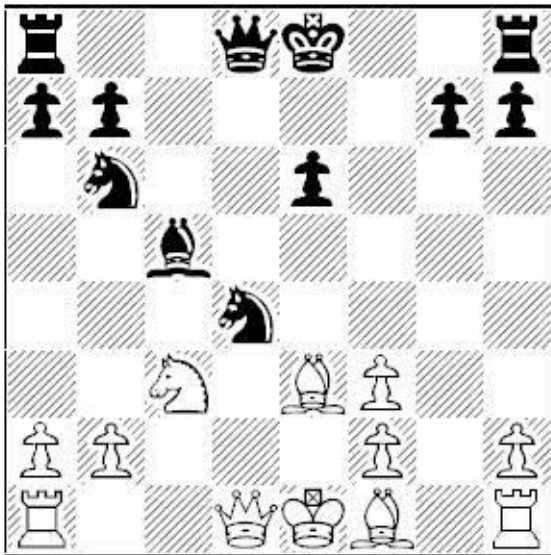
12 ... Bc5 is even messier than the text, but was successful in A.Greenfeld-A.Shirov, Budapest 1996: 13 exf7+ Kxf7 14 Be3 Re8 15 Bd3 Qh4! (threatening 16 ... Rxe3+) 16 Ne4 Rad8 17 Bxd4 Rxd4 18 0-0 Bd6 19 Qb3+ Kf8 20 Nxd6 Rxd6 and Shirov eventually won this complex position. White can keep it simpler with 13 Bb5+ Nxb5 14 exf7+ Kf8 15 Qxd8+ Rxd8 16 Nxb5 Kxf7 17 0-0, as in L.Van Wely-J.Lautier, Monaco (blindfold) 1998. Although Black is a pawn down, taking into consideration White's weak doubled pawns he is not worse.

### 13 Be3

An ambitious move: White tries to refute Black's play.

13 Bg2 is safer: 13 ... Be7 14 0-0 0-0 15 f4 Qd7 16 Qd3 Rad8 17 Qe4 Bb4! (Black targets the knight on c3 so that he can play ... Ne2+; the point is that after 18 Qxb7 Bxc3 19 bxc3 Ne2+ 20 Kh1 Nxc3 the game is totally level according to Jacob Aagaard) 18 Kh1 Qc6 19 Be3 Bxc3 20 bxc3 Qxe4 21 Bxe4 Ne2! (because of the weak white pawns, Black does not fear the two bishops) 22 Bxb7 Nxc3 23 Rfe1 Rf7! 24 Bg2 Nbd5 and Black has no problems, M.Al-Modiahki-M.Dzhumaev, Malaysia 1994.

### 13 ... Bc5!?



### 14 b4

Play becomes forced after this move. The game hangs on a thread for both players, but since it is Black who is attacking it is easier for us!

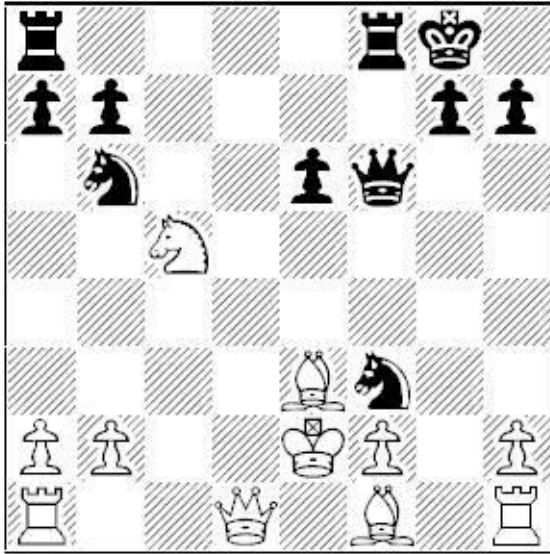
Let's look at the alternatives:

a) 14 Bg2 was at one stage considered best, but concrete analysis shows that this does not trouble Black. 14 ... Qh4! 15 0-0 Bd6 16 h3 Nf5 and:

a1) The dubious 17 Nb5?! was played in L.Winants-M.Adams, Wijk aan Zee 1995: 17 ... Rd8 18 Nxd6+ Rxd6 19 Qe2 Kf7. In his notes to the game, Michael Adams awards this move (the purpose of which is to connect the rooks and defend the e6-pawn at the same time) an exclamation mark and states that the position is already better for Black. He will have control of the centre and the two white bishops are only defenders, not attackers. After the game continuation 20 Rfd1 Nd5 21 Rd2 Rhd8, White's bishops are forced to perform a defensive role protecting their king, whilst the black pieces are optimally placed with the two black rooks about to dominate the centre. All in all, Black stands much better.

a2) 17 Qb3 0-0 18 Qxe6+ Kh8 19 Qe4 Qf6 20 Qg4 Qf7 21 f4 Nc4 (V.Malaniuk-L.Yudasin, Soviet Ch. 1991) is equal: White's open king and Black's active pieces provide enough compensation for the pawn.

b) 14 Ne4 is another possibility, although it has never been played before. After 14 ... Bb4+ 15 Nc3 e5 16 a3 Bxc3+ 17 bxc3 Nf5 18 Qxd8+ Rxd8 Black does not have any problems. The piece sacrifice 14 ... 0-0!? is also interesting: 15 Nxc5 Nxf3+ 16 Ke2 Qf6.



Black attacks the b2-pawn and eyes f2; he also threatens ... Rad8 followed by ... Nd4+. White's position is unenviable, as the following variations illustrate:

b1) 17 Bg2? shows just how dangerous the sacrifice is: 17 ... Qxb2+ 18 Kf1 Nc4! 19 Bxf3 Nxe3+ 20 fxe3 Rad8 21 Qe2 Rd2 and Black is winning.

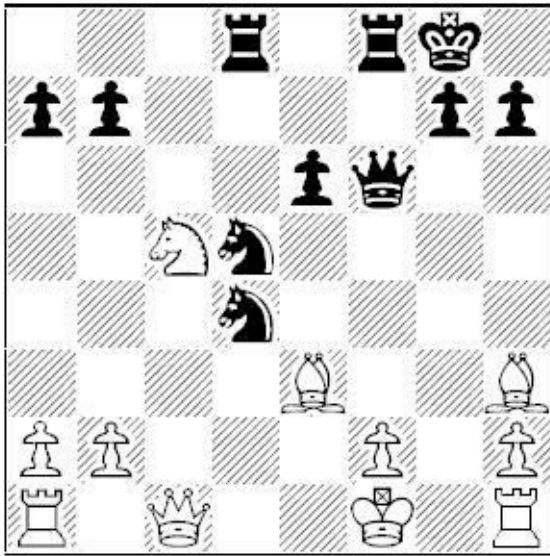
b2) 17 Qc2 Nd4+! 18 Bxd4 Qxd4 (Black threatens both to capture the f2-pawn and pin the knight on c5) 19 Ke1 Rac8. White must return the piece with a losing position.

b3) 17 Ne4?? loses immediately to 17 ... Qxb2+ 18 Nd2 Qb5+.

b4) 17 Nd3 Nc4 18 Qc2 Rac8 19 Qb3 Nd4+ 20 Bxd4 Qxd4 and it is difficult to meet 21 ... Qe4+ without any material loss: 21 Bg2 Qg4+ 22 Kf1 Nd2+ wins for Black.

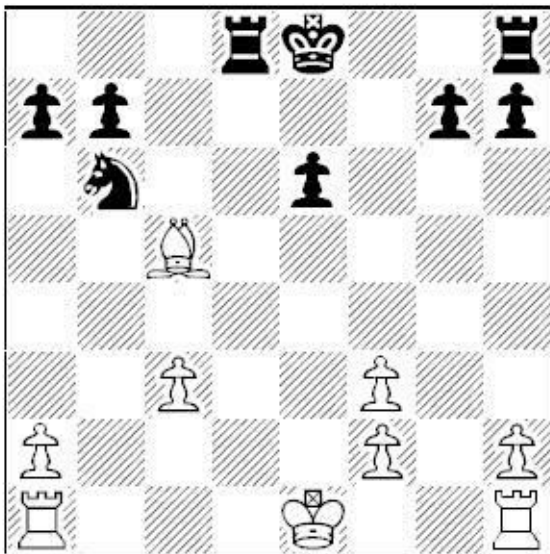
b5) 17 Rb1 Rad8 18 Qc1 Qf5 (planning both ... Rc8 and ... Nd4+) 19 Bg2 Nd4+ 20 Bxd4 (20 Kf1 Nc2 21 Be4 Rd1+!! – this move destroys White – 22 Qxd1 Nxe3+ is crushing) 20 ... Rxd4 21 f3 Rc4 and Black is winning.

b6) 17 Bh3 Rad8 18 Qc1 Nd4+ 19 Kf1 Nd5 (with the threat of ... Qf3)



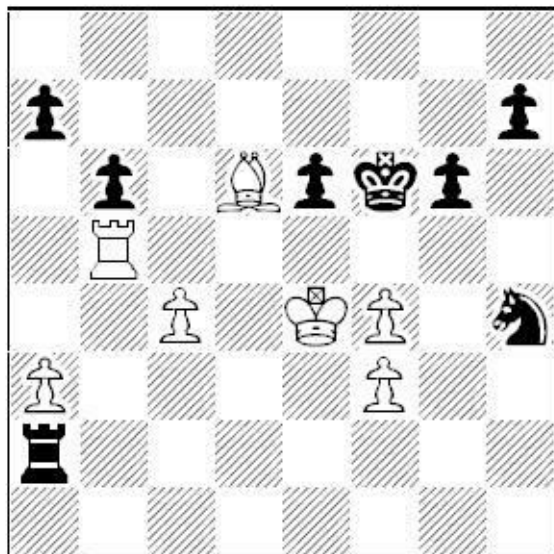
20 Bg2 Nf5 and now 21 Bg5?? fails to 21 ... Ng3+, checkmating.

c) After 14 Bb5+? Black can look forward to a very pleasant endgame because of the weak f-pawns. White is only playing for two results: a draw or a loss! A recent game of mine, A.Rudolf-J.Houska, British League 2007, continued 14 ... Nxb5! (14 ... Kf7 is also possible, but the text is simplest) 15 Bxc5?! (15 Qxd8+ Rxd8 16 Nxb5! is preferable for Black, but a better chance for White) 15 ... Nxc3 16 Qxd8+?! (A bad practical decision; after 16 bxc3 I was planning to play 16 ... Qc7) 16 ... Rxd8 17 bxc3.



White, with six weak pawn islands, really has very few chances here. Black will now aim to steer the game into a rook endgame where the weaknesses of White's pawns will really tell: 17 ... Nc4!? (17 ... Na4!? may be stronger: 18 Bb4 b6 19 Rg1 a5 20 Ba3 Rg8? 21 Rg4, G.Todorovic-D.Kosic, Tivat 1995, and now instead of 21 ... Nxc3, stronger is 21 ... b5) 18 Rd1? (the risky-looking 18 Bxa7! was the only way for White to stay in the game: 18 ... 0-0 19 Rb1 Rf7 20 Be3 Ra8 21 0-0 Rxa2 22 Rfd1 h6 and Black is better, but with active pieces White has more chances of holding the position) 18 ... Rxd1+ 19 Kxd1 Kf7 20 f4 Rd8+ 21 Kc1 b6 22 Bd4 Rd5 (Black gets ready to dart between the two weak pawns on a2 and h2) 23 Kc2 Ra5 24 Kd3 Nd6 (Black's next task is to remove the bishop from its central post and slowly creep up the board) 25 Be5 Nf5 26 Ra1 Ne7 27 c4 Ng6 28 Bd6 Kf6 29 a3 Rh5 30 Rh1 Kf5 31 Ke3 Rh3+

32 f3 Nh4 33 Rf1 Rxh2?! (33 ... Ng2+ was better) 34 Rg1! Ng2+ 35 Kd4 g6 36 Rb1 (now Black must play accurately) 36 ... Nh4 37 Rb5+ Kf6 38 Ke4 Ra2 (the start of a plan to checkmate the king in the middle of the board)



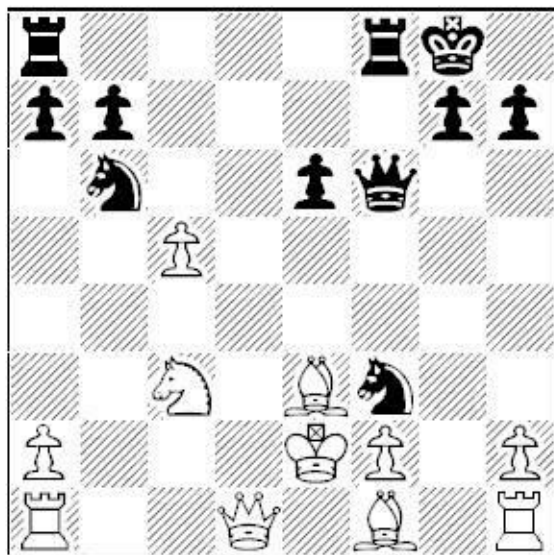
39 c5 Nf5! 40 Be5+ Ke7 41 cxb6 Rxa3! 42 Bd4 Nd6+ 43 Ke5 Nc4+ 44 Ke4 Nd2+ 45 Ke5 Nxf3+ 46 Ke4 Nd2+ 47 Ke5 Nc4+ 48 Ke4 Nd6+ 49 Ke5 axb6 50 Bc5 bxc5 51 Rxc5 Ra5 0-1.

**14 ... 0-0**

Sacrificing a piece for a dangerous attack.

**15 bxc5 Nxf3+ 16 Ke2 Qf6!**

Attacking the knight, and intending to follow up with ... Rad8.



**17 cxb6!**

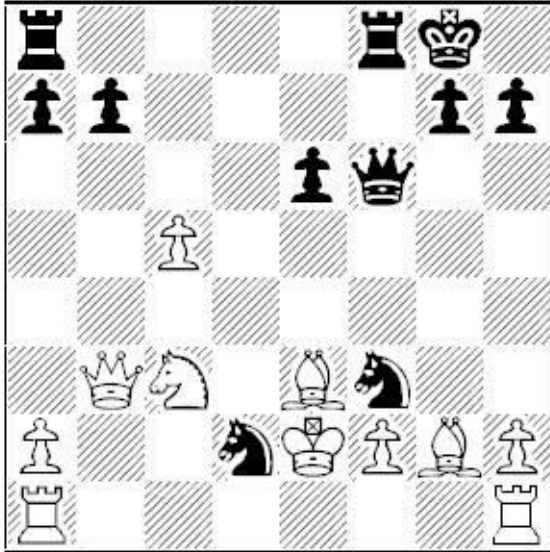
White must play accurately here:

a) 17 Rc1 Rad8 18 Ne4?? (a big blunder) 18 ... Qb2+ 19 Bd2 Qb5+ 20 Ke3 Nd5 mate!, S.Lalic-J.Wilson, Lloyds Bank Masters, London 1987. White had to give up the queen with 18 cxb6, e.g. 18 ... Rxd1 19 Kxd1 Qf5 (preventing the king running to safety) 20 bxa7 Rd8+ 21 Ke2 Qg4 22 h3 Ng1+ 23 Ke1 Nf3+ with a draw by perpetual check.

b) 17 Bg2 Nc4! (recommended by GM Skembris) and now we have the following:

b1) 18 Qd3? was played in J.Buenafe Moya-P.Aymerich Rosell, Valencia 2003, and now Black should have played 18 ... Nfe5 19 Qd4 (after 19 Qc2?? Nxe3 20 fxe3 Qf2+ 21 Kd1 Rad8+ 22 Kc1 Qxe3+ Black has a devastating attack) 19 ... Rad8, forcing the queen to abandon its protection of f2 – 20 Qe4 Rd2+!

b2) 18 Qb3 Ncd2! (the knight, immune from capture due to ... Nd4+, attacks the white queen whilst simultaneously defending its brother on f3)



19 Qb4 Rad8 20 Rad1 Qg6 (threatening to checkmate with the queen on d3, and also attacking the bishop on g2) 21 Rxd2 Nxd2. Black has a rook for two minor pieces but what matters in these types of position is king safety. Whilst White's king is exposed to the elements Black's is snug behind some pawns. What Black should not do is just exchange pieces as this will rid him of the initiative.

**17 ... Qxc3!**

With the threat of ... Qb2+

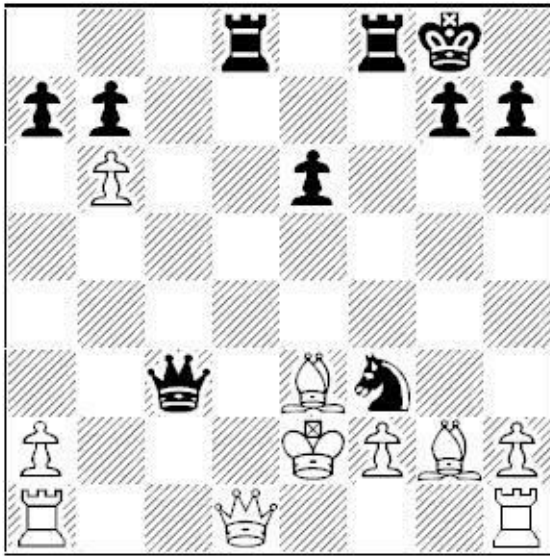
**18 Bg2**

Or:

a) 18 Rc1 Qb2+ 19 Qc2 Nd4+ 20 Bxd4 Qxd4 21 f3 Rxf3 22 Kxf3 Rf8+ 23 Ke2 with a perpetual check.

b) 18 Bh3 Qe5 (threatening ... Qb5+) 19 Rb1 (19 bxa7?? Qb5+ 20 Qd3 Qb2+ 21 Bd2 Nxd2 22 Qxd2 Rxf2+ and Black wins) 19 ... Rad8 20 Qxd8 Rxd8 21 Kxf3 Rf8+ 22 Ke2 Qh5+ 23 Kd3 Qd5+ and Black has at least a draw. Or 20 Qc1 Nd4+ 21 Kf1 Rc8 (Black continues to hound White; notice how every move contains a threat!) 22 Qd2 Qe4! and Black is winning.

**18 ... Rad8**



### 19 Bxf3

19 Qc1?? fails to 19 ... Qd3 mate. Perhaps White's best is 19 Rc1! Qb2+ 20 Qc2 Rd2+! and now:

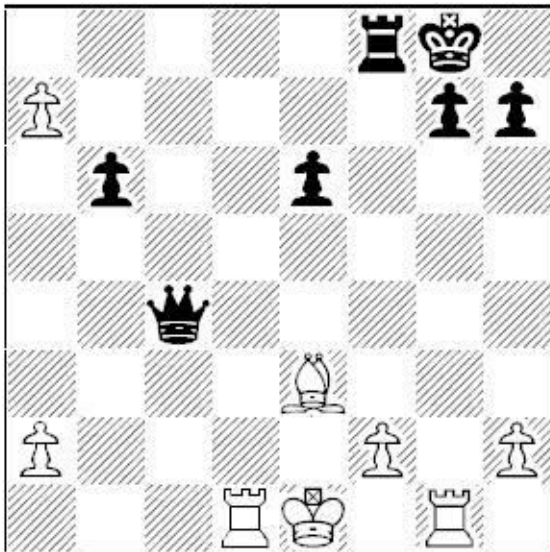
a) 21 Bxd2 Nd4+ 22 Kd1 Nxc2 23 Rxc2 Qxb6 and the situation is very unclear. White is material ahead yet his king is very, very exposed. Black certainly has an easier job than White.

b) 21 Qxd2 Nxd2 22 Bxd2 Qxb6 23 f4 is more fun to play for Black, as White does not have a safe haven for his king.

### 19 ... Qc4+ 20 Ke1 Rxd1+ 21 Rxd1 Rxf3 22 bxa7 Rf8

The exposed king makes life very difficult for White.

### 23 Rg1 b6!



Black will aim to pick up the a-pawn with a nice position. White's pieces are not coordinated enough to be effective, and Black is winning after lines such as 24 Rd7? Qb4+ 25 Rd2 (25 Ke2 Qb5+ 26 Rd3 Ra8 and White drops the pawn) 25 ... Ra8 26 Ke2 Rxa7.

## Summary

In this sharp line Black quickly exchanges his light-squared bishop for the f3-knight to ruin White's

kingside pawn formation. Black should play actively and where possible blockade the d4-pawn. In Line B1 Black gets excellent counterplay against the weak pawns if he blocks off white's activity on the e-file. 11 Qd1 (Line B2) leads to very sharp, tactical play. Black must be prepared to sacrifice a piece to displace the white king, take control of the d-file, and target the weak f2- and b2-pawns.

# Chapter Five

## Panov-Botvinnik Attack: 6 Bg5

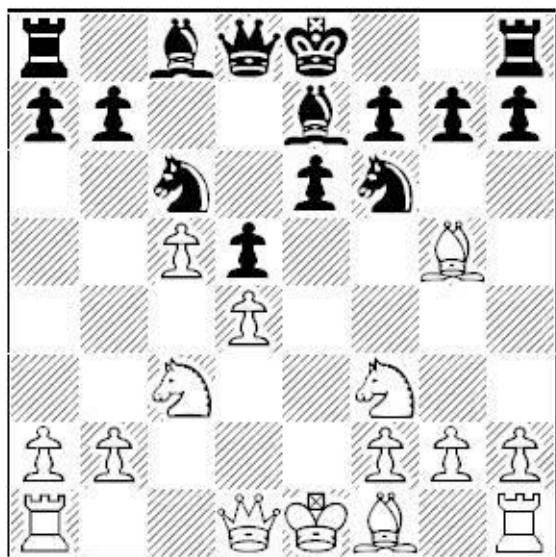
1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 c4 Nf6 5 Nc3 Nc6 6 Bg5

6 Bg5, piling pressure on d5, is Botvinnik's idea. With this move White seeks complications and a sharp middlegame. With 6 ... e6 Black doesn't give White what he wants, and plays to reach a solid position. White has two options: the most popular is an early push with c4-c5; the alternative is to reach an IQP position. We will consider each in turn.

### White Plays c4-c5

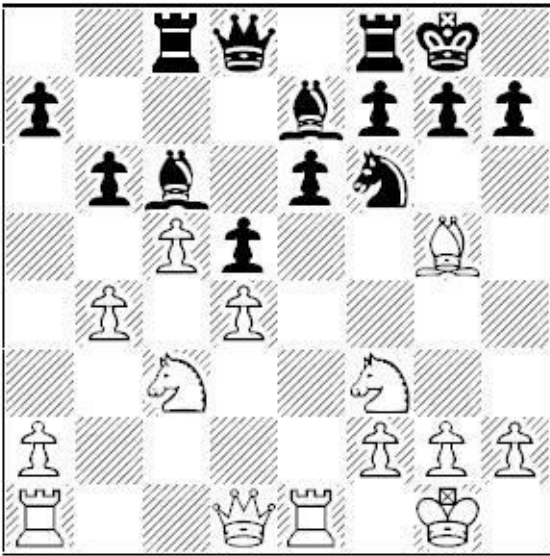
1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 c4 Nf6 5 Nc3 Nc6 6 Bg5 e6 7 Nf3 Be7 8 c5

Black should be aware of some positional considerations underlining this variation. White has a firm control of the e5-square and will often aim to expand rapidly on the queenside by marching the pawns up the board. It is important to recognize that, unusually for the Panov, White has the better pawn structure so Black should avoid exchanging into an endgame if White's pawn structure remains intact.



Looking at the position after 8 c5, we see why this is a good pawn structure for White: the d4-pawn prevents Black from advancing his kingside pawn majority, whereas White's queenside majority is very mobile. Therefore it is crucial that Black seeks to break up the queenside (with either ... b6 or ... e5), arranges play against the white king, or targets the soft d4-pawn (or sometimes a mixture of all three). One point that I cannot stress enough is that Black *must* take active measures to avoid any cramping bind.

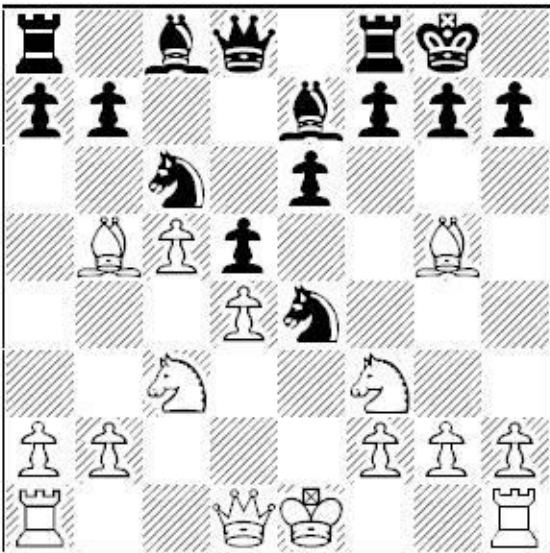
### White's Ideal Position



**P.Nielsen-S.Milliet**  
 Evry 2004

This is an example of how things can go wrong. The simple reason is that Black did not sense any danger and did not play actively enough. White has a fantastic pawn structure on the queenside, one that threatens to overrun Black completely. As Black has left it too late to start any central counterplay all she can do is wait for White to carry on improving his position.

**Avoiding the Bind with the Knight Hop 9 ... Ne4**

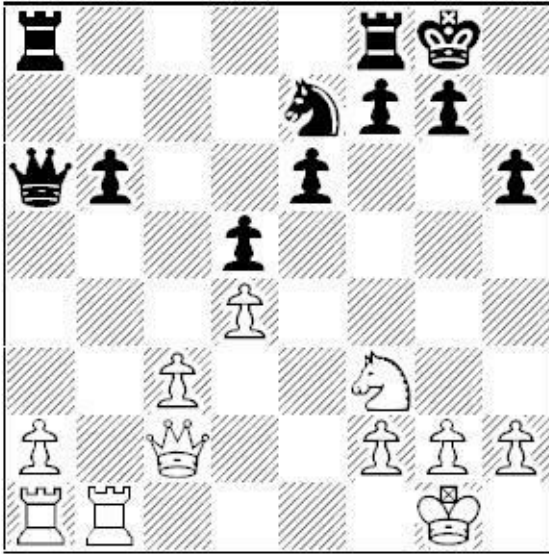


9 ... Ne4 is probably the most important move of this variation, because to some extent it is not that natural. The aim of this move is threefold: to relieve spatial problems by exchanging a set of minor pieces; to add more power to a ... b6 pawn break as the knight attacks the c5-square; and also by attacking the white knight on c3, to make it more difficult for White to meet ... b6 with b4.

Another, less common idea is to use the knight as a spearhead, as in Stonewall systems, to begin a

kingside offensive. Such plans will usually involve the pawn push ... f5 and a bishop transfer from c8 to h5.

## Black's Ideal Position



**K.Klundt-R.Dautov**

Bad Wiessee 2001

This is an excellent position for Black. White has two pawn weaknesses as opposed to Black's one, the b6-pawn, which can be easily defended. In addition Black has the fantastic outpost on c4 for the knight.

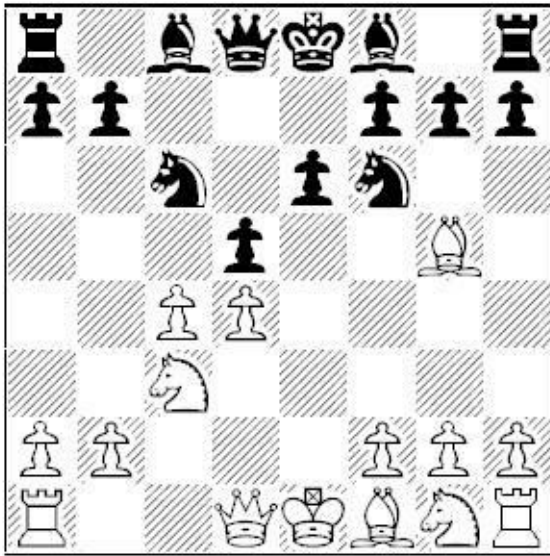
## Weak Points

For White: the d4-pawn; c5 can be weak if ... b7-b6 is successful.

For Black: the e5-square; White has extra space on the queenside flank.

## Looking at the Theory

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 c4 Nf6 5 Nc3 Nc6 6 Bg5 e6



### 7 Nf3

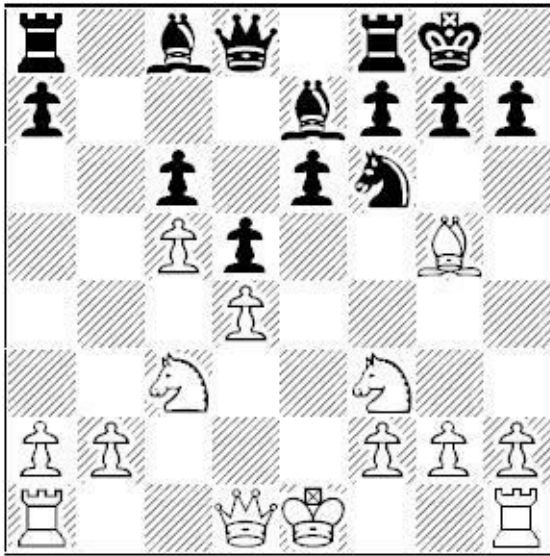
White has two alternatives:

a) 7 cxd5 exd5 only gives White equality: 8 Bb5 (White can win a pawn with 8 Bxf6 Qxf6 9 Nxd5, but 9 ... Qe6+ 10 Qe2 Bd6 11 0-0-0 0-0 12 Qxe6 Bxe6 13 Nc3 Nb4! 14 a3 Nd5 offers Black very fast development and active play; or 8 Nf3 Be7 9 Be2 0-0 10 0-0 h6 11 Bh4 Re8 and in this symmetrical position, Black has no problems) 8 ... Be7 9 Nge2 0-0 10 0-0 Bg4 (provoking a weakness) 11 f3 Be6 and now:

a1) 12 Bxc6 bxc6 13 Na4 h6 14 Bh4 Re8 15 Rc1 Rc8 16 Qd3 Qa5 (preventing the knight from jumping into c5 too easily) 17 b3 Ba3 18 Rce1 Nd7 19 Nf4 Qb5 20 Qc2 c5 21 Nxe6 fxe6 22 Qg6 (V.Liberzon-A.Zaitsev, Moscow 1969) 22 ... Qc6 and Black has a perfectly good position.

a2) 12 Nf4 is not really such a big concern for Black, as the d4-pawn now becomes an easy target: 12 ... Rc8 13 Nxe6 (13 Re1? loses a pawn after 13 ... Nxd4!) 13 ... fxe6 14 Kh1 Qb6 (Black now focuses all his efforts on winning the d4-pawn) 15 Be3 a6 16 Bd3 Qxb2 17 Na4 Qa3 and Black has safely picked up a pawn.

b) 7 c5 usually just transposes into the main line. However, there is a variation that one should be aware of: 7 ... Be7 8 Bb5 0-0 9 Bxc6 (9 Nf3 is the main line) 9 ... bxc6 10 Nf3.

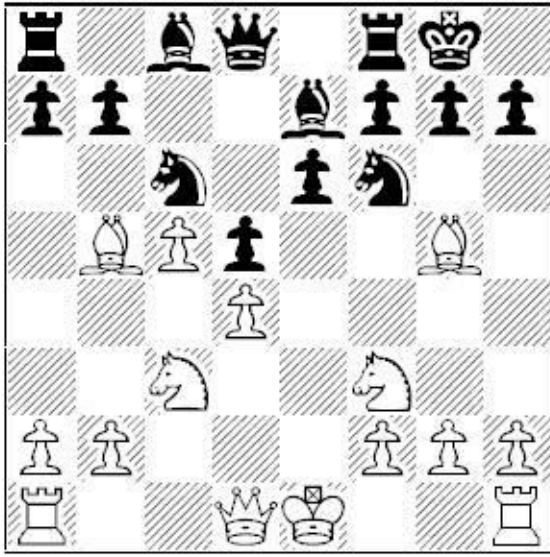


According to old analysis by Botvinnik and Boleslavsky, Black should play 10 ... Ne4, but I personally prefer 10 ... Nd7 with the aim of breaking through with ... e5 (10 ... Ba6 is bad because of 11 Ne5 followed by Qa4). Following 10 ... Nd7 White has a choice:

b1) Against 11 Bf4 Black has the powerful reply 11 ... Ba6!, making it awkward for White to castle: 12 Qa4 Qc8 13 0-0-0 f6! (the ... e5 pawn break is a powerful idea for Black) 14 Rhe1 e5 15 dxe5 Nxc5! 16 Qc2 Qg4 17 Bg3 f5 and Black stood well in B.Kristjansson-O.Magnusson, Reykjavik 1970.

b2) 11 Bxe7 Qxe7 12 0-0 (12 Qa4 e5 13 0-0 Bb7 14 Nxe5 Nxe5 15 dxe5 Qxc5 and Black has equalised, if not more) 12 ... e5 13 Re1 e4 14 Qa4 Qe6 15 Ng5 Qg6 was good for Black in H.Roesner-M.Frohberg, Untergrombach 1999.

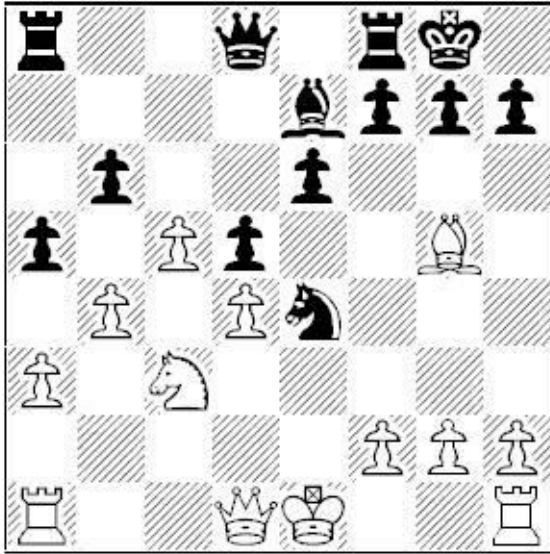
**7 ... Be7 8 c5 0-0 9 Bb5!**



By far the best move, the aim of which is twofold: to further control the e5-square by attacking the knight, and to prevent any undermining ... b6 pawn break. At the same time White may saddle Black with a backward c-pawn by exchanging the bishop for the knight; this may prove to be an easy target for White to attack.

White has two main alternatives:

a) If 9 Bd3, Black should begin undermining White's queenside structure immediately, as White will have to make a second move with the light-squared bishop to safeguard the c-pawn: 9 ... b6! 10 Bb5 Bd7 11 Bxc6 Bxc6 12 Ne5 Rc8 13 Nxc6 Rxc6 14 Qa4 Rc8 15 b4 a5 16 a3 Ra8 17 Qd1 Ne4! (an important idea that we'll see again: Black exchanges pieces to lessen any spatial difficulties he may have)



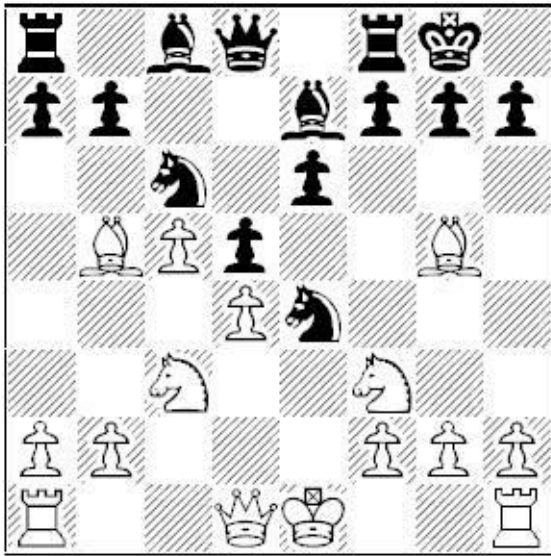
18 Bxe7 Qxe7 19 Na4 axb4 20 Nxb6 Rxa3 21 Rxa3 bxa3 22 0-0 and Black had reached a good position in S.Biro-P.Kiss, Eger 1996.

b) 9 Rc1 is another possibility: 9 ... Ne4! (the ideas are the same for Black though!) 10 Bxe7 Qxe7 and now:

b1) 11 Be2 Rd8 12 0-0 e5 13 dxe5 Be6 14 Re1 Nxc5 is equal. Or 12 Qc2 Nxc3 13 Qxc3 e5! (Black capitalizes on the fact that by not playing Bb5, White has loosened his grip on e5) 14 Qe3 e4 15 Nd2 Qf6 16 Nb3 Ne7 17 0-0 Nf5 18 Qc3 Bd7 (I.Efimov-E.Arlandi, Asti 1996) and the game is roughly level although easier to play with Black, who has the straightforward idea of concentrating his forces on the kingside.

b2) 11 Bb5 is less popular, as it allows Black to begin immediate action in the centre: 11 ... Nxc3 12 Rxc3 e5! 13 dxe5 Nxe5 14 Nxe5 (14 Re3? would be a very bad mistake: 14 ... Nxf3+ 15 Qxf3 Qxc5 and Black is winning) 14 ... Qxe5+ 15 Qe2 Qg5 16 0-0 d4 17 Rcc1 Be6 18 a3 Rad8 and the game is roughly level, P.Charbonneau-I.Miladinovic, Montreal 2000. Black will play down the e- and d-files where possible and use the d-pawn as a clamp.

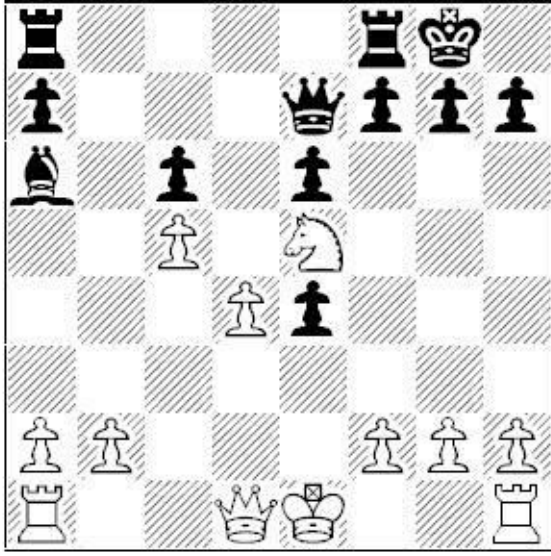
**9 ... Ne4!**



I cannot stress enough the importance of this move; it underpins Black's approach to the entire variation. The reasoning behind 9 ... Ne4 is *space*. Put simply, Black does not have enough space to develop in a normal way. Doing so will simply reach White's ideal position as seen in the introduction: 9 ... Bd7 10 0-0 Rc8 11 Re1 b6 12 Bxc6 Bxc6 13 b4, P.Nielsen-S.Milliet, Evry 2004. Therefore Black must strike, as the proverbial saying goes, 'while the iron is hot', by first of all grabbing some space of his own and secondly by exchanging pieces.

**10 Bxe7**

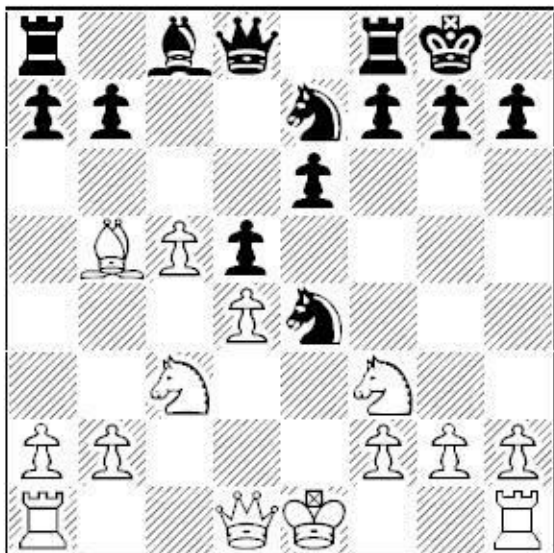
10 Nxe4 is not promising for White after 10 ... dxe4 11 Bxc6 bxc6 12 Bxe7 Qxe7 13 Ne5 Ba6!.



Black must play this move otherwise his position would be terrible. He should be prepared to gambit a pawn to prevent White from castling short (although White would be quite foolhardy to accept!): 14 Qc2 (14 Qg4 Qb7 15 0-0-0 Rab8, R.Letelier Martner-H.Pfeiffer, Dubrovnik Olympiad 1950; 14 Nxc6 Qb7! and Black wins) 14 ... Qb7 15 0-0-0 f6 16 Nc4 Qb4 17 Nd6 Bd3! 18 Rxd3 (otherwise the bishop would be a real power player) 18 ... exd3 19 Qxd3 Rab8 20 Qc3 Qa4 21 Kb1 Rb4! 22 Qh3?? (overlooking a stunning tactic) 22 ... Rxb2+!! (Black demolishes the white defences) 23 Kxb2 Rb8+ and White resigned in D.Zagorskis-D.Fridman, Ruhrgebiet 1998.

## 10 ... Nxe7

The most popular continuation in practice. Black's plan will be to play ... b7-b6 to try and break up White's queenside. 10 ... Nxe7 has been played by Grandmaster Dautov amongst others, although theory has traditionally preferred 10 ... Qxe7. An example: 11 0-0 Nxc3 12 bxc3 Bd7 13 Rb1 Rfc8 14 Qe2 Na5 (Black wishes to eventually place a knight on c4) 15 Ne5 Bxb5 16 Rxb5 b6 17 Rfb1 Nc6 18 Nd3 bxc5 19 Nxc5 and White was better in J.Friedel-G.Kacheishvili, Las Vegas 2006.

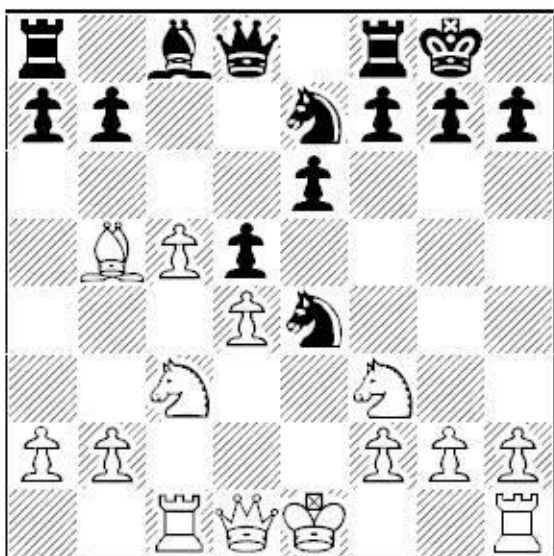


After 10 ... Nxe7 White has two main continuations:

**A: 11 Rc1**

**B: 11 Qc2**

**A) 11 Rc1**



## 11 ... Bd7!?

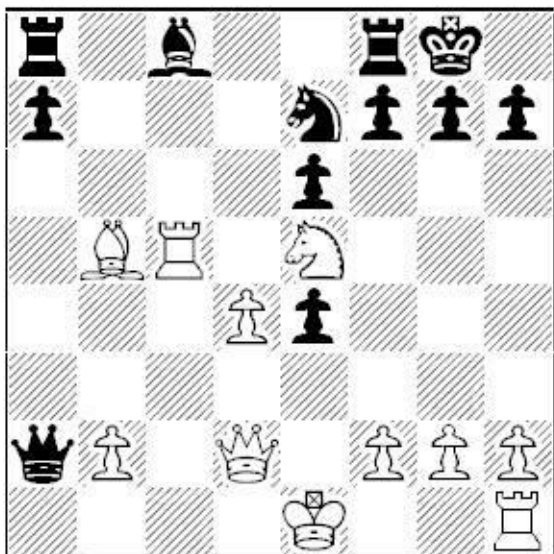
Offering the bad bishop for exchange. As a generalization, when deciding whether or not you should exchange a set of pieces I recommend that you play what IM Robert Bellin calls 'the game of

equivalents'. The rule is simple: just assess the value of your piece in comparison to the value of its counterpart.

Undermining the c-pawn with 11 ... b6!? is the main line. For example:

a) The logical 12 b4 is of course met by 12 ... a5 13 a3 axb4 14 axb4 bxc5 15 dxc5 (15 bxc5? would be very bad: 15 ... Nxc3 16 Rxc3 Qa5 – oops! – and White has chucked a piece) 15 ... Nxc3 16 Rxc3 Rb8. This was assessed by Schwarz to be slightly better for Black. Continuing the analysis with 17 Qe2 Ng6 18 0-0 Qf6 19 Rfc1 e5, I would have to agree.

b) 12 Nxe4 dxe4 13 Ne5 bxc5 14 Rxc5 Qa5+ 15 Qd2 Qxa2 ...

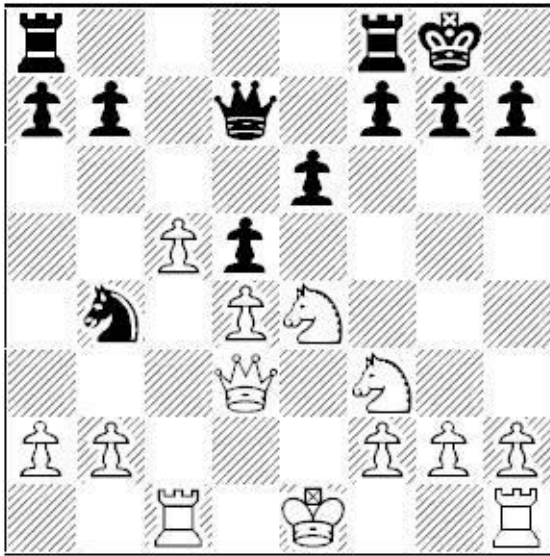


... and according to GM Nigel Davies it is not clear what compensation White has for the pawn. Pachman assessed 15 ... Qxd2+ as bad for Black, and to me this seems correct. Black is just too passive. Of course Black can maybe hold on for the draw but things look grim after 16 Kxd2 Rd8 17 Nc6.

c) 12 Bd3 f5!? is an interesting idea by Khenkin. Black aims to support the knight as in a Stonewall variation, with a pawn fortress: 13 b4 a5 14 a3 axb4 15 axb4 bxc5 16 dxc5 Nc6 (targeting the b4-pawn; Black hopes that White will overextend his queenside) 17 b5 Nb4 18 c6?? (this is a big blunder) 18 ... Ra3 19 Bxe4 fxe4 20 0-0 (20 Nd4 Nd3+; 20 Ne5 Qg5 and White must lose a piece) 20 ... exf3 21 Qd4 Qg5 22 g3 Qf5 0-1 M.Kolasinski-I.Khenkin, Lubniewice 1998.

### 12 Bd3

According to my database 12 Bxd7 has never been played before, and indeed from a practical point of view it does not make much sense as White trades off one of Black's worst pieces for one of his more active ones. However, whilst not 'correct' based solely on this thinking, it is a valid move and one that should be investigated: 12 ... Qxd7 13 Qd3 Nc6! 14 Nxe4 Nb4! (this little zwischenzug saves the day):



a) 15 Qc3 dxe4 16 Qxb4 exf3 17 gxf3 Qd5 18 Qb3 Qxd4 19 Qxb7 (allowing Black to bring his rooks into the game) 19 ... Rab8 20 Qe4 Qxe4+ 21 fxe4 Rxb2 22 c6 Rc8 and Black is fine – the c-pawn is not dangerous.

b) 15 Qe2 dxe4 16 Qxe4 Nxa2 (Black recovers the pawn) 17 Ra1 Nb4 18 0-0. Black has a nice outpost on d5 to place his pieces and a very easy target on d4 to aim at.

c) 15 Nf6+ gxf6 is no disaster for Black: the doubled f-pawns protect the important e5-square and open up the g-file, something that is to Black's benefit.

### 12 ... f5!

Black sets about establishing a stronghold in the centre. He should recognize that it is White who holds all the cards when it comes to the queenside, so he should not act on that side (we are simply following the principle of never advancing pawns where you are weakest). Instead Black should look for White's weaknesses.

Black has two modes of action that can be combined quite nicely. We can see that the pawn on d4 is a little bit of a soft touch. So, where possible, Black should continue to apply pressure on this point. Secondly, we must consider 'which is our best piece?' The answer to that is the knight on e4: it blocks the e-file and is generally a thorn in White's side. Where possible Black should play to maintain the knight on this square. Our third ambition is to begin operations where we are strongest, which is on the kingside – Black's pieces are poised for a kingside attack. Here we can utilize some ideas used in the Stonewall: the rook lift from f8-f6-h6, and bringing the light-squared bishop into play via e8 to h5.

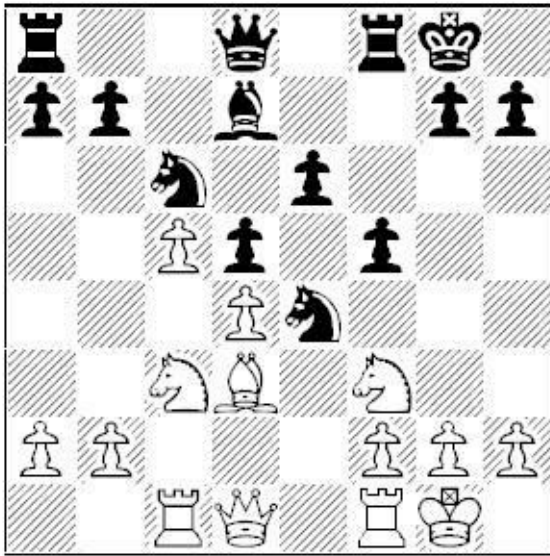
### 13 0-0

Or 13 Ne5 Nc6 14 Nxc6 bxc6 15 0-0 (15 f3? is too hasty and it loses to the old trick 15 ... Qh4+ 16 g3 Nxg3) 15 ... Rb8 (placing a rook on the open b-file) 16 Qc2 Qh4 and now:

a) 17 Ne2 Rf6 18 g3 Qh6 is very double-edged, but Black should not stand worse. His plan is to bring the d7-bishop into the game via e8 to h5 and to continue attacking on the kingside.

b) 17 f3 Nf6 18 Ne2 g5!? (Black begins aggressive measures to open up the kingside) 19 b3 g4 20 Qd2 gxf3 21 Rxf3 Ne4! (this is the whole point: Black secures back the e4-square) 22 Qe3 Kh8 23 Rh3 and again the situation is complex.

### 13 ... Nc6



Putting pressure on the d4-pawn.

### 14 a3

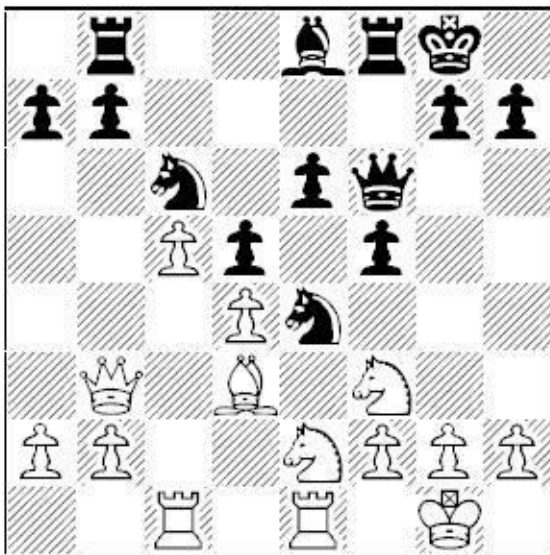
Attempting to implement a queenside pawn storm.

14 Nd2 Nxd2 15 Qxd2 Nxd4 is a good extra pawn for Black, but 14 Re1 is a sensible alternative:

14 ... Be8 15 Qb3 Qf6! (Black targets the d4-pawn) and now:

a) 16 Qxb7 does not promise White anything after 16 ... Rb8! 17 Qa6 Rxb2 (Black picks up the b-pawn and now White has to solve the problem of defending the d4-pawn) 18 Nd1 Rb8 and I prefer Black, whose position is more harmonious than White's. He will continue his plan on the kingside but now he has the open b-file to exert further pressure.

b) 16 Ne2 Rb8 with a further branch:



b1) 17 Qa3, getting ready to advance the queenside pawns, is met by 17 ... Bh5!. The bishop has escaped from its own pawns and now exerts heavy pressure down the h5-d1 diagonal.

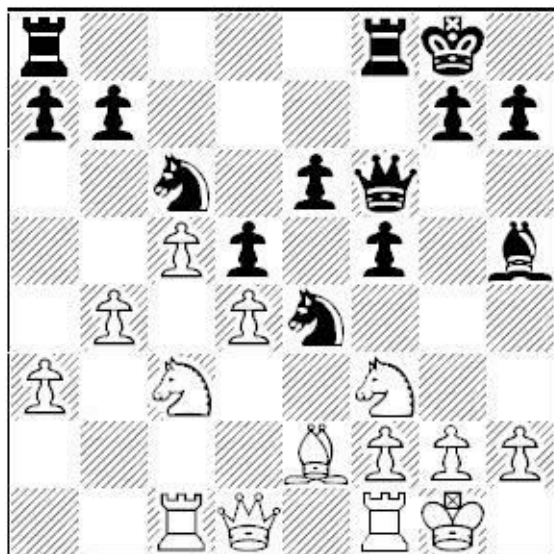
b2) 17 Qa4 Bh5! (now White has big problems defending the d4-pawn) 18 Ne5 Nxe5 19 dxe5 Qxe5 20 Ng3 Bf7 21 f3 Nxc5! and White has no good way to attack the black knight: 22 Qh4 Qxb2! 23 Rxc5 Qd2; or 22 Qa3 Qd4+, picking up a piece.

b3) 17 Nf4 does not work either: 17 ... Nxd4 18 Nxd4 Qxd4 19 Nxe6 Qxf2+ 20 Kh1 Rf6, intending 21 c6 Ng3+ 22 hxg3 Rh6 mate.

**14 ... Be8**

As in the Stonewall, the solution to Black's problems lies in liberating the light-squared bishop.

**15 b4 Bh5! 16 Be2 Qf6**



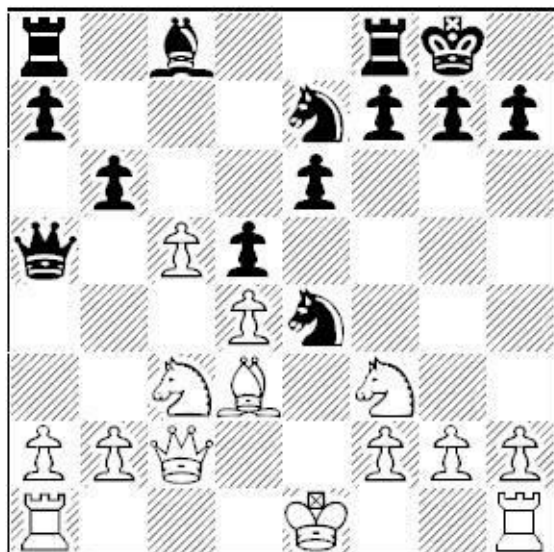
Black continues heaping more pressure on the weak d4-pawn.

**17 Ne5 Bxe2 18 Nxe2 Nxe5 19 dxe5 Qxe5 20 f3 Ng5 21 Qd2 Qf6 22 b5**

Black is a pawn up. It's true that the situation remains double-edged, but although White has some compensation for the pawn, Black does not stand in any way worse.

**B) 11 Qc2 Qa5 12 Bd3 b6!**

This is the most accurate move order since it limits White's possibilities. 12 ... Nxc3 13 bxc3 h6 14 0-0?! b6 returns to the main text, but 14 Rb1! prevents Black from arranging an effective ... b6 break and after 14 ... Qc7 15 0-0 b6 16 cxb6 axb6 White is better. With the move order I am recommending, this possibility is eliminated.



### 13 0-0

13 Bxe4? is weaker. After 13 ... dxe4 14 Qxe4 Ba6 15 Ng5 Ng6 16 h4 bxc5 we have:

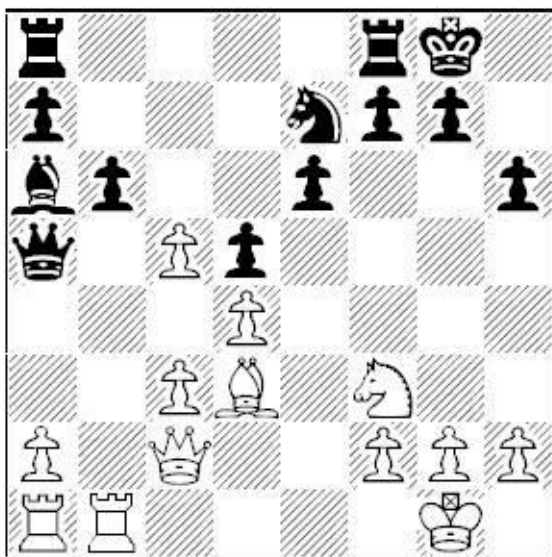
a) 17 h5 cxd4 18 hxg6 (tactics such as 18 Nxf7 do not work: 18 ... dxc3 19 b4 Qd8 20 hxg6 Qd2 mate) 18 ... Qxg5! (Black should eliminate the dangerous knight) 19 gxh7+ Kh8 20 Qxd4 Rfd8 21 Qe3 Qxg2 22 Qe4 Qg5 and Black has the initiative.

b) Castling queenside does not solve White's problems either: 17 0-0-0 cxd4! 18 Rxd4 Rac8 19 Rh3 and now instead of 19 ... h6, as played in E.Virnik-E.Chasovnikova, Mureck 1998, Black could have improved her position with 19 ... e5!

### 13 ... Nxc3 14 bxc3 h6 15 Rfb1

If 15 Nd2 Black should continue as in the main text with 15 ... Ba6!, as White has no threats: 16 Nb3 Qa4 17 Qe2 Bxd3 18 Qxd3 Rfb8 19 Rfe1 Qc4 (Black craftily offers the exchange of queens to chase the knight away from its protection of the c5-square; if 20 Qxc4 dxc4 21 Nd2 bxc5 22 dxc5 Rb5 Black is better on account of White's weak c5-pawn) 20 Qf3 bxc5 21 Nxc5 Nf5 22 h3 Rb2 23 Nd3 Rc2 and Black is doing very well.

### 15 ... Ba6



Black is better due to the weakness of White's pawns. Grandmaster Dautov shows exactly how to exploit this:

**16 Bxa6 Qxa6 17 cxb6 axb6 18 Qb3 Rfc8 19 a4 Qa5 20 Ra3 Nc6 21 h3**

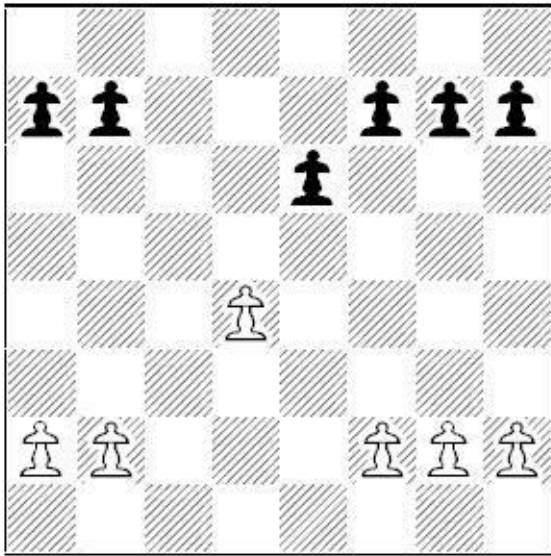
Not 21 Qxb6 Rab8 22 Qxa5 Rxb1+ etc.

**21 ... Qa7 22 Raa1 Rab8 23 Qb5 Qc7 24 Rc1 Na5 25 Ne5 f6 26 Nf3 Qc4 27 Rab1 Qxb5 28 Rxb5 Nc4 29 Kf1 Ra8**

... and the a-pawn soon fell in K.Klundt-R.Dautov Bad Wiessee 2001.

## The Isolated Queen's Pawn

The IQP is one of the most complicated positions in modern chess. Because of the open files, diagonals and space, there is a vast array of possibilities for either side. In my experience, people fall into two groups: they either love playing with or against the IQP, or they simply hate the positions full stop. Nimzowitsch believed the IQP to be an 'out of date' idea. In his book *Chess Praxis* he claimed that the dynamic advantages White possessed could be easily rebutted, although at least he did acknowledge that these advantages existed.



Even though in our selected lines of the Panov, the positions that result in the IQP are relatively rare, it is very important to be aware of some of the general rules that are applicable when either facing the IQP or in possession of it, especially since it crops up in other variations of the Caro-Kann.

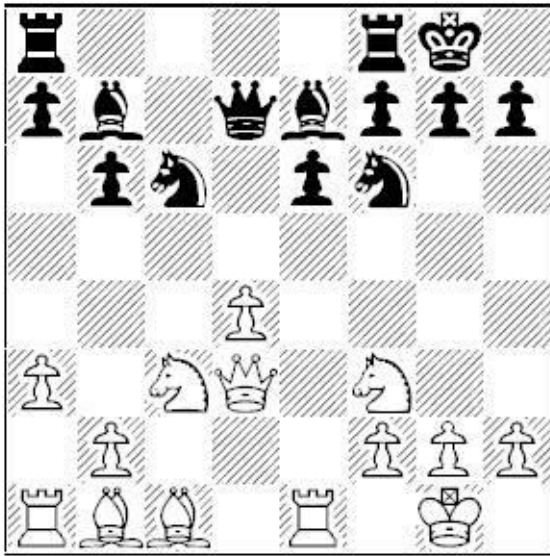
There is a strategy to playing against the IQP. However, one should remember that, like with most things in chess, there are very few hard-and-fast rules and these are just guidelines to help. Firstly, the whole position seems to revolve around one square: the square *in front of* the IQP – not, as some people believe, the square the IQP is situated on. The reason for this is that by controlling the square in front, the static/dynamic tension remains in the position because the holder of the IQP cannot rid himself of this potential weakness so easily.

As a very rough rule, use Joe Gallagher’s guide to assess the positions: with four minor pieces each the position is slightly better for White; with three minor pieces it is roughly level; and with two or fewer minor pieces things turn in Black’s favour. As White’s advantage is of a fluid nature, he will have to play very actively and purposefully or else he can quickly drift into a worse position. As Nimzowitsch put it, the weakness of the isolated pawn makes itself felt in the endgame where the outpost on d5 is more valuable than the potential outposts on c5 and e5, which means that Black should steer the position into the endgame. White’s static weaknesses manifest themselves in two ways: the d-pawn requires constant support and there are also weaknesses on the adjacent squares.

### White’s Plans

White’s various plans include utilizing the open c- and e-files (and in particular his strong squares e5 and c5), advancing the d-pawn to d5, and playing for mate on h7. This final idea is usually started by the defensive a2-a3 (to prevent ... Nb4) and this is followed by lining up the queen and bishop on the b1-h7 diagonal. If Black does not have a pawn on e6, another idea is to aim at the f7-square.

In the following example White brought two of these ideas into play:



**A.Hunt-J.Houska**  
British League 2000

I had just played **13 ... Qd8-d7?** (13 ... g6 was forced) and White answered powerfully with **14 d5! exd5 15 Bg5 g6 16 Rxe7 Nxe7 17 Bxf6**, with a decisive advantage.

### Black's Plans

The main strategy Black should employ is the blockade of the d5-square; this is usually achieved by a knight either on d5 or f6. The 'bad' light-squared bishop (unless you have been lucky enough to develop it to g4) should be developed on the long diagonal h1-a8, either on b7 or, if not possible, via c8-d7-c6. If White begins an assault on h7, in general Black should try to avoid pushing the pawn to h6 as this is not the correct defensive method. A pawn on h6 is often just a target for White and it weakens the b1-h7 diagonal. A much better defensive move is ... g6, bolstering the light squares and blocking b1-h7. The weakness of the dark squares is not such a problem: the dark-squared bishop is located much closer to the king and it can go to its aid much easier than its light-squared partner.

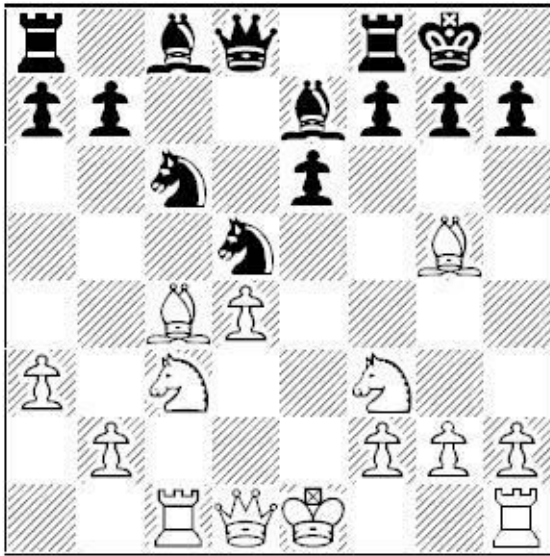
Let's now look at some possible IQP lines arising from 6 Bg5 e6.

**1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 c4 Nf6 5 Nc3 Nc6 6 Bg5 e6 7 Nf3 Be7 8 Bd3**

There are other moves that also lead to IQP positions:

a) 8 cxd5?! looks illogical as it fits in with Black's main objective of exchanging pieces: 8 ... Nxd5 9 Bxe7 Qxe7 10 Bd3 0-0 11 0-0 Nf6 12 Re1 Rd8 (preventing any d5 ideas) 13 Be4 Qd6 and Black is comfortable.

b) 8 a3!?, which has been played by Grandmasters Vescovi and Suba, is not bad since a2-a3 is a precautionary move that is usually seen in IQP positions – White prevents the knight from going from c6 to b4 (and to d5). A typical continuation is 8 ... 0-0 9 Rc1 dxc4 10 Bxc4 Nd5 and now:

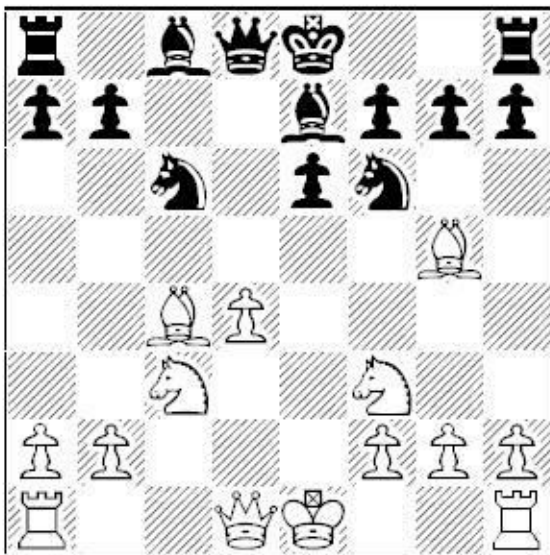


b1) 11 Bxe7 Ncxe7 12 0-0 b6 13 Ne5!? (13 Nxd5 Nxd5 14 Qa4 Bb7 15 Ba6 Qe7 16 g3 h5 gave Black absolutely no problems in Y.Balashov-A.Kharlov, St Petersburg 1993) 13 ... Bb7 14 Qf3 Rc8 15 Bd3 Nxc3 16 Qxb7 Rc7 17 Qa6 Ncd5 with an equal position.

b2) 11 h4?! (White plays in a very aggressive way, but the talented Grandmaster Harikrishna calmly repels the attack) 11 ... h6! 12 Qd3 hxg5! 13 hxg5 g6 14 Ne5 Nf4! (preventing Qh3) 15 Qg3 Qxd4 16 Nf3 Qxc4 17 b3 Nd3+ 18 Kd2 Qf4+ and White resigned, G.Vescovi-P.Harikrishna, FIDE World Cup, Khanty Mansyisk 2005.

c) 8 Rc1 0-0 9 a3 transposes to note 'b', while 9 c5 reaches 8 c5 0-0 9 Rc1 (see the previous section).

**8 ... dxc4 9 Bxc4**



Given that the bishop has taken two moves to reach c4, White is now a tempo down on a line in the Queen's Gambit Accepted. This is not quite a standard IQP position, as the placement of the pieces has already been decided. Black's chief plan, as outlined earlier, is to blockade the advance of the d-pawn, and this is usually achieved by playing ... Nf6-d5 or ... Nc6-b4(-d5). He must also neutralize White's strong squares e5 and c5, and he often does this by swapping off into an endgame.

**9 ... 0-0 10 0-0 b6 11 a3**

A common idea, White stops any pesky ... Nc6-b4 ideas and at the same time gets ready to line up his queen and bishop on the b1-h7 diagonal in preparation for an attack.

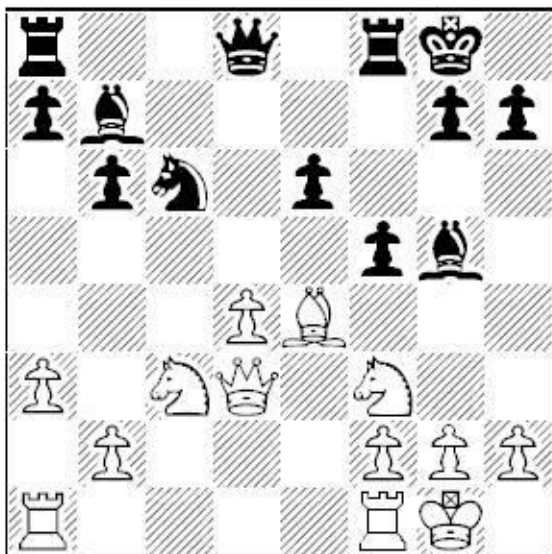
**11 ... Bb7 12 Qd3!**

White gets ready to build an attack by first centralizing his pieces.

**12 ... Nd5!?**

Swapping of a pair of minor pieces.

**13 Bxd5 Bxg5 14 Be4 f5!**

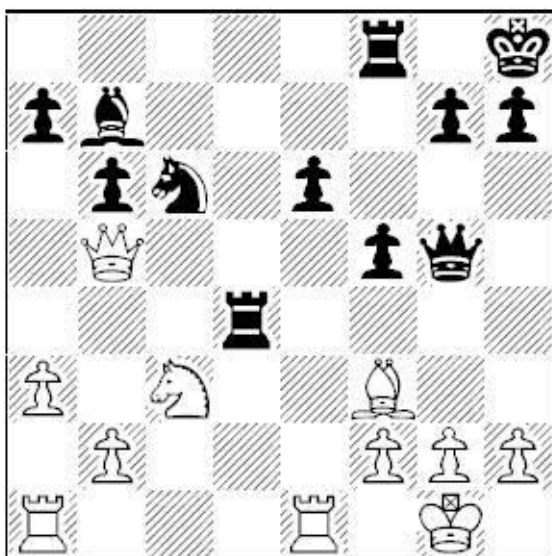


**15 Nxg5**

After 15 Bxc6 Bxc6 16 Nxg5 Qxg5 17 f3, the weakness of the backward e-pawn is counterbalanced by the weakness of White's d-pawn. One possible continuation is 17 ... Rf6 (as Qc4 was threatened) 18 Rae1 Rd8 19 Qc4 Rd6 20 Nb5 Rg6 21 Rf2 Bxb5 22 Qxb5 Qd8 23 Rfe2 with an equal position.

**15 ... Qxg5 16 Bf3 Rad8 17 Rfe1 Kh8 18 Qf1! Rxd4 19 Qb5!**

19 Rxe6? would be a mistake: 19 ... Nd8 20 Re3 f4 21 Rd3 Ba6! wins material.



We have been following the old game A.Alekhine-K.Richter, Munich 1942. In this position Black

blundered with 19 ... Rd6?, and after 20 Ne4 Qg6 21 Nxd6 Nd4 22 Bxb7 Nxb5 23 Nxb5 Qf6 24 Nc3 White's extra material told. However, following 19 ... Na5 20 Bxb7 Nxb7 21 Rxe6 Nc5 22 Re8 Rd8 23 Rae1 Qd2 24 h3 Ne4 25 Rxf8+ Rxf8 the position is completely equal.

## Summary

In the 6 Bg5 e6 line White normally tries to cramp Black with an early c4-c5. It is very important for Black to remember the key move 9 ... Ne4!, after which he has two aims: to break up the queenside pawn formation with ... b6, or to play on the kingside. After 11 Qc2 (Line B), the key move for Black is the later attack on the pawn chain with 12 ... b6!.

The general rules for IQP positions certainly apply to those IQPs reached after 6 Bg5 e6, and should give Black valuable pointers.

# Chapter Six

## Exchange Variation

**1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 Bd3 Nc6 5 c3**

The Exchange Variation was originally thought to be one of the most harmless lines against the Caro-Kann, until Bobby Fischer utilized it to beat former World Champion Tigran Petrosian in 1970. This variation is not quite as innocuous as it appears, and is popular largely because of its easy and direct strategy based on very classical ideas of development.

### An Asymmetrical Pawn Structure

White's plan is simple: develop the bishops to d3 and f4, the queen to c2, launch the knight into e5 and begin a kingside attack. Black has to fight two battles in this variation: controlling the e5-square and finding a place for his light-squared bishop. That is, if White plays Bd3 and h2-h3, where should the bishop go? The approach I am recommending is very much a straightforward response, in which Black develops in a logical way.

Since nothing is happening in the centre, and nor is it likely to, then each side must concentrate their forces on the wings. The asymmetrical pawn structure shows us where both sides should base their plans. The white pawn chain (b2, c3, d4) points towards the kingside so that is where White is headed, whilst the black pawns point the opposite way towards to the queenside. Black progresses gradually using what is known as the *minority attack*. This is where Black launches an assault against White's static pawn majority by advancing the b- and a-pawns, hoping to saddle White with a permanent pawn weakness.

### The Battle over the e5-square

*e5 is to White as c4 is to Black ...*

Both sides have a strong square which they will seek to control and occupy, often before beginning their respective attacks. For White it is the important square e5, and for Black it is c4. For this reason it is vital that Black gets his move order right. His first task is to prevent the dark-squared bishop developing to f4, and this is achieved with a quick ... Qc7 (indeed, 5 ... Qc7 is the move I'm recommending).

### Weak Points

For White: the queenside pawns, in particular c3, are vulnerable to attack; the c4-square.

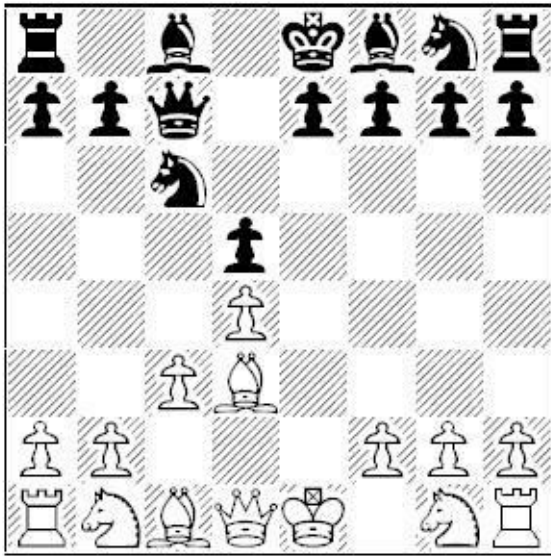
For Black: the e5-square; he must beware of tactics on h7.

### Looking at the Theory

**1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 Bd3**

This is accepted as White's most testing move order, as it prevents Black from developing with ... Bf5 or ... Bg4.

**4 ... Nc6 5 c3 Qc7!?**



Preventing White's Bf4 plan. In the opinion of IM Alexander Nikitin, 5 ... Qc7 is the best move for Black.

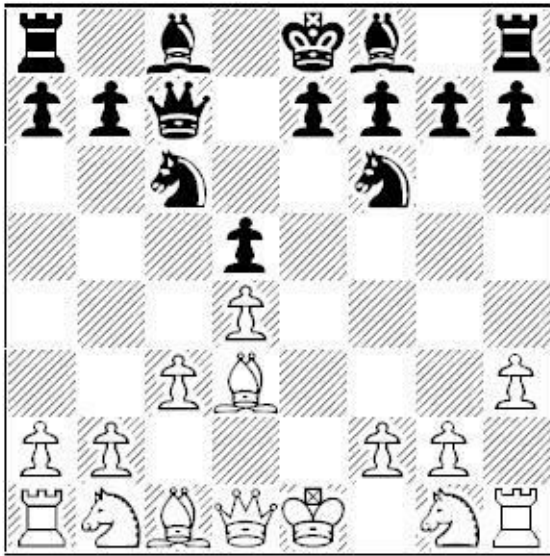
Now we will look at the following possibilities for White:

- A: 6 h3**
- B: 6 Ne2**
- C: 6 Bg5 and others**

**A) 6 h3!?**

The clear aim of 6 h3 is to prevent Black from developing his c8-bishop. However, there are two main drawbacks: The first one is that the pawn now occupies a square which for attacking purposes White would ideally like a queen or rook to stand on. This means that Black can play ... e6, closing the c8-h3 diagonal, without too much fear. Secondly, playing h2-h3 is a kingside concession, which means that the idea of ... g7-g6 followed by ... Bf5 is greatly strengthened. This is the plan for Black that I personally prefer.

**6 ... Nf6!**



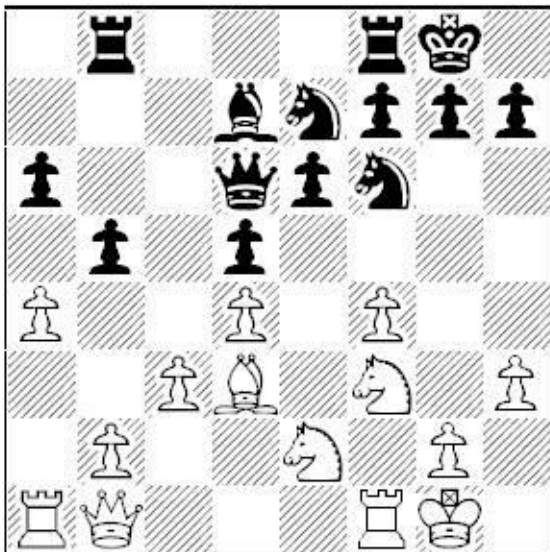
The best move. Black keeps his options open as to which plan to adopt.

**7 Nf3**

Alternatively:

a) 7 Qe2?? Nxd4 nets a pawn.

b) 7 Ne2 makes the idea of ... g6 less favourable for Black, as he will not be able to swap off the bad light-squared bishop. However, White has made a big concession in relinquishing control over the e5-square. This gives Black two choices: to strike in the centre immediately with ... e5 or adopt the more classical method with ... e6. Let's take the latter option: 7 ... e6 8 Bf4 Bd6 9 Bxd6 Qxd6 10 Nd2 a6 (getting ready for ideas of ... b5) 11 a4 Rb8 12 0-0 0-0 13 Qb1 Bd7 14 f4 (White demonstrates his aggressive intentions) 14 ... Ne7 15 Nf3 (the clamping move 15 a5 allows 15 ... Bb5!, swapping off the bishops) 15 ... b5! (Black must act quickly before White swamps him on both wings)

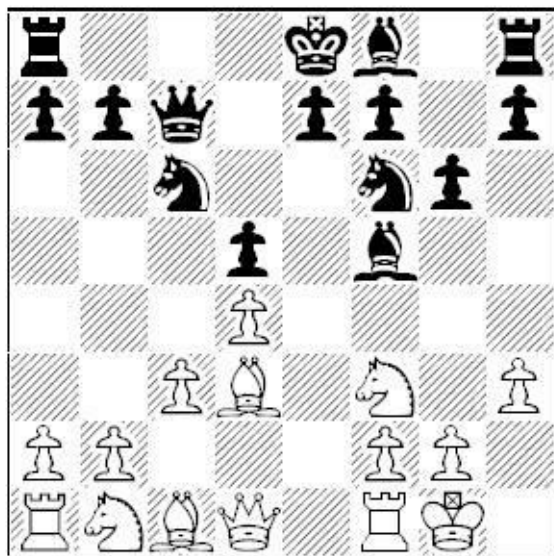


16 Ne5 bxa4 17 Nxd7 Qxd7 18 Bxa6 Rb6 19 Bd3 Rfb8 20 Ra2 Qb7 21 Rxa4 and Black accepted a draw in a superior position in J.Degraeve-E.Amigues, Cappelle la Grande 2005. Going back, 16 axb5 is weaker: 16 ... Bxb5! 17 Ne5 Nf5! (suddenly Black's pieces start entering the game) 18 Qa2 (or 18 Bxf5 exf5 with an edge) 18 ... Rb6 19 Bxb5 Rxb5 and Black is better. It is true that Black has a weak pawn on

a6, but he will pile heavy pressure at the base of White's pawn chain (b2), and this in turn will make the c3-pawn weak.

c) If White does not in some way discourage ... e5, then Black should play it! An example of this is 7 Nd2 e5!. Black should not worry about the resulting IQP since he will have easy piece development. Black should bear in mind that he has strong squares on e4 and c4, and also that White has a weakness on the h2-b8 diagonal (since White has weakened his kingside by playing h2-h3). Play continues 8 dxe5 Nxe5 9 Bc2 Bc5 10 Nb3 Bd6 (10 ... Bb6 was played in E.Geller-Y.Razuvaev, Soviet Ch. 1979) 11 Nf3 0-0 12 0-0 Re8 13 Be3 (or 13 Bg5 Ne4 14 Be3 Nc4 15 Qxd5 Nf6 16 Qd4 Nxe3 17 fxe3 Be6 and Black's two bishops along with heavy pressure on the weak e3-pawn give him good compensation for the pawn) 13 ... Bd7 14 Nxe5 Bxe5 15 Qd3 a6 with equal chances.

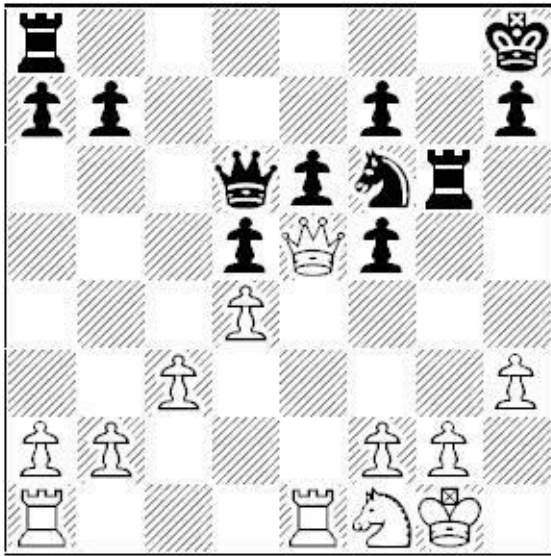
**7 ... g6 8 0-0 Bf5!?**



Although at first sight it looks very strange to double the pawns in this manner, there is a great deal of logic behind the idea. Black secures the central e4-square, opens the g-file for his rooks to attack down and leaves White lumbered with a bad bishop!

Another possibility for Black, played by the strong Georgian Grandmaster Zviad Izoria, is 8 ... Bg7 9 Re1 0-0 and now:

a) 10 Nbd2 Bf5! 11 Bxf5 gxf5 12 Ne5 Nxe5 13 Rxe5 e6 14 Re1 Kh8 (Black gets ready to work his magic on the g-file) 15 Nf1 Rg8 16 Qf3 Bf8 17 Bf4 Bd6 18 Bxd6 Qxd6 19 Qe2 Rg6 20 Qe5 and Black was better in S.Paridar-Z.Izoria, Dubai 2004 – White has trouble defending the g-pawn adequately:



20 ... Qxe5 21 Rxe5 Rag8 22 g3 Ne4 23 Rd1 Re8 24 Nd2 f6 25 Nxe4 fxe5 26 Nd6 with a Black advantage; or 21 dxe5 Rag8 22 g3 Ne4 23 Kg2 f4! and Black will win a pawn.

b) With 10 Bg5, first played by Capablanca, White develops as actively as possible: 10 ... Bf5 11 Bxf5 gxf5 (intending to follow the same plan as seen in Paridar-Izoria above) 12 Qc1 Ne4 13 Bf4 Qb6 14 Nbd2 Rac8 15 Qb1 f6 16 Nb3 e5! 17 Bh2 f4 18 c4 Ng5! 19 Nxc5 fxc5 20 c5 (after 20 cxd5 Nxd4 Black has the preferable position: White's bishop is hemmed in on h2, in effect leaving him playing a piece down) 20 ... Qb4 21 dxe5. So far we have been following the game A.Parkanyi-P.Bodiroga, Gyula 2000, and here Black could have maintained his advantage simply by playing 21 ... Nxe5 22 Qd1 Rcd8 23 a3 Qc4 24 Rc1 Qa6, threatening ... Nd3.

### 9 Re1

9 Bxf5?! only helps Black: 9 ... gxf5 10 Re1 e6 11 Ne5 Nxe5 12 dxe5 Nd7 is equal.

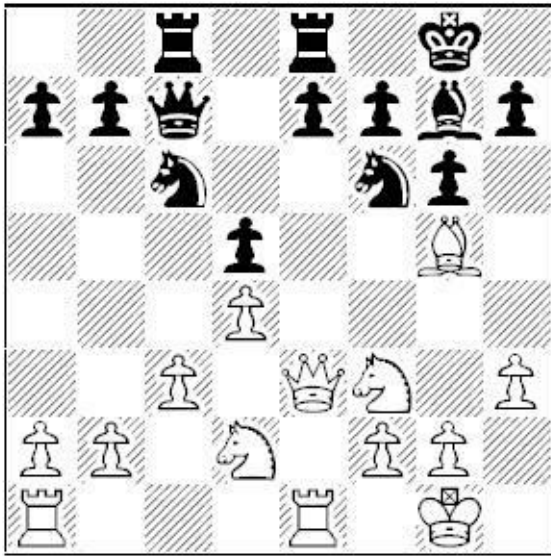
### 9 ... Bxd3!

This is an important move since after the natural 9 ... Bg7? 10 Bxf5 gxf5 11 Nh4! it is difficult for Black to defend the f5-pawn.

### 10 Qxd3 Bg7 11 Bg5 0-0 12 Nbd2 Rac8 13 Qe3

If White plays 13 Nf1, Black can reply effectively with 13 ... Ne4!

### 13 ... Rfe8

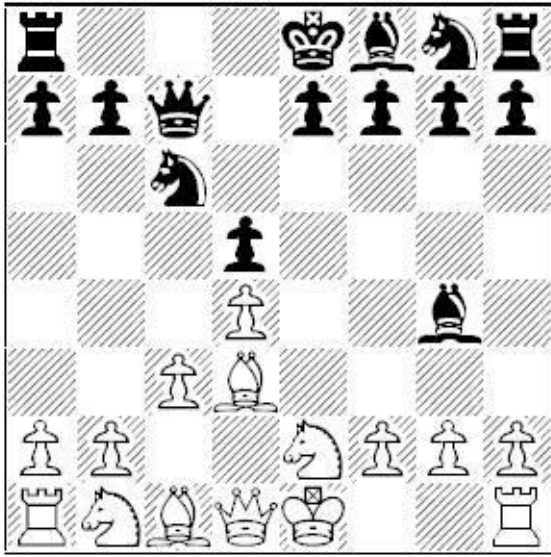


Black has no problems in this position. His long-term plan is to begin a minority attack on the queenside, exploiting the fact that he can make use of the semi-opened c-file. White on the other hand will try and utilize the important e5-square whilst trying to chip away at the black king.

**B) 6 Ne2**

Planning to harass the queen with 7 Bf4.

**6 ... Bg4!**

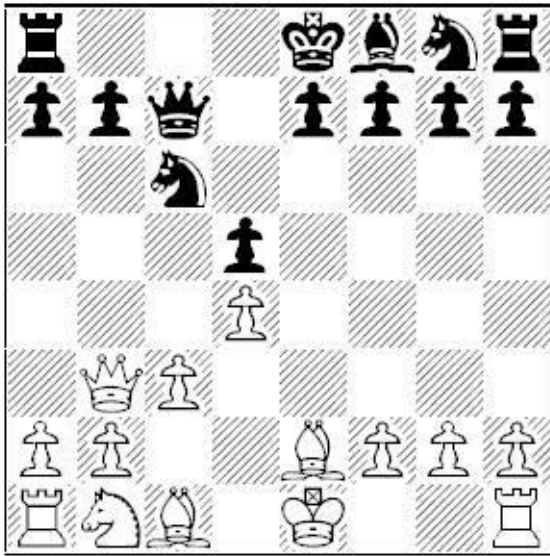


Solving the problem of the light-squared bishop.

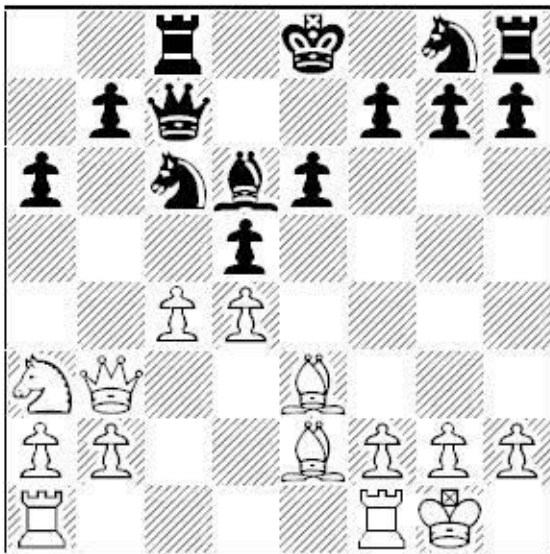
**7 f3**

This is the most popular continuation. White does not want to exchange the perceived ‘bad bishop’ for a knight that can in the future have an influence over the e5-square. However, there are alternatives for White:

a) After 7 Qb3 Black is forced to exchange the light-squared bishop with 8 ... Bxe2 8 Bxe2, as White was threatening to play Ng3 after which the bishop must return to d7 – not the most ideal square for this piece!



In any case, this is not such a bad trade-off for Black, as this bishop is his problem piece in the whole variation. With one of the knights gone, Black can rest in the knowledge that there is one fewer piece eyeing up the critical e5-square. Here's an example: 8 ... e6 (8 ... Nxd4 is also a good route to equality if a little drawish; after 9 Qxd5 Black should play 9 ... Nxe2! – the tempting 9 ... Nc2+ would immediately lose after 10 Kd1 Rd8 11 Bb5+) 9 Na3 (the purpose of this move is not to attack the black queen but to transfer the knight to e3 via c2, or help support a c3-c4 pawn push) 9 ... Rc8! (better than 9 ... a6, since that move allows 10 Bf4! seizing control of the important h2-b8 diagonal) 10 0-0 (10 Nb5 is not to be feared: after 10 ... Qd7 11 Bf4 a6 White will have to return his knight back to a3, rather shame-faced) 10 ... a6 (the idea behind this move is to secure the b5-square: firstly, so that Black can develop his bishop to its optimal square on d6; and secondly, in preparation of a future pawn thrust ... b7-b5-b4) 11 Be3 Bd6 12 c4

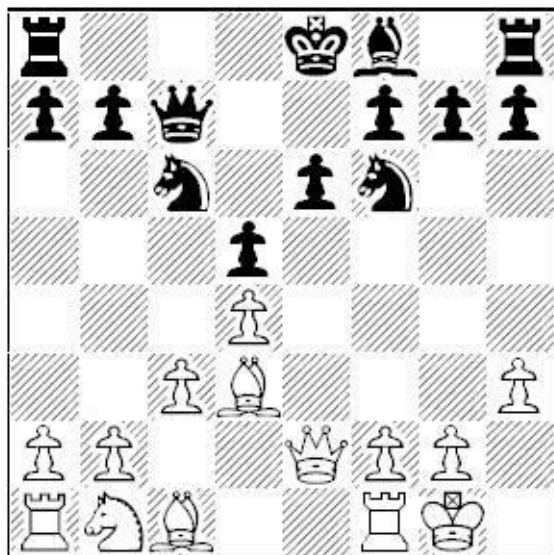


12 ... Nge7 (12 ... dxc4!? is risky but possible: 13 Nxc4 Bxh2+ 14 Kh1 b5 15 Ne5 Bxe5 16 dxe5 Qxe5 17 a4 Nge7 18 axb5 axb5 19 Qxb5 Qxb5 20 Bxb5 Rb8 21 Ba4 0-0 22 Bc5 Rfc8 23 b3 and Black is a pawn up but White has some compensation with the two bishops and the passed pawn) 13 g3 Qd7 14 cxd5 Nxd5 15 Nc4 Be7 16 Bf3 0-0 (there is no need for concern, as the knight fork is not dangerous; 16 ...

b5 17 Ne5 Nxe5 18 dxe5 Nxe3 19 Qxe3 was agreed drawn in I.Schneider-B.Kalinitschew, German League 2005) 17 Rac1 (17 Bxd5?! Qxd5 18 Nb6 Qxb3 19 axb3 Rcd8 and Black is better) 17 ... Bf6 18 Rfd1 b5 19 Ne5 Nxe5 20 dxe5 Rxc1 21 Bxc1 Bxe5 22 Bxd5 exd5 23 Qxd5 is completely equal.

b) 7 0-0 e6 8 Bf4 (8 f3 transposes into the 7 f3 lines) 8 ... Qxf4 9 Nxf4 Bxd1 10 Rxd1 Bd6 11 Ne2 Nge7 12 Nd2 Rb8 13 a4 0-0 14 Nf3 Rfc8 15 g3 a6 16 Kg2 Na5 17 Nd2 Bc7 18 h4 h6 19 Kf1 g6 20 Kg2 Kg7 and in R.Gallego Martinez-J.Bacerra Riviero, Andorra 1995, Black eventually won by playing the knight to c4 and targeting White's Achilles' heel: the weak b2- and c3-pawns.

c) 7 h3 Bxe2 (7 ... Bh5 is also possible, but after 8 Qb3 Black must capture the knight with 8 ... Bxe2) 8 Qxe2 e6 9 0-0 Nf6



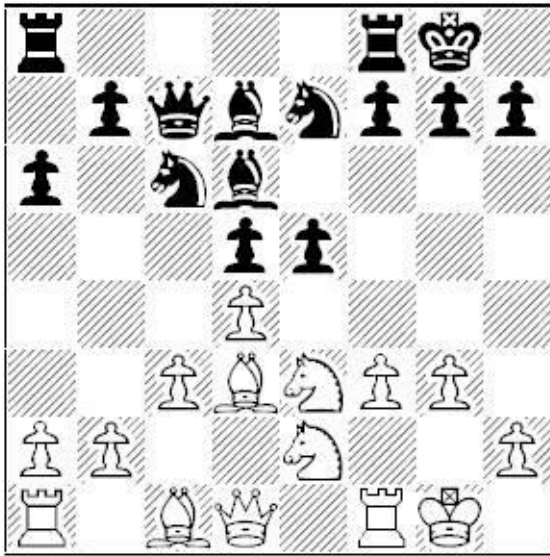
10 f4 (White reacts aggressively to Black's set-up but this was unnecessary; it would have been better to play 10 Nd2 Bd6) 10 ... Bd6! 11 Be3 (11 f5 would be met by 11 ... e5 and suddenly it is White whose king is in trouble, especially on the dark squares) 11 ... 0-0 12 Nd2 a6 (getting ready to play ... b7-b5 to start hacking at the queenside pawns) 13 Nf3? and now in F.Bellini-E.Dizdarevic, Playchess 2003, Black could have taken the pawn: 13 ... Bxf4 14 Bxf4 Qxf4 15 Ne5 Qg5 16 Nxc6 bxc6 17 Bxa6 Ne4 and Black has the better position.

### 7 ... Bd7

Once Black has provoked a weakness he retreats back to safety. 7 ... Bh5?! gives White a better position after 8 Bf4!? Qb6 9 Qb3! (threatening to exchange queens and leave Black with weak doubled pawns) 9 ... Qxb3 10 axb3.

### 8 Bf4

8 Na3 a6 9 Nc2 e5 10 0-0 Bd6 11 g3 Nge7 12 Ne3 0-0, as seen in A.Kiriakopoulos-I.Simeonidis, Kalithea 2006, gives Black a nice centralized position.



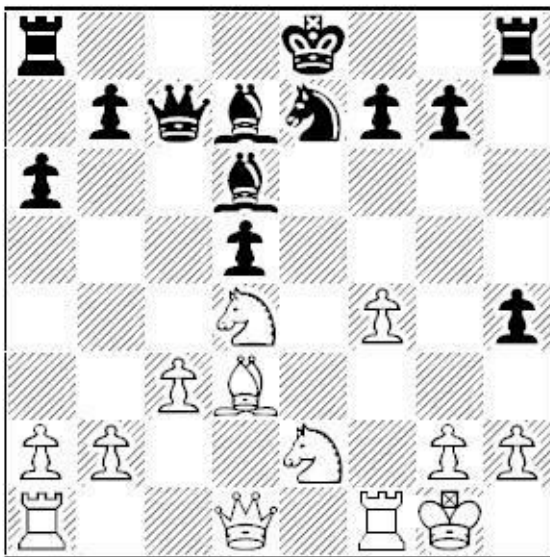
He will place the rooks on the e- and d-files, and pressurize the d4-pawn.

**8 ... e5!**

A good answer! This line has been played by several grandmasters, including world-class players Alexei Dreev and Liviu-Dieter Nisipeanu.

**9 dxe5**

I personally feel that 9 Bg3 is a little too timid: 9 ... Bd6 10 Na3 a6 11 Nc2 Nge7 12 0-0 h5!? (with the threat of a possible ... h4, exposing a weakness on the b8-h2 diagonal) 13 dxe5 Nxe5 14 Bxe5 Bxe5 15 f4 Bd6 16 Ncd4 h4



17 Kh1 Rh6 18 b4? (positionally very suspect as this allows Black to secure the c4-square with a well-timed ... b5!) 18 ... Kf8! (getting the king to safety; Black now has ideas of controlling the e-file) 19 Qd2 Re8 20 f5 Ng8 21 Nf4 Nf6 22 Rac1 b5! and Black soon won in B.Gonzalez-K.Sasikiran, Calvia Olympiad 2004. Going back to the previous diagram, White should try and start some counterplay straight away with 17 Rc1 g5!? 18 Qd2. A quick 18 c4?! allows Black to strike immediately with 18 ... h3 19 g3 (19 cxd5 is not dangerous and instead encourages the queen to go to a better square with 19 ... Qb6) 19 ... gxf4 20 cxd5 Qb6 21 gxf4 Bc5 with a strong attack.

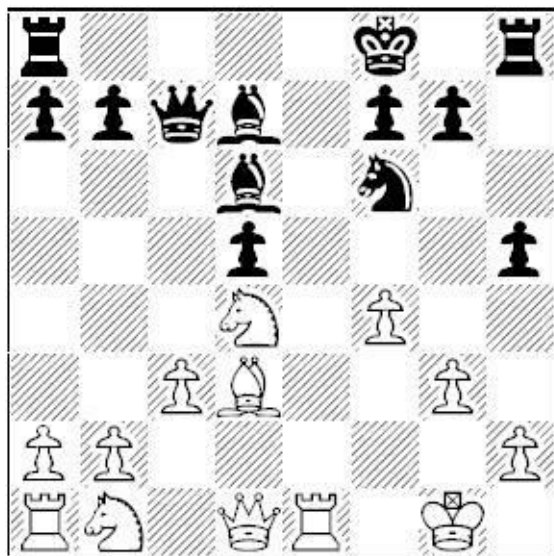
Returning to the position after 12 0-0, a safer method for handling the position is 12 ... 0-0. Black need not fear getting an IQP because he has open access down the e- and c-files for the rooks, and White has created a weakness to his kingside by playing f2-f3.

**9 ... Nxe5 10 0-0**

Or 10 Bc2 Bd6 11 Ba4 Bc6 12 0-0 Ne7 13 Nd4 0-0 14 Bc2 N7g6 15 Bxg6 hxg6 16 Nd2 Rae8 17 Bg3 Re7 18 Qc2 Rfe8 and with control of the e-file, Black stood better in L.Yudasin-G.Kacheishvili, New York 2004.

**10 ... Bd6 11 Re1 Nf6 12 Bxe5 Bxe5 13 f4 Bd6 14 Nd4+ Kf8 15 g3 h5!**

From apparently nowhere Black begins an aggressive operation, but if we investigate the position more closely we can see that this is not so surprising. The barrier of pawns protecting White's king has advanced to vulnerable squares, and in the game I.Saric-T.Polak, Split 2005, Black took full advantage:



**16 Nd2 h4 17 Nf1 hxg3 18 hxg3 g6 19 Qf3 Rh3 20 f5 Kg7 21 Kg2 g5 22 Qe3 Rh5 23 Re2 Re8 24 Qd2 Reh8 25 Qe3 Ng4 26 Qf3 Ne5 27 Qe3 Ng4 28 Qf3 Nh2 29 Qxd5 Nxf1 30 Rxf1 Bxg3 31 Re7 Rh2+ 32 Kf3 Qf4 mate**

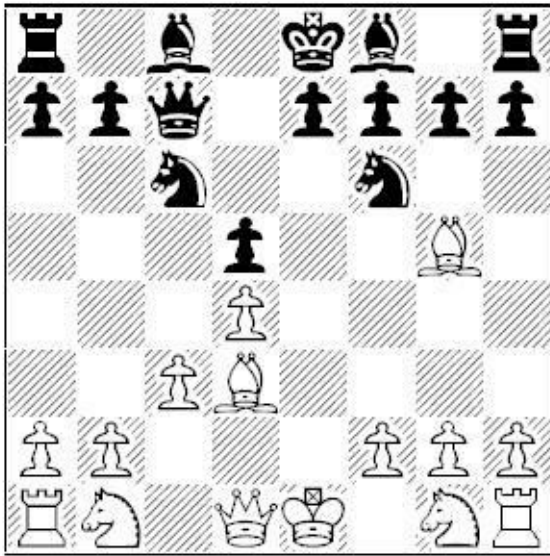
### C) 6 Bg5

This is considered the most testing reply to Black's set-up. Rounding up White's alternatives:

a) 6 Nf3 is of course met by 6 ... Bg4, and play could easily transpose to the main text.

b) 6 Nd2 Nf6 7 Ngf3 (7 h3 is countered by the central strike 7 ... e5!) 7 ... Bg4 8 0-0 e6 9 Re1 Bd6 10 Nf1 0-0 11 Ng3 Rfe8 12 Bg5?! (this move unexpectedly passes the advantage to Black) 12 ... Nh5! (threatening to penetrate White's position with ... Nf4!) 13 h3? (White unnecessarily gives away a pawn) 13 ... Bxf3 14 Qxf3 Nxf3 15 fxg3 Bxg3 16 Re3 Bd6 and Black later won in A.Koustas-V.Malakhatko, Korinthos 2002.

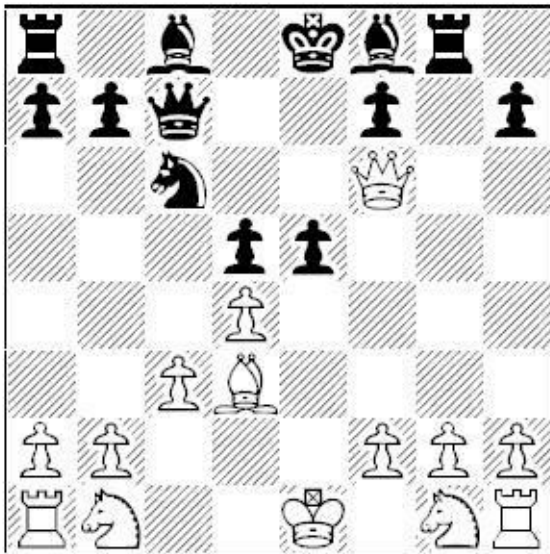
**6 ... Nf6!**



This looks surprising since Black voluntarily offers to give himself a doubled pawn, but should White choose to do this he will be giving Black a helping hand in establishing a nice pawn centre.

### 7 Nd2

7 Bxf6? gxf6 is not a problem for Black. After 8 Nd2 e5 9 Qh5 Be6 10 Ne2 0-0-0 Black is doing well, while 8 Qf3 fails to prevent Black's planned advance 8 ... e5!. This is possible since 9 Qxd5 Be6 10 Qf3 0-0-0 11 Ne2 exd4! gives Black a tremendous position and 9 Qxf6 does not work after 9 ... Rg8 (hitting the g-pawn):



a) 10 g3 Nxd4 (this is the tactical point!) 11 cxd4 Qc1+ 12 Ke2 Qxb2+ 13 Nd2 e4 14 Rb1 exd3+ 15 Kf1 Qa3 16 Re1+ Be7 and Black has a great position.

b) 10 dxe5 does not help White either: 10 ... Qxe5+ 11 Qxe5+ Nxe5 12 Bf1 (White is forced backwards) 12 ... Bf5 13 Nd2 0-0-0 14 0-0-0 Bc5 15 f3 Nd3+ 16 Bxd3 Bxd3 17 g3 Be3 and it is very difficult for White to develop without returning the extra pawn; for example, 18 Nh3 Be2 19 Rde1 Bxf3 and Black is better.

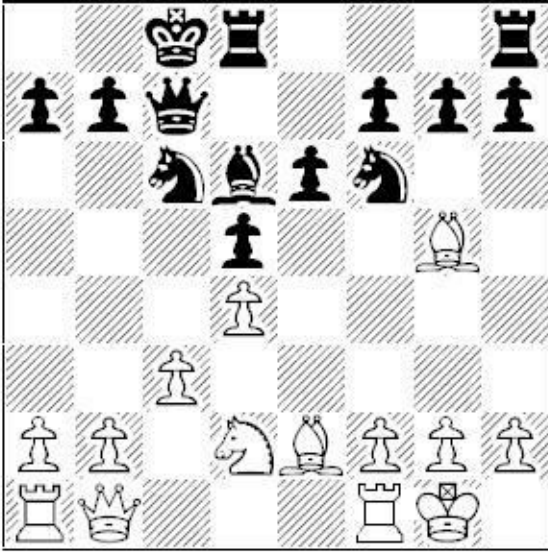
c) 10 Bxh7 Be7 11 Qf3 e4 12 Qh5 Rg5 13 Qe2 Rxe2 and White has serious problems with the bishop on h7.

7 Nf3 Bg4 8 Nbd2 reaches the main text.

### 7 ... Bg4 8 Ngf3

Alternatively:

a) 8 Qb1? aims to force a bishop-for-knight swap, but is not that logical. The correct plan for Black is, as Nikitin suggests, to castle queenside and develop normally: 8 ... e6 9 Ne2 Bxe2 10 Bxe2 0-0-0! 11 0-0 Bd6



12 g3 (12 h3 gives Black something to chew on and the ... g7-g5-g4 pawn push added power) 12 ... h6 13 Bxf6 gxf6 14 Bh5 Rdg8 15 Qd3 Rg5 16 Be2 h5 17 Nf3 Rg7 18 Kh1 f5 19 Rg1? (White has to try and generate some counterplay on the queenside but things are still difficult for him) 19 ... Rhg8 20 Nh4 f4 21 Bxh5 fxg3 22 fxg3 Rh8 23 Qf3 Rgh7 24 Bg4 f5 25 Bh3 Be7 and Black is winning.

b) 8 Qa4!? was played by IM Andrew Greet against me in a rapidplay game in 2006. Black is doing fine after 8 ... e6 9 Ngf3 Nd7 (ruling out Bxf6 but also defending the e5-square) 10 0-0 Bd6 11 Bh4 Bh5 12 Bg3 Bg6 13 Bb5 Bxg3 14 hxg3 0-0 15 Rfe1 Rfc8 16 Re3 a6 17 Bxc6 Qxc6 18 Qb3 h6 19 Ne5 Nxe5 20 dxe5 b5; there is the typical plan of attacking White's queenside pawns.

c) 8 Qb3 e6 9 Ngf3 Bd6 (Black continues with the standard plan) 10 0-0 Nd7 (10 ... 0-0 11 Bxf6 gxf6 is also okay) 11 Bh4 Bh5 12 Bg3 Bg6 13 Bxd6 Qxd6 14 Be2 0-0 is equal.

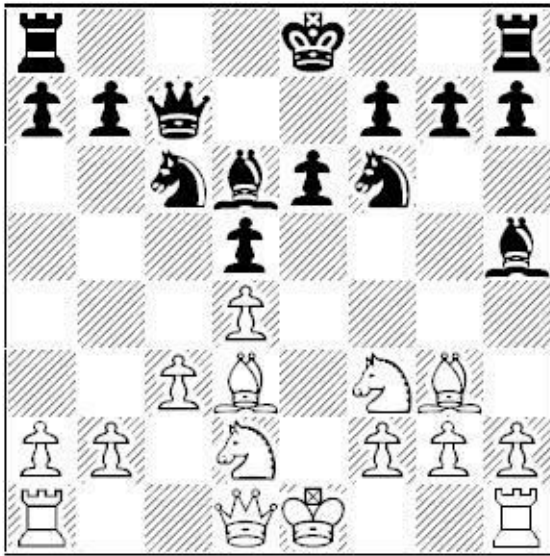
### 8 ... e6 9 Bh4

With the intention of playing Bg3, blunting the dark-squared bishop and queen combo. 9 h3 Bh5 10 0-0 Bd6 11 Re1 reaches a level position.

### 9 ... Bd6

9 ... Nh5!? is a rarely played but valid alternative; the idea is to give White a kingside weakness and castle queenside! This plan proved to be particularly effective in the game K.Mokhova-T.Grabuzova, St Petersburg 2003: 10 Bg3 Nxc3 11 hxg3 0-0-0 12 Qa4 Kb8 13 Bb5 f6! (White cannot keep her king in the centre for long) 14 Bxc6 Qxc6 15 Qxc6 bxc6 16 b4 Bd6 17 0-0-0 h6 18 Rde1 Rde8 19 Re3 e5 20 Rhe1 e4 21 Nh2 Bc8 22 Rh1 f5 23 Ree1 g5 and Black had a great position.

### 10 Bg3 Bh5!



This manoeuvre is an important defensive idea. The plan is to swap off White's menacing light-squared bishop on d3 by playing ... Bg6. However it is usually only a good idea to play ... Bg6 when either: (a) Black has not castled and intends to castle queenside; or (b) White has played h2-h3, thus preventing ideas of Rh3, Qh4 etc.

**11 Bxd6**

With 11 0-0, White intends Re1 followed by Ne5. The game continues 11 ... Bxg3 12 hxg3 Bg6! 13 Qe2 Bxd3 14 Qxd3 0-0 15 Rfe1 Rac8 with an equal position. Going back, 13 Qc2?! fails to 13 ... Nb4 and Black is a bit better, while 13 Bxg6? hxg6, opening up the h-file, is really playing into Black's hands. He will castle queenside and follow up with a powerful attack down the h-file.

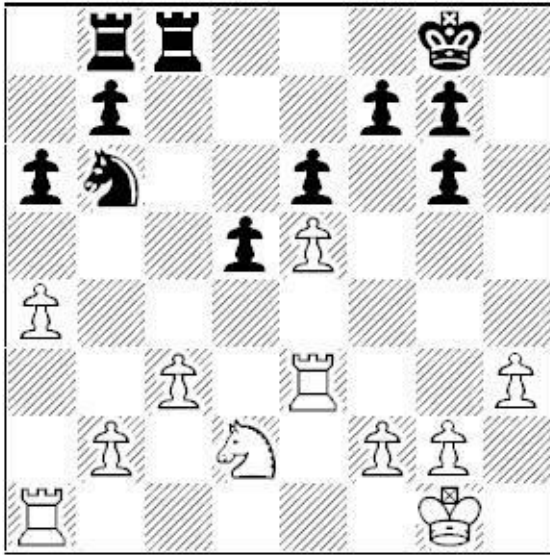
**11 ... Qxd6 12 0-0 0-0 13 Re1 Rab8**

Intending to begin the queenside offensive.

**14 a4 Qc7 15 Qb1 a6 16 Ne5 Rfe8 17 h3 Bg6 18 Bxg6! hxg6 19 Qd3 Nxe5 20 dxe5**

20 Rxe5 is met by 20 ... Rec8 with the idea of ... Ne8-d6-c4.

**20 ... Nd7 21 Qd4 Rec8 22 Re3 Qb6! 23 Qxb6 Nxb6**



Black's position is easier to play, M.Illescas Cordoba-V.Anand, Linares 1994.

## Summary

The Exchange Variation has a reputation for giving White the smallest of edges, but by using a safe system Black should have no problems. With an early ... Qc7 Black prevents White from playing Bf4, taking control of the e5-square. Black's aggressive intentions are on the queenside, using a minority attack, whilst White will aim to mate on the kingside.

# Chapter Seven

## Advance Variation with 3 ... c5: Introduction

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5

### Dragging the Caro into the 21st Century

In the past the Advance was considered to be a timid variation that allowed Black to get a good' version of the French Advance; a good version because the light-squared bishop was able to develop outside the pawn chain. This assessment has dramatically changed in recent years after an explosion of interest, and now it is one of the most popular lines against the Caro. But it has not stopped there; all the time new ideas are sprouting at a fast and furious rate. In the 3 ... Bf5 variation Black must be prepared to meet many lines: from the hyper-aggressive 4 Nc3 to the more sophisticated Short system 4 Nf3, where White tries to exploit the light squares on the queenside now that the bishop has moved out of range.

Therefore, to keep things practical I am recommending the lesser-studied but equally interesting 3 ... c5 – a continuation chosen by Botvinnik in his 1961 match against Mikhail Tal. As the theory in this variation is continuously changing, much of what is covered in the following two chapters is new territory, and in these situations one must accept that things can be very unclear.

#### **An important question: As Black has wasted a tempo by first playing ... c7-c6 and then ... c6-c5, surely this move cannot be good?**

Yes, it is true Black has indeed 'wasted' a move, but the situation cannot be judged as simply as that. Black has lost a tempo in taking two moves to get to play ... c5, but White has already chosen his pawn structure and ... c5 is actually a move that Black would naturally play anyway against White's set-up. The advantage of playing ... c5 as early as move three is that Black sets White immediate questions on how to deal with this challenge. Should White accept the offered pawn, then the game will swing sharply into complications: Black ruins White's pawn structure and achieves active piece play in return for a hunted pawn on c5. Supporting the pawn chain with c2-c3, hoping for some kind of French Advance, is also possible, but there is a fundamental difference between this and the real French Advance, and the 3 ... Bf5 Caro Advance. Black has not yet committed his light-squared bishop. For example, if White plays cautiously with a quick Nf3, then the best place for the bishop is g4 and not f5.

It is not advisable for White to meet 3 ... c5 cautiously because, in frank terms, 3 ... c5 is an arrogant move; Black is asking to play the best move on the board without any of the normal positional concessions. In the French Advance, Black makes his light-squared bishop 'bad' to play ... c5 in one move. In the 3 ... Bf5 Caro-Kann Advance, Black usually prepares this move for a while so as not to suffer from the effects of a quick c2-c4 strike.

I have divided the material into two sections:

- 1) White avoids 4 dxc5 (this chapter)
- 2) White plays 4 dxc5 (Chapter 8)

# White Maintains the Pawn Chain

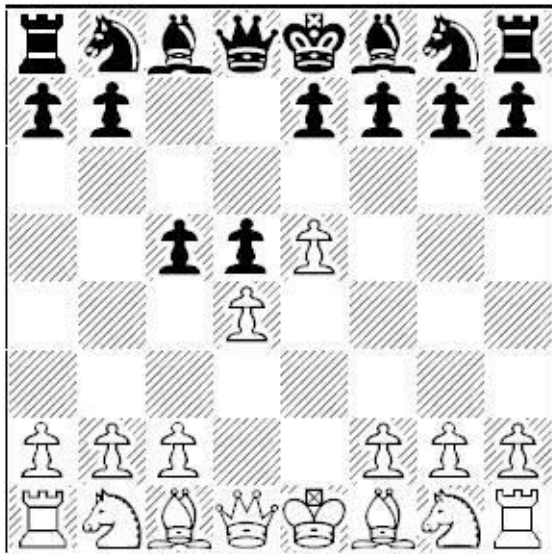
There are some general guidelines to follow if White chooses to keep his pawn formation intact. Black should remember that in this type of position the f3-knight is worth more than the light-squared bishop. Why is this? In general terms the knight is better than the bishop in closed positions, but the deeper reason lies in the critical f5- and d4-squares. The knight on f3 is a valuable defender of the d4-pawn; by exchanging the bishop for the knight we relieve White of one of his important defenders and this in turn makes the d4-pawn a more vulnerable target. Black will then aim to coax as many queenside weaknesses as possible to give the c6-knight a juicy post on c4.

Secondly, a problem Black faces is that there is often too little space to manoeuvre – the knight would like to be on f5 but then so would the bishop. When we consider which one has greater worth on f5, the answer is the knight. Also, if we consider the value of White's minor pieces, his most ideal set-up would be a bishop on d3, pointing towards the king, and a knight on f3. By playing ... Bg4 Black adds pressure to the weak d4 point and more or less forces White to place the bishop on e2 (not the best square for the bishop). After an exchange of bishop for knight, the white bishop becomes situated on f3, two moves away from the optimum b1-h7 diagonal.

## Looking at the Theory

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5

Unfortunately for White, there is no line which promises him a small positional advantage, one that allows him to avoid tactical complications with 'safe' choices. This is something that Black can and should play upon.



We will look at:

**A: 4 c3**

**B: 4 Nf3!?**

That leaves:

**4 c4!?**

With this move White tries to blow Black apart completely. Rounding up White's alternatives:

a) 4 Ne2 transposes into the old line 2 Ne2 d5 3 e5 c5 4 d4, which is dealt with in Chapter 13.

b) 4 Nc3 (the knight has no place on this square: it blocks the c-pawn's advance, either to c3 or c4)

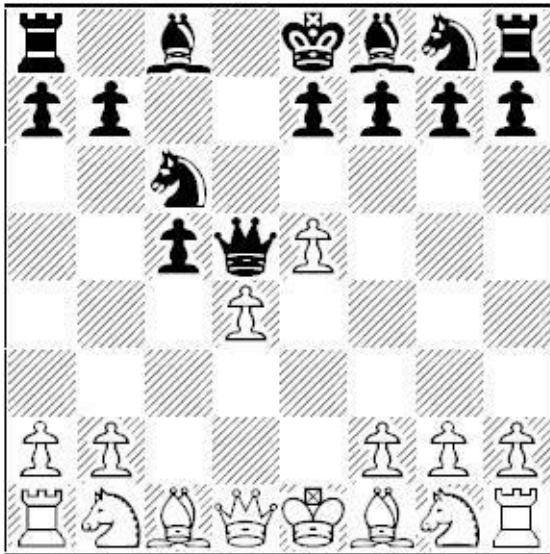
4 ... Nc6 5 Bb5 e6 6 Be3 cxd4 7 Bxd4 Nh6 (re-routing the knight to the desirable f5-square) 8 Nf3 Nf5 9 0-0 Be7 10 Ne2 0-0 (Black has no problems here) 11 Bd3 Nfxd4 12 Nexd4 f6 13 Ng5? (White begins to lunge wildly) 13 ... fxg5 14 Qh5 Rf5! (picking up two pieces for the rook) 15 Nxc6 (15 g4 does not work due to 15 ... g6!) 15 ... bxc6 16 Bxf5 exf5 17 Rfe1 Be6 and Black is easily winning, J.Pareja Perez-D.Campora, Ceuta 1992.

#### 4 ... Nc6 5 cxd5

This little gambit is quite unsound: White's pieces are not active enough to be threatening; and as the position is closed, the extra tempi White gets by attacking the queen do not count for too much.

5 Nf3 transposes to Line B2.

#### 5 ... Qxd5



#### 6 Nc3

6 Nf3 does not offer White any chances of an attack: 6 ... Nxd4 7 Bb5+ Bd7 8 Bxd7+ (Black is fine after 8 Nc3 Nxf3+) 8 ... Qxd7 9 Be3 Nxf3+ 10 Qxf3 e6 11 Nc3 Ne7 12 Rd1 Qc6! 13 Qxc6+ Nxc6 14 Nb5 Rc8 and, although a little passive, Black is a pawn up.

#### 6 ... Qxd4 7 Be3 Qb4!? 8 a3 Qa5 9 Bb5 e6 10 Bxc6+ bxc6 11 Qa4

11 Qg4 Ne7 12 Nge2 Nf5 13 0-0 is slightly better for Black.

#### 11 ... Qxa4

This is the safest course. Instead Z.Topalovic-A.Mikhalchishin, Varazdin 2003, continued 11 ... Qb6 12 b4 Qa6 13 Qxa6 Bxa6 14 bxc5 Ne7 15 Ne4 Nd5 16 Bd4 with an unclear position.

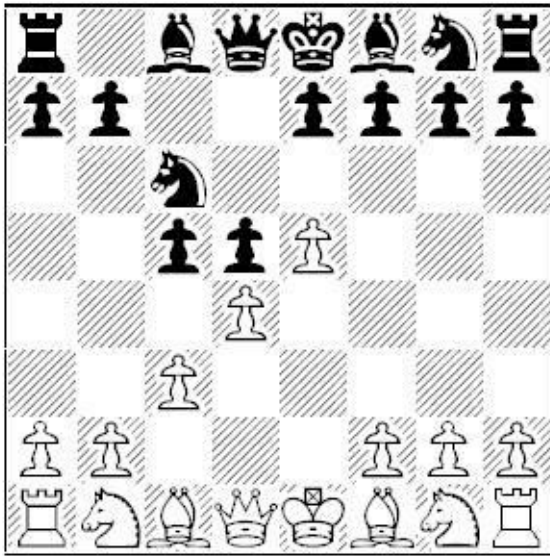
#### 12 Nxa4 c4 13 Rc1 Ne7 14 Rxc4 Ba6 15 Rc1 Nd5

This is okay for Black.

#### A) 4 c3

White tries to maintain the 'pure' pawn structure normally associated with the Advance variation of both the French Defence and the Caro-Kann. The problem with this approach is that the placement of Black's light-squared bishop has not yet been decided, and this makes the overall situation more complicated.

#### 4 ... Nc6

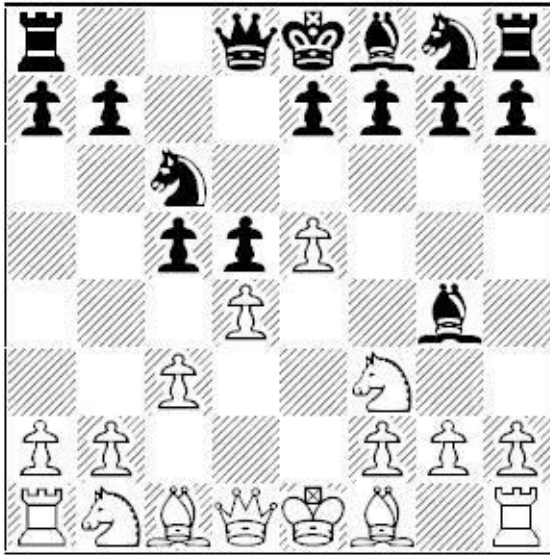


Black is placing White's d-pawn under a bit of pressure. In order to develop his pieces White must resolve this issue first.

**5 Nf3**

If White tries to be more sophisticated, and tries to prevent the bishop developing to its optimum g4-square by playing 5 Be3, Black should continue 5 ... Qb6!. For example, 6 Qd2 cxd4 (the c5-pawn was under threat) 7 cxd4 Bf5 8 Nc3 e6 9 Nf3 Nge7 10 Be2 Bg4!. In these closed positions it is useful to know that the knight is worth more than the bishop. In this specific position we can see that there is a little bit of overpopulation: both the knight and bishop are fighting for the f5-square, but it is clear that the knight will do a better job on that square. From f5 the knight will add more pressure to the d4-pawn and, crucially, unblock the way for the dark-squared bishop on f8: 11 0-0 Nf5 12 Rfd1 Be7 13 Na4 Qd8 14 a3? (not understanding the positional subtleties of the position, I make an important weakness on the queenside) 14 ... Bxf3 15 Bxf3 Na5! 16 Qd3 0-0 17 Nc3 Nc4 and Black soon won in J.Houska-H.Hunt, British League 1998.

**5 ... Bg4!**



**6 dxc5**

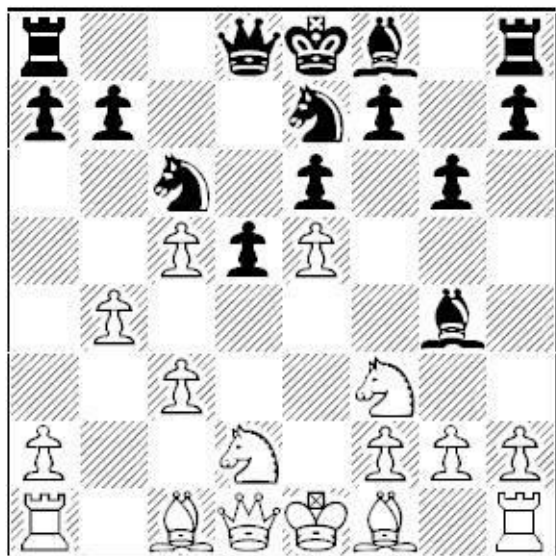
In the game W.Kugelmann-P.Dittmar, Bad Wörishofen 2006, Black simply developed logically in reply to 6 Be2: 6 ... e6 7 0-0 Qb6 8 dxc5 Bxc5 9 b4 Be7 10 Be3 Qc7 11 Nbd2 Nh6 12 a3 Nf5! 13 Bf4. Now instead of the perhaps more risky 13..Rg8, as played in the game, I prefer the safe 13 ... 0-0, which gives Black the advantage after 14 h3 Bxf3 15 Nxf3 f6! 16 exf6 Qxf4 17 fxe7 Ncxe7 – with extra central pawns and a weak c3-pawn to target, Black is better.

### 6 ... e6 7 Be3

White can also try to hold on to the c5-pawn more permanently with 7 b4:

a) 7 ... Nxe5?? is not possible because of 8 Qa4+ Nc6 9 b5 Bxf3 10 bxc6 and White wins. 8 ... Nd7 is even worse: 9 Ne5 Ngf6 10 Bg5 Bf5 11 Nxd7 Qxd7 12 Bb5 and Black loses a queen.

b) 7 ... Nge7 8 Nbd2 g6 (Black intends to attack the pawn on e5 with ... Bg7)



9 Bb5 Bg7 10 h3 Bxf3 11 Nxf3 0-0 12 Bf4 Qc7 13 Qe2 a5! (undermining White's queenside majority) 14 Rb1 axb4 15 cxb4 d4 16 a4 Nd5 17 Bd2 Nxe5 18 Nxe5 Bxe5 19 0-0 Nc3 with equality, A.Lastin-K.Landa, Tomsk 2006.

### 7 ... Bxf3 8 Qxf3 Nxe5 9 Bb5+ Nc6 10 Nd2 Nf6 11 0-0 Be7 12 c4

White tries to destabilize the d5-pawn, but this is not scary for Black.

### 12 ... 0-0 13 cxd5 Nxd5 14 Nc4?

This hands over the initiative to Black, as it allows him not only to get rid of the bishop pair but to secure the d5-square as an outpost for the knight on c6. Instead 14 Rad1 would have been stronger.

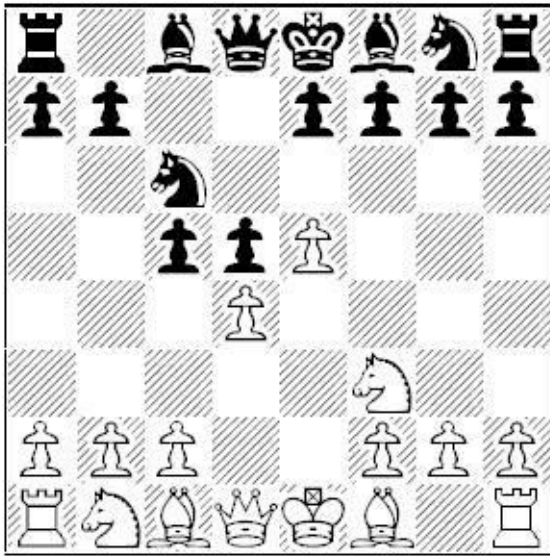
### 14 ... Nxe3 15 Qxe3 Nb4 16 Rac1 Nd5 17 Qd4 Bf6 18 Qe4 Qc7

(H.Jurkovic-R.Zelcic, Rabac 2003) Black's position is already preferable. It is not possible for White to defend the weak pawns on c5 and b2.

### B) 4 Nf3!?

This little move carries more venom than it appears to. White's most dangerous strategy is not to combine Nf3 with c3, trying to hold the centre, but instead to play c4 and blow Black off the board.

### 4 ... Nc6



Now White can play:

**B1: 5 dxc5**

**B2: 5 c4!**

5 Bb5 is not so challenging: 5 ... cxd4 6 Nxd4 Bd7 7 Nxc6 Bxc6 8 Bxc6+ bxc6 9 0-0 e6 10 c4 Ne7 11 Qa4 Qd7 (the only potential weakness in Black's position is the c6-pawn, but this is not enough for White to get anything tangible) 12 Nd2 Rb8 13 b3 Nc8 (if Black can force White to exchange pawns on d5 then he will be doing very well, since he will have a strong d5-pawn and the c- and b-files for his rooks to bear down) 14 Rd1 Nb6 15 Qa5 dxc4 16 Bb2 cxb3 17 axb3 Nd5 18 Ne4 Bb4 19 Qxa7 Qxa7 20 Rxa7 0-0 21 Rc1 Rfd8 22 Rxc6 Be7 23 g3 Rxb3 24 Bc1 h6 ½-½ G.Kosanovic-R.Szuhanek, Hrvatska 2002.

**B1) 5 dxc5 Bg4!**

Developing to the best square.

**6 Bb5**

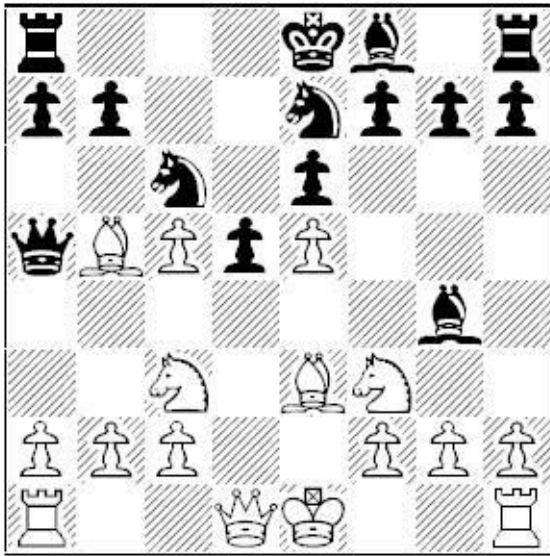
6 Be2 is a little too passive. Black replies 6 ... e6 and now:

a) After 7 Nbd2 Bxc5 8 a3 Nge7 9 c4 Bxf3 10 Nxf3 dxc4 11 Qxd8+ Rxd8 12 Bxc4 a6 13 0-0 Ng6!, the pawn on e5 has become an easy target for Black and it proves impossible for White to hold on to it: 14 b4 Bd4 15 Nxd4 Rxd4 16 Ba2 Ngxe5 and Black later won in L.Couso-T.Engqvist, Stockholm 1999.

b) 7 Be3? Bxf3! (removing the defender of e5) 8 Bxf3 Nge7 9 c3 Nf5! 10 Bd4 f6!? 11 exf6 Nfxd4 12 cxd4 Qxf6 and White has no way to prevent his centre from falling apart, M.Vachier Lagrave-R.Fontaine, Val d'Iserre 2004.

c) 7 Bf4 Bxc5 8 0-0 (or 8 Nbd2 Nge7 9 h3 Bxf3 10 Nxf3 Ng6 11 Bg3 0-0 12 Bd3 f5! 13 exf6 Qxf6 and Black has excellent prospects in the centre, A.Casa-E.Gereben, Monaco 1968) 8 ... Nge7 9 Nbd2 Ng6 10 Bg3 0-0 and Black is perhaps slightly better on account of White's e5-pawn, which has become more of a liability than an asset.

**6 ... Qa5+ 7 Nc3 e6 8 Be3 Nge7**



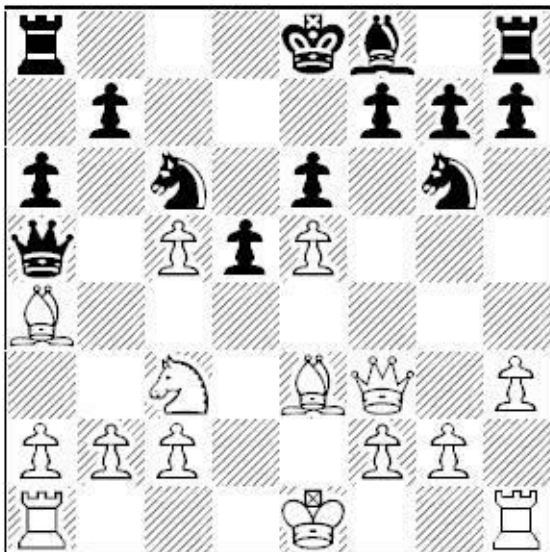
### 9 h3

The most popular continuation, 9 a3, aims to protect the perilously placed c-pawn but leaves White potentially exposed. If Black achieves a breakthrough in the centre with a well-timed ... f6 then White will be in trouble despite being material ahead: 9 ... 0-0-0 10 b4 Bxf3 11 gxf3 Qc7 (Black has two threats now: to push the d-pawn, forking the bishop and knight, and to win the pawn on e5) 12 Bxc6 Nxc6 13 Bd4 a6 14 f4 f6! (Black must play actively whilst the white king is in the centre) 15 h4 Be7 16 Qd3 fxe5 17 fxe5 Nxe5 18 Qh3 Kb8 19 0-0-0 Rhe8 (Black's position has come alive and White is in trouble as the dark squares around his king are just too weak) 20 Rhe1 Bf6 21 Kb1 Ng6 22 Bxf6 gxf6 23 Ne2 and Black was very comfortable in S.Galdunts-R.Zelcic, Graz 2001.

### 9 ... Bxf3 10 Qxf3

10 gxf3? would be a very big error since White cannot defend adequately after 10 ... 0-0-0! (threatening ... d4) 11 Bxc6 Nxc6 12 Bd2 Nxe5, when White's position is terrible.

### 10 ... a6 11 Ba4 Ng6



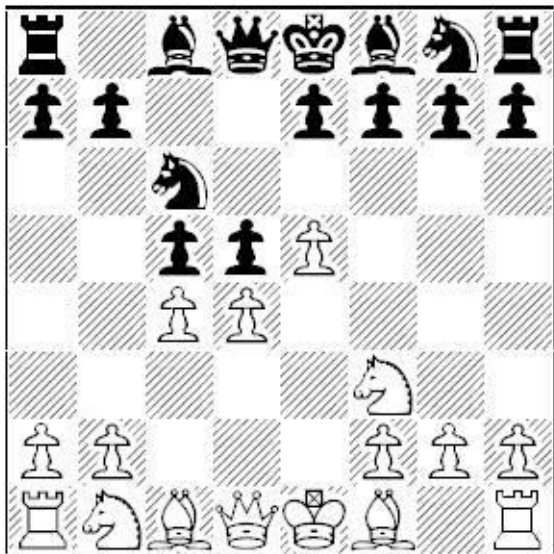
Piling the pressure on the e5-pawn.

12 a3 Qc7 13 0-0 Qxe5 14 Rad1 Be7 15 Rfe1 0-0 16 Bxc6 bxc6 17 Bd4 Qc7 18 Qh5 Rae8

(O.Bitic-R.Zelcic, Zadar 2005) Once Black gets in ... e6-e5, he will stand very well indeed.

## B2) 5 c4!

Throwing down the gauntlet.

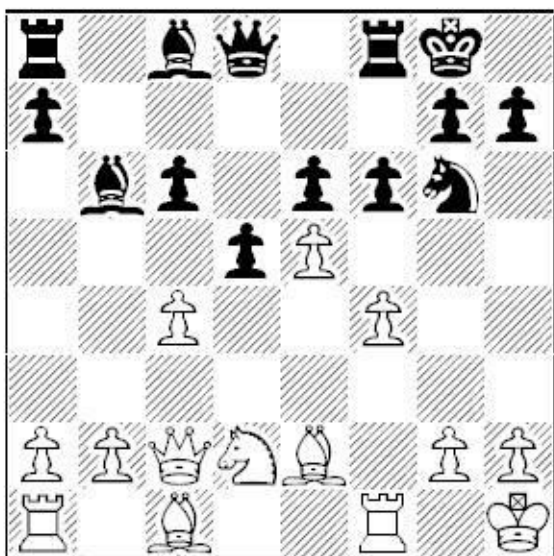


### 5 ... cxd4 6 Nxd4 e6

The safest response for Black; other moves are okay but hand over the initiative to White.

### 7 Nc3

With 7 Nxc6 White simplifies the position, hoping that the potentially weak c6-pawn will trouble Black. However, this approach gave Black no worries in the game V.Kotrotsos-V.Kotronias, Salonica 2006, where Black adopted a very French-like solution to the problem by undermining the e5-pawn with a well-timed ... f7-f6: 7 ... bxc6 8 Be2 Ne7 9 0-0 Ng6 10 f4 Bc5+ 11 Kh1 0-0 12 Qc2 Bb6 13 Nd2 f6! (now that the black pieces are all fully developed, it is time to begin operations)



14 Nf3 fxe5 15 fxe5 Ba6 (now that Black has opened the f-file, he seeks action on the other flank) 16 Bg5 Qe8 17 Bd3 dxc4 18 Bxc4 Bxc4 19 Qxc4 h6 20 Bd2 Rd8 21 Rad1 Rd5!. Black's pieces are very active: his rook is entrenched on d5, attacking the weak e5 point, whilst his knight has the nice square f4

to hop into. Black has no problems here and indeed went on to win.

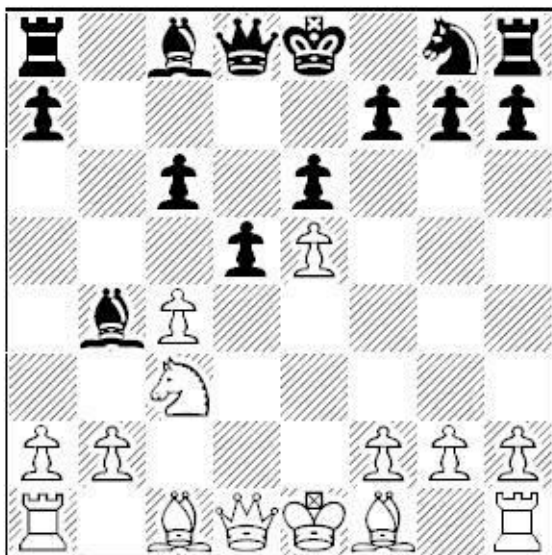
### 7 ... Bb4!

Black develops actively. I feel this is a better move than the popular 7 ... Bc5, which allows 8 Nxc6 bxc6 9 Qg4!.

### 8 Nxc6

The immediate 8 Qg4 is possible but not so poisonous after 8 ... Nxe5! 9 Qxg7 Qf6! 10 Qxf6 Nxf6 11 cxd5 (Black sets a crafty trap: the natural 11 Bg5?! doesn't work due to 11 ... Ne4!) 11 ... Nxd5 12 Bd2 Nxc3 13 bxc3 Bc5 with a level position.

### 8 ... bxc6

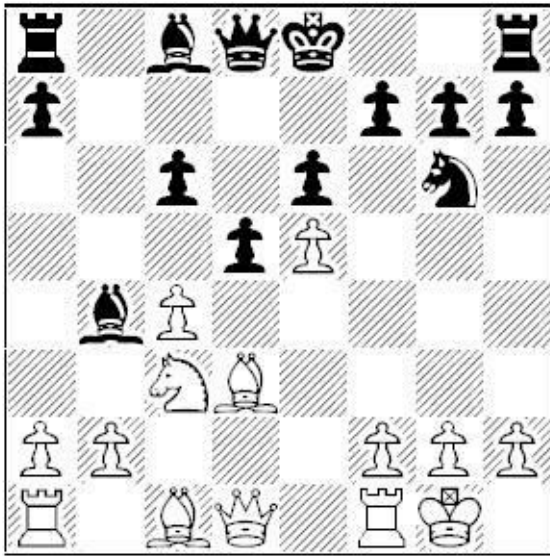


### 9 Qa4

There are a couple of alternatives here:

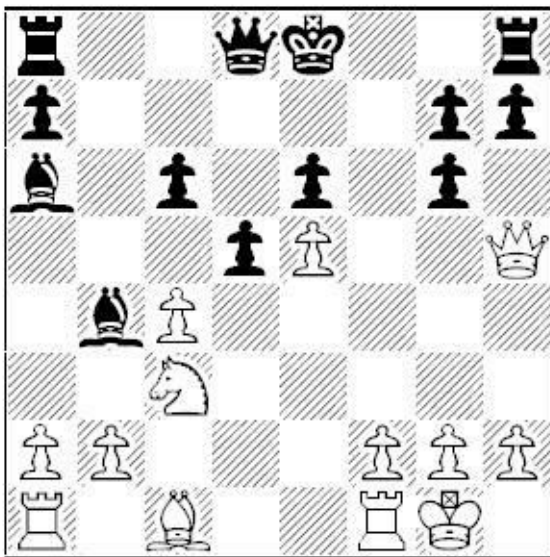
a) 9 Qg4!? is still possible: 9 ... d4! 10 a3 (10 Qxg7? just loses after 10 ... dxc3 11 Qxh8 cxb2+ 12 Ke2 bxa1Q 13 Qxg8+ Bf8) 10 ... Bf8! (Black must retreat the bishop all the way back so as to protect the pawn; 10 ... dxc3?? is simply bad after 11 axb4 cxb2 12 Bxb2, when White is winning) 11 Ne2 (11 Ne4 Qa5+ 12 Bd2 Qxe5 is better for Black) 11 ... c5 12 Nf4 Qc7! (a common theme in this whole variation: Black continues to apply pressure to the vulnerable e5-pawn) 13 Nd3 Ba6 14 Qd1 (White threatens 15 Qa4+; after 14 b3 Rb8 White has to retreat with 15 Qd1 anyway so as to defend the b-pawn) 14 ... Bb7 15 Bd2 Ne7 16 b4 Ng6 with equal chances.

b) 9 Bd3 Ne7!? (I like the simplicity of this move: Black just develops instead of taking extreme measures) 10 0-0 Ng6 is a possibility that is yet to be tested:



b1) The impressive-looking 11 f4 should not faze Black too much since any f4-f5 push leaves the e5-pawn exposed. Black should now concentrate on the opportunities afforded to him on the a7-g1 diagonal: 11 ... 0-0 12 Qa4 (12 Be3?! d4 13 Bxg6 dxe3 14 Be4 Ba6 15 Qa4 Qb6 16 Rfe1 Bxc4) 12 ... Qb6+ 13 Kh1 Bb7 14 a3 Be7. White has a slight problem in coordinating his pieces effectively; for instance, 15 b4 Qd4! 16 Qc2 a5 (16 ... dxc4 leads to a repetition after 17 Bxg6 hxg6 18 Rd1 Qb6 19 Na4 Qb5 20 Nc3) 17 Bb2 dxc4 and Black has the advantage.

b2) 11 Qh5 Ba6! (putting pressure on the c4-pawn and attempting to encourage White to exchange pawns on d5) 12 Bxg6 fxg6.



As a very general rule, one should normally recapture towards the centre. However, taking with the f-pawn (aside from being forced!) does have its merits – it opens the f-file and gives Black another piece to target what must now be a very frazzled e-pawn: 13 Qh3 (trying to win a pawn with 13 Qg4 does not work: 13 ... Qd7 14 cxd5 Bxc3! 15 dxe6 Qc7 16 bxc3 Bxf1 17 Kxf1 Qxe5 and Black picks up the exchange) 13 ... Qe7 14 Bg5 Qf7 15 a3 Bxc3 16 Qxc3 0-0 17 b3 and Black is fine. His plan is to chiefly play on the light squares and place pressure on the c4-pawn, whilst at the same time utilizing the semi-open f- and b-files.

## 9 ... Rb8

This move, which I don't think has been played before, is only possible because Black is threatening to play ... d4. Black should not be overly concerned with material; instead he should focus on obtaining good compensation for the pawn. This compensation is based on the fact that it is not easy for White to develop his pieces and castle.

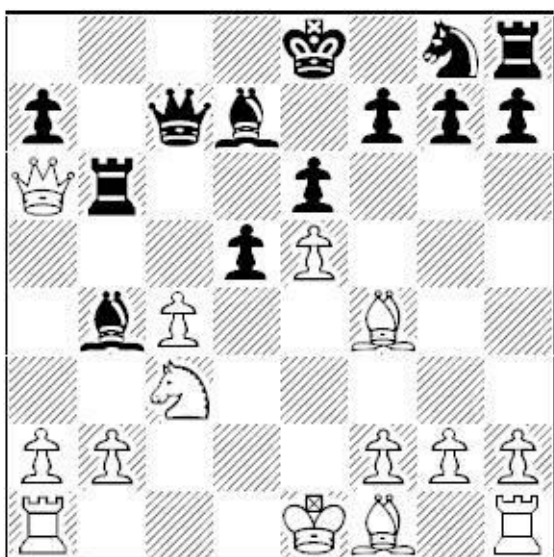
9 ... a5 was played in the game E.Najer-D.Chuprov, Tomsk 2006, which continued 10 cxd5 Qxd5 11 Qxb4 axb4 12 Nxd5 cxd5 13 Bd2 b3 14 a3 Ba6 15 Rc1 Kd7 16 Bxa6 Rxa6 17 h4 Ne7 18 Rh3 Rb8 19 Rf3 Ke8 20 Rc7 Rc6 21 Ra7 h5 and Black managed to hold on for a draw.

Returning to 9 ... Rb8, White has four main continuations:

### 10 Qxa7!

White takes the bull by the horns and accepts one of the pawns. Let's also look at the other options White has in this position:

a) 10 Qxc6+? Bd7 11 Qa6 Qc7! (as mentioned earlier, 11 ... d4 is not a threat because of 12 a3! when White is slightly better; instead Black hits the e-pawn ... and threatens something else!) 12 Bf4 Rb6

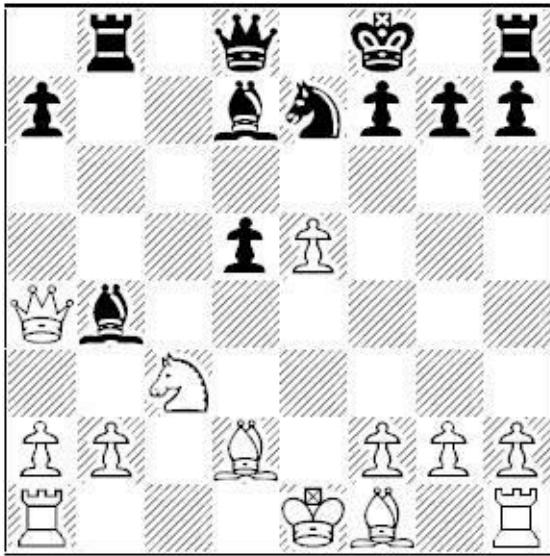


... and the white queen is trapped!

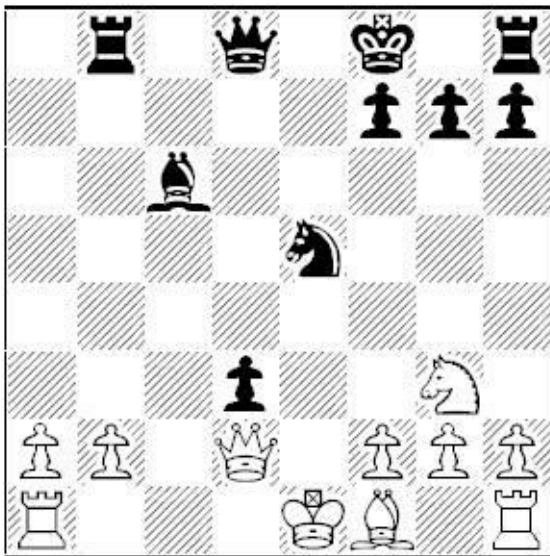
b) 10 Be3 (White tries to develop his pieces, ignoring the offered pawns) 10 ... Ne7 11 a3 (11 Qxa7 Rb7 12 Qa4 Qc7! – by now Black should be familiar with this move! – 13 f4 Nf5 14 Bf2 d4! 15 a3 Be7 16 Ne4 Rxb2 and Black has recovered his pawn, plus he has the better position) 11 ... Ba5 12 b4 Bb6 13 c5 Bc7 14 f4 0-0 15 Be2 Nf5 16 Bf2 f6 with an edge for Black, who undermines the centre and intends to exploit the long a1-h8 diagonal and the open f-file.

c) 10 cxd5 exd5 and now:

c1) 11 Qxc6+ Kf8 (preserving the d5-pawn) 12 Bd2 (attacking the bishop with 12 a3 Ne7 13 Qa4 Ba5 14 b4 Bb6 15 Bb2 d4 16 Rd1 Qc7 17 Ne2 Nf5 leads to a position where it is very difficult for White to develop his pieces) 12 ... Ne7 13 Qa4 Bd7! (Black starts harassing the queen; his next target will be the weak e5-pawn)



14 Qxa7 (14 Qc2 Qc7 15 0-0-0 d4 16 Ne4 Bxd2+ 17 Rxd2 Qxe5 is very double-edged, but with lots of lines open against the white king Black does not stand worse) 14 ... Nc6 15 Qa4 Nxe5 16 Qc2 d4 17 Ne4 Bxd2+ 18 Qxd2 Bc6 (Black is only one pawn down and not only are his pieces incredibly active, but the open e-file leaves the white king looking painfully exposed as well) 19 Ng3 d3.



The d3-pawn is a massive thorn in White's side: he cannot develop his f1-bishop. Now 20 Rd1 loses to 20 ... Qe8!, whilst 20 0-0-0 Nc4 21 Qc3 (21 Qxd3? Qg5+ 22 Kb1 Qf6 23 Qd4 Nxb2 24 Qxf6 Nxd1+ and Black is winning!) 21 ... Qg5+ 22 Rd2 Nxd2 23 Qxd2 Qxd2+ 24 Kxd2 Rxb2+ is pretty dismal for White.

c2) 11 Qxa7 is also possible. Black will chase the queen away and then play for ... d5-d4, although he must be aware that it is not an immediate threat as it can be met by a2-a3, chasing the bishop away: 11 ... Rb7 12 Qa4 Qc7 (targeting White's weak spot e5) with a further branch:

c21) If 13 Bf4 then 13 ... Ne7!, heading for two squares: either g6 or, more dangerously, d5 once the d5-pawn has vacated the square: 14 Be2 d4 15 a3 Nd5! 16 axb4 Nxf4 17 g3 Nxe2 18 Nxe2 d3 19 Nf4 Qxe5+ 20 Kf1 0-0 21 Qxc6 Re7 and suddenly the precarious position of the white king is painfully revealed.

c22) After 13 f4 Qb6, the natural developing move 14 Be2? loses a piece after 14 ... Ra7 15 Qb3 d4, as now the move a2-a3 is rather pointless.

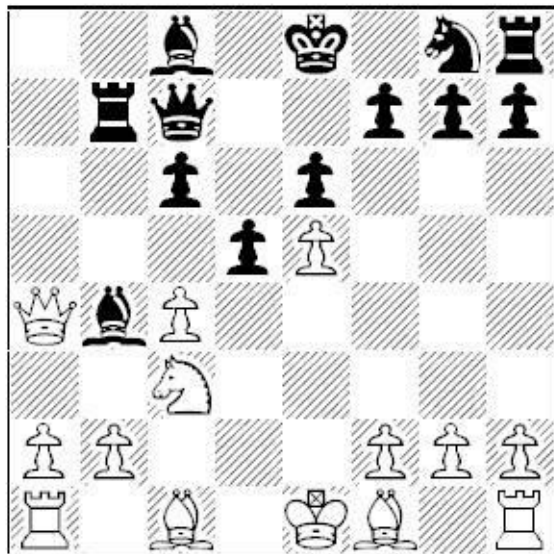
### 10 ... Rb7 11 Qa4!

The best retreat for the queen. 11 Qd4 allows 11 ... c5 and now:

a) 12 Qg4? d4 13 a3 (13 Qxg7? loses to 13 ... dxc3!) 13 ... Ra7! (pinning the a-pawn) 14 Rb1 dxc3 15 axb4 c2 and amusingly the rook is trapped!

b) 12 Qd1 d4 13 a3 Ba5 14 b4 cxb4 15 Nb5 bxa3+ 16 Bd2 Bc7 17 f4 Ne7 and Black should not have any problems in this position: he has recovered the pawn, has a nice square on f5 for his knight and should utilize the long a8-h1 diagonal for his bishop.

### 11 ... Qc7



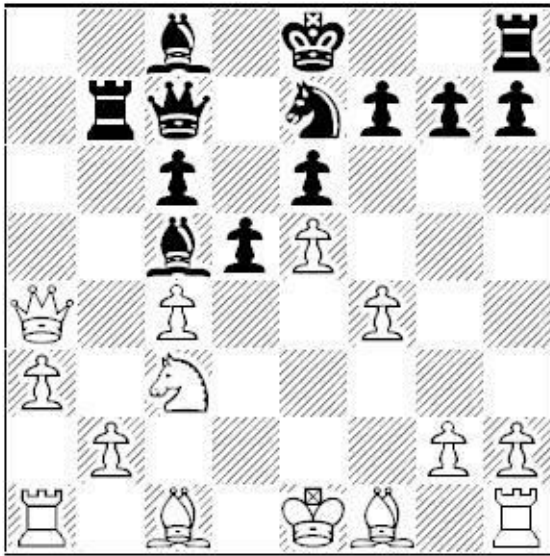
### 12 f4!

Or 12 Bf4?! Ba5! (Black threatens the b2-pawn and to win a piece with ... d4) 13 0-0-0 Bxc3 14 bxc3 Ne7 15 Bd3 0-0 and with the open b-file Black is sure to stand better.

### 12 ... Ne7 13 a3

Another line is 13 Bd2 d4 14 Ne4 Bxd2+ 15 Nxd2 f6!? (undermining the e5-pawn) 16 exf6 gxf6 (now Black threatens both the f4- and b2-pawns) 17 g3 (in the complicated position arising after 17 Be2 Qxf4 18 Bh5+ Kf8 19 0-0-0 Kg7 20 Rhf1 Qe5 21 Bf3 Bd7 22 Nb3 Nf5, Black has at least equal chances; he should concentrate on attacking White's king, aiming to provoke weaknesses) 17 ... e5 18 0-0-0 Bf5 19 fxe5 (19 Bg2!?) 19 ... fxe5 20 Bg2 0-0 21 a3 (21 c5 is met by 21 ... Be6; 21 Rhf1? Ra7 22 Qb3 Rb8 and White has real problems as he cannot defend a2) 21 ... Rfb8 22 b4 Ra7 23 Qb3 Rba8 24 Kb2 Rxa3 25 Qxa3 Rxa3 26 Kxa3 c5. Material is roughly level but White has problems with his king.

### 13 ... Bc5



Black's compensation for the pawn lies in White's difficulty in getting his king to safety. If White simply fuffs around then Black will castle and start undermining the centre with ... f6.

**14 Bd3**

Or 14 b4 Bd4 15 Qc2 f6! (with the white king in the centre Black should try to open lines as fast as possible) 16 exf6 Bxf6 17 Bd3 e5! 18 0-0 e4 19 Be2 0-0 (Black has a nice central pawn phalanx) 20 Bb2 Nf5 (targeting the d4-square) 21 Qb3 Be6 22 cxd5 cxd5 and here 23 Nxd5?? would be a massive blunder, as 23 ... Bxb2! nets a piece.

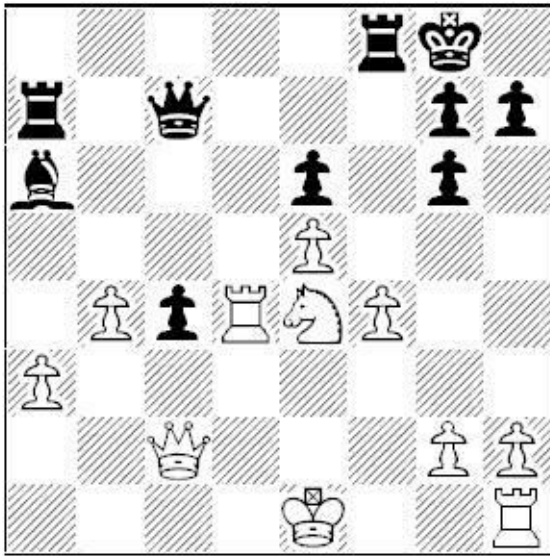
**14 ... Ra7 15 Qc2 Ba6**

Black targets the c4-pawn.

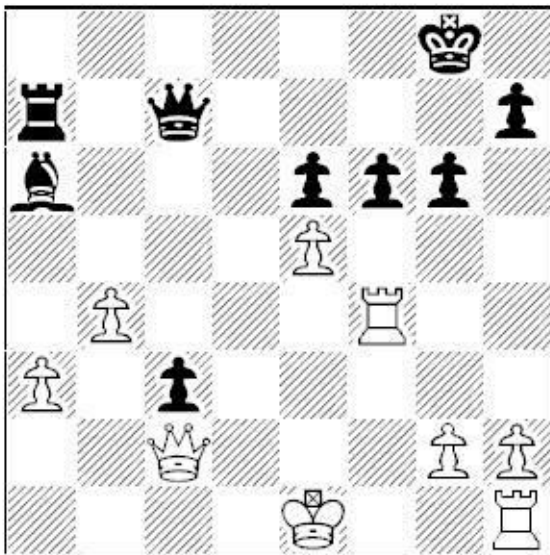
**16 b4**

After 16 cxd5 exd5 17 Bxa6 Rxa6 18 Bd2, Black must bear in mind that White has no safe place for the king – if he castles queenside then Black has a ready-made attack. The position is very complicated, and material gain is less important than maintaining activity and the initiative; for example, 18 ... 0-0 19 0-0-0 Rb8 20 g4 Bd4 21 g5 Qa7 22 Rdf1 Rab6 etc. White can also play 18 Ne4, but then 18 ... Bb4+ 19 Bd2 Bxd2+ 20 Nxd2 Qa7 21 Qd3 0-0 22 Ke2 f6! gives Black a pleasant attacking position.

**16 ... dxc4! 17 Be4 Bd4 18 Bb2 c5 19 Rd1 Ng6 20 Bxg6 fxg6 21 Ne4 0-0 22 Bxd4 cxd4 23 Rxd4**



In this incredible position Black should play **23 ... Rxf4!!** allowing **24 Nf6+ gxf6 25 Rxf4 c3!!**  
 An amazing move; the threat is to play ... Bb5 winning the a-pawn.



### 26 Rf3

This should lead to a draw, but 26 Re4? loses to 26 ... Bb5! 27 exf6 Rxa3! 28 Kf2 Qa7+ 29 Kg3 Ra2 30 f7+ Kf8. I couldn't resist including the rest of the moves: 31 Qxc3 Qf2+ 32 Kg4 Qxg2+ 33 Kf4 Rf2+ 34 Ke5 Qg5+ 35 Kxe6 Qe7+ 36 Kd5 Qd7+ 37 Kc5 Rf5+ 38 Kb6 Qd6+ 39 Ka7 Rxf7+ 40 Ka8 Qd8+ and Black is checkmating.

### 26 ... Qxe5+ 27 Kf2 Qd4+ 28 Re3 Qf4+ 29 Rf3 Qd4+

After 30 Re3 Black should accept the perpetual check. If White plays 30 Kg3??, however, Black can play on with 30 ... g5 31 h4 (31 Rxc3 Qf4+ mates) 31 ... Bb7 32 Qxc3 Qd6+ 33 Kh3 Bxf3 34 Qxf3 when he has the better position.

## Summary

White has no 'safe' way to reach an advantage. If he plays passively with 4 c3 then Black should look to develop the light-squared bishop to g4. The move 4 Nf3 is more adventurous, but the analysis in Line B

shows that Black should be okay here.

# Chapter Eight

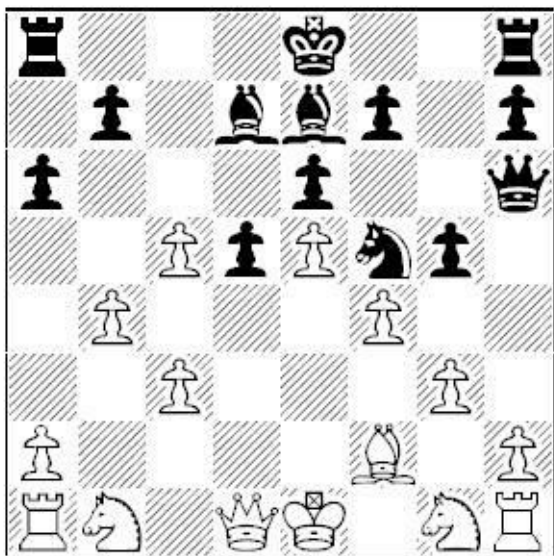
## Advance Variation: 3 ... c5 4 dxc5

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 dxc5

4 dxc5 is the critical answer to 3 ... c5. White enters into the complications Black offered on the third move.

### The Ruined Pawn Chain

At the cost of a pawn Black has succeeded in getting White to ruin his own pawn chain, giving him two targets: e5 and c5. It is important that Black does not fight for material equality at any cost. Indeed, it should be mentioned that at times Black does not manage to recover the pawn. Instead he aims to get as much positional compensation as possible, e.g. an advantage in development, tying White down to the protection of his pawns, no productive plans for White and so on. Black achieves this by placing immense pressure on the e5- and c5-pawns; the plan is for White to overextend himself so much or place his pieces on such awkward squares that when Black succeeds in breaking through or winning back one of the pawns then he will have a concrete advantage. Let me show you an example:



*position after 13 ... g5!*

In this position (taken from Line A3) White has an impressive-looking pawn structure, but his pieces remain undeveloped and furthermore he has big problems with his light squares. By aggressively opening lines, Black demonstrates how precarious the white position really is.

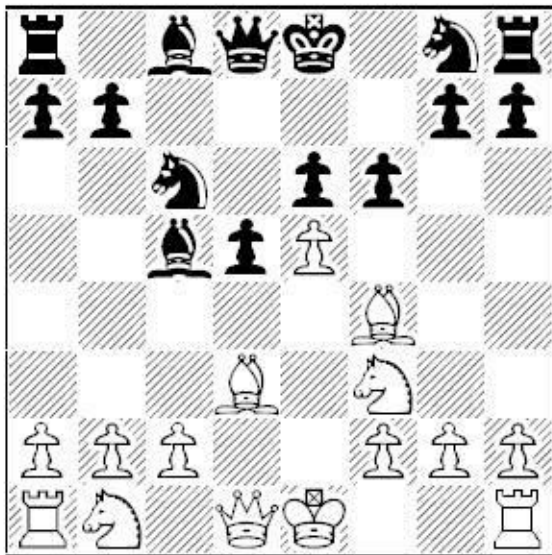
There are a few things in this line that Black should get to grips with:

### The 'French' Bishop

This variation shares many characteristics with the French Defence in the respect that after the capture of the pawn on c5, Black chooses to lock in the bishop with ... e6, leaving it trapped behind its own pawns. In true French style Black will often try to release this piece through the ... f6 pawn break or by swapping it for its counterpart.

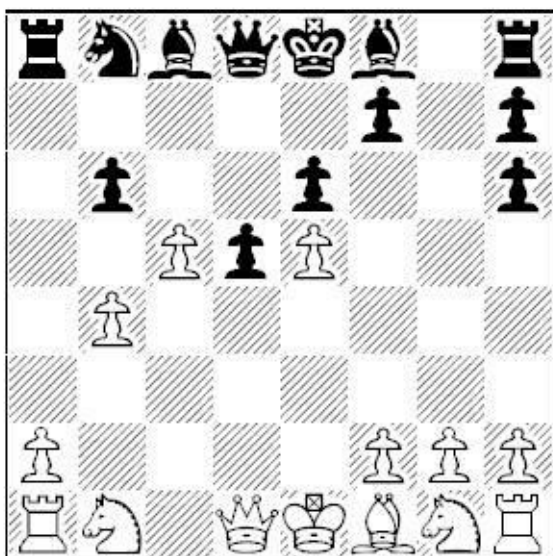
## The ... f6 Pawn Break

This move has two aims: to break up the white centre, opening up lines against the white king, and also to solve the problem of the bad bishop on c8.



In this specific position (from Line C) White has committed to playing Bf4 early, which allows Black to begin French-style operations to undermine the centre. Further ahead, Black may use the newly opened e8-h5 diagonal to free his bishop.

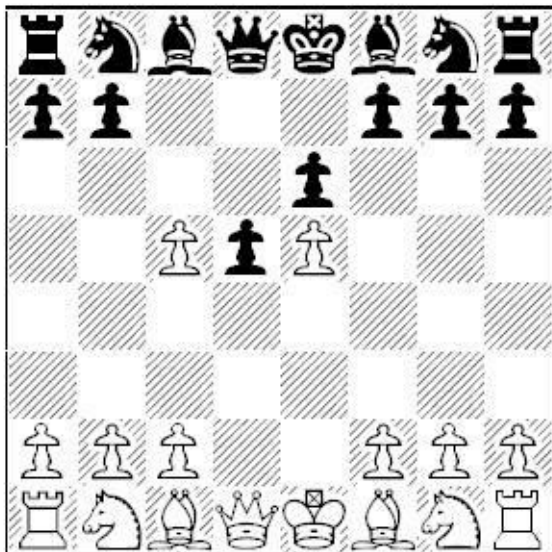
## The ... b6 Pawn Break



Here's a position taken from Line A1. Black has just played **9 ... b6!**, attacking the queenside pawn chain in order to open lines against White's queenside and king, and to grab all the dark squares. The pawn cannot be captured because of ... Bxb4+!, when Black has an excellent position.

## Looking at the Theory

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 dxc5 e6



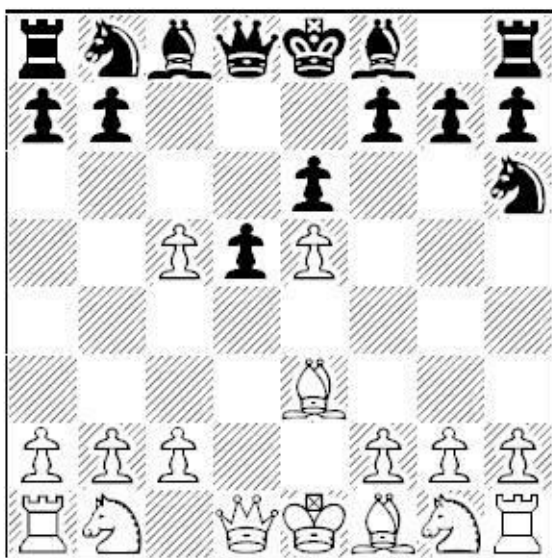
The so-called choice of grandmasters, and a more reliable move than 4 ... Nc6. Caro specialist GM Keith Arkell told me that 4 ... Nc6 is more arrogant, a move that tries to gain an advantage.

After 4 ... e6 the main line is 5 Be3, defending the c-pawn with the bishop. We will consider that move first before moving on to alternatives where White does not defend the pawn.

White's choices are:

- A: 5 Be3
- B: 5 Nc3
- C: 5 Be4
- D: 5 Qg4
- E: 5 Nf3

A) 5 Be3 Nh6



GM Dautov's idea: the knight wants to get to its ideal location of f5, attacking the e3-bishop which in turn defends the c5-pawn. Now White can play:

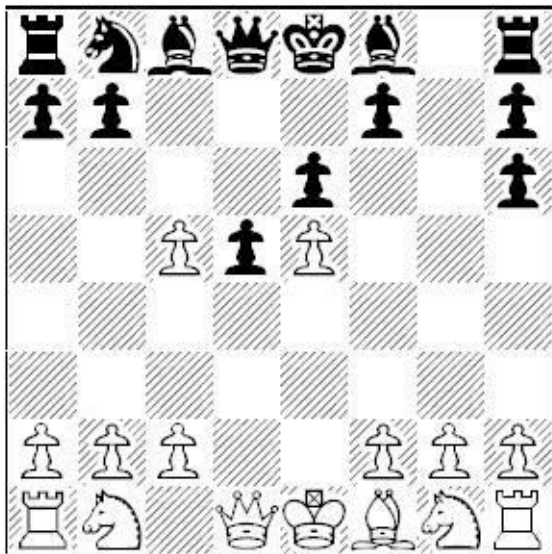
**A1: 6 Bxh6**

**A2: 6 Nf3**

**A3: 6 c3**

6 f4? is careless: 6 ... Nd7! (hitting the c5-pawn) 7 Bb5 (if 7 b4 a5! 8 c3 axb4 9 cxb4 b6! 10 Bb5 bxc5 11 Bc6 Rb8 12 bxc5 Bxc5 13 Bxc5 Qa5+! Black recovers the piece with an excellent position to boot) 7 ... Qa5+ 8 Nc3 a6! 9 Bxd7+ Bxd7 10 Nge2 (after 10 a3 Qc7 11 b4 b6! Black has a significant advantage) 10 ... Nf5 11 Bf2 Bxc5 and Black has already got the upper hand, M.Nimtz-I.Khenkin, Bad Wiessee 2000.

**A1) 6 Bxh6 gxh6**

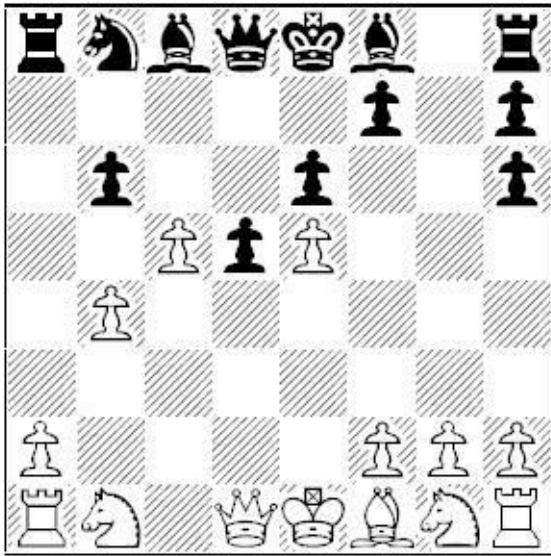


Technically speaking this is the most principled line, but it is hardly ever played. In compensation for the doubled h-pawns Black has the two bishops and will almost certainly recover the lost pawn. In the battle for activity the doubled h-pawns are not a weakness; in fact they help Black as he now has an open g-file. In some lines White does normally take the knight but this is usually after the moves 6 Nf3 Nd7, and only then 7 Bxh6! is considered the best. However, the situation is different here as the b8-knight is not committed to d7.

**7 Nd2**

Alternatively:

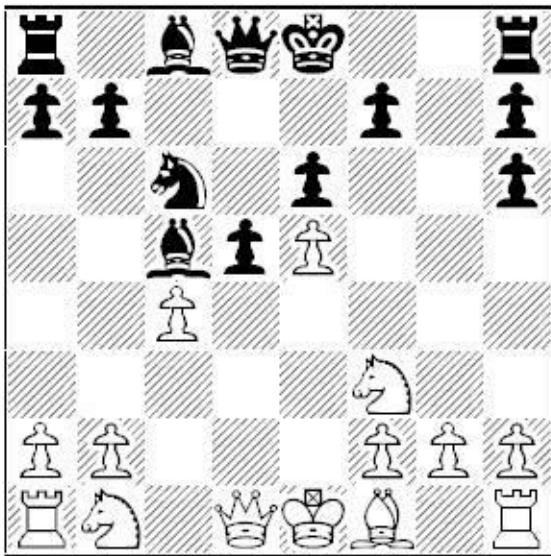
a) With 7 b4?! White holds on to the extra pawn for dear life but with no regard for the consequences: 7 ... a5!? (Black should commence active operations to open lines immediately) 8 c3 axb4 9 cxb4 b6! (again Black begins to break up the white pawns so that his two bishops can be happier) and now:



a1) 10 Bb5+ Bd7 11 Bxd7+ Nxd7! (hitting the two pawns: c5 and e5) 12 Nf3 bxc5 13 bxc5 Qc7 14 0-0 Bg7! (this is a good location for the bishop: here it eyes up the e5-pawn and at the same time gives some shelter to the black king after ... 0-0) 15 Nbd2 Nxe5 and Black has a great position; it's clear that the doubled pawns hardly matter at all.

a2) 10 Nf3 bxc5 11 bxc5 Bxc5 (Black intends to apply heavy pressure on the white king as quickly as possible) 12 Bd3 Qa5+ 13 Nbd2 Ba6! (in order to castle White will have to either allow some exchanges to take place, something that will benefit Black as the a-pawn is more of a liability than a strength) 14 Qe2 Qc3! 15 Bb5+ Nd7 16 0-0 Bxf2+!? 17 Qxf2 Bxb5 18 Rfc1 Qa5 19 Qg3 Qb6+ 20 Kh1 Bd3! 21 Qg7 Ke7 22 Rc3 and Black has no problems.

b) After 7 Nf3, the safest move is 7 ... Nc6. Now 8 Bd3 Qa5+ 9 c3 Qxc5 10 0-0 Bg7 is fine for Black. If instead White tries to place Black under pressure with 8 c4, as played in J.Kaufeld-F.Doettling, Dortmund 2001, the move 8 ... Bxc5! offers more than the game continuation 8 ... dxc4.



For example, 9 cxd5 exd5 10 Qc2 (if 10 Nc3 Black should seize space with 10 ... d4 11 Ne4 Bb4+ 12 Nfd2 0-0 13 f4 Bf5 14 Nf6+ Kh8 15 a3 Be7 16 Nde4 Bxf6 17 Nxf6 d3 – preventing the bishop from developing – 18 g4 Bg6 and here 19 f5? just blunders a pawn and the game to 19 ... Nxe5) 10 ... Qa5+ 11

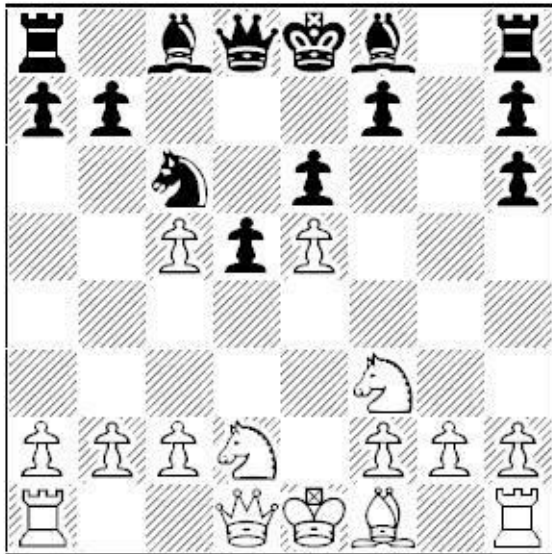
Nbd2?! Nb4 12 Qb3 Bf5! (Black develops his bishop to the most active square; suddenly White must figure out an adequate way of dealing with 13 ... Nc2+) 13 Rc1 Qb6! (the f2-pawn is a target) 14 Be2 Bxf2+ 15 Kf1 Rd8 and Black has the better chances.

### 7 ... Nc6

This is not the normal idea – usually Black rushes to win the c5-pawn with an immediate ... Bxc5. The move I recommend goes after the bigger fish on e5!

7 ... Bxc5 did not prove so successful for Black in the game K.Hansen-J.Andersen, correspondence 2003: 8 Nb3 Bf8 9 f4 Bg7 10 Bd3 0-0 11 Qg4 f6 12 Nf3 Nc6 13 0-0-0 Kh8 and White enjoyed the more pleasant position.

### 8 Ngf3



### 8 ... Bd7

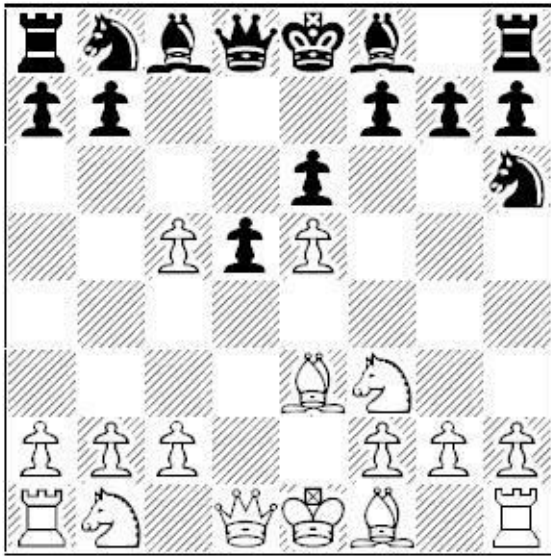
Preventing any Bb5 ideas which would hamper Black's plans of piling pressure on the e-pawn. P.Saint Amour-L.Bernal Moro, correspondence 2003, continued 8 ... Bxc5 9 Nb3 Bf8 10 Bb5 a6 11 Bxc6+ bxc6 12 0-0 c5 13 c4 Bb7 14 Re1 Qb6 15 cxd5 Bxd5 16 Qc2 Be7 17 Nbd2 0-0 18 Rac1 Kh8 and the game was later drawn.

### 9 Bd3 Qc7 10 Qe2 Bg7

The e-pawn cannot be defended, and the position is equal after 11 c3 Nxe5 12 Nxe5 Bxe5 13 0-0-0 0-0-0 14 Nb3 Ba4.

## A2) 6 Nf3

I have cheekily named this line the 'Forgotten Variation', as my database shows it has been virtually untouched since 2003. When investigating why I just could not figure it out. The only thing that I noticed was that commentators had labelled the resulting positions very complicated. Perhaps with the rise of computers humans are growing lazier ... Anyway, to actual the merits of the move. Despite its disappearance 6 Nf3 is actually a very flexible and dangerous variation. It's an elastic move in the sense that White retains the choice of how many squares to advance the c2-pawn.



### 6 ... Nf5

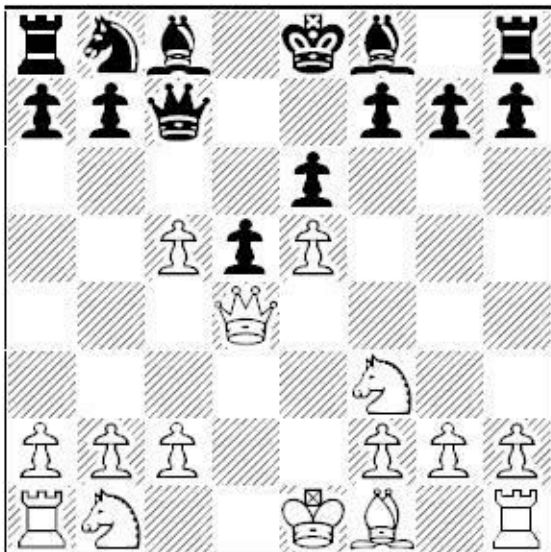
This is a little less popular than 6 ... Nd7. R.Rabiega-I.Khenkin, German League 2001, continued 7 Bxh6! gxh6 8 c4! dxc4 (after 8 ... Bxc5 9 cxd5 White is much better) 9 Bxc4 Bg7 10 Qe2 (10 Bb5 0-0 11 Bxd7 Bxd7 12 Nc3 Bc6 13 Qe2 Rc8 14 0-0 Bxf3 15 Qxf3 Bxe5 16 Qxb7 Qh4) 10 ... Qc7 11 Bb5 0-0 12 Bxd7 Bxd7 13 0-0 Qxc5 14 Nc3 Bc6 15 Ne4 Qb4 16 Rfe1 Bxe4, when White has an edge but Black should hold the position.

### 7 Bg5!

Alternatively:

a) 7 Bb5+ does not make so much sense since White exchanges Black's worst piece on the board. After 7 ... Bd7 8 Bxd7+ Nxd7 9 Bg5 Qc7 Black will win back one of the pawns with equality.

b) 7 Bd4?! Nxd4 8 Qxd4 Qc7!?



Black quite obviously threatens to capture the c5-pawn, and White must make a decision:

b1) 9 b4 (hanging on to the pawn) 9 ... a5 10 a3 Bd7 (now Black is threatening ... Nc6) 11 Qb2 (11 Be2? Nc6 12 Qb2 and Black will recover his pawn and much more) 11 ... Nc6! (the threat is 12..axb4 13 axb4 Rxa1, winning the b4-pawn) 12 b5 Ne7 (now the c5-pawn is beyond saving) 13 Nc3 Ng6 14 Na4

Bxc5 15 b6 Qc6 16 Nxc5 Qxc5 with an edge for Black.

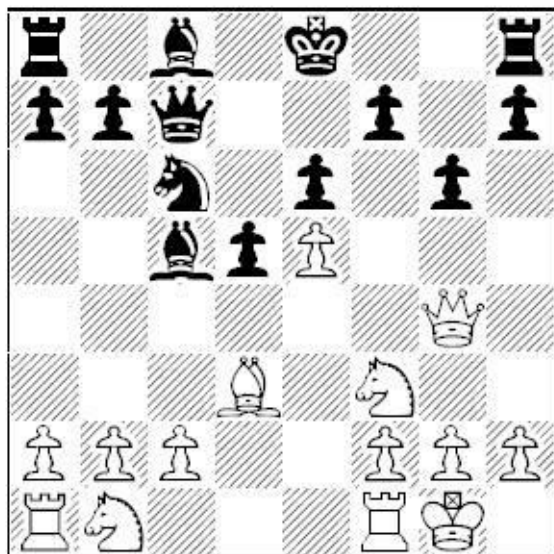
b2) 9 Bb5+ (White throws this check in to make development easier) 9 ... Bd7 10 Bxd7+ Nxd7 11 b4 a5 (Black begins undermining immediately) 12 a3 b6! 13 cxb6 Nxb6 and now:

b21) 14 c3 axb4 15 cxb4 Bxb4+! 16 Qxb4 Qc1+ 17 Ke2 Qxh1 18 Qxb6 0-0 19 Qd4 Qxg2 20 Nbd2 and Black, who should activate his rooks straight away, is fine. White's position is more difficult as his king is more exposed than Black's, although he does have an extra piece to protect it!

b22) 14 b5 Bc5 15 Qg4 0-0 16 0-0 Nc4 17 Qg3 a4 and the b-pawn will drop off.

b23) 14 bxa5 Rxa5 15 0-0 Bc5 16 Qg4 0-0 17 a4 Rfa8. Black has an edge here, as he will soon recapture a pawn and will possess the better structure.

b3) Ignoring Black's threats does not promise White any success: 9 Bd3 Bxc5 10 Qg4 g6 11 0-0 Nc6 and now:



b31) 12 Re1 Qb6! 13 Qh4 Be7 14 Qh6 Bf8 15 Qc1 Bg7 16 c4 dxc4 17 Bxc4 0-0 18 Nbd2 Bd7 19 Bf1 Ne7 20 Nc4 Qc7 and Black is equal.

b32) If White tries 12 Qf4?!, trying to invade the dark squares to create some threats, Black simply plays 12 ... 0-0, threatening ... f7-f6 to take advantage of White's self-pinning himself. Now 13 Re1? f6! wins a pawn, while White's idea of mating on h7 with 13 Qh6? is refuted easily by 13 ... Nxe5 14 Ng5 f6.

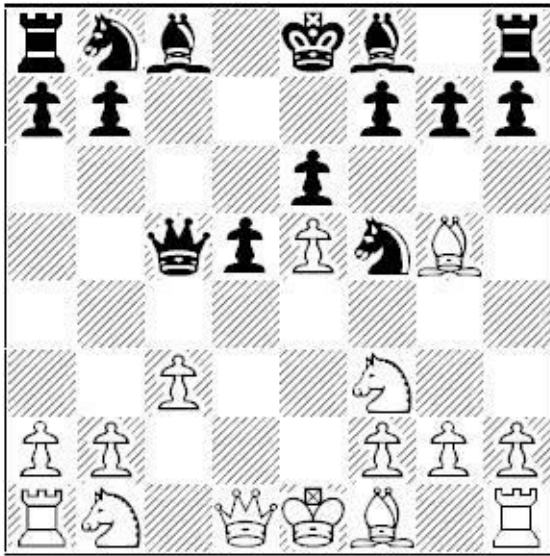
**7 ... Qa5+**

As played by GM Dautov and IM Balabaev.

**8 c3**

The interesting 8 Nc3 has never been played before. After 8 ... Bxc5 9 Bd3 d4 10 Bxf5 dxc3 11 b4 Bxb4 12 Be4 h6 13 Bf4 Nc6 14 0-0 0-0 15 Qe2 Rd8 16 Rfd1 Rxd1+ 17 Qxd1 Ne7 White has compensation for the pawn but Black has no real problems. If 9 Qd2 Nc6 10 Nb5 Black should avoid swapping into an endgame with the bad French bishop. It's better to play 10 ... Qb6 – in a middlegame it's easier to exploit the fact that White no longer has the d4-pawn.

**8 ... Qxc5**



### 9 Bd3!

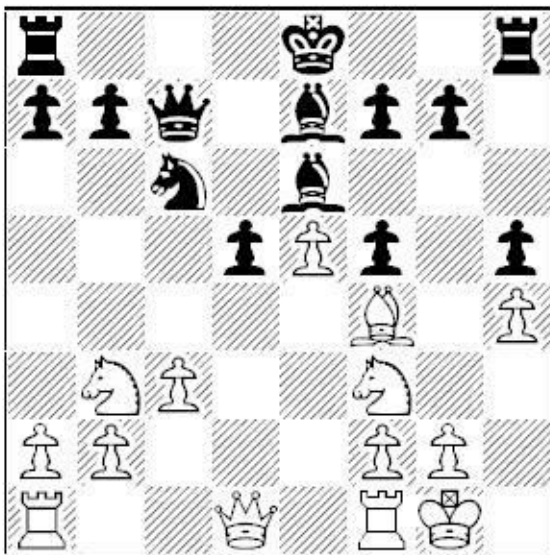
9 g4?! is a crazy looking computer (*Rybka*) suggestion: 9 ... Nh6 10 Nbd2 (10 Bxh6 gxh6 11 Nbd2 Nc6 12 Nb3 Qb6 and Black has no problems – he will simply target the e5-pawn) 10 ... Nc6 (after 10 ... Nxg4?? the joke would be on Black following 11 Qa4+!) 11 h3 Be7 12 Bxe7 Qxe7 13 Bd3 and the position looks equal, if a little double-edged.

### 9 ... h6

White does have a slight edge but it is hardly noticeable.

### 10 Bd2!?

10 Bc1 is more logical as it allows White to develop the b1-knight more freely: 10 ... Be7 11 h4 h5 12 Bxf5 exf5 13 Nbd2 Qc7 14 Nb3 Nc6 15 Bf4 Be6 16 0-0.



In this position it is true that the light-squared bishop is ‘bad’, but it is performing a very important defensive role in guarding the pawns on f5 and d5. It is very difficult for White to break through; for example, 16 ... a5 17 a4 Ra6 18 Re1 Rb6 19 Re2 Qd8 20 Bg5 Qc7 21 Bxe7 Qxe7 22 Qc2 g6 23 Nc1 0-0 24 Nd3 d4 25 c4 Nb4 ½-½ M.Neubauer-J.Molina, Sao Jose de Rio Preto 2003.

### 10 ... Qb6 11 b4

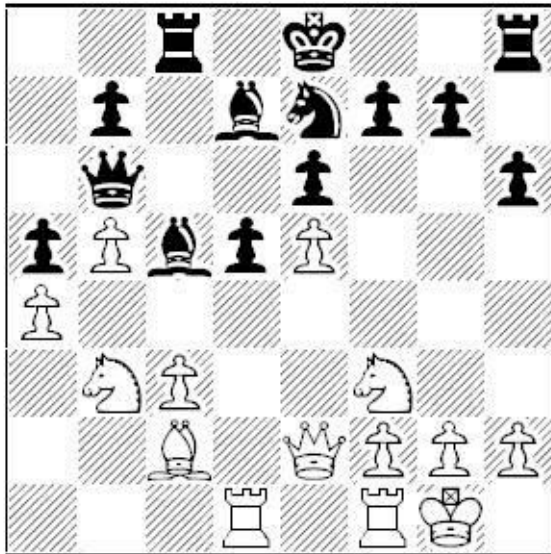
11 Bxf5 is met by 11 ... Qxb2 12 Qb3 Qxb3 13 axb3 exf5 14 Na3 Be6 15 Nb5 Kd7 16 Rxa7 Rxa7 17 Nxa7 Bc5 18 Nb5 Nc6 19 0-0 Ra8 when although White has regained the pawn, Black is more active and this is an important factor in endgames.

After 11 Qc2 Black should just develop normally: 11 ... Be7 12 Bxf5 exf5 13 Be3 Qa6 14 Qe2 b6 15 Nbd2 Nc6 16 Nb3 Qxe2+ 17 Kxe2 Ba6+ 18 Kd2 g5!, seizing space and securing equal chances. White has the strong d4-square, but Black owns all the light squares and has the e5-pawn to target.

**11 ... a5!**

Forcing White to concede the c5-square.

**12 b5 Nd7 13 a4 Nc5 14 Bc2 Ne4 15 0-0 Bc5 16 Qe2 Nxd2 17 Nbx2 Bd7 18 Rad1 Ne7 19 Nb3 Rc8**

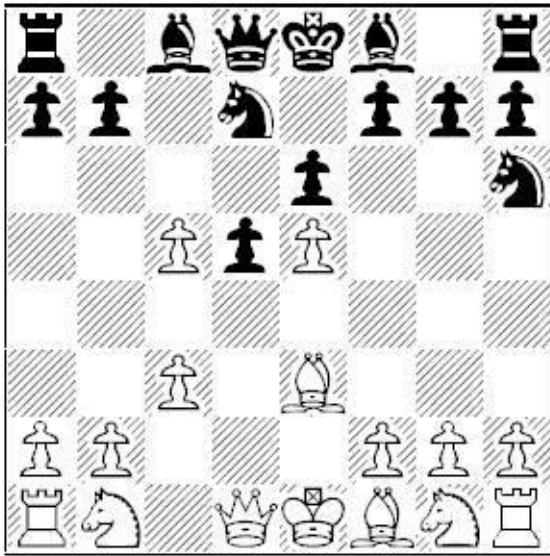


... and Black was doing fine in C.Lutz-R.Dautov, German League 1997. Black will target the weak queenside pawns, particularly c3. However, he should be careful with the light squares around his king, as his own light-squared bishop cannot come to the rescue very easily. The game remained level after 20 Nfd4 Qc7 21 Nxc5 Qxc5 22 Rd3 g6 23 Qd2 Nf5 24 Nb3 Qc7 25 Re1 b6 26 Nc1 h5 27 Bb3.

### A3) 6 c3

The most popular response. White intends to hold on to the pawn for dear life, since that is all he has to show for voluntarily ruining his pawn structure. The point of 6 c3 is purely defensive: it supports the bishop if it gets chased to d4 and also the b2-b4 advance.

**6 ... Nd7**

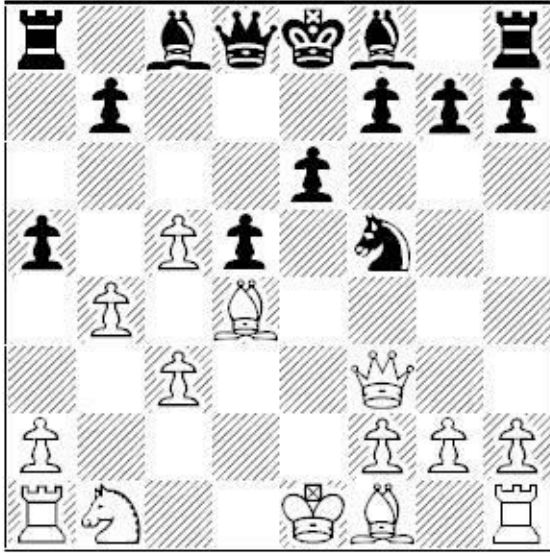


This is virtually a novelty, since according to my database it has been played only once before, in an obscure junior tournament. The idea behind the move is simple: to attack both the c5- and e5-pawns before White has played Nf3 or Bd4. Since this is all new, in addition to giving lines that I consider to be the most testing, I've also shown how a typical player would react.

**7 Bb5**

Or:

a) 7 b4 Nxe5 8 Nf3 (as seen previously, exchanging the knight is not especially dangerous: 8 Bxh6 gxh6 9 Bb5+ Bd7 10 Bxd7+ Qxd7 11 Nf3 Nxf3+ 12 Qxf3 Bg7 13 0-0 a5 14 Qg3 0-0 and Black is okay) 8 ... Nxf3+ 9 Qxf3 Nf5 10 Bd4 a5! (by now a familiar theme)



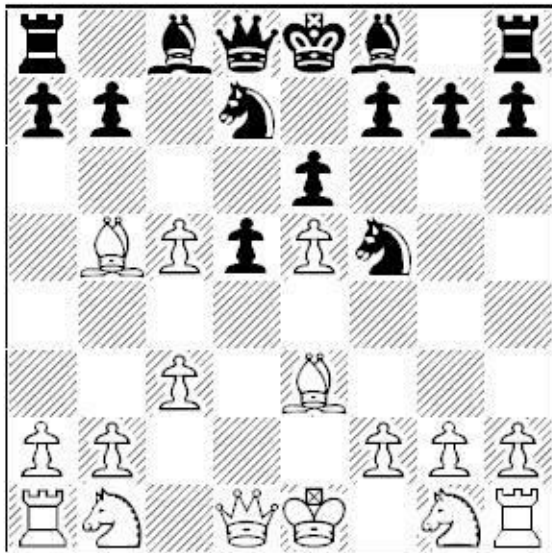
11 Bd3 Nxd4 12 cxd4 axb4 13 0-0 Bd7 14 Nd2 Be7 15 Rfc1 and Black stands very well.

b) 7 Bxh6 gxh6 8 Nf3 Bxc5 9 b4 Bb6 and Black will aim to place pressure on the weak e5-pawn. The doubled h-pawns do not harm Black too much since White does not have a dark-squared bishop to take advantage of the holes around Black's king. 8 c4 doesn't quite work either: 8 ... Nxe5! 9 cxd5 Bxc5 10 Bb5+ Ke7 11 Nc3 a6 12 Qh5 f6 13 Be2 Qe8 and Black is doing well. If White exchanges queens then Black will have the two bishops operating on an open board; if he doesn't then Black should begin

pushing White backwards as much as possible.

### 7 ... Nf5

Here we diverge from the junior game, which continued 7 ... Qc7 8 Nf3 Bxc5 9 Bxh6 gxh6 10 0-0 a6 11 Bxd7+ Bxd7 12 Qd2 Bb5 13 Re1 0-0-0 14 Nd4 Bd7 15 b4 Be7 16 a4 Rdg8 17 b5 a5 18 Na3 b6 19 c4? Bb4 20 Qe2 Bc3 21 Rad1 Qc5 22 Ndc2 Bxe1 23 Rxe1 and Black was better in P.Pambalos-A.Pavlidis, Chania 2003.

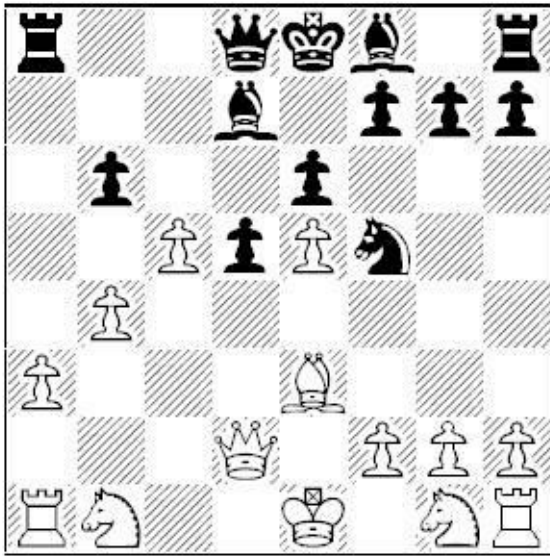


### 8 Bd4

8 b4 is not good for two reasons: firstly, Black can simply take the bishop; secondly, he can easily break up the queenside pawn structure.

a) 8 ... Nxe3 9 fxe3 Qg5 hits three (!) pawns. Suffice to say White cannot protect them all. After 10 Kf2 Qxe5 11 Nf3 Qf6 12 Qd4 Be7 13 Rf1 0-0 14 Nbd2 a6 15 Bd3 Qh6 16 Qf4 the position is roughly equal.

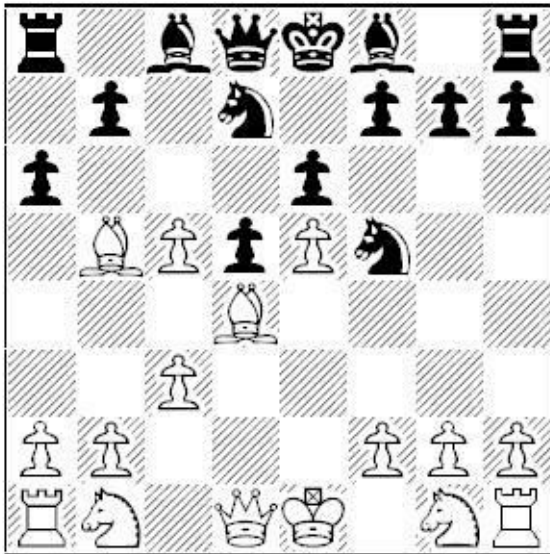
b) 8 ... a6 is also possible, and it is important to see how Black's pawn breaks work quite nicely: 9 Bxd7+ (9 Ba4 Nxe3 10 fxe3 Be7 11 Nf3 0-0 12 0-0 Qc7 13 Qd4 b6 and the material advantage that White has comes to nothing) 9 ... Bxd7 10 Qd2 (if White had not defended the bishop then the best pawn break would have been ... b6!) 10 ... a5! (breaking up the pawns; it is very important that Black does this quickly and forcefully, otherwise White would be able to consolidate his position and Black would simply be a pawn down) 11 a3 (Black is better after 11 Nf3 axb4 12 cxb4 Nxe3 13 Qxe3 b6! 14 0-0 bxc5 15 bxc5 Rc8 16 Rc1 Qa5 17 Nbd2 Bxc5 18 Qg5 0-0 19 Nb3) 11 ... axb4 12 cxb4 b6! and now:



b1) 13 Nf3 Nxe3 14 Qxe3 bxc5 15 bxc5 Qa5+ and Black enjoys a big advantage.

b2) There is a little trick after 13 cxb6?: 13 ... d4! 14 Bxd4 Bc6 (Black attacks both the g2-pawn and the bishop) 15 Ne2 Bxg2 16 Rg1 Nh4 17 Kd1 (17 Rxd2 Nf3+) 17 ... Nf3 18 Qc3 Nxd2 19 Nxd2 Be7 20 f3 0-0 and White's exposed king will be a more decisive factor than the three pawns on the queenside.

**8 ... a6**



## 9 Ba4

Funnily enough, Black's counterplay will be based around this innocuous-looking piece. How? By opening the a-file of course!

Looking at other options:

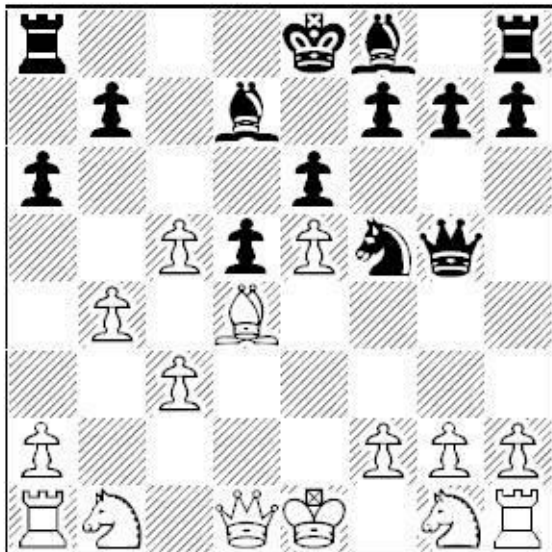
a) White does not gain anything by abandoning his c-pawn: 9 Bd3 Nxc5 10 Bxf5 exf5 11 Ne2 Be7 12 0-0 0-0 13 Nf4 Ne6 14 Qf3 Nxf4 15 Qxf4 Bg5 16 Qf3 Re8 17 Rd1 Be6 with equal chances.

b) 9 Bxd7+ Bxd7 and now:

b1) 10 Nf3 Nxd4 11 cxd4 (or 11 Qxd4 Rc8 12 b4 b6 13 cxb6 Rc4 14 Qd1 Re4+ 15 Kf1 Qxb6 16 Nbd2 Rg4 17 g3 a5 18 a3 h5) 11 ... b6 12 cxb6 (after 12 b4 a5! 13 Qc1 Qc7 Black has the time to prevent White from playing c5-c6 before capturing on b4) 12 ... Qxb6 13 Qb3 (13 b3 allows Black a nasty check

on b4: 13 ... Bb4+ 14 Nbd2 Bb5 15 a4 Bd3 and White is in a real bind) 13 ... Qxb3 14 axb3 with good compensation for the pawn (two bishops, weak b-pawns).

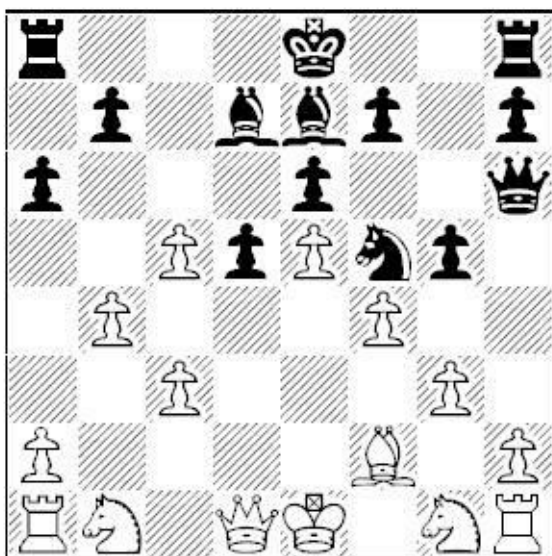
b2) 10 b4 (trying to set up a pawn barricade) 10 ... Qg5!



11 g3 Be7 (Black aims to dismantle the pawn structure a little bit with ... a5, and to prevent White from castling kingside with ... Bb5) 12 f4?! (12 h4 is a better move: 12 ... Qg6 13 Nf3 Qh5 14 Nbd2 a5 15 Qe2 – 15 0-0!? axb4 16 cxb4 – 15 ... 0-0 16 0-0 axb4 17 cxb4 Bxh4! – an amazing move, exploiting the placement of the bishop on d4 – 18 gxh4 Qg4+ 19 Kh2 Nxd4) 12 ... Qh6 and now we have:

b21) 13 Kf2 0-0 14 Nf3 a5 15 Nbd2 axb4 16 cxb4 Ra4 17 Bc3 Rfa8 18 Qc2 (Black has good play down the a-file) 18 ... Bc6 19 Nb3 d4! 20 Nbx4 Nxd4 21 Nxd4 Bxh1 22 Rxh1 Rxa2! and all Black's dreams have come true!

b22) 13 Bf2 leaves the long a8-h1 diagonal exposed so Black should play 13 ... g5!, aggressively dismantling White's pawn structure.

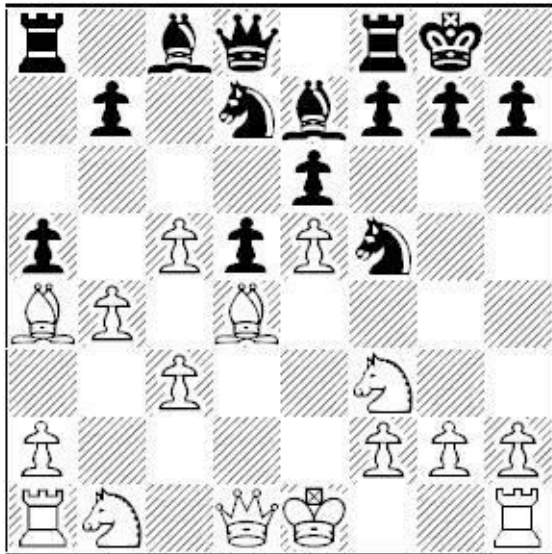


For example, 14 Ne2 Bc6 15 0-0 (15 Bd4 loses to 15 ... gxf4 16 Nxf4 Nxd3) 15 ... Rg8 16 Bd4 0-0-0 17 a4 gxf4 18 Nxf4? (18 Rxf4 Bg5 19 Rf3 Be3+ 20 Bxe3 Nxe3 21 Qc1 d4! and Black is winning) 18 ... Nxd3 19 hxg3 Rxd3+ 20 Ng2 Rxd8 21 Rf2 Rh3 and Black wins.

**9 ... Be7 10 Nf3**

10 b4 0-0 11 Nf3 a5! (Black uses the bishop on a4 as a target of attack to dislodge the protection surrounding the e5-pawn) 12 a3 (12 0-0 axb4 13 cxb4 Nxd4 14 Qxd4 Rxa4) 12 ... axb4 13 axb4 b5 14 cxb6 Nxd4!. Now White has no way to satisfactorily capture the knight: 15 Qxd4? Nxb6 16 b5 Qc7 gains all the dark squares.

**10 ... 0-0 11 b4 a5!**



**12 0-0**

After 12 Bc2 Nxd4 13 Qxd4 axb4 14 cxb4 f6! we see another pawn break in action; once Black has achieved all he can on the queenside he shifts his attention to the other wing. Now White will again have to worry about the dark squares; for example, 15 Qd3 g6 16 exf6 Bxf6 17 Nc3 Ne5 18 Nxe5 Bxe5 19 0-0 (or 19 Rb1 Qh4 20 g3 Qh3 – threatening ... Qg2 – 21 Na4 Bd7 22 b5 Bc7 23 b6 Bd8) 19 ... Qh4 (Black is just teasing White now, forcing him to make another positional concession) 20 g3 Qf6! and Black picks up a piece.

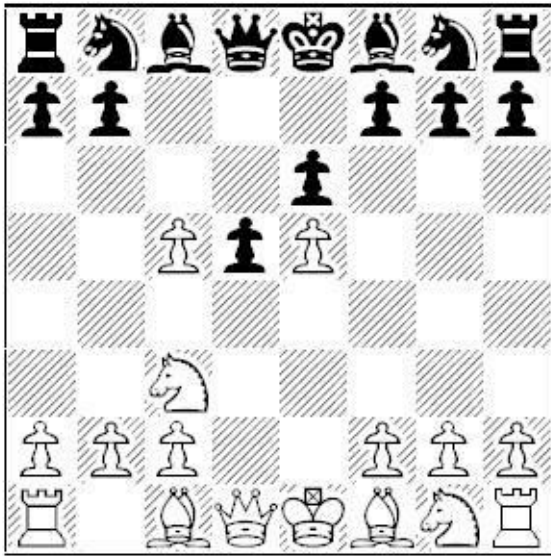
**12 ... axb4 13 cxb4 Nxd4**

The point! White must recapture with the knight or else the bishop on a4 drops off.

**14 Nxd4 Nxe5**

Black captures the pawn on e5 and has all the dark squares on a plate – pretty good going!

**B) 5 Nc3**



First played in the 1961 match between Tal and Botvinnik, this move is widely recognized as not being challenging for Black.

5 c4?! is very seldom played. After 5 ... Nc6 6 cxd5 exd5 we have:

a) 7 Be3 d4 8 Bf4 Bxc5 9 Nf3 Nge7 10 Bd3 Ng6 11 Bg3 Bg4 12 0-0 0-0 and Black enjoys an easy game with free development, S.Cicak-J.Speelman, German League 2000.

b) 7 Nf3 Bxc5 8 Bd3 Bg4 9 0-0 Nge7 10 Bf4 (D.Portmann-G.Siegel, Graechen 1999) is similar. Black should target the e5-pawn with 10 ... Ng6 11 Bg3 0-0.

**5 ... Nc6 6 Bf4**

6 Nf3 Bxc5 (now Qg4 is not a threat) 7 Bd3 Nge7 8 Bf4 Ng6 9 Bg3 is fine for Black.

**6 ... Nge7**

Again Black is in no great rush to capture the c5-pawn as he recognizes that it is not so easy for White to defend the poor thing.

**7 Nf3 Ng6 8 Be3 Ngxe5 9 Nxe5 Nxe5 10 Qh5 Nc6 11 0-0-0 Be7 12 f4 Qa5!**

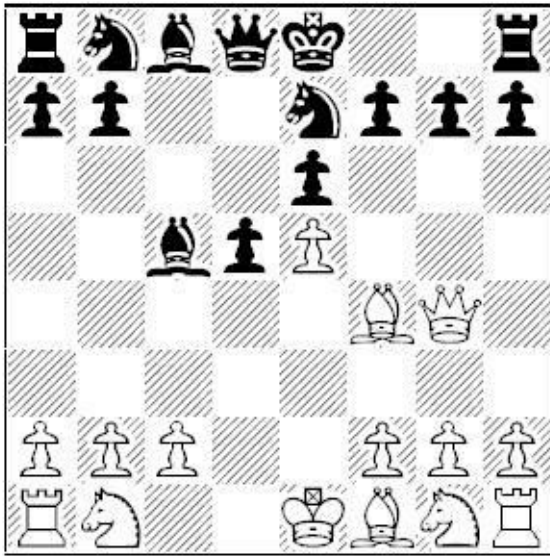
Botvinnik played 12 ... g6, but 12 ... Qa5 seems to solve any problems Black may have. All he needs to do is complete his development. After 13 Kb1 Bd7, 14 f5 is not a threat since Black can play 14 ... .g6! 15 fxg6 fxg6 16 Qf3 0-0-0 with the better position because of the open f-file and weak c5-pawn.

### C) **5 Bf4**

Committing the bishop so early to f4 allows Black to enter a line that is favourable to him (see Black's seventh move).

**5 ... Bxc5 6 Bd3**

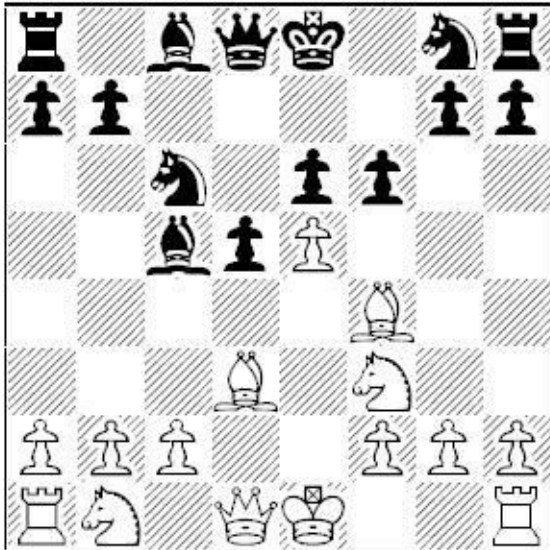
6 Qg4?! should not worry Black after 6 ... Ne7!:



a) 7 Qxg7? Rg8 8 Bb5+ (after 8 Qh6? Qb6 White is in dire trouble) 8 ... Bd7 9 Bxd7+ Nxd7 10 Qxh7 (White is being too greedy whilst Black is developing his forces rapidly and dangerously; needless to say White will perish quickly) 10 ... Bxf2+ 11 Kxf2 Qb6+ 12 Be3 Qxb2 13 Nf3 Qxa1 and it's all over.

b) 7 Nd2 Qb6! (7 ... Ng6 is also valid: 8 Nb3 Qb6 9 Nh3 Nc6 10 Bd3? Qb4+ 11 c3 Ncxe5 and Black was winning in H.Hamdouchi-I.Khenkin, Anderlecht rapid 1998) 8 Nh3 Qxb2 (I don't see a problem with this) 9 Rb1 Qxc2 10 Bb5+ Nd7 11 Qxg7 (or 11 0-0 Qg6 and Black is simply two pawns up) 11 ... Rg8 12 Qh6 Rxg2 13 Bg3 Nc6 14 Kf1 Rxg3 15 hxg3 Ndx5 16 Kg2 (16 Qg7 Bd4 and White is in trouble) and now Black plays 16 ... Bd6, as White was threatening Rhc1.

**6 ... Nc6 7 Nf3 f6!**



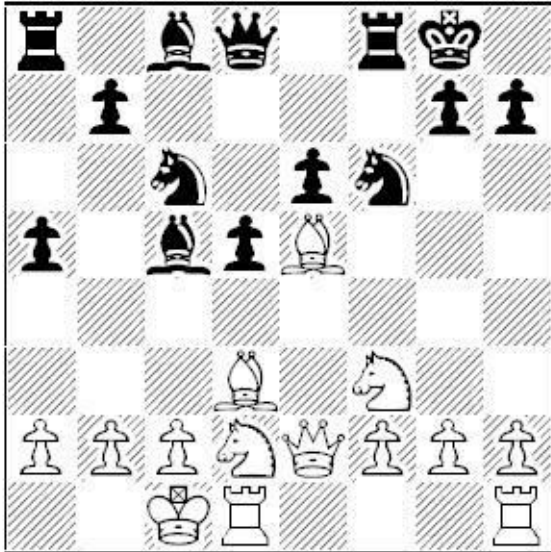
And this is the reason why! Black can now target the e-pawn with ... f6 because White's early Bf4, as opposed to another developing move such as castling, gives it added force. Suddenly the position has become very much like a French Tarrasch and indeed Black must adopt a French solution especially when it comes to the question of his bad bishop! In addition, it should be mentioned that Black may have ... g5 ideas in mind as well.

**8 0-0**

8 Nbd2 is met by 8 ... fxe5 and now:

a) 9 Nxe5? (White should not be seduced by this capture) 9 ... Qf6! 10 Nxc6 Qxf4 11 Qh5+ g6 12 Bxg6+? (now White loses material) 12 ... Kf8 13 Ne5 Bxf2+ 14 Kd1 Nf6 and Black wins.

b) 9 Bxe5 Nf6 10 Qe2 0-0 11 0-0-0?! (it's much better to play 11 0-0!, transposing to the main text) 11 ... a5! (Black mercilessly begins pushing his foot soldiers towards the enemy king)

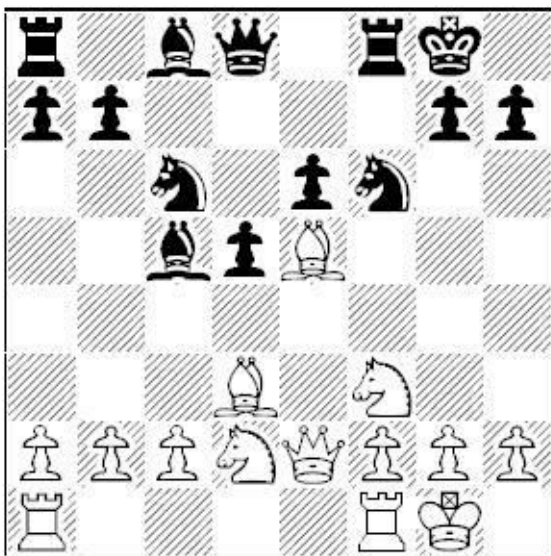


12 Nb3? (a mistake, as this allows Black to get in ... a5-a4 with tempo) 12 ... Bd6 13 Kb1 Bxe5 14 Nxe5 a4! 15 Nc1 a3 16 b3 Qa5 (now the dark squares look decidedly shaky) 17 c4 dxc4 18 Nxc4 Qc7 19 Rhe1?! (19 Ne3!? is interesting according to Kramnik but Black is still better after 19 ... e5) 19 ... Nd5 20 Qd2 Ncb4 and Black has all the chances, A.Shirov-V.Kramnik, Wijk aan Zee 2001.

### 8 ... fxe5 9 Bxe5

Against 9 Nxe5, 9 ... Qf6 is a convincing reply: 10 Nxc6 Qxf4 11 Qh5+ g6 12 Qe5 Qxe5 13 Nxe5 Bd4 14 Bb5+ Ke7 15 Nd3 a6 16 Ba4 (V.Barabash-Y.Kuznetsov, Novokuznetsk 2001) and now 16 ... Bd7 would have given Black the upper hand.

### 9 ... Nf6 10 Qe2 0-0 11 Nbd2!

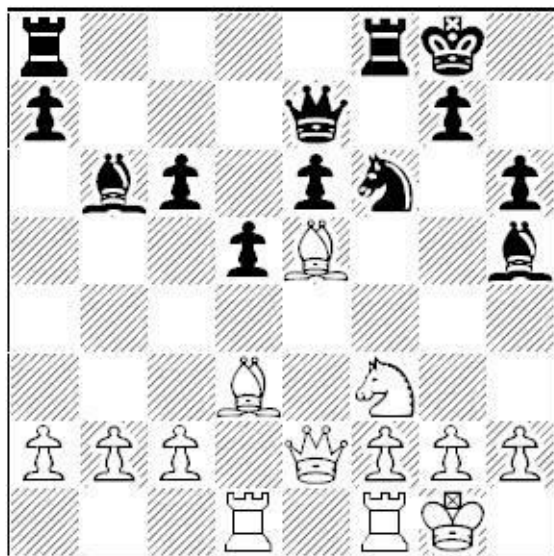


This slightly favours White, but it is one of those difficult positions that after a few moves might turn

out to be better for Black! There is one weakness on e6, but in this Tarrasch-like position this little ‘problem’ is very easy for Black to defend. If Black chooses a plan of sending the light-squared bishop via d7-e8-h5, and White has not played any constructive moves, then things can easily swing in Black’s favour. An ideal set-up would be to get the bishop to h5, with pressure on the f- and c-files. Another interesting idea, pointed out by my partner Arne Hagesaether, is the sortie ... Nf6-h5-f4. Although risky, this could prove to be strong if Bxh7 sacrifices do not work. He told me: ‘I often have spent ages checking that ... Nh5 can be played, only then just to opt out just for safety’s sake.’

### 11 ... Nh5!?

Or 11 ... Bd7 (planning to transfer the bishop to h5; even though this takes a while, the position is not open so Black has time to achieve this) 12 Rad1 Be8 13 Nb3 Bb6 14 Nbd4 Qe7 15 Nxc6 bxc6 16 Ng5 h6 17 Nf3 Bh5.



Plan achieved, and with a pawn on c6 to push and ... Rae8 coming, the position can easily become very comfortable for Black.

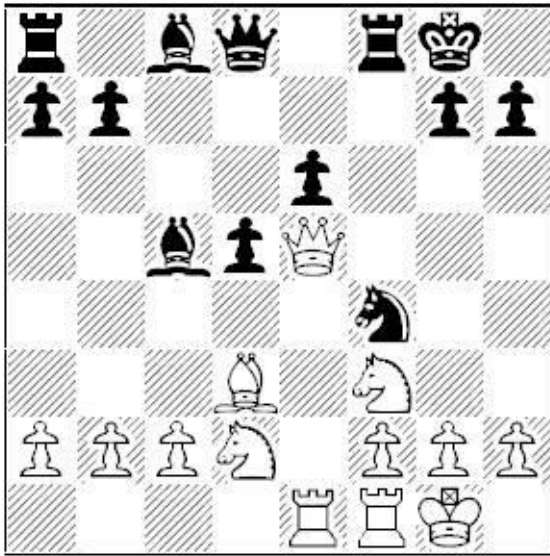
### 12 Rae1

White adds pressure down the e-file. Looking at alternatives:

a) 12 Bxh7+? Kxh7 just throws away a piece as Black has the g5-square covered.

b) 12 g3 creates a weakness for White, and Black should now change plan and start applying some pressure along the f-file: 12 ... Nf6 13 Rad1 Ng4 14 Bc3 e5! (this is the kind of move that Black is just dying to play – if he can do so then he will stand very well; White’s g2-g3 now looks useless and adds power to Black’s future idea of playing ... e5-e4-e3) 15 Ne4 Bb6 16 Bc4 Nd4 17 Nxd4 exd4 18 Bxd4 dxc4 19 Bxg7 Qxd1 20 Qxd1 Kxg7. Black has an assortment of material for the queen and needs to activate his minor pieces. After 21 Qd5 Bf5 22 Qxb7+ Kh8 23 Nd6 Bxc2 24 Nf7+ Kg8 25 Qd5 Kg7 the situation is very doubled-edged.

### 12 ... Nxe5 13 Qxe5 Nf4



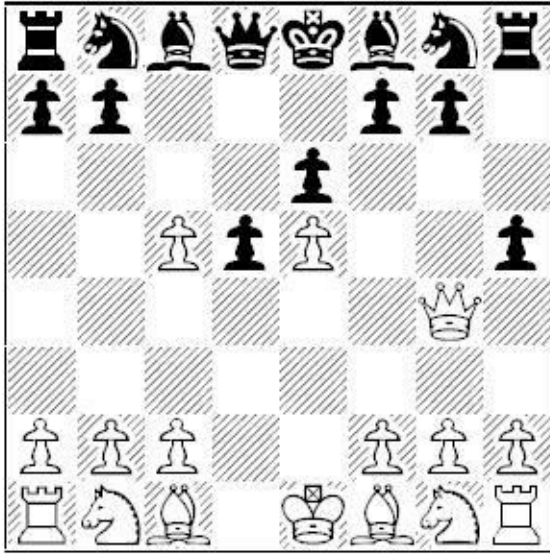
Thank you for the two bishops! Black should be doing fine now: the bishops should secure a long-term advantage, supporting a pawn expansion in the centre or maybe a minority attack on the queenside. The only thing Black must be careful of is his weakness on e6.

**D) 5 Qg4**

White aims to prevent easy development on the kingside. This aggressive move should be dealt with as actively as possible by playing ...

**5 ... h5!**

Although this move is probably the best and certainly the most interesting, it does have one major positional drawback: it weakens the kingside. This means that Black has committed himself to active play and queenside castling, so I should stress that Black should at all times play purposeful and energetic moves! So step one: harass the queen!

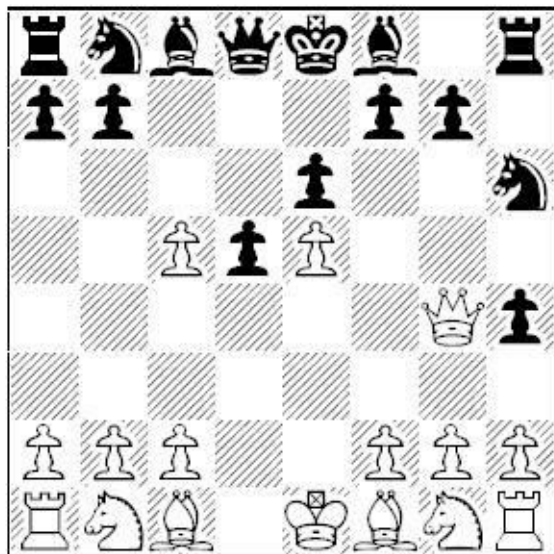


**6 Qf4!?**

Alternatively:

a) 6 Qg3 h4! (step one is still not over, so continue pestering the royal lady!) 7 Qg4 (7 Qf4 Bxc5 8

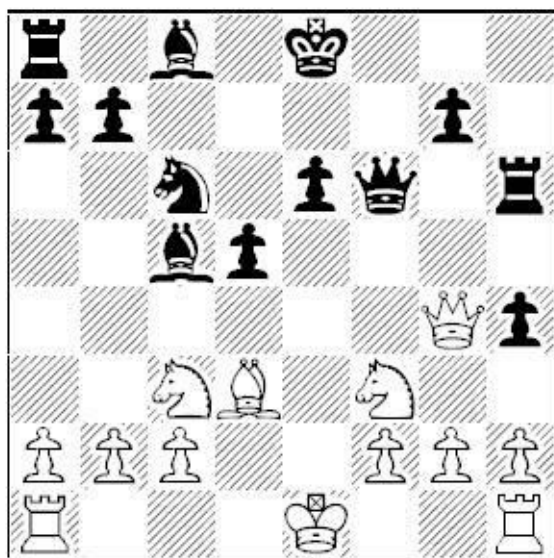
Bd3 Qb6 9 Nh3 Qb4+ 10 Qxb4 Bxb4+ 11 c3 Be7 12 Nd2 b6 13 f4 Ba6 14 Bxa6 Nxa6 15 Nf3 Nh6 16 Be3 Nf5 17 Bf2 Nc5 18 Ke2 Ne4 was eventually drawn in I.Khenkin-V.Iordachescu, German League 1997) 7 ... Nh6.



And again! If you can develop with tempo, do it (provided it doesn't lose on the spot of course!). Here White has played:

a1) 8 Qa4+?! (this move only helps Black to further develop while White dances merrily with his queen!) 8 ... Bd7 9 Qf4 Bxc5 10 Bd3 Qb6 11 Nh3 Nc6 12 0-0 Bd4 (harassing the weak e5-pawn) 13 Qxh4 Nxe5 14 Nc3 f6 15 Ne2 Bc5 16 Qg3 0-0-0 17 Bxh6 gxh6 and Black has the much better game, G.Kamsky-F.Doettling, Internet (blitz) 2006.

a2) 8 Bxh6 Rxh6 9 Bd3 (9 Nf3 did not lead to a promising position for the former World Champion Alexander Khalifman: 9 ... Nd7 10 Bb5 Rg6 11 Qh3 a6 12 Bd3 Rh6 13 0-0 Nxc5 14 Nbd2 Bd7 15 Nb3 Nxd3 16 cxd3, A.Khalifman-K.Kachiani Gersinska, Bad Wiessee 1997) 9 ... Nc6 10 Nf3 (or 10 f4 Nb4 11 Ne2 Nxd3+ 12 cxd3 Rg6 13 Qh3 Bxc5 and Black is better) 10 ... f5 11 exf6 Qxf6 12 Nc3 Bxc5 and Black had very strong pressure in C.Carton-O.Renet, French League 2001.



After 13 0-0-0 Bd7 14 Bb5 0-0-0 15 Rhe1 Rg6 16 Qxh4 Rxc2 Black has a structural advantage.

b) 6 Bb5+ helps Black to get rid of the 'bad bishop': 6 ... Bd7 7 Bxd7+ Nxd7 8 Qe2 Bxc5 9 Nf3 and

here Dautov recommends 9 ... Qa5+!? 10 c3 Qa6! 11 Qxa6 bxa6 12 Nbd2 Ne7 13 Nb3 Bb6 14 0-0 Ng6 15 Re1 Bc7 when it's not clear how White defends the e5-pawn.

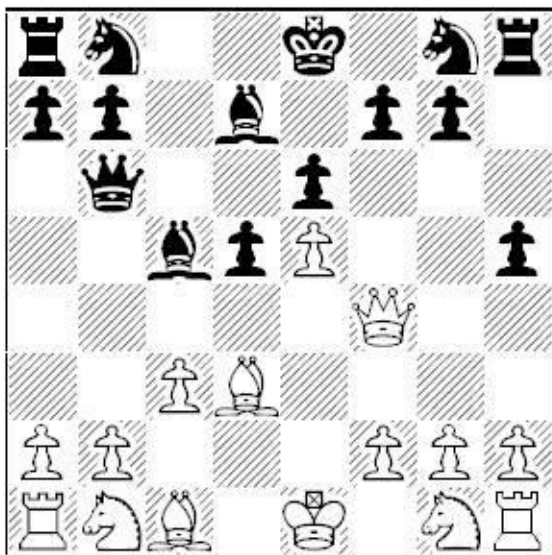
**6 ... Bxc5 7 Bd3 Qb6**

Preventing White from obtaining harmonious development.

**8 c3!**

White has no time to lose. He must protect d4 as this is the square Black would use to attack the weak e5-pawn.

**8 ... Bd7**



Aiming to swap off the bad bishop with ... Bb5.

**9 b4?!**

9 Qg3 leads to complications after 9 ... Ne7 10 b4 Bxb4! 11 cxb4 Qd4 (the white rook does not have any squares) 12 Ne2 (not the rash 12 Qxg7? Rg8 13 Qf6 Qxd3 14 Bg5 Rxc5 15 Qxg5 Qd4! and the a1-rook is still trapped) 12 ... Qxa1 13 Nbc3 d4 14 Ne4 Kf8 15 0-0 h4 16 Qf4 Qxa2 17 Nd6 Nf5, when things are very unclear.

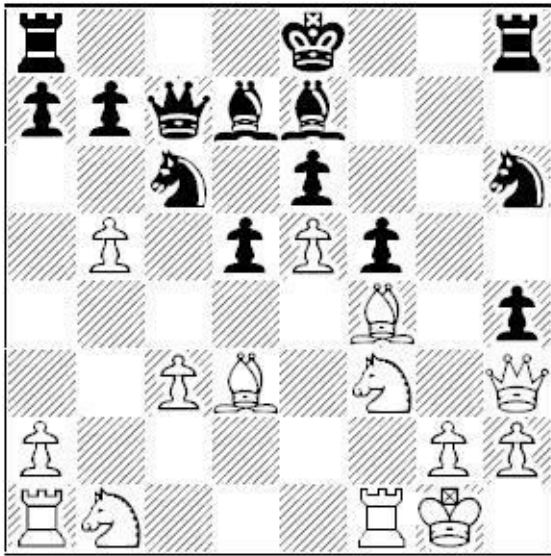
**9 ... Be7 10 Be3 g5! 11 Qg3**

It's an equal endgame after 11 Bxb6 gxf4 12 Bd4 Nc6 13 a3.

**11 ... h4 12 Qh3 Qc7 13 f4 Nc6 14 Nf3 gxf4 15 Bxf4 f5 16 0-0 Nh6**

With the aim of transferring the knight to g4.

**17 b5**



Black has a great position. Instead of 17 ... Bc5+, as played in A.Shirov-F.Vallejo Pons, Ayamonte 2002, Black can improve with:

**17 ... Na5! 18 Nd4 0-0-0 19 Nd2 Kb8**

It's advisable to get the king immediately to safety.

**20 Nxf5 Nxf5 21 Bxf5 Rdf8!**

21 ... exf5 is not so good as it leaves Black with a shattered pawn structure: 22 e6 Bd6 23 Bxd6 Qxd6 24 exd7 with an edge for White.

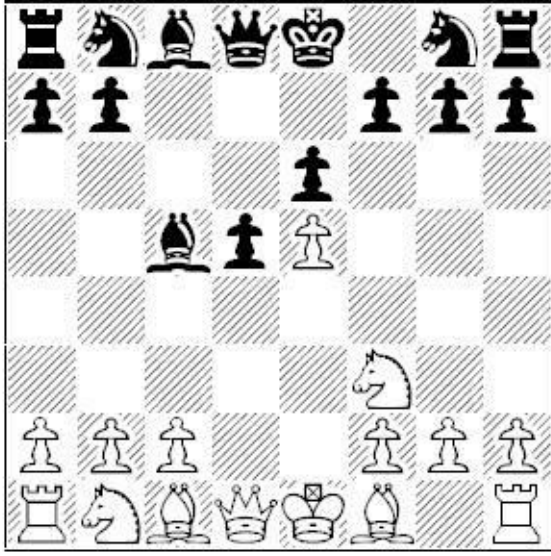
**22 Bd3**

Black has a lot of fun after 22 Bc2 Bxb5, while 22 Bxe6? loses a piece to the simple 22 ... Qb6+.

**22 ... Qxc3 23 Rac1 Bc5+ 24 Kh1 Qd4 25 Bg5 Qxe5 26 Rxf8+ Rxf8.**

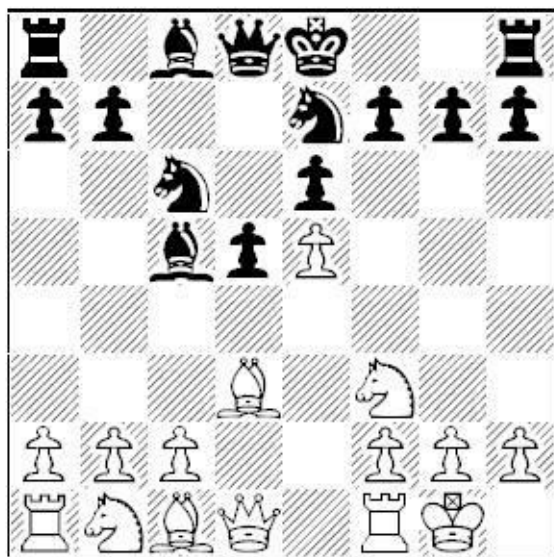
Black has the better chances after 27 Qxh4, and the natural 27 Nf3? fails to the cheeky tactic 27 ... Rxf3! 28 gxh3 (28 Qxf3 Bd6!, threatening mate and ... Qxg5) 28 ... Qxg5 29 Rxc5 Qe3 30 Qxh4 Qxc5 and Black wins.

**E) 5 Nf3 Bxc5**



Whilst this is not the most critical line, Black has not quite achieved full equality yet. White plans to steer the game away from complications and instead intends to use his extra space to secure a slight advantage.

**6 Bd3 Nc6 7 0-0 Nge7**



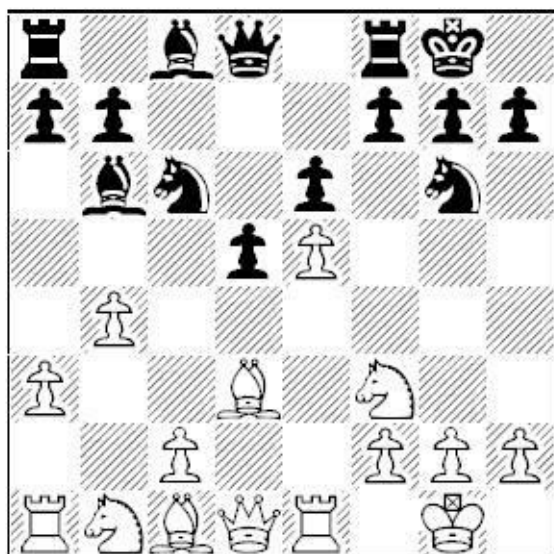
**8 Bf4**

White defends the potentially weak e5-pawn. He has three other ideas:

a) With the innocuous-looking 8 a3 White intends to seize queenside space with b2-b4. Play continues 8 ... Ng6 9 b4 Bb6 and now:

a1) 10 Bb2?! (the bishop does not really belong here; compared to its black counterpart it stands very poorly) 10 ... 0-0 11 Nbd2 Nf4 12 Nb3 a5 13 Qd2 Nxd3 14 cxd3 Qe7 15 Rfc1. The main battle will be on the queenside – Black will play against the weak b4-pawn and aim to develop his bishop via d7 to b5 and, with luck, to c4.

a2) 10 Re1 0-0 and now the further branch:

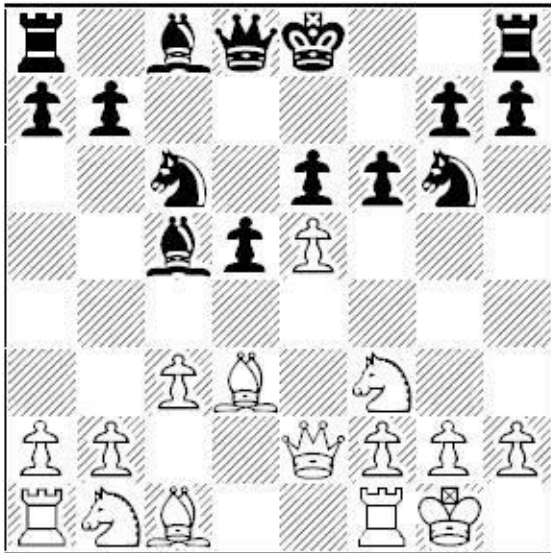


a21) 11 b5 Nd4! 12 Nxd4 (12 Bb2 Nxf3+ 13 Qxf3 Bd7 14 Qg3 Ba5 15 Rd1 Rc8 and the position is equal) 12 ... Bxd4 13 c3 (13 Bxg6 Bxa1) 13 ... Bc5 14 Bb2 Qh4 15 Qf3 f6 is winning for Black.

a22) 11 Bb2 Nf4 12 Qd2 Nxd3 13 Qxd3 Bd7 is equal.

a23) 11 Bxg6 fxg6! (opening up the f-file) 12 Be3! (the black bishop is very strong on b6 so White should take measures to exchange it immediately; Black should play on the light squares) 12 ... Bc7 13 Bg5 Qe8 14 Nc3 h6! 15 Bd2 (15 Bh4 a6 16 Rb1 g5 17 Bg3 Ne7 18 Nd4 Bd7 is level) 15 ... g5! (as soon as life is breathed into the bishop on c8 Black will have complete control of the light squares and this sleeping bishop will become one of Black's strongest pieces) 16 Nb5 Bb6 17 Nd6 Qg6 with the serious threat of ... g4.

b) 8 c3 Ng6 9 Qe2 f6!?

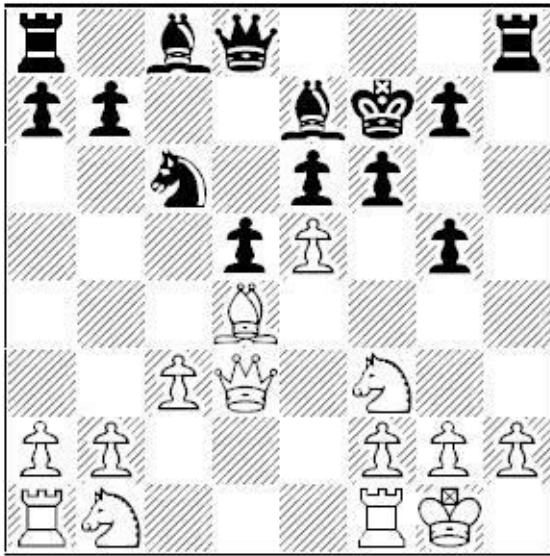


This very interesting move, played by Doettling, gathers added strength now that White has voluntarily closed off the h8-a1 diagonal. Some possible lines:

b1) 10 exf6 Qxf6 11 Bg5 Nf4 12 Qd2 Nh3+! 13 Kh1 is equal.

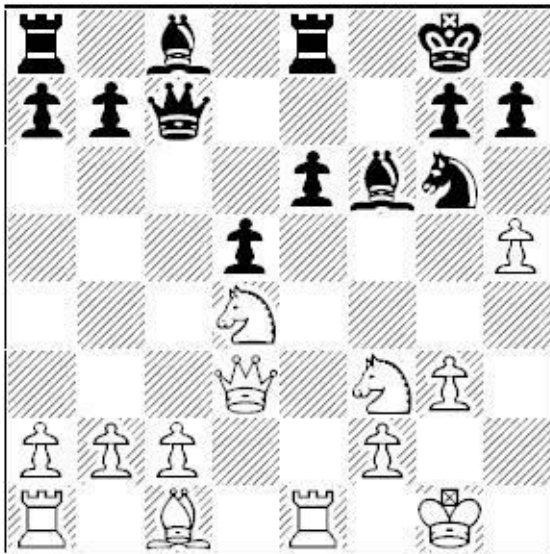
b2) 10 b4 Be7 11 exf6 Bxf6 12 Bxg6+ hxg6 13 b5 Ne7 (the knight heads to f5 from where it will not only do a great defensive job, but also look menacingly at the white king) 14 Bf4 Nf5 15 Re1 Bd7 16 Ne5 g5 17 Nxd7 (17 Bg3!?) 17 ... Qxd7 18 Be5 (after 18 Bg3 Nxd3 19 hxg3 e5 followed by ... 0-0-0, Black possesses all the attacking possibilities) 18 ... 0-0 (18 ... Kf7 19 Nd2 Rh6 20 c4 Rg8 21 Nf1 is unclear) 19 Bxf6?! (this only helps Black) 19 ... Rxf6 20 Nd2 Rf8 21 Nf3 Nh4 22 Nxd3? (22 Ne5 is better) 22 ... Rxf2! 23 Qxf2 Rxf2 24 Kxf2 Qxb5 and White has a difficult time defending the g2-pawn adequately. For example, 25 Rad1 Qb6+ 26 Kg3 Nf5+ 27 Kf3 Qc7 28 Nxe6 Qxh2 29 Rxd5 Qg3+ 30 Ke2 Qxg2+ and Black wins.

b3) 10 Bxg6+ hxg6 11 Qd3 (11 exf6 gxf6 12 Be3 Be7 13 Qd3 – 13 Na3? e5 leaves Black better – 13 ... Kf7 14 Rd1 Qc7 is equal) 11 ... Kf7 12 Be3 Be7 13 Bd4 g5! (Black's king is so safe on f7 that he can even think about launching his own attack)



14 h3 Bd7 15 Nbd2 Nxd4 16 Qxd4 f5 17 Nb3 Rh5 18 Rfd1 (18 c4!?) 18 ... Qb6 (18 ... Qh8 also looks very interesting) 19 Qxb6 axb6 20 Nh2 Ba4 21 Re1 Rbh8 22 f3 Rh4 and Black had the advantage in T.Fogarasi-F.Doettling, Budapest 2001.

c) 8 Nbd2! is probably White's most promising reply: 8 ... Ng6 9 Nb3 Be7 (9 ... Bb6 is just as good) 10 Qe2 Qc7 11 Re1 (so far this is all standard) 11 ... Nb4 12 Nbd4 Nxd3 13 Qxd3 0-0 14 g3 Re8 15 h4 and now instead of 15..Nf8, as played in Zhang Pengxiang-Yu Shaoteng, Yongchuan 2003, 15 ... f6 would have been very interesting. For example, 16 exf6 Bxf6 17 h5 and now we have:



c1) The natural 17 ... Ne5?! is a little dubious after 18 Rxe5! Bxe5 19 Nb5 Qb8 20 Ng5 h6 21 Qh7+ Kf8 22 Bd2 (intending Bb4+) 22 ... a5 (White wins after 22 ... hxg5 23 Bb4+ Kf7 24 Qg6+ Kg8 25 Qxe8+) 23 f4 Bf6 24 Bc3 Bxc3 25 bxc3 hxg5 26 h6 gxh6 27 Nc7 Re7 28 Qxh6+ Kg8 29 Qg6+ Kf8 30 Qh6+ and the game results in a draw by perpetual check.

c2) 17 ... Nf8 18 Bf4 Qf7 19 Nb5 Rd8 and now 20 Nc7 fails to 20 ... e5!.

**8 ... Ng6!**

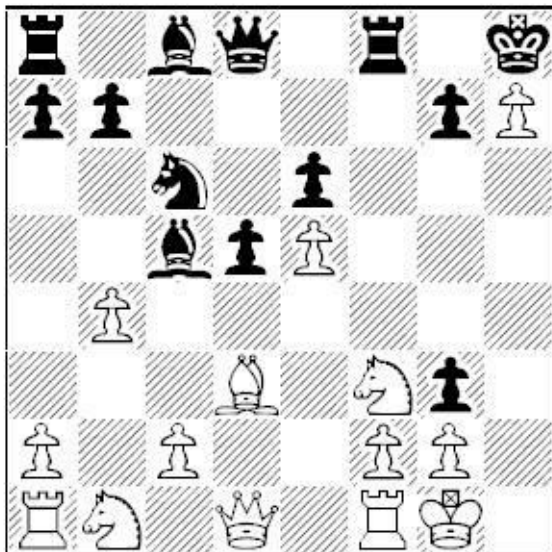
As I've said before, if you can improve your position with tempo then do it!

**9 Bg3 0-0 10 Nbd2**

White has tried some other options here:

a) 10 Nc3 a6 11 a3 f5 12 exf6 gxf6 13 Qd2 f5 14 b4 Be7 15 Rae1 Bf6 was fine for Black in A.Ledger-J.Speelman, British League 2002.

b) The hyper-aggressive 10 h4? did not work out well in T.Rendle-J.Sherwin, British League 2000, after 10 ... f5! 11 h5? f4 12 hxg6 fxg3 13 gxh7+ Kh8 14 b4.



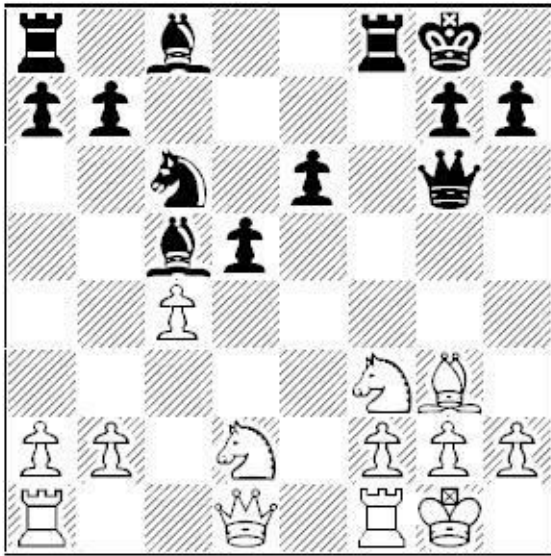
Here Black missed the beautiful 14 ... Rxf3!!, which would have finished the game off instantly: 15 bxc5 gxf2+ 16 Rxf2 Rxf2 17 Kxf2 Qh4+ 18 Kg1 Qd4+ 19 Kh1 Qxa1 and Black is a rook up for nothing; or 15 Qxf3 Qh4 and White loses material.

c) 10 c4 is recommended by Karpov as the only way for White to get a slight plus, but even this is not enough: 10 ... dxc4 11 Bxc4 Qb6! (not 11 ... b6, as suggested) and now 12 Qe2 Bd7 13 Nc3 Nd4 14 Nxd4 Bxd4 15 Rfd1 Bc6 16 Rac1 Rfd8 is equal, while 12 Nc3 Qxb2 13 Na4 Qb4 14 Rc1 Rd8 15 Qb3 simply leaves Black a pawn up.

**10 ... f5!?**

Setting about undermining White's central stronghold in order to improve the prospects of his light-squared bishop.

**11 exf6 Qxf6 12 Bxg6 Qxg6 13 c4**



### 13 ... Be7

The bishop was a target on c5: White was threatening to take on d5 and then play Nb3 and Qxd5+, although even then Black would have compensation in light of the bishop pair and open position. After 13 ... Be7 chances are balanced.

## Summary

The theory of this variation, and of 3 ... c5 as a whole, is very fresh. If White holds on to his pawn advantage with 5 Be3, then Black should place heavy pressure on the e5- and c5-pawns, and should also be willing to undermine them with the ... b6 and ... f6 pawn breaks.

# Chapter Nine

## Fantasy Variation

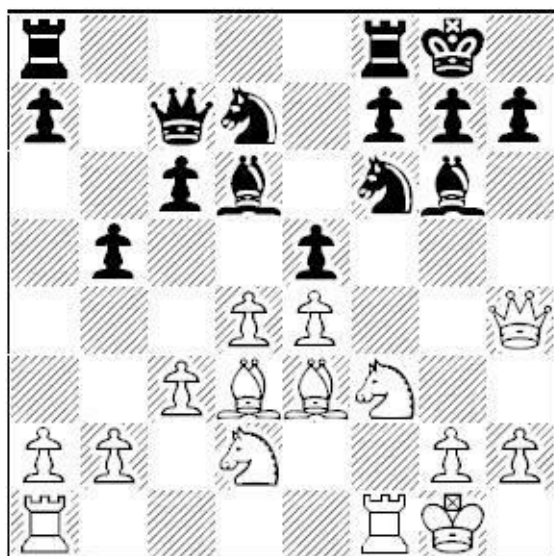
1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 f3

A few years ago, after being in a quandary about what to play against Grandmaster Keith Arkell, I decided to try out the Fantasy Variation in the hope that I could draw him away from his beloved endgames and into a tactical mess. My approach didn't work at all: not only did I not get into a tactical position but I lost horribly in an endgame ... Anyway, what made the biggest impact on me was that during the post-mortem of the game Keith said he felt that playing the pawn to f3 was a serious positional concession to Black: White hampers the development of his own kingside pieces and simply makes the dark squares around the king very weak. I touched the opening only once more after that.

### The Pros and Cons of f2-f3

Despite first appearances, 3 f3 does have some positional basis to it. After all, top grandmasters have played this the Fantasy Variation and one can safely say that a strong grandmaster rarely plays positionally suspect openings. With f2-f3, White bolsters the centre with pawns and gets ready to open the f-file for his rooks to attack à la King's Gambit. The Fantasy Variation has an extraordinarily sharp character and is often accompanied by sacrifices and dangerous traps. It does, however, have a downside: the pawn on f3 hampers White's development, and the Achilles' heel of White's position is the f2-square and the weakened g1-a7 diagonal, so Black should adopt a *dark-square strategy*.

Black should be looking to keep as much of the central tension as possible and by this I mean that Black should not readily exchange the e5-pawn for the d4-pawn. Instead he should develop his pieces so that they place indirect pressure on the two central files. Take the game K.Trygstad-A.Volzhin, Bergen 2000, where Grandmaster Volzhin demonstrates the perfect strategy:

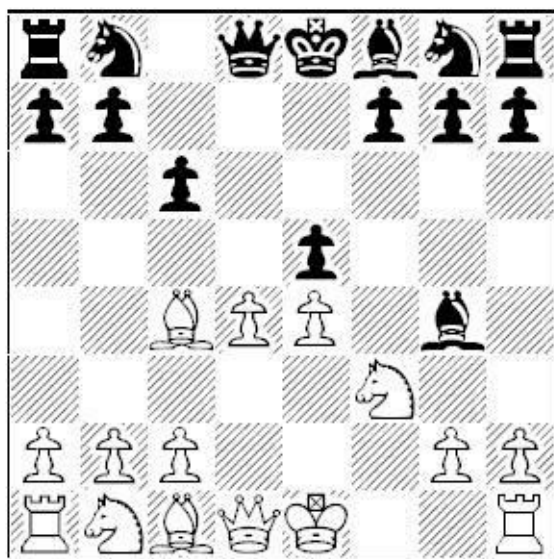


Black will put further pressure on the two centre pawns by placing the rooks on the e- and d-files and try to chip away with a ... b5-b4 push. White was so worried about the pressure Black could build up, he eased the central tension himself with **14 dxe5** (see the theory section below).

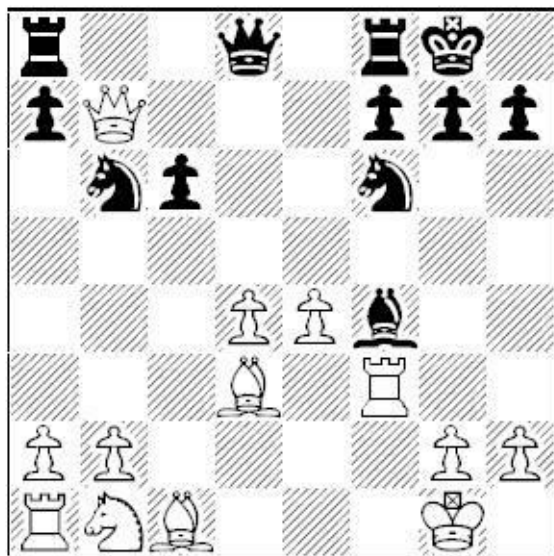
Another drawback, from a practical point of view, is that the terms of the game are somewhat dictated by Black. If Black doesn't want to play a tactical mess then he can decline White's invitation by playing 3 ... e6 or 3 ... g6. If he decides to accept the challenge then 3 ... dxe4 (my recommendation) is more than adequate. All this means is that whilst White must be familiar with every single line, Black only needs to know one!

## Tricks

The f7 point is the Achilles' heel in the black position, so very early on he must be wary of some tricks from White.



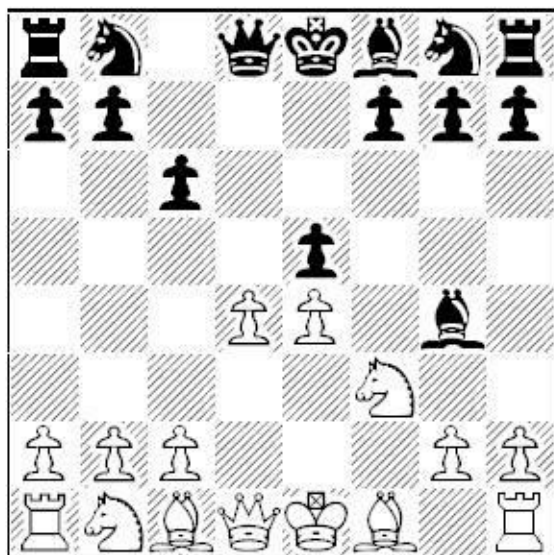
In the diagram above, Black must be alert to tactics on the open f-file, in particular against the f7-pawn. Here he must play 6 ... Nd7, guarding against the immediate threat of 7 Bxf7+ Kxf7 8 Nxe5+.



Black also has some tricks himself. For example, in the diagram position above Black has just played the amazing move **13 ... Bd6-f4!**, an excellent tactic that highlights White's main problem: inferior control of the dark squares (see the note to White's 12th move below).

# Looking at the Theory

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 f3 dxe4 4 fxe4 e5 5 Nf3 Bg4!?



Not only is this move very interesting, but there are also a lot of traps that White could fall into.

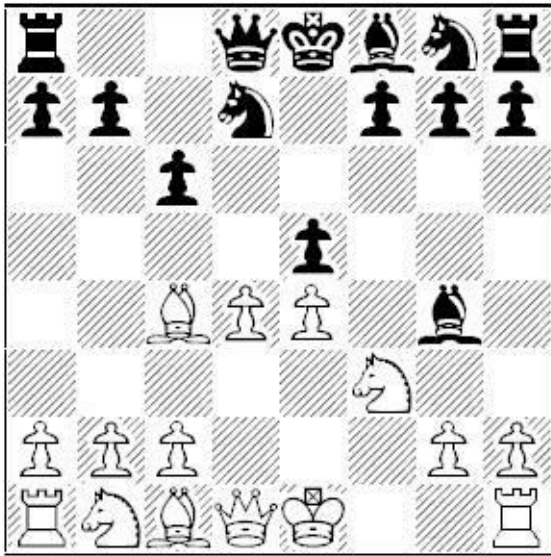
Warning! 5 ... exd4?? would be a very bad mistake. I cannot stress this enough; train yourself not to think of it! After 6 Bc4 Nf6 7 0-0 White suddenly has a raging attack on the f7-square and Black is practically helpless. For example, 7 ... Be7 8 Ng5 0-0 9 Nxf7 Rxf7 (9 ... Qb6 would lose by force to 10 Rxf6!! Bxf6 11 Qh5! d3+ 12 Kh1 Qf2 13 Ng5+ Kh8 14 Qxh7 mate) 10 Bxf7+ Kxf7 11 e5 Kg8 12 exf6 Bxf6 and this is not a position I would wish to play.

## 6 Bc4!

Joe Gallagher recommends the set-up with 6 Be3 in his book *Starting Out: The Caro-Kann*. It is a very unusual idea, but nonetheless Black has a straightforward approach to it: 6 ... Nd7! 7 Nc3 (Black is better after 7 dxe5 Qa5+ 8 Bd2 Qb6) 7 ... exd4 8 Bxd4 Qa5 (getting ready to castle queenside) 9 Bc4 0-0-0 (with the threat of ... Ne5) 10 Qe2 (after 10 0-0 Bc5! Black wins material) 10 ... Nb6 11 0-0-0 Nxc4 12 Qxc4 Be6 and I prefer Black's position by far.

Another possibility is 6 c3 Nd7 (6 ... exd4 7 Bc4 is rather risky for Black) 7 Bd3 Ngf6 8 0-0 Bd6, when Black should continue to fight over the e5-square.

## 6 ... Nd7



This is a key move. I cannot stress how absolutely necessary it is; otherwise White will capture on f7 and gain a devastating position.

**7 0-0**

Alternatively:

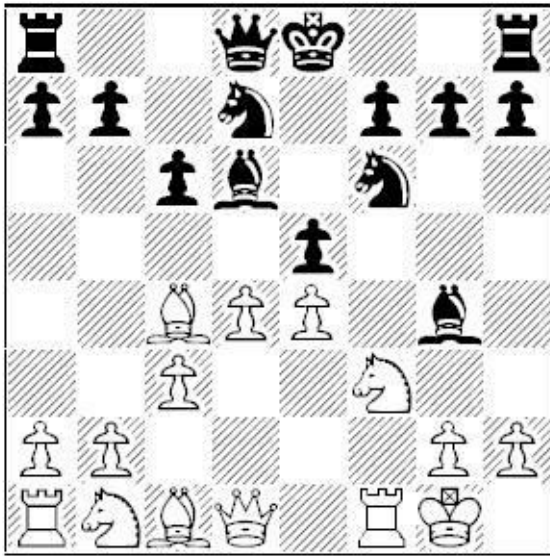
a) 7 Bxf7+ is bad due to 7 ... Kxf7 8 Ng5+ Qxg5!.

b) 7 c3 b5 8 Bd3 (or 8 Bb3 Ngf6 9 0-0 Bd6 10 Bg5 0-0 11 Nbd2 Qb6 12 Be3 Rae8! – applying indirect pressure to the e4-pawn – 13 h3 Bh5 14 Qc2 exd4 15 cxd4 c5 16 e5 c4 17 exf6 Nxf6 18 Rae1 cxb3 and Black has the advantage) 8 ... Ngf6 9 0-0 Bd6 10 Be3 0-0 11 Qe1 Qc7 (Black's plan is to maintain the central tension for as long as possible; the first stage has been to line up the queen and bishop on the b8-h2 diagonal, targeting the h2-pawn) 12 h3 Bh5 and now:

b1) 13 Nbd2 Rfd8 14 Nh4 c5 15 d5 c4 16 Bc2 Bc5 17 Nf5 Bg6 and Black will advance his queenside pawns to begin counterattacking on that flank.

b2) 13 Nh4 (it is premature for White to undertake measures like this without first developing the queenside) 13 ... Rad8 14 Nf5 exd4 15 cxd4 Bh2+! 16 Kh1 Nc5 17 Nxc7!? Bg6 18 Rxf6 Nxd3 19 Qh4 Kxc7 20 e5 Bxe5 21 Bh6+ Kg8 22 dxe5 Qxe5 23 Nd2 Rd4 and Black is clearly better.

**7 ... Ngf6 8 c3 Bd6**



The golden rule for Black in this position is to hold the e5-square.

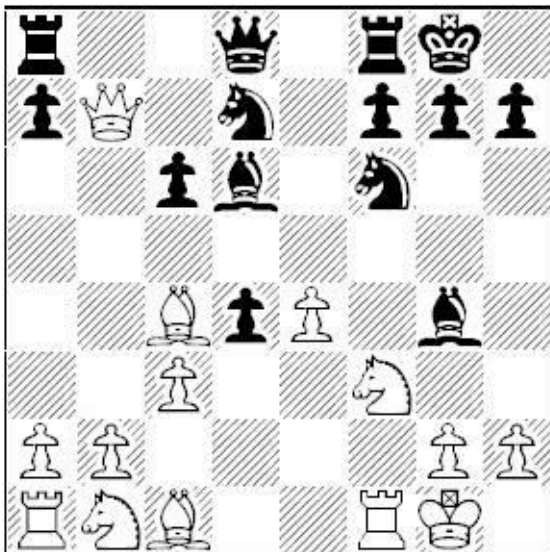
### 9 Qb3?!

Popular but dubious: White goes pawn hunting but should be satisfied with trying for a very small edge. That said, if White prefers the quieter life with 9 Be3 0-0 10 Nbd2, Black can look to the game K.Trygstad-A.Volzhin, Bergen 2000, where Black obtained a very good position: 10 ... b5 11 Bd3 Qc7 12 Qe1 Bh5! (transferring the bishop to the g6-square, where it occupies an ideal position: here it defends the king and creates pressure against the e4-pawn) 13 Qh4 Bg6 14 dxe5 Nxe5 15 Nxe5 Bxe5 (Black has a very comfortable edge due to the weakness of White's e4-pawn) 16 Nf3 Nd7 17 Bd4 and now instead of 17 ... Bxd4, stronger would have been 17 ... Bd6 when Black has an edge on account of White's isolated pawn.

### 9 ... 0-0! 10 Qxb7

White may as well stick to his guns.

### 10 ... exd4



### 11 cxd4

11 Qxc6 (trying to be clever, but this move order does not help) 11 ... Ne5! (11 ... Qe7? was played

in An.Rodriguez-E.Limp, Sao Paulo 2006) 12 Nxe5 Bxe5 (Black now threatens ... Rc8) 13 h3 dxc3 14 bxc3 (14 Nxc3? Rc8 15 Qa6 Qd4+ wins a piece) 14 ... Rc8 15 Qa6 Nxe4 16 hxg4 Rxc4! 17 Bf4 (or 17 Qxc4 Qb6+ 18 Kh1 Ng3+ and Black wins) 17 ... Bxf4 18 Rxf4 Qc7 and Black has a devastating position.

### 11 ... Nb6 12 Bb3

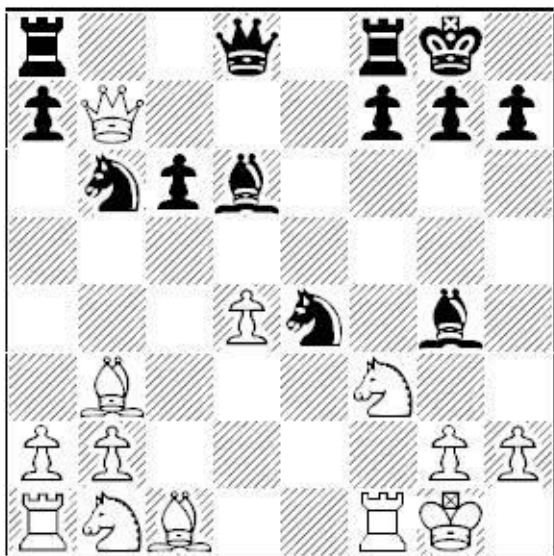
12 Bd3 is strongly met by the unexpected 12 ... Bxf3 13 Rxf3 Bf4!, regaining the pawn and obtaining the better chances:

a) 14 Rxf4 Qxd4+ 15 Kh1 Qxd3 and White's position is horrible.

b) Ignoring the problem does not help White: 14 Nc3 Qxd4+ 15 Kh1 Bxc1 16 Rxc1 Ng4 with a Black advantage.

c) 14 Bxf4 Qxd4+ 15 Be3 Qxb2 16 e5 Nfd5 17 Rh3 g6 18 Bh6 Rfc8 19 Rf3 Rc7 and Black wins.

### 12 ... Nxe4



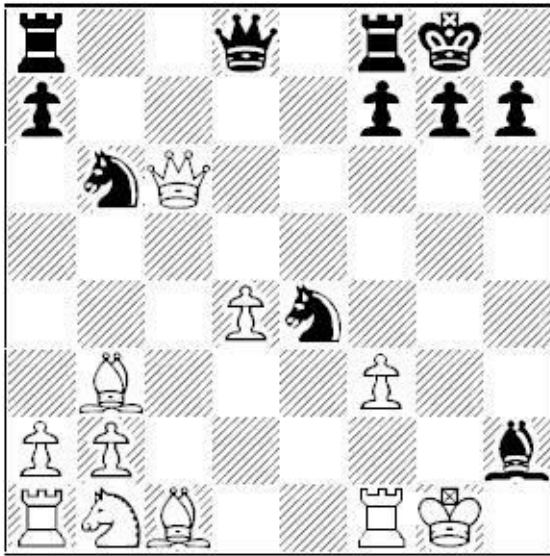
### 13 Qxc6?

According to Volzhin, this over-optimistic move loses by force.

He goes on to give White's best as 13 Nc3!, after which 13 ... Nxc3 14 bxc3 Qd7 15 Qxd7 Nxd7 leads to a complex and approximately equal endgame; for example, 16 Ng5 Nf6 17 Bf4 Bxf4 18 Rxf4 Rae8.

### 13 ... Bxf3! 14 Rxf3

14 gxf3 is also bad: 14 ... Bxh2+!! (a great demolition sacrifice)



15 Kxh2 (15 Kg2 Qh4 16 Qxe4 Qg3+ 17 Kh1 Qh3 18 Qg4 Qxf1+ 19 Kxh2 Qxc1) 15 ... Qh4+ 16 Kg1 Qg3+ 17 Kh1 Qh3+ 18 Kg1 Ng3 19 Re1 Qh1+ 20 Kf2 Qh2+ 21 Ke3 Rae8+ and Black picks up the rook as well as the game.

**14 ... Rc8!**

This is even stronger than 14 ... Qh4, which was effective enough in N.Peregudov-V.Savon, St Petersburg 1994.

**15 Qxe4 Rxc1+ 16 Kf2 Bxh2**

Not surprisingly, Black has a winning attack.

## Summary

Black should exchange pawns on e4 and adopt a dark-square strategy, developing the bishop to g4, supporting the e5-pawn and maintaining the central tension. He should look out for tactics on the a7-g1 diagonal, but be wary of tricks on f7.

# Chapter Ten

## Panov's Little Brother: 2 c4

**1 e4 c6 2 c4 d5 3 cxd5 cxd5 4 exd5 Nf6**

This variation has for a long time been criticized and lived in the shadow of the Panov-Botvinnik. Some have dismissed 2 c4 as 'rarely having a character of its own' and left it at that. However, this move is fast being recognized as a valid independent system with some dangerous traps. White players wishing to use this variation as a means of transposing to the Panov, though, would be ill advised to do so. In any case, if a Panov emerges it is usually because Black is happy to play into that line.

Like the Panov, the positions are characterized by the IQP. But, unlike the Panov, the nature of the game is determined very early on, with Black voluntarily allowing White the option of playing with an extra pawn, albeit with two doubled, isolated pawns. There are two scenarios:

- 1) White holds on to the material.
- 2) White returns the material.

We will consider each in turn.

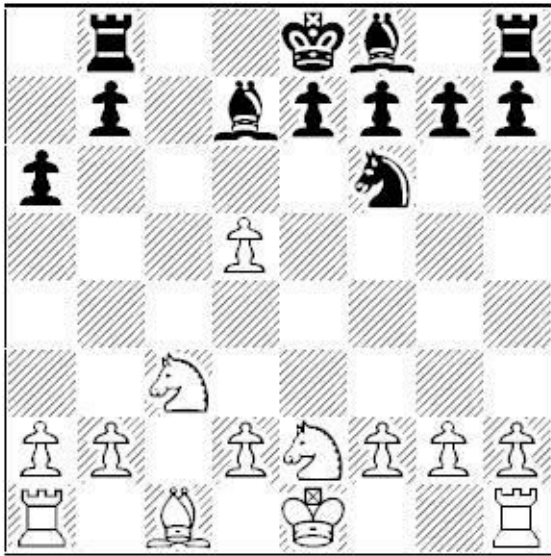
### 1) The Doubled d-pawn: Weakness or Strength?

This is actually a very complicated question. Objectively speaking, yes, the two pawns by themselves are very weak, but the practical problem is that they can be defended by almost the entire white army. This little 'conga' line-up controls a lot of squares; between them the pawns end up virtually dominating most of the squares on the e- and c-files. This often gives Black a problem with space: he does not have an easy way to manoeuvre his pieces around the two pawns.

In the 5 Qa4+ lines, White is willing to place some members of his army on awkward squares, as long as it contributes to defending the d5-pawn. White has two methods of protecting the pawns: he can do it directly, and also indirectly by either attacking the pawn on e7 or making threats against f7.

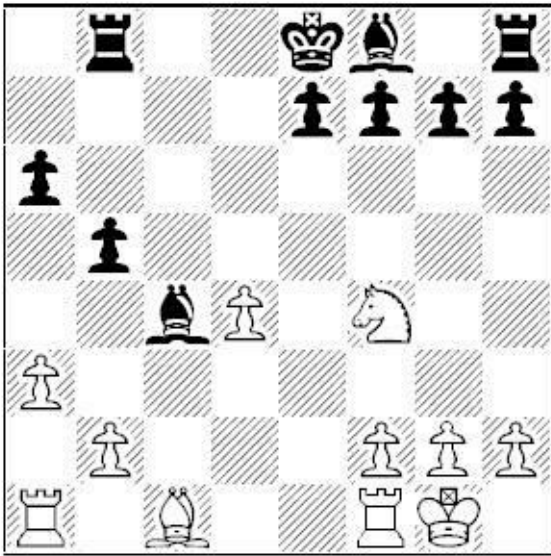
#### The Ending after 5 Bb5+

The variation with 5 Bb5+ (Line A) more often than not leads to an endgame – one that will be very pleasant for Black should he manage to win the d5-pawn and prevent White from penetrating down the c-file.



Here Black can win back the pawn with **10 ... b5**, followed by re-routing the bishop to b7 so as to target d5.

**Black's Ideal Position**

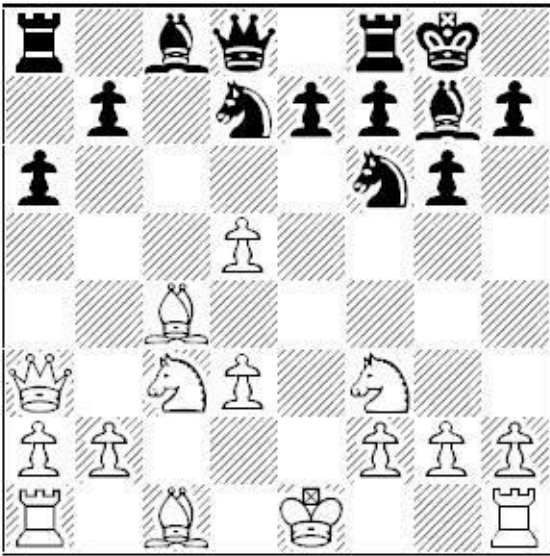


**D.Drollinger-F.Doettling**

German League 2004

This is a fantastic position for Black. By playing quietly White has allowed Black to prevent any queenside activity and to stabilize two long-term advantages: the weak d-pawn and the two bishops.

**The Deadlock after 5 Qa4+**



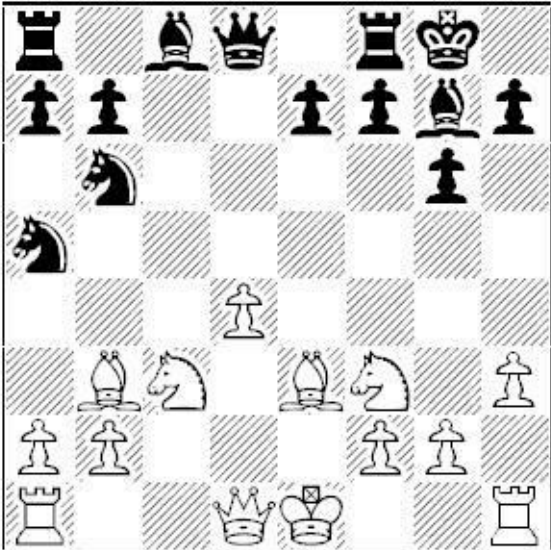
The diagram above shows the position after **10 Qa4-a3** in the 5 Qa4+ variation (Line B). While it is difficult for Black to capture the d5-pawn, it is also not easy for White to improve his pieces. To gain any success Black should therefore play around the pawn, improving his position whilst at the same time still threatening at some stage to capture the pawn.

## 2) The IQP 2 c4-style: 5 Nc3

Often White will simply transpose back to the Panov-Botvinnik Attack, but there are some independent lines that require our study.

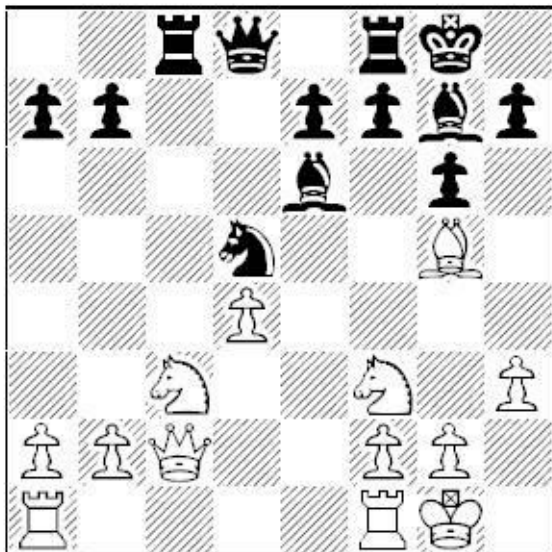
### Playing with ... g6

As White has eased the central tension of the position so early by exchanging on d5, instead of supporting the centre with ... e6, Black can often play ... g6 to develop his dark-squared bishop on the long diagonal and directly pressurize White's central pawn.



The battle still rages over the d5-square but this time Black fights over this square using piece activity. In the diagram above (see Line C2), Black has just played **11 ... Na5!** to chase away the bishop,

which is controlling d5.

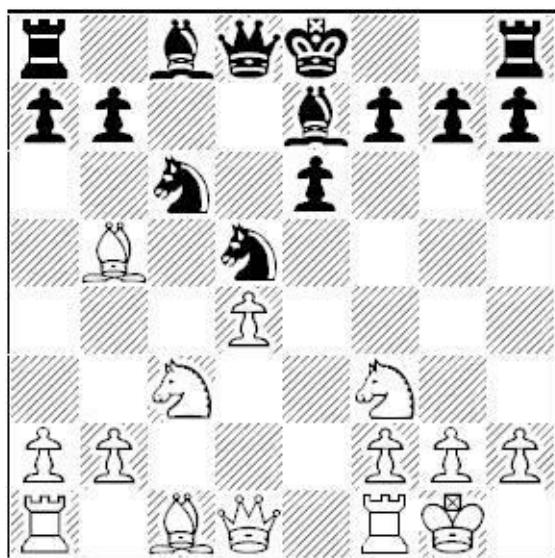


Moving on a few moves, in the game O. Moilanen - J. Kortelainen, Finnish Team Championship 2000, Black has obtained an ideal position, with excellent control over the d5-square.

### White Plays Bb5

In order to discourage Black from playing ... g6 systems White can play an early Bb5, which virtually forces Black to play the defensive move ... e6. The bishop on b5 does one main thing: it prevents Black's bishop from developing via the natural ... b6 and ... Bb7. This means that Black must somehow make use of the ... Bd7 move. This is usually through ... Be8, so that Black can pile the pressure on the d4-pawn and maintain an effective blockade (see Line C1).

### Looking at the Theory

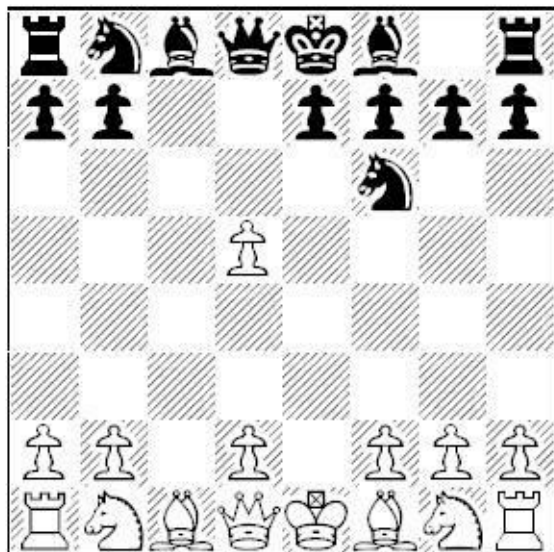


**1 e4 c6 2 c4 d5 3 cxd5**

3 exd5 usually leads to the same thing, but 3 ... Nf6!? is an additional option for Black. Now there is nothing better than to take the game back into the Panov (with 4 d4 cxd5) or Line C of this chapter (with 4

Nc3 cxd5 5 cxd5), as accepting the pawn is too dangerous: 4 dxc6 Nxc6 5 Nf3 e5 6 d3 e4 7 dxe4 Qxd1+ 8 Kxd1 Nxe4 9 Be3 Bf5 10 Nbd2 0-0-0 11 Kc1 Nxd2 12 Nxd2 Bb4 and Black has very active piece play.

**3 ... cxd5 4 exd5 Nf6**



The most principled choice: Black aims to recapture the d5-pawn with the knight. White has three replies:

**A: 5 Bb5+**

**B: 5 Qa4+**

**C: 5 Nc3**

The idea behind the first two moves is to force Black, in the action of blocking the check, to obstruct the d-file. White is looking to hold on to the d5-pawn with all his might. With the third option, White either wants to transpose to the Panov-Botvinnik Attack or to simply play the position with the IQP.

**A) 5 Bb5+ Nbd7 6 Nc3 a6 7 Qa4**

With this move, the most popular continuation, White makes it impossible for Black to capture the bishop. Alternatively:

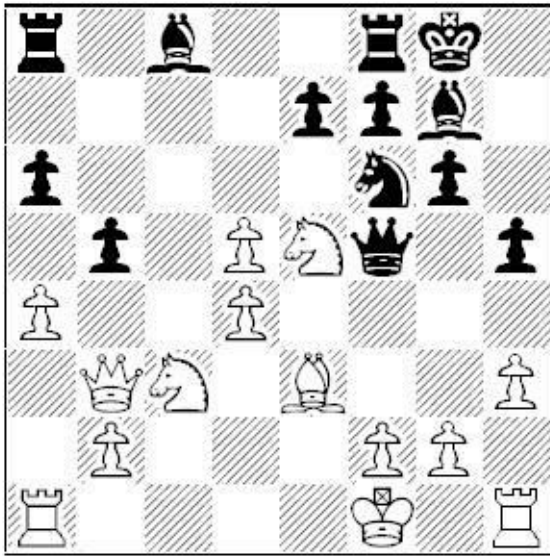
a) 7 Ba4 b5 8 Bc2 Nb6 and Black will regain the pawn.

b) 7 Be2 Nb6 8 d4 Nbx d5 9 Nf3 e6! reaches a typical IQP position.

c) 7 Bxd7+ Qxd7 and now:

c1) 8 Nf3 is a little tricky: 8 ... Nxd5 9 0-0 Nxc3 10 bxc3 e6 11 a4 (preventing Black from playing ... b7-b5) 11 ... b6 12 Rb1 Rb8 13 Re1 Bd6 14 d4 (Black is a bit passive for the time being as he is slightly behind in development, but he has good long-term prospects with the two bishops and a potentially weak a4-pawn to target) 14 ... Qc7 15 Qd3 h6 16 Ne5 0-0 17 Qh3 (White has ideas of sacrificing on h6) 17 ... f6! 18 Ng6 Rd8 19 Bd2 b5 20 axb5 Rxb5 21 Rxb5 axb5 22 Qd3 Bxh2+ 23 Kh1 Bd6 24 Qxb5 Qf7 25 Qd3 e5 26 Kgl and Black had the better chances in J.Klugel-J.Mercadal Benejam, correspondence 1998.

c2) 8 Qb3 Qg4! (the most active continuation) 9 Kf1 g6! (Black develops logically) 10 Nf3 Bg7 11 Ne5 Qf5 12 d4 0-0 13 Be3 h5 14 h3 b5 15 a4



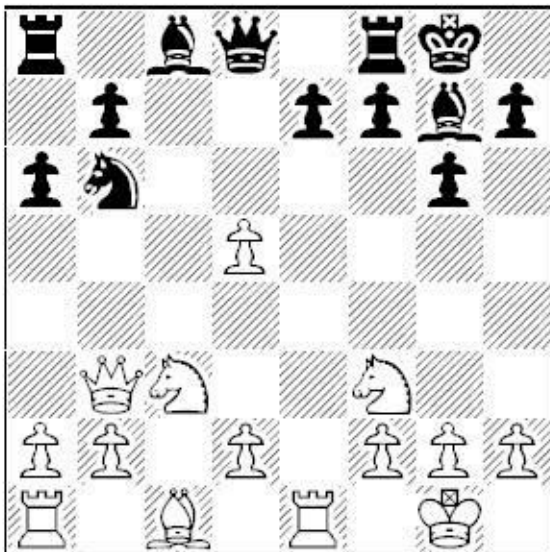
(so far we have been following L.Ljubojevic-A.Dreev, Moscow 1993) 15 ... Bb7 16 axb5 axb5 17 Rxa8 Rxa8 18 Ke2 Ne4 19 Nxb5 Bxe5 20 dxe5 Ba6 and there is no way to save the knight.

**7 ... Rb8!**

If you don't fancy playing an endgame then 7 ... g6 is also possible. 8 Nf3 Bg7 9 0-0 0-0 10 Bxd7! (10 d4? loses a piece after 10 ... Nb6; 10 Be2 Nb6 11 Qh4 Nfxd5 is also no hassle for Black) 10 ... Nxd7 and now:

a) 11 Qh4 Nf6 12 d4 Nxd5 13 Bh6 Bf5 14 Rfe1 e6 15 Bxg7 Kxg7 16 Nxd5 Qxd5 17 Re5 Qc4 18 g4 (or 18 b3 Qc3 19 Rae1 Rac8 20 R5e3 Qa5 21 g4 Bc2 22 g5 Bf5 23 Ne5 Rfd8 and Black has enough counterplay) 18 ... Bd3 and here 19 Ng5? is bad because 19 ... Qxd4 20 Qxh7+ Kf6 21 Qh4 Rh8! is winning for Black.

b) 11 Re1 (targeting the e7-pawn) 11 ... Nb6 12 Qb3



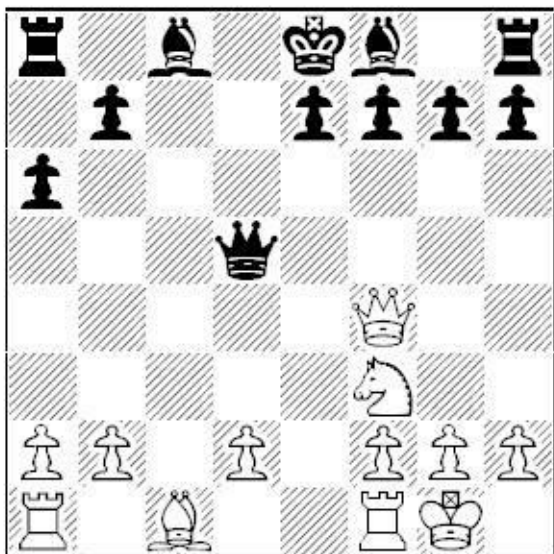
12 ... e6! 13 d4 (13 dxe6 Bxe6 – the point is that the white queen is awkwardly placed – 14 Qb4 Rc8 15 d4 Rc4 16 Qa3 Bg4 17 Ne4 Bxf3 18 Qxf3 Qxd4 19 Bg5 Rc6 is equal) 13 ... Nxd5 14 Bg5 Qd6 15 Ne4 Qb4 16 Qd3 Bd7 17 Rab1 (N.Miezis-J.Boudre, Montpellier 2004) and now instead of Boudre's 17 ... h6, Black could have played 17..Rac8 with a perfectly good position.

## 8 Bxd7+ Qxd7 9 Qxd7+

This leads to an endgame which is completely acceptable for Black. However, avoiding the endgame does not promise White much either. 9 Qf4 Ra8 and now:

a) If White holds on to the pawn with 10 Qd4 g6, the queen is awkwardly placed: 11 Nf3 Bg7 12 0-0 0-0 13 Ne5 Qc7 14 Re1 Ng4!? (provoking a weakness) 15 f4 Bf5 16 d3 Rac8 (Black has good compensation for the pawn) 17 h3 Nf6 18 g4? (too reckless) 18 ... Bd7 19 Be3 h5 and White has simply over-extended.

b) 10 Nf3 (White gives the pawn back for some development) 10 ... Nxd5 11 Nxd5 Qxd5 12 0-0.

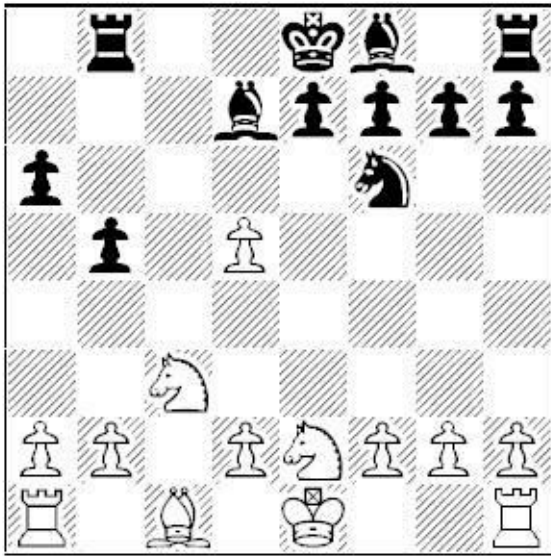


Here Black has two ways of developing: 12 ... e6 and 12 ... g6. Both are equally valid, but I prefer the safer 12 ... e6:

b1) 13 Qg3 tries to make things awkward for Black but White only creates problems for himself: 13 ... f6! 14 d4 g5! (the queen does not have too many squares to go to) 15 Be3 Bd6 16 Qh3 h5 and White's pieces are in a pickle.

b2) 13 d4 Be7 14 b3?! (there is no reason to put the bishop on the long diagonal as it is hemmed in by its own d4-pawn; after 14 Qg3 0-0 15 Bh6 Bf6 the weakness of the IQP is beginning to tell) 14 ... 0-0 15 Bb2 b5 and Black not only has the two bishops but the better pawn structure too. The game V.Gonzalvo Lara-S.Erenburg, Las Palmas 2003, continued 16 Rac1 Bb7 17 Rfd1 a5!. Black does not hurry to contest the c-file and instead concentrates on inducing further weaknesses on the queenside.

## 9 ... Bxd7 10 Nge2 b5!?



This is probably the most interesting try. If White does nothing then Black will quickly gain an advantage.

**11 a3**

After 11 b4 Rd8 12 Nf4 Bf5 13 a4 g5 14 axb5 axb5 15 Nfe2 Nxd5, already in practical terms Black is a bit better: he has the stronger pawn structure and two bishops that will roam freely across the board.

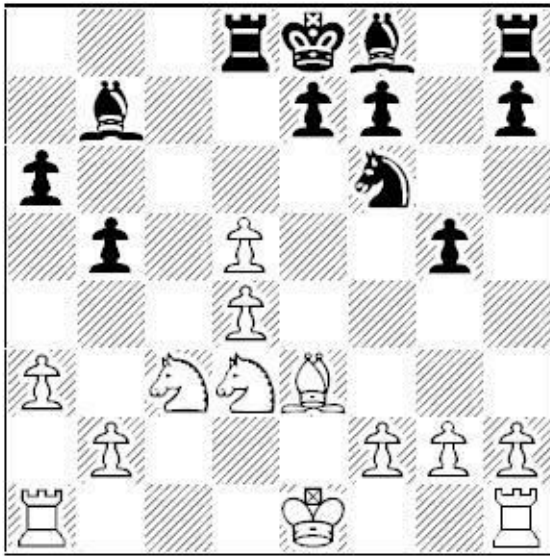
**11 ... Bc8!?**

The aim is to relocate the bishop to b7 and then recapture the d5-pawn. White must stir up counterplay quickly because if Black is able to consolidate he will have a clear advantage. The game A.Wuerdinger-M.Bintakis, German League 1999, instead continued 11 ... Rd8 12 h4 Bc8 13 Nf4 Bb7 14 d4 Nxd5 15 Ncxd5 Bxd5 16 Nxd5 Rxd5 17 Be3 e6 and a draw was agreed, although Black is better in the final position.

**12 d4 Bb7 13 Nf4**

13 0-0 is too slow: 13 ... Nxd5 14 Nxd5 Bxd5 15 Nf4 Bc4 16 Rd1 e6 17 Nd3 Bd6 18 b4 Bxd3 19 Rxd3 Kd7 20 Bd2 Rhc8 21 Kf1 Rc4 and Black later won very easily in D.Drollinger-F.Doettling, German League 2004.

**13 ... Rd8 14 Be3 g5 15 Nd3**

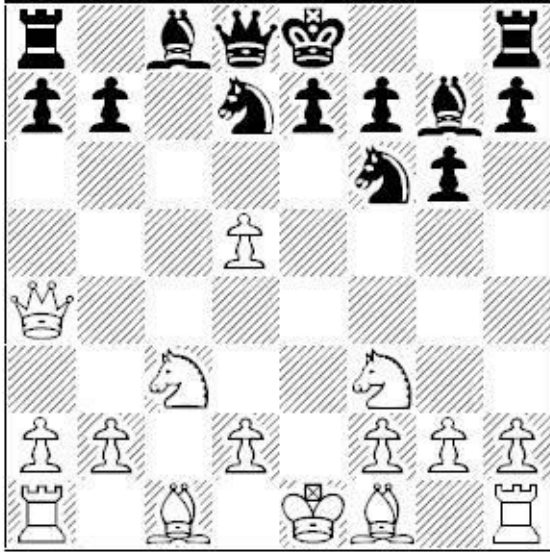


(P. Taylor-J. Houska, British League 2005) Now instead of the slow 15 ... h6, I should have continued with 15 ... Nxd5! 16 Nc5 Bc8 17 Bxg5 Rg8 18 h4 f6 19 Bd2 Rxd2 20 Ke2 Rg4 21 N3e4 Nf4+ 22 Kf3 Ng6 23 h5 Nh4+ 24 Ke2 Nf5, when the loss of the d-pawn is unavoidable.

**B) 5 Qa4+**

White has in mind the same idea as 5 Bb5+, but developing the queen in the opening is always a more risky strategy.

**5 ... Nbd7 6 Nc3 g6 7 Nf3 Bg7**

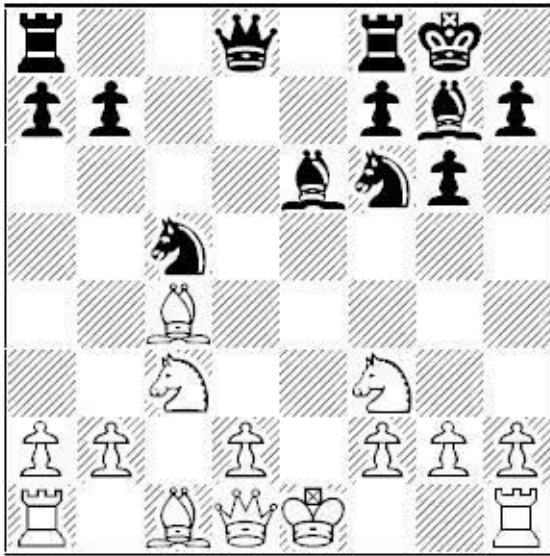


**8 Bc4**

The most fashionable and most challenging. White uses all his resources in defending the central pawn whilst Black concentrates his entire army on attacking it. If Black is successful in winning back the pawn then he will certainly stand better.

Another option for White is 8 Qb3 0-0 9 Bc4 Nc5 and now:

a) 10 Qd1 e6! (Black sacrifices a pawn to open lines against the white king) 11 dxe6 (11 d4 exd5 12 dxc5 dxc4 is equal) 11 ... Bxe6!.



This is the point. Should White play 12 Bxe6, then 12 ... Nd3+ gives Black very good compensation for the pawn.

b) 10 Qa3! Nce4 11 0-0 Nd6 (Black uses his knights to harass the white bishop whilst at the same time pre-empting any pressure White may place on the e7-pawn; Black's plan is to basically arrange ... b7-b5 and develop the bishop to b7 where it becomes another piece attacking the d5-pawn) 12 d3 a6 13 Re1 Rb8 14 Ne5 Ng4 and Black exchanges the powerful knight on e5 so as to be able to play ... b7-b5.

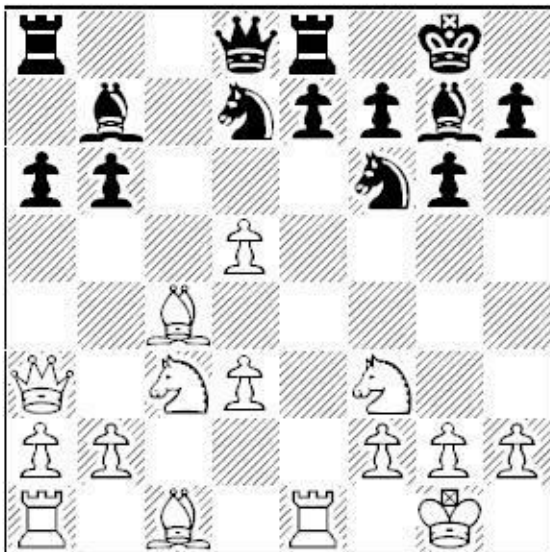
**8 ... a6! 9 d3 0-0 10 Qa3**

After 10 0-0? b5 11 Bxb5 Nb6! Black picks up a piece.

**10 ... b6!**

Planning ... Bb7.

**11 0-0 Bb7 12 Re1 Re8**



**13 Ng5**

White focuses on the f7-pawn.

13 Be3 is a quieter move, and 13 ... b5 14 Bb3 Nb6 15 d6 exd6 16 Ng5 Nbd5 looks equal. White does have the ambitious sacrifice 17 Nxf7, but after some accurate moves from both sides the game

should end in a draw: 17 ... Kxf7 18 Bg5 Re5! 19 Rxe5 (19 f4? Qb6+ 20 Kh1 Rxe1+ 21 Rxe1 Kf8 and Black has defended everything) 19 ... dxe5 20 Bxf6 Bxf6 21 Qc5 Rc8 22 Qa7 Rc7 23 Nxd5 Bxd5 24 Bxd5+ Kg7 25 Qa8 Rc2 26 Rb1 Qxa8 27 Bxa8 and Black's active rook provides excellent compensation for the pawn.

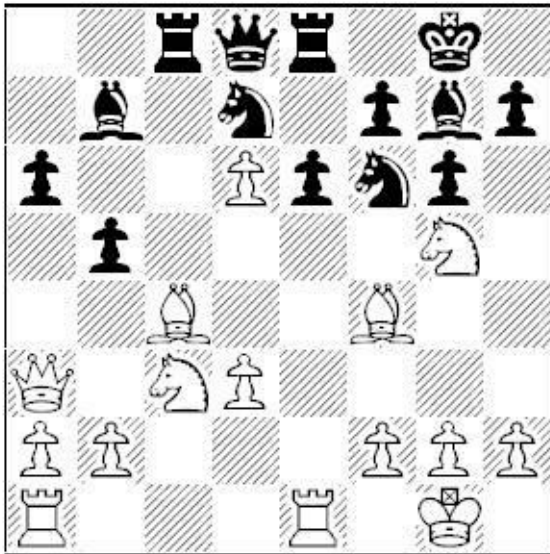
13 Bg5 is met by 13 ... b5!, when White cannot hold on to the pawn. After 14 Bb3 Nb6 15 Re2 Nbx5 16 Nxd5 Bxd5 17 Bxd5 Nxd5 Black has no problems whatsoever.

### 13 ... Rc8!?

The most challenging and the most provocative.

### 14 Be3

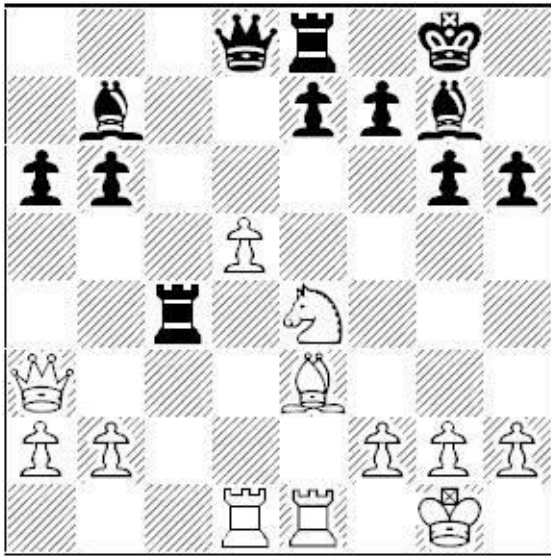
14 d6 looks the most obvious move, and yet White does not gain anything from it. The d6-pawn has been effectively thrown to the wolves and the threat to f7 can be easily met: 14 ... e6 15 Bf4 b5! and now:



a) Sacrificing a piece only gives White a lost position after some accurate moves from Black: 16 Bxe6 fxe6 17 Nxe6 Qb6 18 Qb3 Kh8 (getting the king to safety) 19 d4 b4 20 Na4 (after 20 Ng5??, the threat of Nf7+ is very easily met by 20 ... h6) 20 ... Qc6 21 f3 Nd5 and now 22 Rac1?? loses to 22 ... Rxe6! 23 Rxc6 (or 23 Rxe6 Bxd4+ 24 Kf1 Qb5+ 25 Ke1 Nxf4 26 Rxc8+ Bxc8 27 Re8+ Kg7 28 Rg8+ Kh6 and Black is winning) 23 ... Rxe1+ 24 Kf2 Bxc6 25 Kxe1 Nxf4, when Black has too many pieces for the queen.

b) 16 Bb3 Nc5 17 Rad1 Nxb3 18 axb3 Nh5 (chasing the bishop away) 19 Be3 f5 (with the threat of ... f4, winning the knight) 20 Nh3 Qd7 21 f3 Bf8 22 Bc5 Rcd8 23 d4 Bxd6 and Black was absolutely fine in the game B.Kadziolka-S.Erenburg, Warsaw 2005.

**14 ... Ne5 15 Rad1 h6 16 Nge4 Nxe4 17 Nxe4 Nxc4 18 dxc4 Rxc4**



### 19 Qd3?

Falling for a cheap trick. Stronger is 19 f3 Rc2 20 Nc3 Bc8 (transferring the bishop to a more active diagonal) 21 Qb3 Bf5 and now:

a) 22 Bxb6 Qd6 23 Ba7! (Black is much better after 23 Bf2 Rb8!) 23 ... Rc8 and Black is very active.

b) 22 g4? Qd6 23 Re2 Bxc3 24 Rxc2 Bxc2 25 Qxc2 Be5 is also good for Black.

c) 22 Re2 Rxe2 23 Nxe2 b5 is equal.

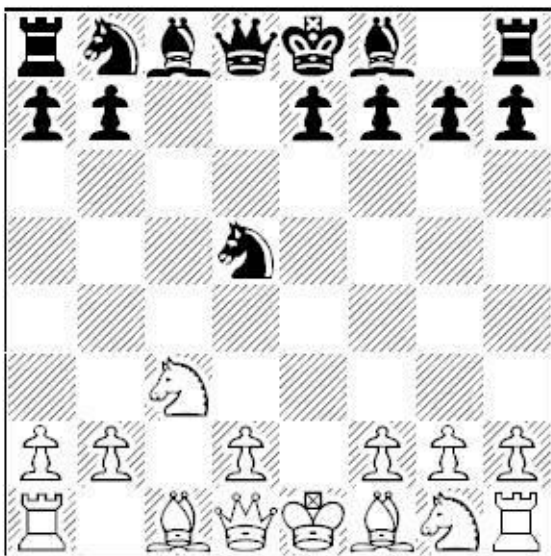
### 19 ... Qxd5! 20 Qxd5 Bxd5 21 Rxd5 Rxe4

... and Black was better in K.Rasmussen-J.Aagaard, Aalborg 2006.

### C) 5 Nc3

This is White's most common choice. He avoids some of the critical lines that can be found in the Panov-Botvinnik Attack and instead concentrates on getting a good IQP position.

### 5 ... Nxd5



Now we will look at:

**C1: 6 Nf3**

**C2: 6 Bc4**

Alternatively:

a) 6 d4 Nc6 7 Nf3 can transpose to the Panov-Botvinnik Attack after 7 ... Bg4 (see Chapter 4). Black can also play 7 ... e6, although 8 Bc4 Be7 9 0-0 0-0 10 Re1 is slightly better for White, and 10 ... Nxc3 11 bxc3 b6 12 Bd3 Bb7 13 h4 is quite dangerous.

b) If White plays the slightly incredulous 6 Qb3, Black should react calmly and aim for a ... g6 system: 6 ... Nb6 7 Nf3 Nc6 8 Bb5 Be6! (developing with tempo) 9 Bxc6+ bxc6 10 Qc2 g6 and Black is at the very least equal.

c) White usually avoids the immediate 6 Bb5+ because of 6 ... Bd7!?. For example, 7 Qa4 Nb6 8 Qb3 e6 9 Nf3 Nc6 10 0-0 Be7 11 d4 0-0 12 Bf4 Na5 13 Qc2 Bxb5 14 Nxb5 Nd5 15 Bd2 Nc6 16 Nc3 Bf6, Z.Korpics-P.Tomcsanyi, Győr 1992. Black has blockaded the d4-pawn and got rid of White's dangerous light-squared bishop, so he is doing well.

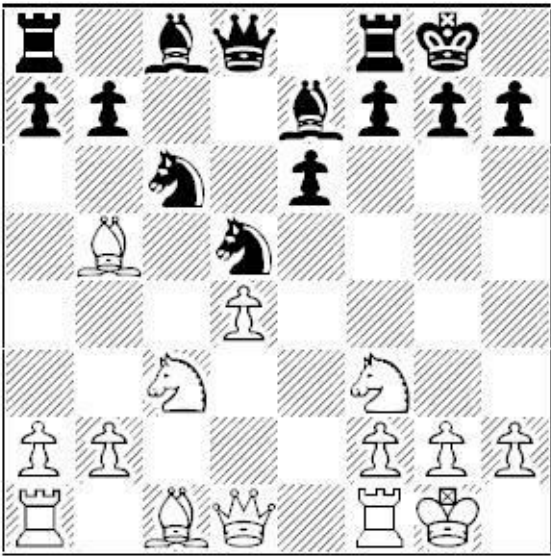
**C1) 6 Nf3 Nc6**

6 ... Nxc3 7 bxc3 g6 is the other main line. In the event of 6 ... e6 7 Bc4 Be7 8 0-0 0-0 9 d4 White has avoided early ... Bb4 lines, one of the main ideas of this move order.

**7 Bb5**

Played in order to force Black into ... e6 rather than ... g6 lines. As we've seen, 7 Bc4 e6 8 0-0 Be7 9 d4 0-0 10 Re1 is slightly better for White, but Black can play 7 ... Nb6 8 Bb3 g6 9 d4 Bg7 transposing to Line C2.

**7 ... e6 8 0-0 Be7 9 d4 0-0**



**10 Re1**

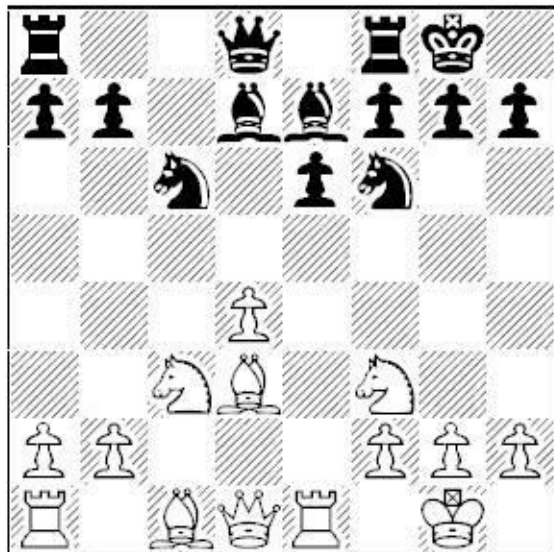
10 Qe2! is another option: 10 ... Bd7 11 a3 (a good defensive move – White gets ready to line up his queen and bishop towards the h7-square; after 11 Rd1 Rc8 12 Nxd5 exd5 13 Ne5 a6 14 Bd3 Bf6 15 Bf4 g6 16 Bc2 Re8 17 Bb3 Bf5 White really has no advantage, G.Milos-A.Dreev, FIDE World Ch. Moscow 2001) 11 ... Rc8 12 Bd2 Bf6 13 Ne4?! (White now has big problems defending the d-pawn; 13 Qe4 Nce7 is equal) 13 ... a6 (13 ... Nxd4?? 14 Nxf6+ Qxf6 15 Nxd4 loses a piece) 14 Bd3!? Nxd4 15

Nxd4 Bxd4 16 Nd6 Bxb2! 17 Rab1 Bxa3 18 Nxc8 Qxc8 19 Bxh7+! Kxh7 20 Qd3+ Kg8 21 Qxa3 Bc6 and with two pawns for the exchange, Black was fine and went on to win in J.Polgar-A.Dreev, Moscow (rapid) 2002.

**10 ... Bd7 11 Bd3**

11 Nxd5 leads to a symmetrical position: 11 ... exd5 12 Bf4 a6 13 Bxc6 Bxc6 14 Ne5 Be8 15 Qb3 f6 16 Nd3 Bb5 17 Nc5 Bxc5 18 dxc5 Bc6 19 Qb4 Re8 20 Bd6, M.Brodsky-V.Popov, Sochi (rapid) 2004.

**11 ... Nf6!?**



This is a very interesting move. Black does not allow White to exchange knights; instead he decides to utilize typical ideas for playing against the IQP. In fact Black does this very easily in the game we follow: he centralizes his rooks, prevents any counterplay on the long diagonal with ... g7-g6, and finally capitalizes with a well thought-out sacrifice.

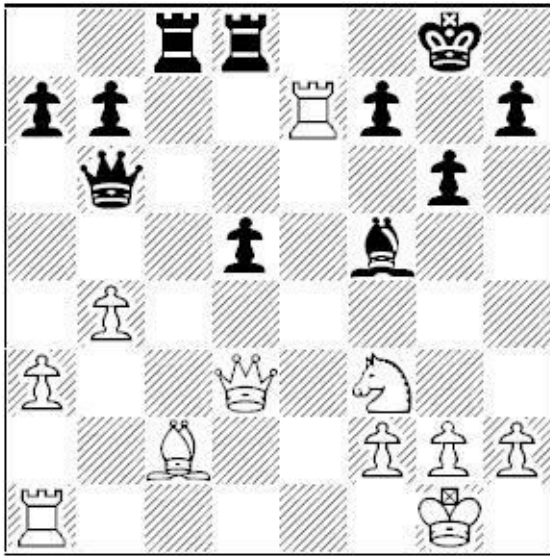
**12 a3 Rc8 13 Bc2 Qa5 14 Bg5 Rfd8 15 Qd3**

White has conducted his play in a very normal fashion.

15 d5?!, whilst tempting, is not correct after 15 ... Nxd5:

a) 16 Nxd5 Qxd5 17 Qxd5 exd5 18 Bxe7 Nxe7 (the point here is that the white bishop on c2 is en prise) 19 Bxh7+ Kf8 20 Bd3 g6 21 Rac1 Bf5 22 Bxf5 Nxf5 23 g4 Nd6 with an equal endgame.

b) Playing 16 Qd3 doesn't help White either: 16 ... g6 17 b4 Qb6 18 Nxd5 exd5 19 Bxe7 Nxe7 20 Rxe7 Bf5!.



Black wins back the piece with a much better position. For example, 21 Qd4 Rxc2 22 Qxb6 axb6 23 Rxb7 d4 24 Rd1 d3 25 Nd2 Re8 26 h3 Re2 27 Nf1 Rxf2 28 Ne3 Ra2 and Black is virtually winning.

**15 ... g6 16 h4?!**

Perhaps with hindsight this move is a bit too ambitious, but the problem is that if White does not commence active operations then little by little he will begin to stand worse.

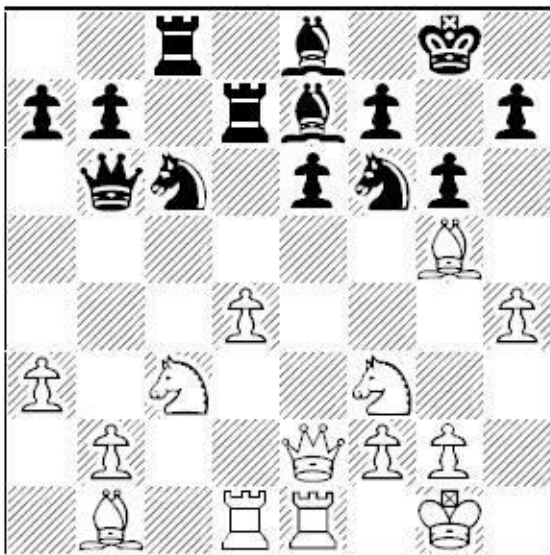
**16 ... Be8 17 Rad1 Qb6 18 Bb1**

Indirectly defending the b2-pawn, since after 18 ... Qxb2 19 Na4 Black must drop material.

**18 ... Rd7**

Black plans to use all his forces to attack d4.

**19 Qe2!?**



**19 ... Nxd4!?**

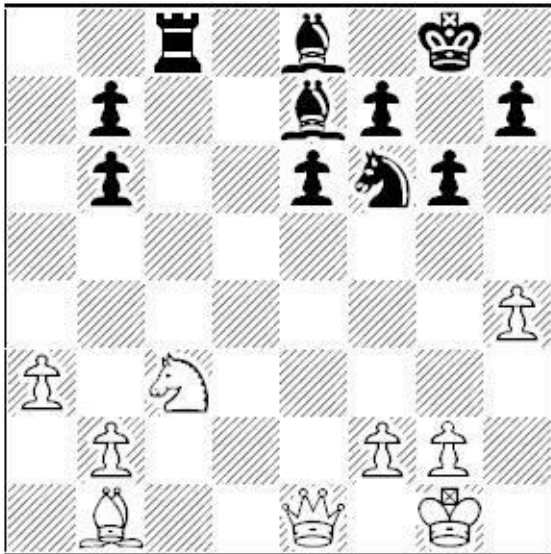
If Black doesn't fancy giving up his queen, grabbing space with 19 ... a5 is an alternative:

a) 20 Bxf6 Bxf6 21 d5 Bxc3 22 bxc3 exd5 is equal, as is 20 Ba2 Rcd8.

b) 20 Be3 Ng4! 21 Bf4 Rcd8 (turning the pressure up) 22 Ng5 h5 23 d5 Nd4 24 Qd2 Rxd5!! 25 Nxd5 Rxd5 is a pretty variation. It's impossible for White not to concede any material.

c) 20 h5!? (White goes all out for the attack) 20 ... Nxh5 21 d5 Nd4! (distracting the f3-knight from its defensive duties) 22 Nxd4 Bxg5 23 Qg4 Rxc3! 24 bxc3 Rxd5 and with two pawns and a bishop for the rook, Black is fine.

**20 Nxd4 Rxd4 21 Be3 Rxd1!? 22 Bxb6 Rxe1+ 23 Qxe1 axb6**



An amazing sacrifice. Although technically Black has enough material in compensation, it is very difficult to bring oneself to sacrifice the queen.

White has a few problems here. Black has a great bishop on e7, and together with a rook on the d-file it will reign supreme. This bishop can easily target the dark squares around White's king, which despite appearances is rather unsafe. To guard against possible mating ideas on the dark squares White will be forced to make weaknesses on the light squares, something he cannot do without opening himself up to further mating possibilities. Furthermore, White's army is not coordinated, and aside from the b6-pawn White lacks any real target to attack.

**24 Ba2 Rd8!**

Taking the d-file.

**25 b4 Bc6 26 Bb3 b5 27 Qe2 Rd4!**

Attacking the a4-pawn.

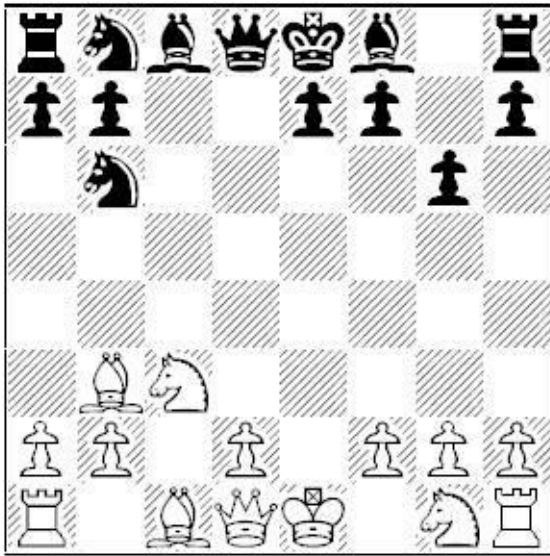
**28 Nxb5**

Black has a clear advantage after 28 g3 Ne4 29 Nxb5 Rd2 30 Qe3 Bf6.

**28 ... Re4 29 Qf1 Rxh4 30 Bc4 Ne4 31 Qe2 Bf6 32 Qe3 Bg5 33 Qb6 Ng3 34 fxg3 Rxc4 35 Nd6 Rc2 36 Qc7 Be3+ 37 Kh2 Rxc2+ 38 Kh3 Rf2 39 Qd8+ Kg7**

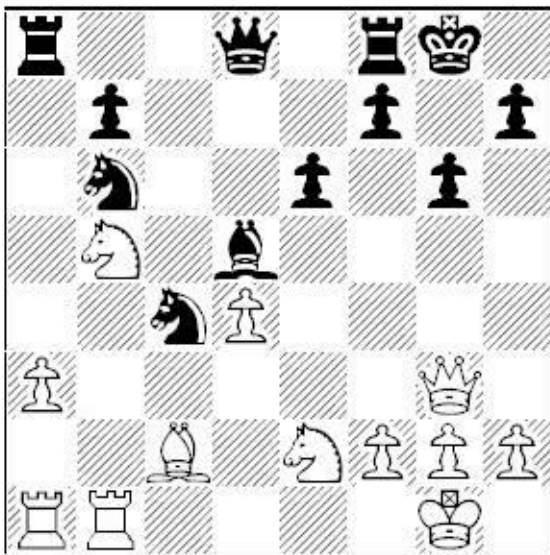
We have been following the game Zhang Zhong-A.Kharitonov, Moscow 2004. It's worth seeing how Black finished off his attack on the white king: 40 Ne8+ Bxe8 41 Qxe8 h5 42 Qb5 g5 43 g4 hxg4+ 44 Kg3 f5 45 Qd7+ Kf6 46 Qd8+ Ke5 47 Qc7+ Kd4 48 Qb6+ Kd3 49 Qxe6 Rf3+ 50 Kg2 f4 51 Qb3+ Kd4 52 Qb2+ Kd5 53 Qb3+ Kd6 54 Qd3+ Kc7 55 Qc4+ Kb8 56 Qb5 Rf2+ 57 Kh1 g3 58 Qe5+ Kc8 59 Qe8+ Kc7 60 Qe7+ Kb6 61 Qd8+ Kb5 62 Qd5+ Ka4 63 Qd1+ Kxa3 64 Qa1+ Ra2 and White resigned as ... Rh2 mate is coming.

**C2) 6 Bc4 Nb6 7 Bb3 g6!?**



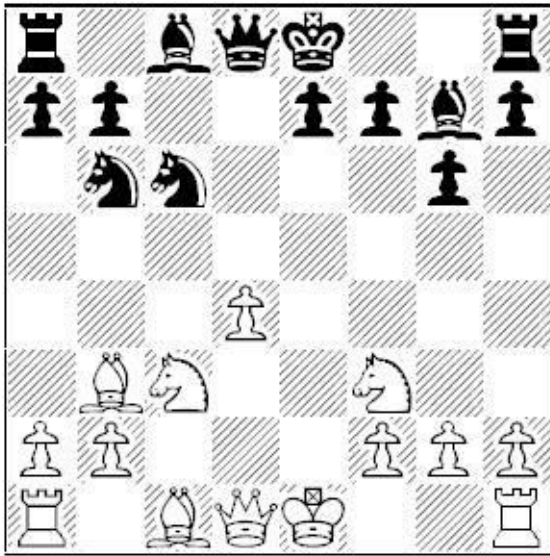
### 8 Nf3

8 Qf3, threatening f7, is a bit dubious: 8 ... e6 9 Nge2 Bg7 10 d4 Nc6 11 0-0 0-0 (11 ... Nxd4?! is just plain greedy: 12 Nxd4 Qxd4 13 Rd1! Qe5 14 Bf4 Qf5 15 g4 Qa5 16 Ne4 0-0 17 Bd2 Qb5 18 a4 Qe8 – 18 ... Qc6 19 Rac1 – 19 Bc3! f6 20 Bb4 and White picks up an exchange) 12 Rd1 Na5! (preventing the advance of the d-pawn) 13 Bc2 Bd7 (transferring the ‘bad bishop’ to the long diagonal) 14 Bf4 (14 Qg3 Bc6 15 h4 Nac4 16 h5 looked good for Black in L.Ortega-C.Garcia Palermo, Frascati 2005; instead of the game’s 16 ... Nd6, I prefer 16 ... Nd5 17 hxg6 hxg6 18 Qh3 Re8 and I don’t see what White has planned) 14 ... Bc6! 15 Qg3 Bd5 (blockading the d5-square) 16 Bd6!? Re8 17 Nb5 Nac4 18 Bb4! (18 Bf4?! loses to 18 ... Nxb2 19 Rdb1 N2c4 20 Nc7 e5!) 18 ... Bf8! (Black wants to trade this bishop for its more active counterpart) 19 a3 Rc8 20 Nxa7 Ra8 21 Bxf8 Rxf8 22 Nb5 Nxb2 23 Rdb1 N2c4.



We have been following the game M.Chiburdanidze-S.Lalic, Novi Sad Olympiad 1990, Black is much better here: Susan has blockaded the d5-square and saddled the former Women’s World Champion with two pawn weaknesses (d4 and a3). All that remains is to steer the position into an endgame where these factors can be realised more easily.

**8 ... Bg7 9 d4 Nc6**



### 10 d5

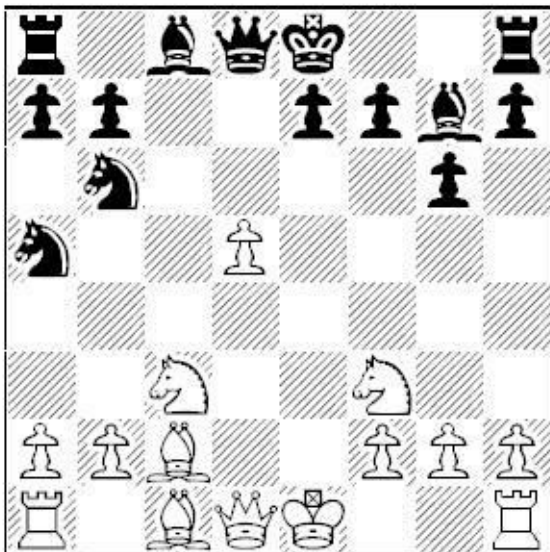
Or 10 Be3 0-0 11 h3 (preventing the light-squared bishop from developing to g4) 11 ... Na5! and now:

a) 12 0-0 allows Black to remove one of the controllers of d5 with 12 ... Nxb3. Black has an edge after both 13 axb3 Nd5! 14 Qd2 Re8 15 Rfc1 Bf5, and 13 Qxb3 Be6 14 Qc2 Nd5 15 Bg5 Rc8, O.Moilanen-J.Kortelainen, Finnish Team Ch. 1991.

b) 12 Bc2 Nac4 13 Bc1 Be6 14 0-0 Bd5!? 15 Nxd5 Nxd5 16 Qe2 Rc8 17 Bb3 b5 18 Qe4 e6 19 Bg5 Qd6 and Black was doing well in M.Fierro Baquero-K.Kachiani Gersinska, Bled Women's Olympiad 2002.

### 10 ... Na5! 11 Bc2

11 0-0 again allows 11 ... Nxb3. For example, 12 axb3 0-0 13 Re1 Qd6 14 Bg5 e6 15 dxe6 Qxd1 16 exf7+ Rxf7 17 Raxd1 Bg4 18 Rd3 Nd7 19 Rde3 Bxf3 20 gxf3 h6 21 Be7 Bd4 22 Re6 Re8 23 Bd6 Rxe6 24 Rxe6 Rxf3 and Black was better in G.Danner-P.Wells, Passau 1998.



### 11 ... 0-0 12 0-0 Nac4

If White now plays 13 h3, preventing ... Bg4, Black can win a pawn with 13 ... Nxb2! 14 Bxb2 Nc4 15

Qc1 Nxb2 16 Qxb2 Qa5.

## Summary

2 c4 is a very interesting line, and Black is alive and kicking. If White keeps his pawn with 5 Qa4+, Black must attack the weak d5-pawn as much as possible, forcing the white pieces onto awkward squares. The endgame after 5 Bb5+ is perfectly good for Black, who should aim to capture the pawn on d5 by relocating the bishop to b7. Finally, if White concentrates on development rather than holding on to the pawn, then Black should aim to blockade the square in front of the IQP.

# Chapter Eleven

## Two Knights Variation

**1 e4 c6 2 Nc3 d5 3 Nf3 Bg4**

The Two Knights Variation is characterized by White developing the two knights instead of pushing the d-pawn. Although this system does not look promising for White, by refraining from moving the d-pawn, it does have the advantage of keeping more options open. White can build up with a controlled d2-d4 or play the position like the King's Indian Attack with d2-d3 followed by a kingside attack.

### Why 3 ... Bg4?

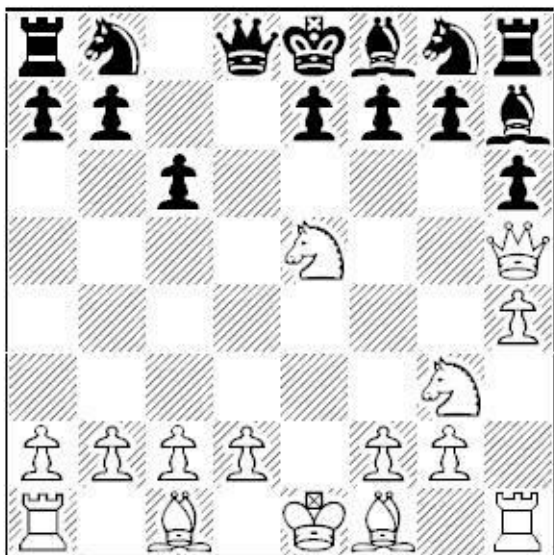
The best move after 3 Nf3 is undoubtedly 3 ... Bg4, although at first sight it does appear to be very strange. Whilst researching this variation on the Internet, I happened to come across a chess forum where players discussed their opinions on openings. It became obvious that when talking about the Two Knights Variation many people did not understand the reasoning behind this bishop move. People assumed that handing the bishop pair to White on a plate was tantamount to conceding a small but lasting advantage.

However, this is not the case here. Firstly, if we take a look at the pawn structure we notice that most of Black's pawns will be on light squares. This means he has a light-square bind that can restrict the activity of White's light-squared bishop. Secondly, the position is not yet of an open nature, so the advantage of the bishop pair is not apparent. Thirdly, we must look at the potential of White's f3-knight and Black's light-squared bishop, and also some tactical possibilities. If Black wanted to keep the bishop, in order not to become 'bad' it would need to be developed outside the pawn chain, either on f5 or g4. Let's see what happens when the bishop is placed on f5:

**1 e4 c6 2 Nc3 d5 3 Nf3 dxe4 4 Nxe4 Bf5?! 5 Ng3! Bg6 6 h4 h6**

White has not expended a tempo on d2-d4, and now this can be used to good effect.

**7 Ne5! Bh7?! 8 Qh5!**



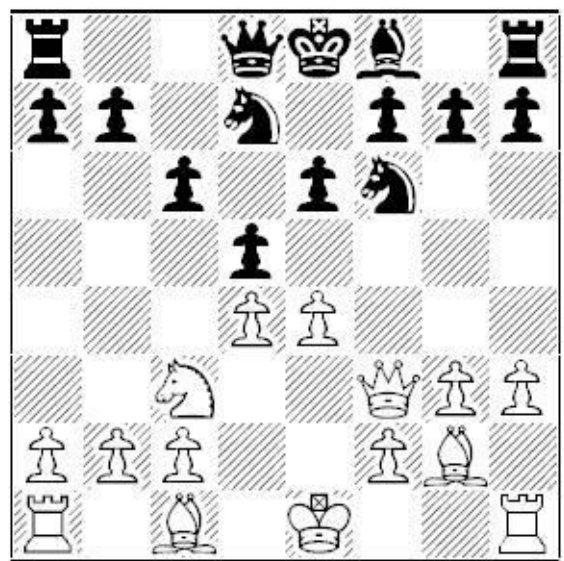
Sadly for Black he is forced to play 8 ... g6 with an absolutely miserable position. In addition, look at the power of the knight on e5, and how with just two pieces White wrecks the black position: 9 Qf3

Nf6 10 Qb3 11 Qxb7 etc.

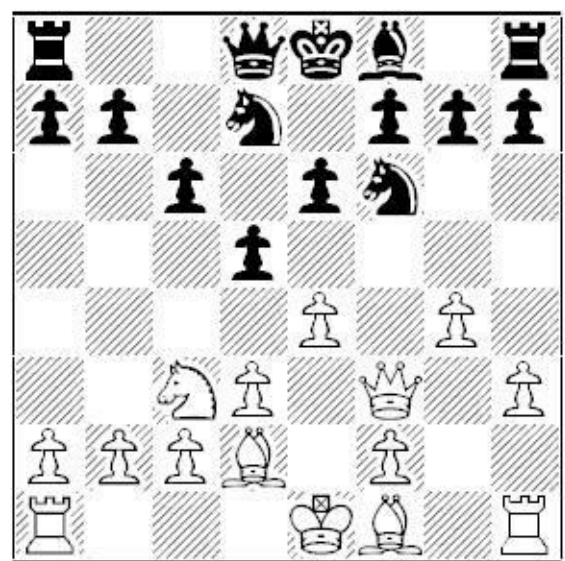
There are two main methods of play for White in the Two Knights Variation: the positional approach based on the classical school of thought, and the aggressive approach.

## White Takes the Positional Approach

White's aim is to take the centre and try to maximize the advantage of the bishop pair by striving to open the position. However, it is not easy for White to do this; Black has the resources at hand to keep the position closed. Indeed, it will be Black's aim to provoke White into closing the position and to employ a dark-square strategy whilst maintaining a light-square bind with the pawns wherever possible.



## An Aggressive Plan: the Kingside Thrust



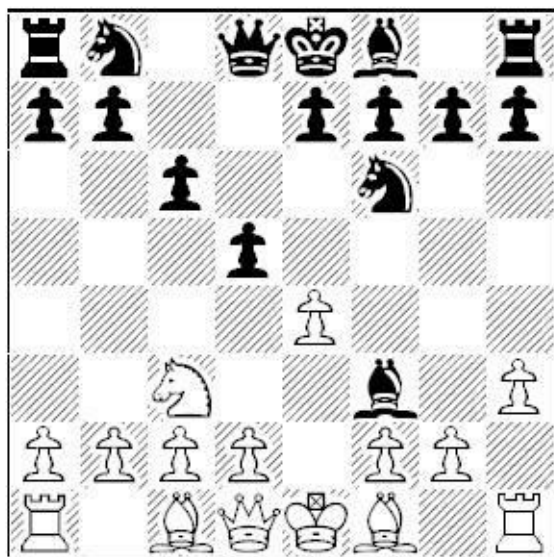
White's basic idea here is to castle queenside and then to push the kingside pawns up the board in order to checkmate the king. This is a very high-risk strategy and one where Black's chances are no worse. In fact, I often like it when White players do this. Some of the plans leave a gaping hole on f4;

others allow Black to set up a counter-strike of his own through a quick ... b5. It should be noted that Black does not have to fear the space grabbing e4-e5. This move, while seizing space, releases the central tension, makes White's light-squared bishop inferior to the black knight and keeps the nature of the position closed – something which will favour Black. Black's strategy should be to exchange the dark-squared bishops, leaving White with a bad bishop. Once this is achieved Black should play to secure the f4-square, which will become an excellent outpost for the knights.

## Looking at the Theory

**1 e4 c6 2 Nc3 d5 3 Nf3 Bg4 4 h3 Bxf3!?**

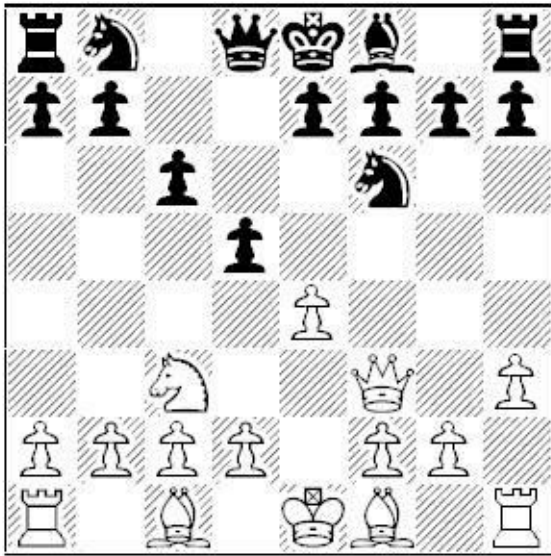
4 ... Bh5 is also possible, although Black is playing with fire a little after 5 exd5 cxd5 6 Bb5+ Nc6 7 g4 Bg6 8 Ne5.



### **5 Qxf3**

5 gxf3? is possible but highly unlikely, although it was played by Tal against Botvinnik in a world championship match for 'psychological' effect. Suffice to say, when White voluntarily makes such a positional concession like this, Black cannot stand worse.

### **5 ... Nf6**



Theory has fluctuated so much between 5 ... e6 and 5 ... Nf6. Originally 5..Nf6 was considered the most accurate move order as the pawn sacrifice after 6 d4 is not considered to be effective. However, the general trend these days is to play 5 ... e6. It must be said that normally these two moves transpose into each other, but I prefer 5 ... Nf6 – at least it sets a little trap!

We'll begin by looking at positions unique to 5 ... Nf6 before moving on to the main lines. White can play:

- A: 6 e5?!**
- B: 6 d4**
- C: 6 exd5**
- D: 6 g3 and others**
- E: 6 d3**

**A) 6 e5?!**

Far too hasty; this move falls right in with Black's plans of keeping the position as closed as possible.

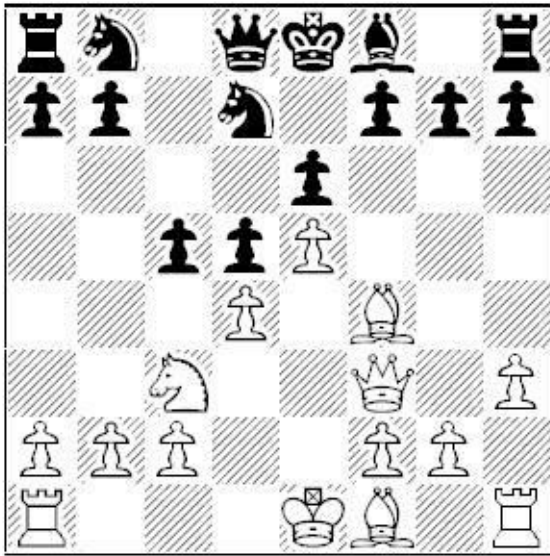
**6 ... Nfd7! 7 d4**

Alternatively:

a) 7 e6? is tempting but wrong – I can guarantee an opponent will fall for this at some stage, especially in blitz! 7 ... fxe6 8 d4 e5! 9 dxe5 Nxe5 10 Qg3 (10 Qh5+ Nf7!) 10 ... Nbd7 11 f4 Nf7 12 Be3 Qc7 13 Be2 g6 14 Qf2 Bg7 15 0-0 0-0 16 Rad1 Nd6 and White had no compensation for the pawn in H.Van Gool-K.Arkell, Vlissingen 2003.

b) 7 Qg3 (trying to stop Black's development) 7 ... e6 8 Be2 c5! (grabbing some central squares) 9 f4 Nc6 10 Nb5 g6 11 c3 a6 12 Na3 c4 13 Nc2 Nc5 14 d3 cxd3 15 Bxd3 Nxd3+ 16 Qxd3 Bc5 and Black had an excellent position in E.Rozentalis-E.Moldobaev, Calvia Olympiad 2004.

**7 ... e6 8 Bf4 c5!**



Black undermines the centre as quickly as possible, especially since the white knight is awkwardly placed on c3.

**9 dxc5 Nc6!**

9 ... Bxc5 is also possible.

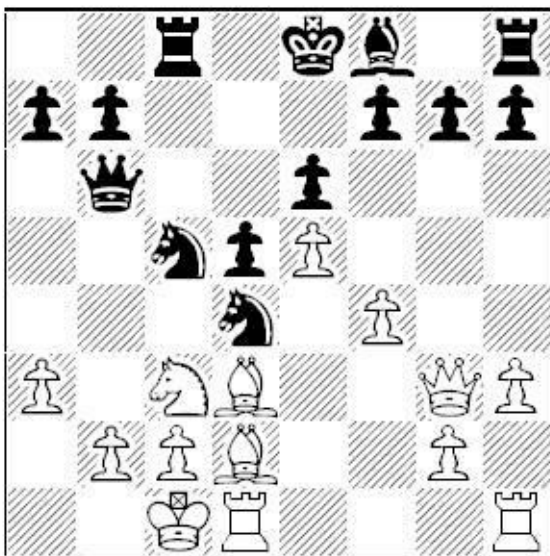
**10 Qg3**

After 10 Bb5 a6 11 Bxc6 bxc6 12 0-0 Rb8 13 Rab1 Qa5 14 a3 Qxc5 Black has neutralized any traces of White's initiative. All that remains is for him to complete his development and push the c6-pawn.

**10 ... Qa5 11 Bd2 Qxc5 12 f4 Rc8**

12 ... a6!?, preventing a piece coming to b5, is also an interesting idea: 13 Bd3 Nb4! (eliminating White's 'good' bishop) 14 a3 Nxd3+ 15 Qxd3 Be7 16 0-0-0? (with the a3-pawn as a target and a semi-open c-file, it seems to me that White is really 'castling into it' as they say ... ) 16 ... Rc8 17 Kb1 0-0 18 Be3 Qa5 19 h4 Rc4 20 Qxc4 dxc4 and Black was soon winning in I.Crisan-D.Filipovich, Ontario 1993.

**13 a3 Nd4 14 Bd3 Qb6 15 0-0-0 Nc5**



Now 16 f5 doesn't work because of 16 ... Ne4!:

a) 17 Bxe4?? Rxc3!! 18 Qg4 (taking the rook is impossible because of 18 ... Ne2+) 18 ... Rxa3! 19 Kb1 dxe4 and Black is winning.

b) 17 Qh4 exf5! is good for Black, who wins after 18 Nxd5 Nb3+ 19 Kb1 Nbx d2+.

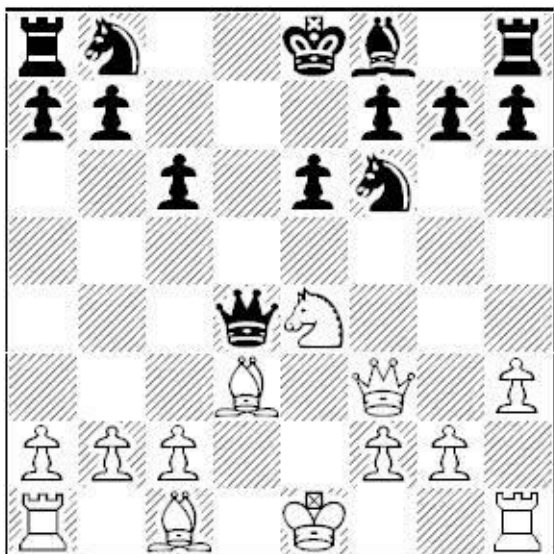
## B) 6 d4

One of the fine points about the move order with 5 ... Nf6 is that 6 d4 is not effective.

### 6 ... dxe4 7 Qe3

White wants to preserve the d-pawn.

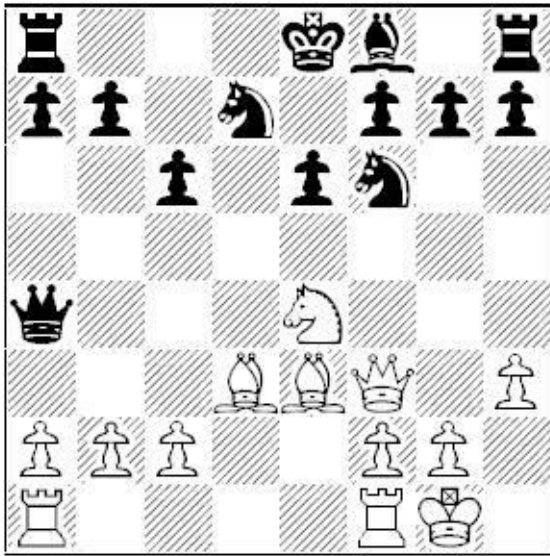
The pawn sacrifice 7 Nxe4 Qxd4 is not too well regarded by theoreticians – sacrificing pawns for quick development normally works better in open positions rather than semi-open ones. Play continues 8 Bd3 e6 and now:



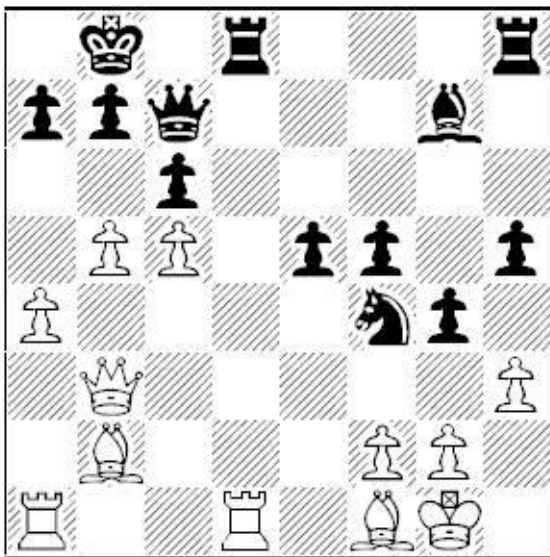
a) 9 Be3 Bb4+! (this intermediate check is quite important since it displaces the white king) 10 Ke2 Qd8 11 Qg3!? (11 Rhd1 Nxe4 12 Bxe4 Qe7 13 Kf1 0-0 14 Qg3 Na6 15 c3 Bc5! is Lukac's improvement on 15 ... Ba5, as played in I.Boleslavsky-V.Makogonov, Moscow 1940) 11 ... Nxe4 12 Qxg7?! (this is wrong; White should be content with 12 Bxe4!, although Black is okay after 12 ... 0-0) 12 ... Qf6! (a convincing reply) 13 Qg4 Bc5 14 Qxe4 Bxe3 15 Qxe3 Nd7 16 Rhd1 Nb6 17 c3 Nd5 (Black cleverly centralizes the knight) 18 Qe4 Rg8 19 Kf1 Rg5 20 Re1 0-0-0 and Black had the initiative in V.Soloviev-T.Petrosian, Moscow 1950.

b) 9 c3 is not dangerous: 9 ... Qd8! (the safest place for the queen) 10 0-0 Nbd7 11 Bf4 Nc5!? 12 Rad1 Ncxe4 13 Bxe4 Qb6 14 Be5 Be7 15 b4 0-0 16 Bd3 a5 and Black had no problems in S.Azarov-P.Dempsey, Mureck 1998.

c) 9 0-0 Nbd7 10 Be3 Qa4!?

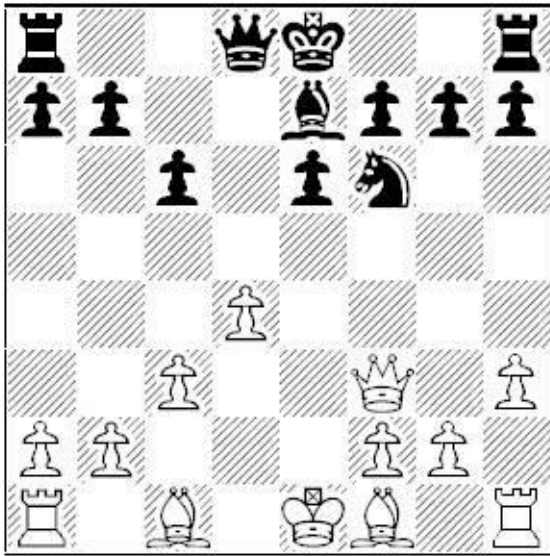


Black intends to transfer the queen to a5 from where it can defend both wings and the potentially weak dark squares. This move also has the advantage of not allowing White to chase away the queen with natural developing moves: 11 Nxf6+ (11 Bd2, attempting to trap the queen, does not work because of 11 ... Nxe4! 12 Bxe4 Nc5; 11 b3 Qa5 12 Bd2 Qd8 13 Bc3 Be7 14 Rad1 Qc7 15 Rfe1 0-0-0 and Black was better in J.Villarreal-E.Arlandi, Moscow Olympiad 1994) 11 ... Nxf6 12 Qg3 Qa5 13 a3 Nd5 14 Bd4 0-0-0 15 Be5 f6 16 b4 Qb6 17 Bb2 e5 18 Rfd1 g6! (preparing a pawn storm and a developing route for the bishop) 19 Qg4+ Kb8 20 Bf1 Bg7 21 c4 Nf4 22 c5 Qc7 23 a4 h5 24 Qf3 f5 25 b5 g5 26 Qb3 g4 (the threat now is to open lines against the white king with ... gxh3)



27 h4 cxb5 28 Rdc1 (28 axb5 Qxc5 29 Ba3 Qb6 30 Rxd8+ Rxd8 31 Qf7? loses to 31 ... g3 32 Qxg7 Nh3+!) 28 ... b4 29 a5 Rd2 and Black has a very pleasant position, I.Badjarani-S.Guliev, Baku 1997.

7 ... e6 8 Nxe4 Nxe4 9 Qxe4 Nd7 10 c3 Nf6 11 Qf3 Be7



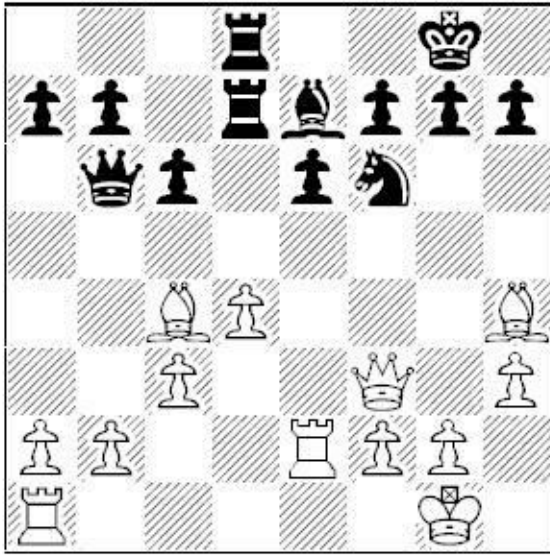
Now that there has been some exchanges, Black must be very careful not to let White improve his position. White will centralize the two rooks on the e- and d-files while Black will have to counter this by playing for a ... c6-c5 pawn break.

**12 Bd3 0-0 13 0-0 Qb6 14 Bg5 Rfd8 15 Rfe1 Rd5!?**

This is a very interesting idea, although Black must be on guard for some concealed dangers. Although the position looks reasonably quiet White has tricks involving sacrificing on e6 and also some potential back rank mating ideas.

15 ... h6?! would be dubious: 16 Bf4 Rd7 17 b4 Nd5 18 Bd2 a5 19 a3 and after defending everything on the queenside White now has a real target to attack on the kingside.

**16 Bh4 Rad8 17 Bc4 R5d7 18 Re2!**



**18 ... Nd5**

18 ... c5?! was seen in M.Ghinda-W.Watson, Thessaloniki Olympiad 1988, and here 19 Rae1! 19 ... Qc7 20 Bxf6 Bxf6 21 d5! e5 gives White a big advantage.

**19 Bxe7**

19 Bg3 is met by 19 ... c5!. In contrast to the previous note, Black does not have to worry about

threats on e6 and the back rank.

**19 ... Rxe7 20 Rae1 Red7 21 b4**

Preventing the ... c5 break.

**21 ... a5 22 a3 axb4 23 axb4 Ra8**

As it is difficult for White to dislodge the very strong knight from d5, Black has no problems.

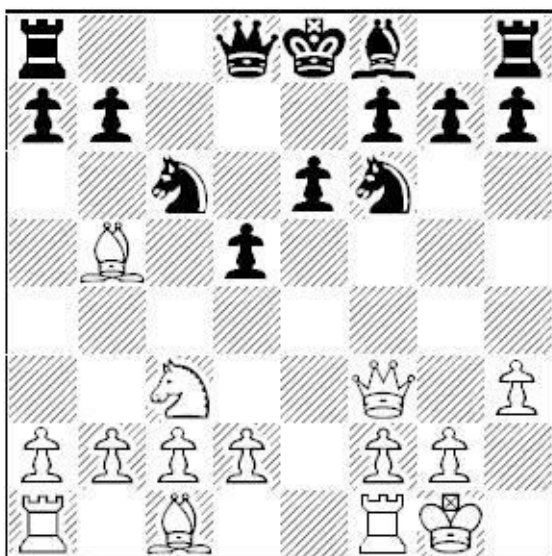
**C) 6 exd5 cxd5 7 Bb5+**

White aims for an improved version of the Exchange Variation. He doesn't have very aggressive intentions, and is content with a greater amount of space and more active piece play.

**7 ... Nc6 8 0-0!**

This is the most sensible approach. 8 d3 e6 9 g4 only helps Black: White now has to castle queenside to connect the rooks and this is exactly where Black's pawns are pointing ...

**8 ... e6**



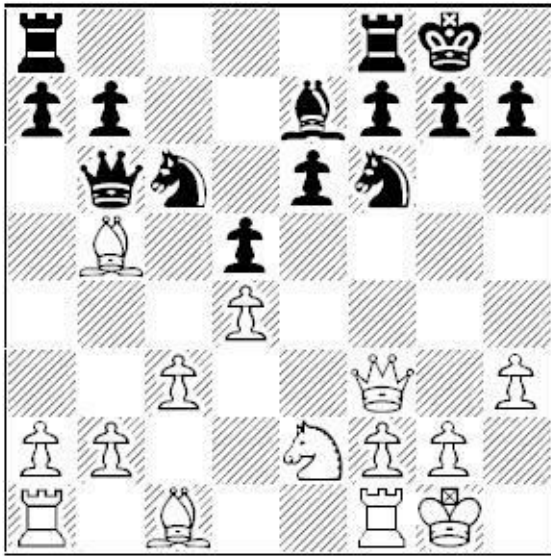
**9 d4**

9 Qg3, trying to restrict Black's development, is not so successful after 9 ... Qd6! 10 f4 (or 10 Qxd6 Bxd6 and White will find it difficult to open up the position to activate the two bishops) 10 ... Qc5+ 11 Kh1 (11 d4 Qxd4+ 12 Be3 Qb4) 11 ... d4! and White will have to concede his light-squared bishop. 9 d3 is also possible but less challenging.

**9 ... Be7!?**

9 ... Bd6 is another option, but 10 Bg5!? is a little bit annoying. White has an edge after 10 ... a6 11 Bxc6+ bxc6 12 Na4 0-0 13 Rfe1 Rb8! 14 a3.

**10 Ne2 0-0 11 c3 Qb6**



### 12 a4

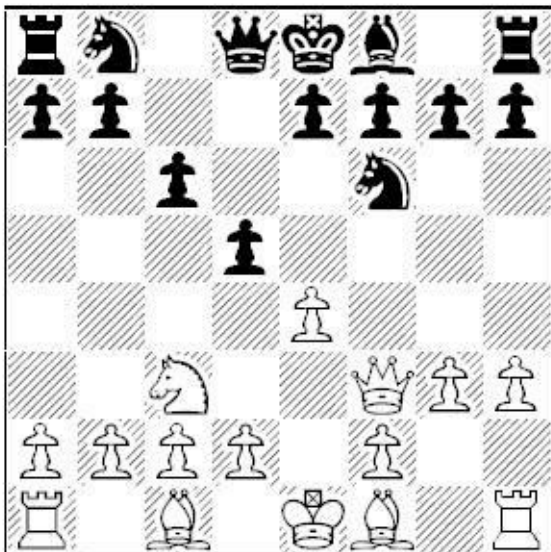
Black meets 12 Bd3 with 12 ... e5!, taking advantage of the misplaced white pieces to begin some active operations of his own: 13 dxe5 (13 Qg3 e4 gives Black the edge) 13 ... Nxe5 14 Qg3 Bd6 15 Bf4 (or 15 Bc2 Rfe8 16 Nf4 Qc6 17 Be3 Ne4 18 Qh4 g5 19 Qh5 gxf4 20 Bxf4 Ng6) 15 ... Rfe8 (threatening ... Nh5) 16 Bxe5 (16 Bh6?? loses a piece to 16 ... Nh5) 16 ... Rxe5 and Black has the initiative.

### 12 ... Rac8 13 Ng3 Na5

Black has no problems here. The light-squared bishop is not targeting anything and Black has the easy plan of placing the knight on c4 and then continuing operations on the queenside (again where the pawns are pointing!).

### D) 6 g3

White retains some flexibility in his pawn structure by delaying d3 or d4 so he can choose which of these systems to adopt according to what Black decides to play.



There follows a brief round up of the alternatives:

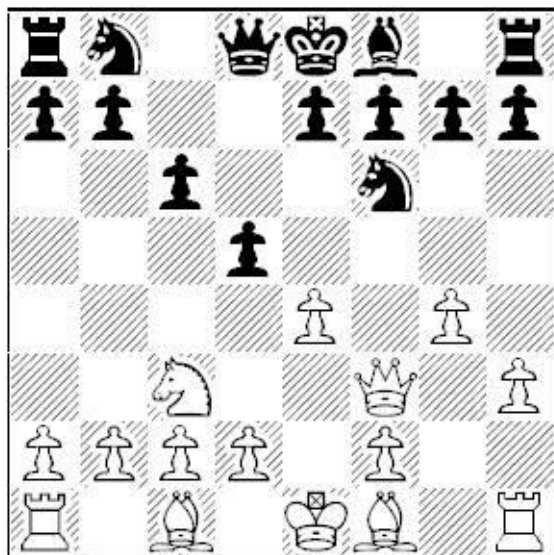
a) 6 Be2 e6 (as played by Grandmasters Korchnoi and Dautov) 7 0-0 Bb4!? 8 e5 (this move is not

so scary: Black loses two tempi but in return White has closed the centre, which can only benefit Black) 8 ... Nfd7 9 Qg4 Bf8 10 f4 g6 11 Bf3 and now:

a1) 11 ... Nb6 12 d3 N8d7 13 Qg3 Qc7 14 a4 Bc5+ 15 Kh1 Nc8 16 Ne2 Ne7 17 d4 Nf5 18 Qf2 Be7 and with a secure post for the knight on f5 Black can look forward to a rosy future, S.Belkhodja-A.Hauchard, Marseille 2001.

a2) 11 ... c5, with the same idea of securing the f5-square for the knight, is also very good: 12 d3 Nc6 13 Bd2 Nd4 14 Rac1 h5 15 Qg3 Qb6 and with a strong knight on d4 Black is doing well.

b) 6 g4. Black should certainly not be intimidated by this caveman-style lunge; by playing calmly he can achieve a level position:



6 ... Nxe4 7 Nxe4 dxe4 8 Qxe4 Nd7 9 Bg2 Nf6 10 Qc4 e6 11 0-0 Be7 12 b4 a6 13 d3 0-0 14 Bd2 Nd5 15 a4 Bf6 16 Rae1 Qd6 17 a5 Rad8 18 Re4 and Black continued with his plan of centralization and later won in P.Blatny-Z.Hracek, Kecskemet 1991. White has a spatial advantage but Black should have no problems.

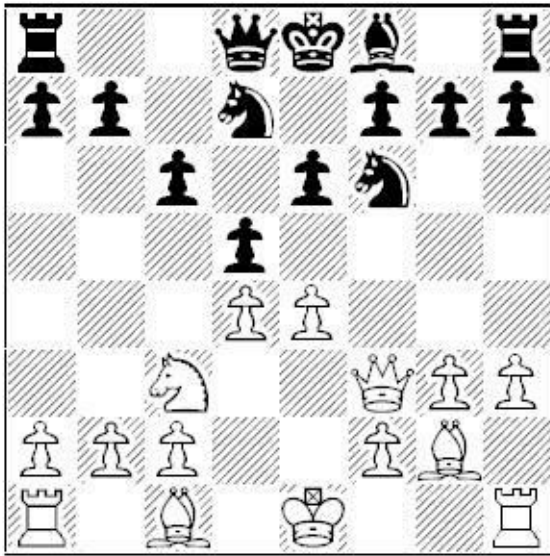
**6 ... e6 7 Bg2 Nbd7**

7 ... Bc5 is also another possibility.

**8 d4**

8 d3 has always been considered relatively harmless. White intends to adopt a King's Indian Attack set-up but this is not dangerous. A game of mine, D.Bareham-J.Houska, British League 2004, continued 8 ... Bb4 9 0-0 0-0 10 Qe2 (10 Ne2 Bd6 11 Nf4 Qb6 – preventing White from developing easily – 12 Rb1 Ne5 13 Qe2 dxe4 14 dxe4 Rad8 15 Be3 Bc5 is equal) 10 ... Qc7 11 f4 dxe4 12 dxe4 Rfd8 (taking control of the d-file, but 12 ... e5! was stronger) 13 e5 Nd5 (13 ... Bxc3 makes a great deal of positional sense as well: 14 bxc3 Nd5 15 c4 Qb6+ 16 Kh2 Ne7 17 Be3 Qa6 18 Be4 Nb6 19 Bd3) 14 Ne4 b5 15 c3 (15 a4 a6 16 axb5 axb5 is again equal) 15 ... Be7 16 b3 Nc5 17 Bd2 Nxe4 18 Bxe4 Rd7 (Black gets ready to centralize the rooks down the d-file) 19 Rad1 Rad8 20 Qf3 and now 20 ... f5! 21 exf6?? Nxf6! was a sly trick that left White with no way of saving the piece.

Returning to 8 d4:



### 8 ... Bb4

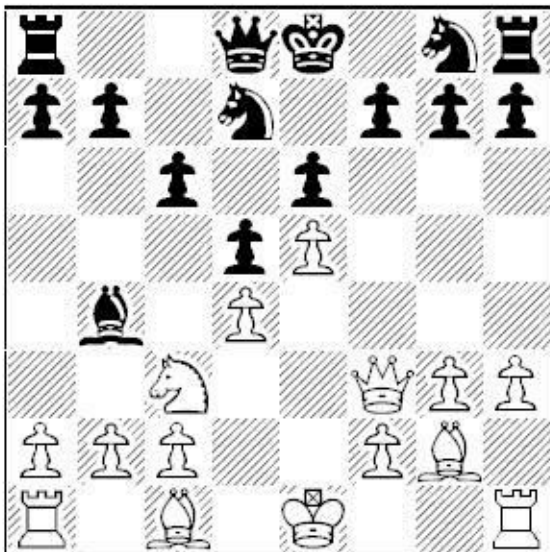
This move is not without risk, but it's an interesting way to play.

8 ... dxe4 is the safest course for Black, but the position tends to be slightly favourable for White and easier to play for the first player: 9 Nxe4 Nxe4 10 Qxe4 Nf6 11 Qe3?! (11 Qd3! Be7 12 0-0 0-0 13 Rd1 Qb6 14 c4 Rfd8 15 Be3 and White is slightly better) 11 ... Nd5 12 Qe2 Bb4+ 13 Bd2 Bxd2+ 14 Qxd2 0-0 15 0-0 and Black has equalized, O.De la Riva Aguado-R.Ponomariov, Andorra (blitz) 2003.

Going back to 8 ... Bb4, I played a very eventful game in this line (P.Chomet-J.Houska, French League 2005), which we are following here:

### 9 e5 Ng8

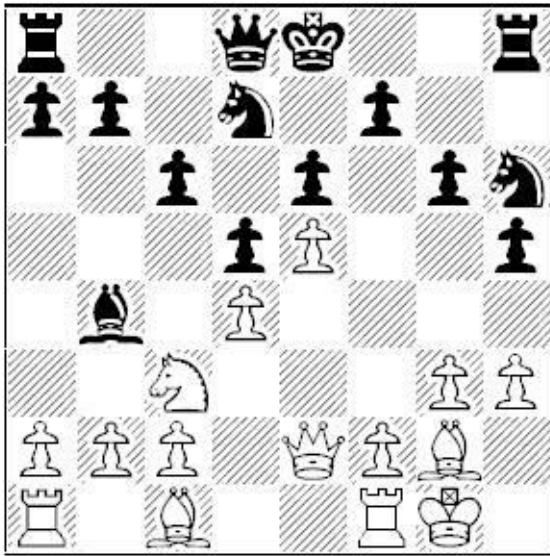
The alternative is 9 ... Ne4, e.g. 10 0-0 Nxc3 11 bxc3 Be7 12 Qd3 0-0 13 f4, E.Berg-A.Galkin, Moscow 2004.



### 10 Qg4

Although this move cannot be bad, it fell in with my plan of playing ... g6 and ... h5, giving me extra time to develop my knight to f5.

### 10 ... g6 11 0-0 h5 12 Qe2 Nh6



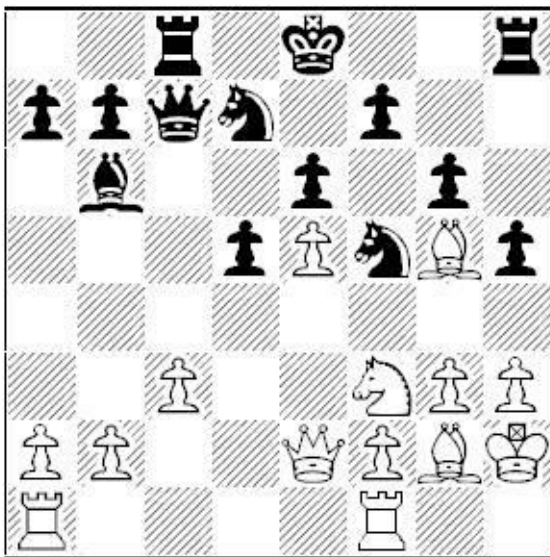
### 13 Nb1?

It was probably best to retreat the knight to d1 so as not to waste a tempo. 13 Nd1 Nf5 14 c3 Be7 is a little bit better for White but there is plenty of play in the position. Black will arrange ... c6-c5 and work on the queenside; White has more of a global strategy involving play on both wings.

### 13 ... Nf5 14 c3 Be7 15 Nd2 c5

My plan is a clear one: I want to exchange into an endgame where White cannot take advantage of my dark-square weaknesses but I can exploit his poorly placed bishop on g2.

### 16 dxc5 Bxc5 17 Kh2 Qc7 18 Nf3 Rc8 19 Bg5 Bb6



### 20 Qd2?!

I was concerned about 20 b3 since it prevented my main plan of exchanging queens. However, 20 ... Ba5 is a good answer, and following 21 b4 Bb6 Black has equal prospects.

After 20 h4 Qc4 21 Qd2 Nc5 Black's strategy is similar to the game: to achieve commanding positions for the knights.

### 20 ... Nc5

Suddenly my other knight leaps into the game!



**28 Kxh3 Rh8+ 29 Nh4**

Or 29 Kg4 Rh4+!! 30 gxh4 Qxg2+ 31 Bg3 Qxg3 mate. Beautiful!

**29 ... Nxh4 30 Qb4+**

30 gxh4 Rxh4+ 31 Kxh4 Qh5 is another mate.

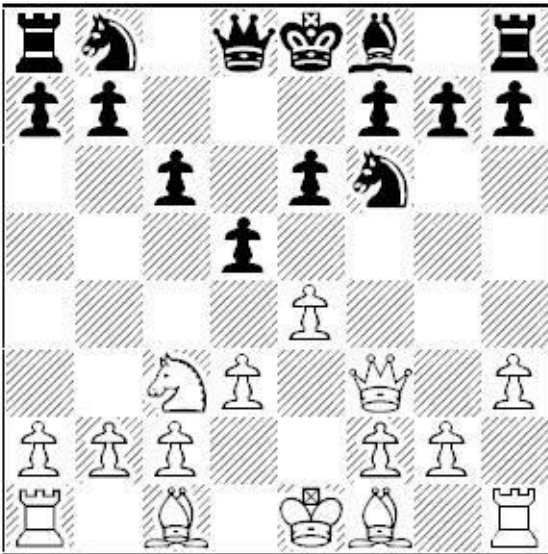
**30 ... Kd8 0-1**

It is hopeless for White, who can only delay checkmate by giving up his queen.

### E) 6 d3

By far the most popular continuation. The big idea behind White's move is to begin the fight in a complicated middlegame rather than in the opening.

**6 ... e6**



Now White can play:

**E1: 7 a3**

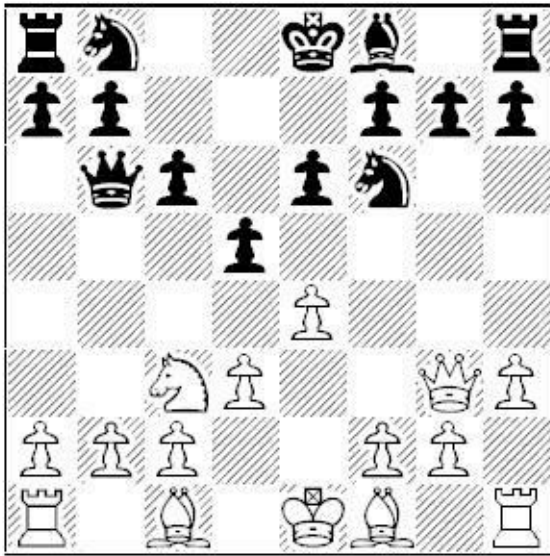
**E2: 7 Be2**

**E3: 7 Bd2**

Alternatively:

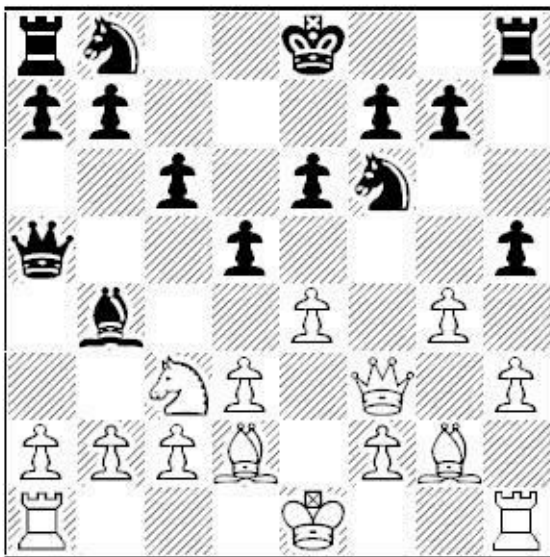
a) 7 g3!? Bb4 (the most aggressive continuation) 8 Bd2 d4 9 Nb1 Qb6! 10 b3 Bxd2+ 11 Nxd2 Qc5 (hitting the c-pawn) 12 Qd1 Nbd7 13 Bg2 h5!? 14 0-0 h4 15 b4 Qe7 16 g4 e5!. Black secures the f4-square for his knight and White's bishop looks absolutely terrible on g2; Black is already much better.

b) 7 Qg3 (a rare move) 7 ... Qb6!? (Black copies White's example by making it difficult for White to develop his queenside)



8 Be2 (8 e5 gives Black a good French with no bad bishop, regardless of what the computers say: 8 ... Nfd7 9 Be2 c5 10 0-0 Nc6 and Black is doing well) 8 ... Nbd7 9 0-0 g6 10 Rb1 Bg7 11 e5 (11 Bf4 transposes to Line E2; 11 Bg5 0-0 12 Bf3 dxe4 13 dxe4 e5 14 Be3 Qc7 15 Rfd1 Rfd8 16 Be2 Nf8 is marginally better for White, if that) 11 ... Nh5 12 Bxh5 Bxe5! 13 Bf4 Bxf4 14 Qxf4 gxh5 and Black has no problems: he is a pawn up and has a ready-made attack down the g-file.

c) I really don't like 7 g4?!. White has a gaping hole on f4 and once the dark-squared bishop is removed White is left with a dud of a bishop on g2 locked in by its own pawns. This is exactly what Black is aiming for: good knight versus bad bishop. For example, 7 ... Qa5 8 Bd2 Bb4! 9 Bg2 h5

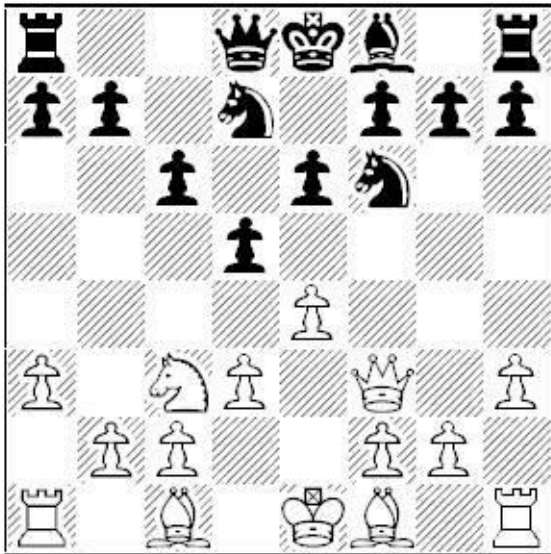


10 gxh5 (10 g5 does nothing for White: 10 ... d4 11 gxf6 dxc3 12 bxc3 Bxc3 13 Qe3 gxf6, when Black is material ahead with good winning chances in the ensuing endgame) 10 ... d4 11 Nb1 Bxd2+ 12 Nxd2 Nbd7 13 Qg3 Nxb5 14 Qd6 (A.Khamatgaleev-D.Svetushkin, Patras 2002) and now instead of 14 ... Qc5, Black could have played the much stronger 14 ... e5! with a wonderful position. 15 b4 doesn't work after 15 ... Qd8, as 16 Nc4 Rh6 wins the queen!

**E1) 7 a3**

The idea behind this move is to prevent the irksome ... Bb4 and make the move ... d5-d4 as difficult as possible. White then has a choice between pursuing two plans: the aggressive g4 or the more positional g3.

7 ... Nbd7



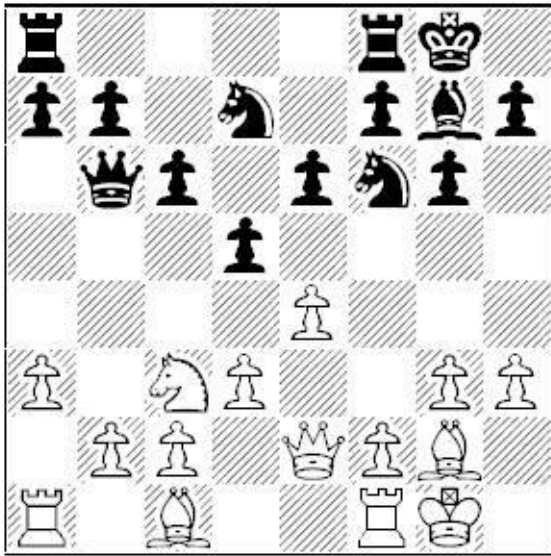
8 g4?!

This is traditionally perceived as the most principled reply to 7 ... Nbd7 as Black can no longer retreat the f6-knight to d7. However, in my opinion this move causes more problems for White than it creates for Black.

8 g3!? is probably the most accurate plan for White to follow. White intends to develop his pieces and only then seize space: 8 ... g6 (now that the square b4 is no longer available, Black changes tack and puts the bishop on the long h8-a1 diagonal) 9 Bg2 Bg7 10 0-0 0-0 and now:

a) 11 Be3 Ne5 12 Qe2? (better is 12 Qd1 d4 13 Bf4 Nh5 14 Bxe5 Bxe5 15 Ne2 with equality) 12 ... d4 13 Bf4 (13 f4 dxc3 14 fxe5 Nh5! 15 Bf4 cxb2 16 Rab1 Qd4+ and Black is winning) 13 ... Nh5 14 Bxe5 Bxe5 15 Nb1 and Black has no problems. The plan is either to concentrate efforts on the queenside or to win a rook and two pawns for two pieces with 15 ... Bxg3 16 fxc3 Nxc3 17 Qf2 Nxf1 18 Qxf1.

b) 11 Qe2 Qb6!? (with a concealed idea):



b1) 12 Rb1? Nh5! 13 Na4 Nxc3 (but not 13 ... Qd4 14 b4!, when 14 ... Nxc3 is not possible because after 15 Qe1 Nxf1 16 Bb2! Black's queen is trapped!) 14 Qe1 (or 14 Qg4 Qa6 15 exd5? Nxf1 and Black won very quickly in B.Shovunov-A.Lastin, St Petersburg 1997) 14 ... Qa6 15 fxc3 Qxa4 and Black has won a pawn.

b2) 12 Kh2 Ne8!? (re-routing the knight to the central square d6) 13 Bd2 Nd6 14 f4 Rfd8 15 e5 Nf5 16 g4 Nd4 17 Be3 c5 is equal. In these types of position 'he who has the most space wins'. Black's plan is to steamroller his a- and b-pawns up the board to victory. Swapping into an endgame usually benefits Black, primarily because of the excellent position of his knight on d4 which is reminiscent of the one in the Closed Sicilian.

**8 ... Bc5!?**

This is a very interesting move. Black develops his bishop onto an active square.

**9 Qg3**

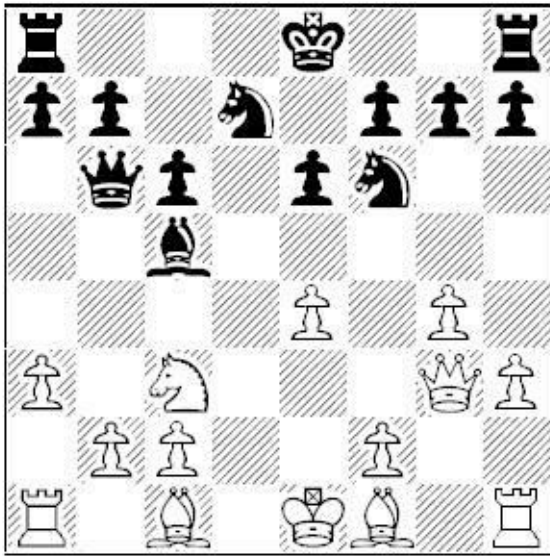
Alternatively:

a) 9 g5 Ne5 10 Qg3 Nfd7 11 Bf4 Bd4!. White cannot exploit the placement of this bishop since 12 Ne2? Bxb2 13 Rb1 Qa5+ is winning for Black.

b) 9 Bg2 dxe4 10 dxe4 Qb6 11 0-0 Bd4 12 Na4 Qa6 13 c3 Be5 14 b3 h6 is a good position for Black. The plan is to take control of the d-file with special attention to the d3-square as an entry point. Black has the choice of castling either side, but I would prefer queenside because White has already made Black's job easier for him there.

**9 ... dxe4 10 dxe4 Qb6!?**

Preventing White from castling queenside. J.Bellon Lopez-D.Marovic, Olot 1969, continued differently with 10 ... e5 11 Bd2 Bd4 12 Bd3 Nc5 13 g5 Nh5 14 Qf3 Nf4!? (White has been too enthusiastic in pushing his pawns up the board, allowing Black to sacrifice a pawn in order to get at White's weaknesses) 15 Bxf4 Bxc3+ 16 bxc3 exf4 17 Qxf4 0-0 18 Qe3 Qa5 19 0-0 Qxc3 20 e5 g6 and White was struggling.



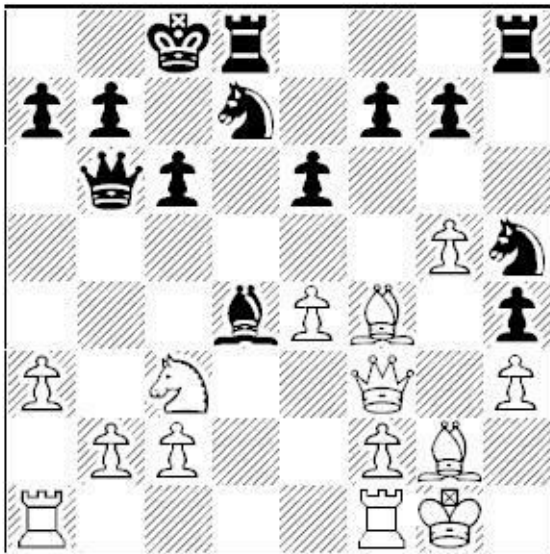
### 11 Bg2

Or 11 g5 Nh5 12 Qh2 (12 Qf3 allows Black's pieces to jump into life with 12 ... Ne5 13 Qg2 Rd8) 12 ... Bd4 and White has to work really hard to develop! 13 Nd1 0-0-0 14 c3 Be5 15 f4 Bb8 16 Be3 Qc7 17 e5 h6 18 gxh6 g5! undermines the centre and leaves Black with a dream position.

### 11 ... 0-0-0 12 0-0 Bd4 13 Bf4 h5

Possible is 13 ... e5 14 Bd2 h6 followed by ... g5, securing the f4-square.

### 14 g5 h4 15 Qf3 Nh5



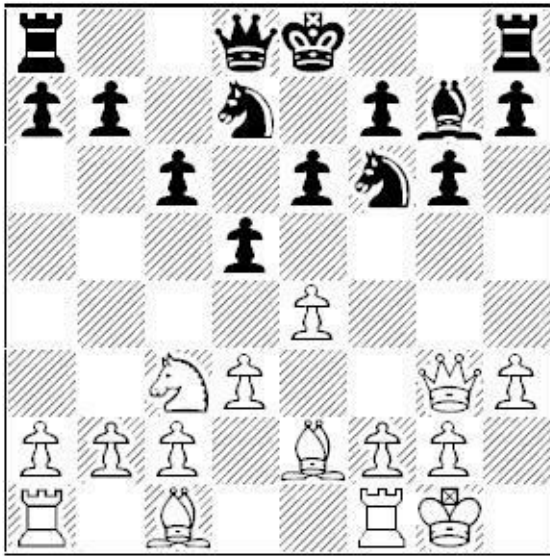
### 16 Bh2?

16 Ne2 is forced but Black can be very happy with his position.

### 16 ... Ng3! 17 Rfd1 Ne5

... and Black wins some heavy material as the queen has nowhere to go.

### E2) 7 Be2 Nbd7 8 Qg3 g6 9 0-0 Bg7



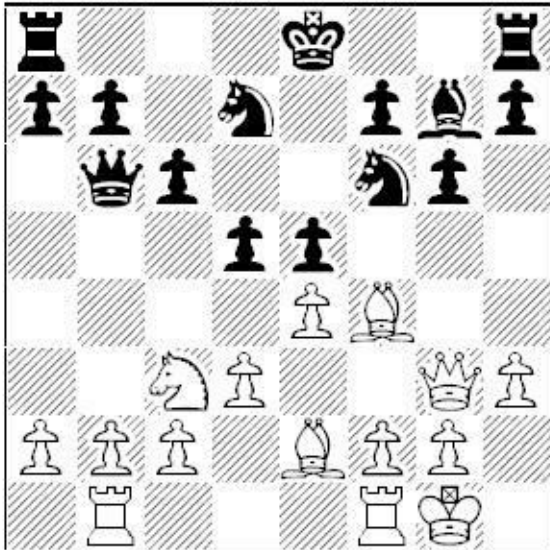
### 10 Bf4

10 f4 0-0 11 e5? (I don't like this move at all; having played the white side of a Closed Sicilian for many years, I have never managed to make these kingside attacks work for White, whilst Black has nice play on the queenside) 11 ... Ne8 12 Bg4 Kh8 13 Bd2 f5 14 exf6 Nexf6 15 Bxe6 Qb6+ 16 Qf2 Qxb2 17 Rab1? Qxc2 18 Rxb7 Qxd3! 19 Rd1 (19 Bxd7? would be a mistake after 19 ... Nxd7 20 Rxd7 Bd4, winning the queen) 19 ... d4 and Black was doing well in S.Petrosian-T.Luther, German League 2000.

### 10 ... Qb6!

10 ... 0-0 is bad as it allows White to clamp down immediately with 11 Bd6! Re8 12 e5.

### 11 Rab1 e5!?



I feel this is a little better than the customary 11 ... 0-0 primarily because it cuts out the option of 12 Bc7.

### 12 Bg5

12 Bd2 d4 13 Nd1 Qa6 is a crafty little move that sets a trap: 14 Re1 (14 a3 Nxe4!) 14 ... Qxa2 15 Rc1 0-0 16 f4 Bh6 and Black is a clear pawn up.

12 Bxe5? loses immediately to 12 ... Nh5!, winning a piece.

**12 ... d4 13 Nd1**

Or 13 Na4 Qb5 14 b3 Nxe4!

**13 ... Qa6!**

Again we see the trick in action: the two threats are ... Nxe4 and ... Qxa2. 14 a3 Nxe4! wins at least a pawn, while 14 Re1 Qxa2 15 Rc1 0-0 is clearly better for Black.

**14 Bxf6 Bxf6 15 f4 Qxa2 16 Nf2 h5**

Preventing the knight from jumping to g4, where it would be highly annoying.

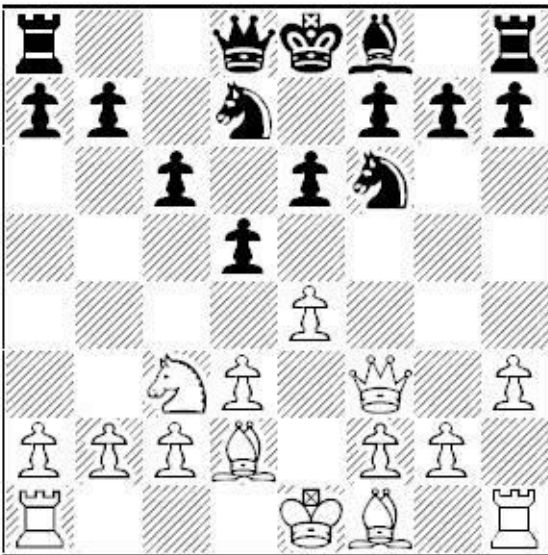
**17 Ra1 Qxb2 18 Rfb1 Qxc2 19 Bd1 Qd2 20 Rxb7 exf4 21 Qf3 Qe1+ 22 Kh2 Bh4 23 Nh1 g5**

With the deadly threat of ... Ne5!, winning immediately.

### **E3) 7 Bd2**

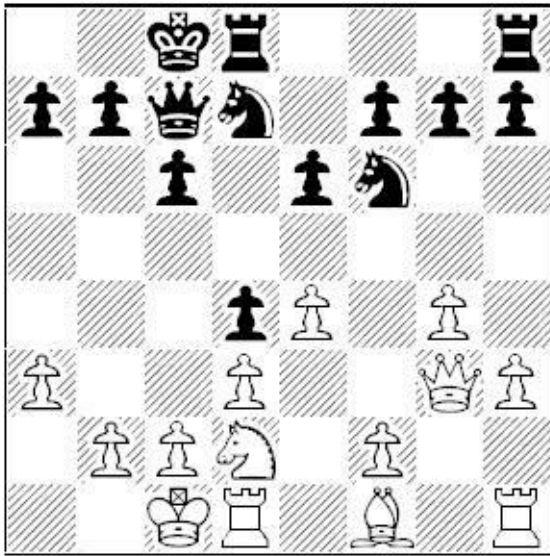
This is considered to be White's main move after 6 ... e6, and thus the main line of this whole system. Black's two key replies are 7 ... Bb4 and 7 ... Nbd7, and I'm choosing the latter.

**7 ... Nbd7**



**8 g4**

Or 8 0-0-0 Bb4!? 9 g4 d4! (planning to swap off White's good bishop) 10 Nb1 Qa5 (provoking White to advance the a-pawn, a concession which may come in handy should Black decide to start aggressive operations on the queenside; J.Schmidt-D.Hofene, Leipzig 1996, instead continued 10 ... Bd6 11 g5 Ng8 12 h4 Qb6 13 Bh3 Qa6 14 e5 Nxe5 15 Qe4 c5 and a draw was agreed) 11 a3 Bxd2+ 12 Nxd2 0-0-0 13 Qg3 (after 13 Bg2 Qc7 14 g5 Ne5 15 Qe2 Nfd7 16 Rdf1 Ng6! Black has achieved his objective) 13 ... Qc7!.



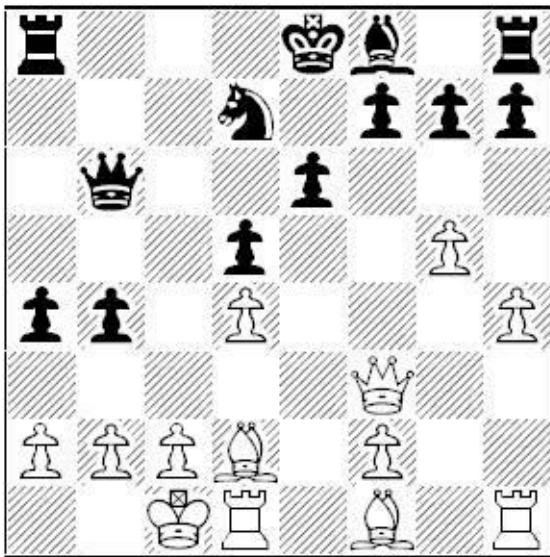
If Black can steer the position into an endgame and then secure the f4-square for his knight, he will stand very well indeed. White's position looks impressive but the downside is that he is playing with a bad bishop and this is something we should have at the forefront of our minds. 14 f4 is not good, as after 14 ... g5! 15 e5 gxf4 16 Qxf4 Qxe5 Black has won a pawn.

**8 ... b5!?**

Black copies White's approach and begins his own counter-strike on the queenside, where White is planning to castle!

**9 g5**

9 exd5 only makes life difficult for White: 9 ... b4 10 Ne4 (10 dxc6? loses material after 10 ... Ne5! 11 Qe2 bxc3 12 Bxc3 Nxc6 13 Bg2 Nd5, or 11 Qg2 bxc3 12 Bxc3 Qc7 13 d4 Nxc6 14 Bb5 Nd5) 10 ... cxd5 11 Nxf6+ Nxf6 12 g5 Nd7 13 d4 Qb6 (White's fundamental problem is where to put the king; it will be exposed should he decide to castle short, yet if White castles long then he will be under attack) 14 0-0-0 a5! 15 h4 a4 and now:

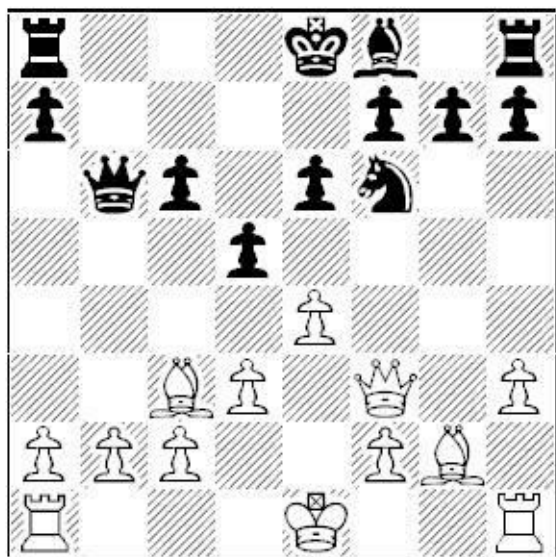


a) 16 Qd3 Bd6 17 h5 b3!? 18 cxb3 (18 axb3? axb3 opens the a-file for Black) 18 ... axb3 19 Qxb3 Qxd4 20 Kb1 0-0 21 g6 Rfb8 22 gxf7+ Kxf7 23 Be3 Qg4 24 Qc2 Be5 25 Bc1 Rc8 and things look rosy.

b) 16 h5 (ignoring Black's attack) 16 ... a3! (Black plans to exploit the dark squares) 17 b3 Qxd4 18 c3 Rc8 and Black's chances are better although of course he should still be careful.

**9 ... b4 10 Nd1**

The alternative is 10 gxf6!? bxc3 11 Bxc3 Nxf6 12 Bg2 Qb6!.



Black is unafraid of losing material: he either gains the g-file for his rook or picks up the b2-pawn with a raging attack. For example:

a) 13 Bxf6 gxf6 14 Qxf6 Rg8 15 0-0 (15 Bf3 would be a serious mistake: 15 ... Bg7 16 Qf4 Qxb2 17 Rd1 Bc3+ 18 Kf1 Qxc2 19 Qd6 Bd4 and White is in dire straits) 15 ... Bg7 16 Qg5 h6 17 Qg4 0-0-0 18 Qe2 Bxb2 19 Rab1 Rg5 20 Kh1 Rdg8 21 Rg1 is equal.

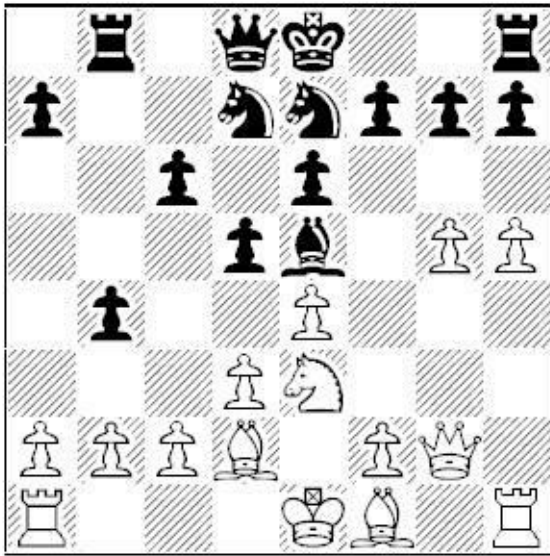
b) 13 exd5 Nxd5 (White is paying the price for his premature d2-d4 thrust; where can the king go without any problems?) 14 0-0 Bd6 15 Qg4 Nxc3 16 bxc3 0-0 17 Rab1 Qa5 18 Qc4 Qe5 19 Rfe1 Qh2+ 20 Kf1 Rab8 21 Qxc6?! Rbc8 22 Qa4 Rxc3 and Black is better, as White's king is far more vulnerable.

c) 13 0-0 d4 14 Bd2 Be7 15 Qg3 g6 16 Rab1 Nh5 17 Qf3 e5!? (Black wants to control the f4-square) 18 Bh6 Qd8 (with the aim of swapping off the dark-squared bishops) 19 c3 Bg5 20 Bxg5 Qxg5 21 cxd4 exd4 22 Rbc1 Rc8 23 e5 0-0 is fine for Black.

**10 ... Ng8 11 Ne3**

11 d4 is a move recommended by Grandmaster Lukacs: 11 ... Qb6 12 Be3 dxe4 13 Qxe4 Bd6 14 Bg2 Ne7 15 0-0 Rc8 16 a3 bxa3 17 bxa3 0-0 and White has over-extended his kingside.

**11 ... Bd6 12 h4 Ne7 13 h5 Rb8 14 Qg2 Be5!**



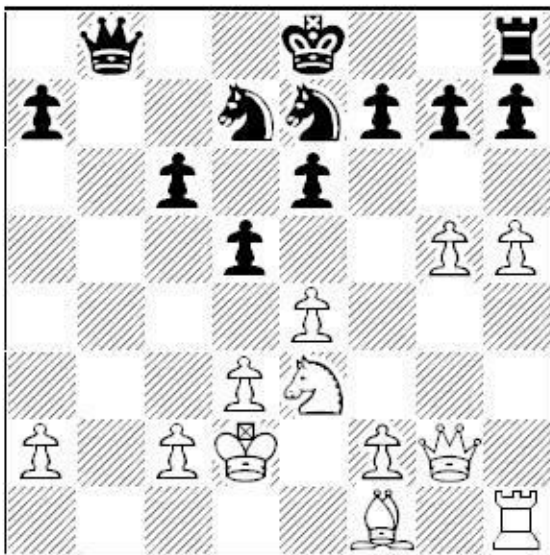
### 15 Rb1

15 0-0-0? is really asking for it, and indeed runs into a devastating attack: 15 ... Qa5 16 Kb1 (16 a3 is no solution either: 16 ... Bxb2+ 17 Kxb2 Qxa3+ 18 Kb1 b3 wins for Black) 16 ... Nc5! (the knight brings itself into the attack) 17 h6 (or 17 Ng4 Bxb2! 18 Kxb2 Qa3+) 17 ... g6 18 Ng4 Bxb2!! 19 Qg3! Rb7 20 Kxb2 Qa3+ 21 Ka1 (after 21 Kb1 Na4 mate is unavoidable) 21 ... b3 and Black crashes through with awesome power.

### 15 ... Bc3!

Eliminating White's strong bishop. In J.Hall-M.Sadler, German League 2002, Black chose 15 ... Qc7 and the game was very double-edge with both sides attacking each other on opposite wings.

### 16 bxc3 bxc3 17 Rxb8 cxd2+! 18 Kxd2 Qxb8



From the diagram above, play could continue 19 g6 Qb4+ 20 Kd1 (20 Ke2? fxe6 21 hxe6 Nxe6 with the tactical point 22 Rxe7?? Nf4+) 20 ... hxe6 21 hxe6 Rxe7 22 gxf7+ Kxf7 23 Qxe7 Ng6 24 Ng4 and Black does not stand worse. Although both kings are a little exposed the combination of the queen and two knights is a very dangerous one indeed.

## Summary

3 ... Bg4 is a logical way to play against the Two Knights Variation. In general Black should keep the position closed and his pawns on light squares to block White's light-squared bishop, and aim for a good knight versus bad bishop scenario.

# Chapter Twelve

## King's Indian Attack

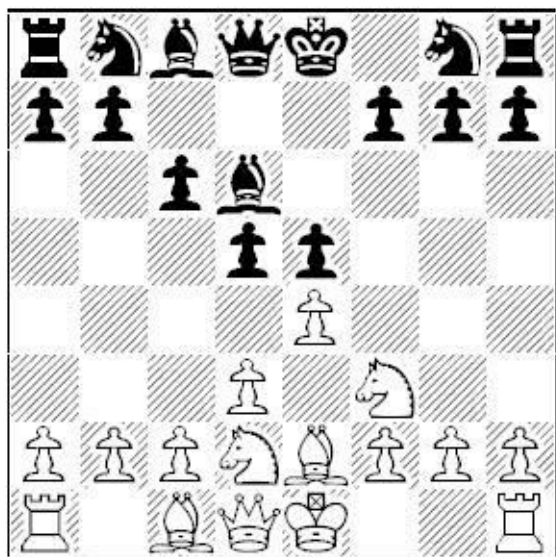
**1 e4 c6 2 d3 d5 3 Nd2 e5 4 Ngf3 Bd6**

The King's Indian Attack (or KIA) is a closed, strategic system, commonly regarded as solid if a little passive. White's typical plans involve the pawn push e4-e5, which leads to a central bind, extra kingside space and concrete attacking chances against Black's king, should Black decide to castle on the kingside. Black's resources are normally focused on the queenside.

However, the KIA has never been popular against the Caro, chiefly because it allows Black to claim the centre immediately with the advance ... e7-e5, which is in fact the simplest way to play. Usually in the Caro-Kann Black plays with a space deficit but here White gives Black the opportunity to fight for the centre on a level footing.

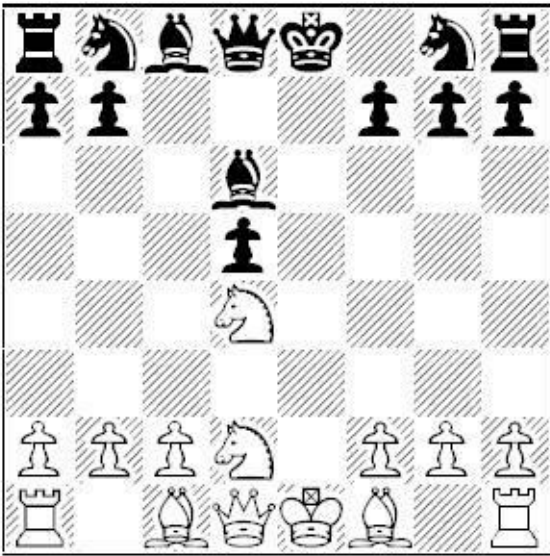
There are three main plans for White. To each of these Black should adapt his method of play.

## The Philidor with Colours Reversed



White is in effect a tempo up on the Philidor Defence (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 d6). The Philidor is a solid but defensive set-up for Black and the same can be said when it is played a tempo up with the white pieces. In response, Black has several aims: to manoeuvre the knight from d7 via f8 to g6, where it will threaten to jump to f4; to secure the c5-square with ... a5; and to take control of the soon to be opened d-file. See Line A for details.

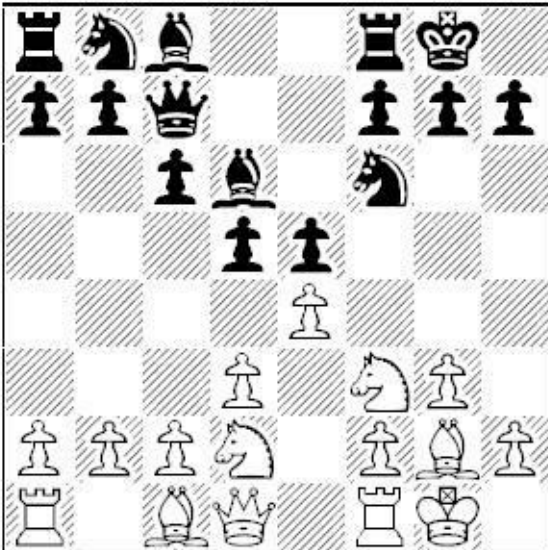
## A Good IQP for Black



The immediate 5 d4 (Line B) is slightly tricky but Black should not be afraid of entering an IQP position. Black enjoys free development and in addition is a tempo ahead on some lines of the French Tarrasch. The same IQP principles apply, but there is one difference: there is no e-pawn which means Black can attack the f2 point at some stage, as well as targeting the white king and controlling the open c- and e-files. The g8-knight should be developed to e7, as ... Nf6 allows an unpleasant pin with Bg5.

## The Main Line KIA

Black's main plan is to play along the classical themes of development, centralize the rooks and attempt to take control of the d-file; this is combined with a gradual queenside expansion.



An important but little-known idea is that it is usually good for Black to provoke c2-c3 (if White hasn't already played it himself!), the reason being to give Black a square – d3 – to penetrate the white position. This square would be an excellent post for a knight, which would probe for weaknesses on the queenside and provide a barrier so that Black could take control of the important d-file. This idea is examined further in Line D.

# Looking at the Theory

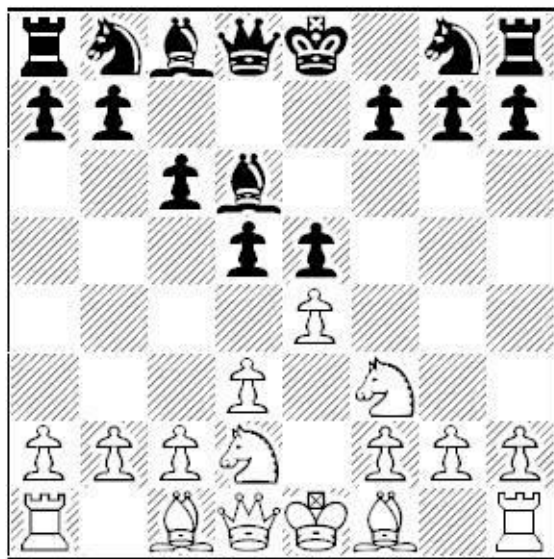
**1 e4 c6 2 d3 d5 3 Nd2**

With 3 Nf3 White takes the game straight into an ending: 3 ... dxe4 4 dxe4 Qxd1+ 5 Kxd1 g6 6 c3 Bg7 7 a4 Nf6 8 Nfd2 Ng4 9 Ke1 0-0 10 h3 Nf6 11 Bc4 Nbd7 12 Ke2 Ne5! (better than 12 ... b6, as played in T.Todorov-S.Kasparov, French League 2005) 13 Bb3 b6 14 Rd1 Ba6+ 15 c4 Rfd8 16 Nc3 and Black has a fantastic position.

**3 ... e5!**

Taking the centre.

**4 Ngf3 Bd6**



Now we will look at the following possibilities for White:

**A: 5 Be2**

**B: 5 d4**

**C: 5 Qe2**

**D: 5 g3**

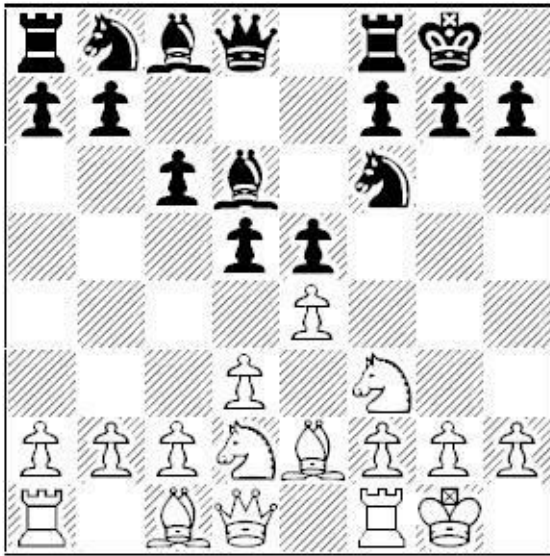
**A) 5 Be2**

White intends to play a Philidor with colours reversed.

**5 ... Nf6 6 0-0**

6 d4!? is a rare move which gives White nothing: 6 ... Nxe4 7 dxe5 (7 Nxe5 is like a Petroff, and 7 ... 0-0 8 0-0 Nd7 9 Nxe4 dxe4 10 Nc4 Bc7 is equal) 7 ... Nxd2 8 Qxd2 Bc7 (keeping an eye on the e5-pawn) 9 0-0 0-0 10 Qd4 (10 c4 Bg4 11 Ng5 Bxe2 12 Qxe2 h6 13 Nf3 dxc4 14 Qxc4 Nd7 15 Re1 Qe7 16 Qb3 Nc5 17 Qa3 Rfe8 was completely level in L.Ljubojevic-R.Dzindzichashvili, Tilburg 1978) 10 ... Nd7 11 Bd3 (targeting h7; 11 Bg5 Bxe5! nets a pawn) 11 ... Bb6 12 Qf4 (12 Bxh7+ is not possible on account of 12 ... Kxh7 13 Ng5+ Qxg5!) 12 ... Nc5 (removing the dangerous bishop; now 13 Bxh7+ does not work because of 13 ... Kxh7 14 Ng5+ Kg8 15 Qh4 Bf5 when Black has everything covered) 13 Qg3 Qd7 14 Bh6 Qg4! and the position is level.

**6 ... 0-0**



### 7 c3

The immediate 7 d4 reaches an equal, but not necessarily drawn ending: 7 ... Nxe4 8 dxe5 Bc7 9 Nxe4 dxe4 10 Qxd8 Rxd8 11 Ng5 Bxe5 12 Bc4 Rf8 13 Re1 Nd7 14 Rxe4 b5 15 Bb3 Bb7 16 Bf4? c5! 17 Bxe5 Bxe4 18 Bd6 Bg6 19 Bxf8 Kxf8 20 Rd1 Nb6 (Black has the better chances now: her pieces are more active and White must find a way to meet ... c5-c4 satisfactorily) 21 Bd5 Rd8 22 Bf3 Rxd1+ 23 Bxd1 Na4 24 Be2 c4 and Black is winning, T.Melamed-L.Khusnutdinova, Nova Gorica 1999.

### 7 ... Re8

Reiterating my thoughts from the introduction, Black wishes to manoeuvre the knight to g6, secure the c5-square and prevent any queenside expansion with ... a5, and take control of the soon to be opened d-file.

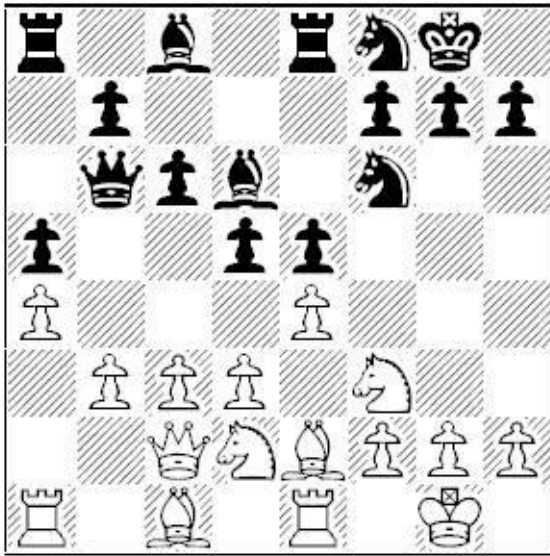
### 8 a4

Alternatively:

a) Attempting to seize space immediately with 8 b4 is undermined by 8 ... a5.

b) With 8 Re1 White gets straight on with his own plan of transferring the knight to g3: 8 ... Nbd7 9 Qc2 Nf8 10 Nf1 Ng6 11 g3 h6 12 Ne3 Qc7 13 Bd2 a5! (with the bishop on d2 White was threatening to expand on the queenside) 14 Rad1 Be6 15 Bc1 a4 16 exd5 cxd5 17 d4 e4 18 Nd2 Rec8 19 a3 h5 20 Nef1 h4 and Black had a great position in M.Markovic-D.Svetushkin, Herceg Novi 2001.

**8 ... a5! 9 Qc2 Nbd7 10 b3 Nf8 11 Re1 Qb6!**



Black develops as actively as possible.

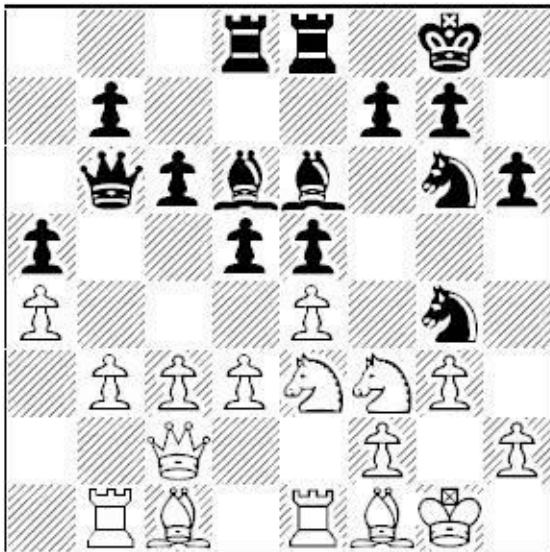
**12 Nf1 Ng6 13 Ne3**

13 Bg5 (suggested by Grandmaster Solozhenkin) 13 ... Ng4 14 Ne3 Bc5 15 Nxc4 Bxc4 16 Rf1 Bxf3 17 Bxf3 d4 gives Black a small edge.

**13 ... Be6 14 Rb1**

After 14 Ng5 Bd7 15 Nf3 Rad8 Black's pieces are more centralized and better placed for active operations. Black's knight intends to jump into the f4-square and when the time is right Black will open the d-file and penetrate with his pieces.

**14 ... Rad8 15 Bf1 h6 16 g3 Ng4**



**17 Nf5?!**

This move is too rash as it allows Black to improve the placement of his bishop. 17 Bh3 (Solozhenkin) is equal.

**17 ... Bc5! 18 Re2**

18 d4? is a bad move because of 18 ... exd4 19 cxd4 Bb4 20 Re2 dxe4 21 Qxe4 Ne7, when it is only Black who can utilize the e-file.

### 18 ... Qc7!?

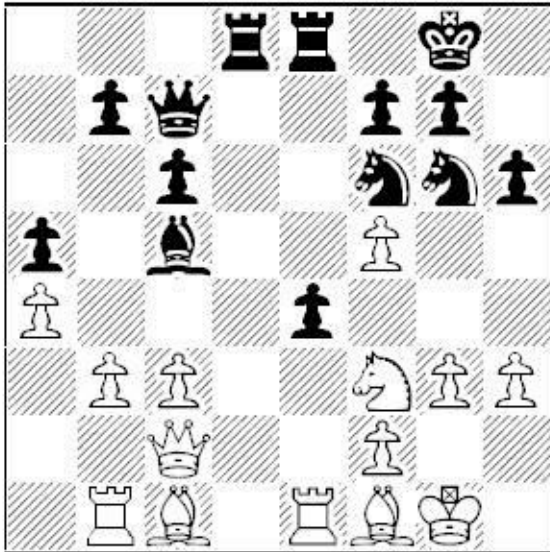
A crafty move that sets a little trap, which White overlooks. White should now play 19 Bh3! Nf6 20 b4 with equality.

### 19 h3?! Nf6 20 Re1?

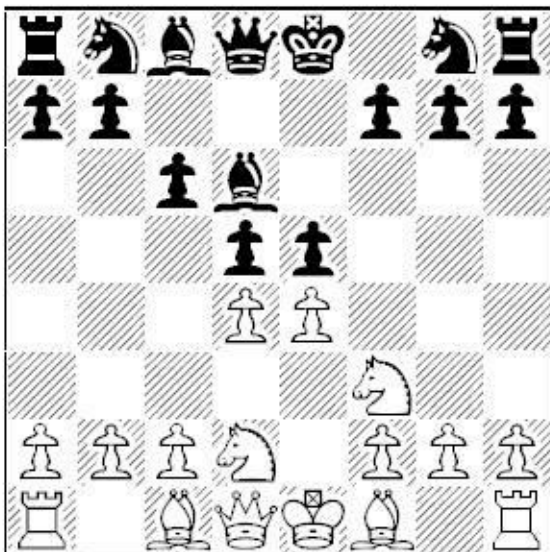
Better was 20 Kh2!?

### 20 ... dxe4 21 dxe4 Bxf5 22 exf5 e4!

Black, who threatens 23 ... Qxg3!, has taken complete control. The e4-pawn will be a continuous thorn in White's side and, to make matters worse, there's a weak pawn on f5. Black soon won without too much trouble in W.Kobese-A.Dreev, Hyderabad 2002.



### B) 5 d4



This line is slightly tricky. However, if dealt with correctly Black gets a reasonable game.

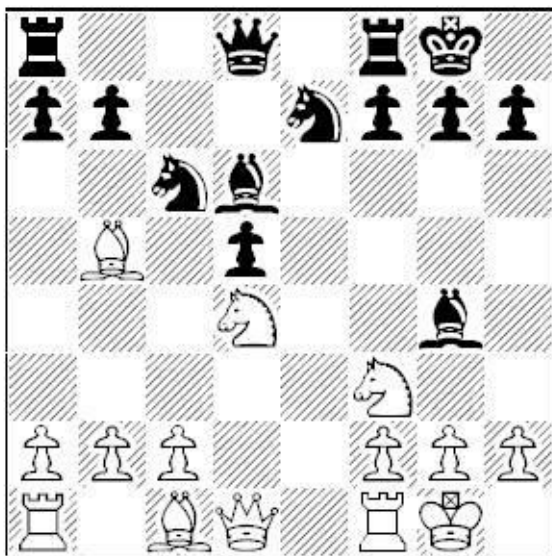
### 5 ... exd4 6 exd5 cxd5!

Basically Black should not be afraid of accepting the IQP position. He has free development and is in effect a tempo up on the French Tarrasch since it has taken two moves for White to play d4. The natural 6 ... c5? is a mistake after 7 Bb5+! Bd7 8 Qe2+. In my game against Gennadi Kuzmin (Hastings 2003/04)

I played the terrible 8 ... Kf8? and was duly trounced by the Ukrainian Grandmaster after 9 Ne4 Bxb5 10 Qxb5 b6 11 0-0 Ne7 12 Re1 h6 13 Bd2 Bc7 14 c4. When considering 8 ... Ne7, I was very worried what Black would do after 9 Ne4. White has the advantage after 9 ... Qc7 10 Bg5 f6, but this is still better for Black than 8 ... Kf8?.

### 7 Nxd4

In Gibraltar 2004, Grandmaster Sarunas Sulskis played 7 Bb5+ against me: 7 ... Nc6 8 Nxd4 Nge7 9 0-0 0-0 10 N2f3 (10 N2b3 is better as it does not allow Black to develop the light-squared bishop to its best square g4: 10 ... a6 11 Bd3 Ne5 12 Re1 N7c6 13 Be3 Nxd3 14 Qxd3 Qf6 and Black's aims are to complete development, occupy the c- and e-files and in particular make use of the enticing square c4) 10 ... Bg4 (this move is very strong: Black fights for control of the d4-square and at the same time subjects White to a pin that may become troublesome later on)



11 Be2 Re8 12 Be3 (unlike lines in the French Tarrasch, White does not have the time to exchange the dark-squared bishops to relieve the tension) 12 ... Nf5 13 Nxf5 Bxf5 14 c3 h6 15 Re1 Bc7 16 Nd4 Be4 17 Bf1 Qh4 (provoking a weakness) 18 g3 Qf6 19 Nxc6?! (ironing out Black's pawn structure) 19 ... bxc6 20 Bd4 and now instead of my 20 ... Be5, I recommend playing 20 ... Qf5 when Black has a pleasant position.

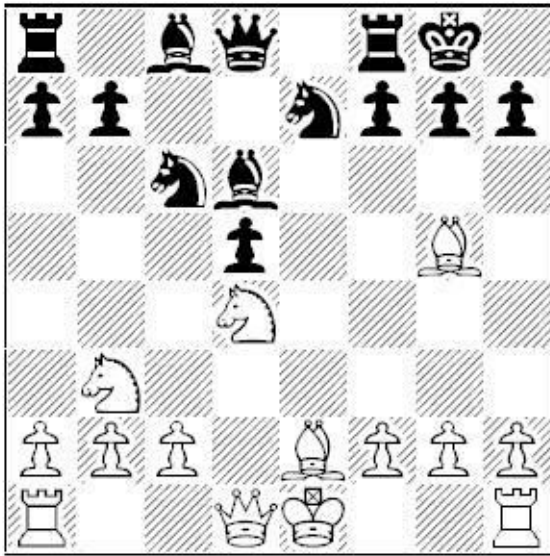
### 7 ... Ne7

The knight should go to e7 rather than f6 because otherwise Bg5 would be annoying.

### 8 Be2

This is surprisingly sharper than 8 Bd3 as White delays castling to secure active piece play. A possible line after 8 Bd3 runs 8 ... Nbc6 9 N2b3 0-0 10 0-0 Ng6 11 Qh5 (or 11 c3 Qh4 12 g3 Qh3) 11 ... Nb4 12 Be2 Re8 13 Bg5 Nf4 14 Bxf4 Bxf4 with an equal position. Black has easy development, and again he will aim to play on the e- and c-files with his rooks. White's queen will be driven back so Black can begin targeting the kingside, with mating ideas on h2.

### 8 ... 0-0 9 N2b3 Nbc6 10 Bg5



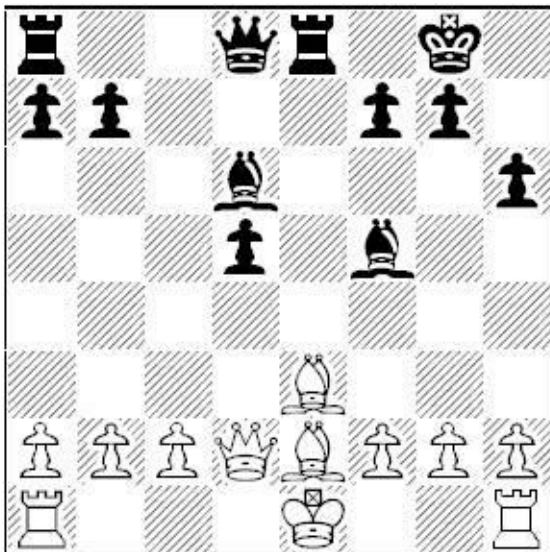
### 10 ... Nxd4!

Given an exclamation mark by Nisipeanu and Stoica in their *Chess Informant* notes to the game S.Tiviakov-L.Nisipeanu, Saint Vincent 2004. That had continued 10 ... a6 11 Bh4 Nxd4 12 Qxd4 Qc7 13 Bg3 Nf5 14 Bxd6 Qxd6 15 Qd2 Qg6 with an equal position.

### 11 Nxd4

The point is that after 11 Qxd4 f6! 12 Bf4 (12 Bh4 Be5 13 Qd2) 12 ... Be5! 13 Bxe5 Nc6 14 Qh4 fxe5 Black gets two central pawns and good prospects. These pawns control a lot of space, and Black's play will be directed down the c- and f-files. However, not everything is plain sailing: the two 'hanging pawns' can sometimes become weak, and Black must take great care to defend them and not to let them become blockaded.

### 11 ... h6 12 Be3 Re8 13 Qd2 Nf5 14 Nxf5 Bxf5

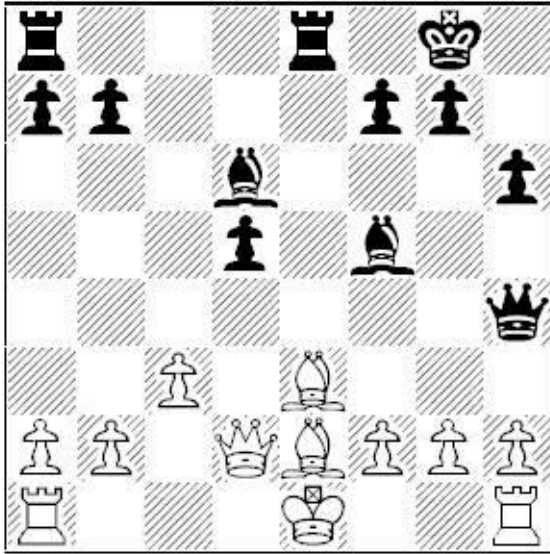


### 15 c3

If White castles short (15 0-0), Black should immediately provoke a kingside weakness and attack the c-pawn with 15 ... Qc7!: 16 Kh1 Qxc2 17 Qxd5 Rad8 18 Bh5 Be6 19 Qxb7 Rd7 20 Qb5 Rb8 21 Qa5 (21 Qe2 is dubious after 21 ... Qxe2 22 Bxe2 Rxb2 – with a rook on the seventh rank, Black stands much

better) 21 ... Rxb2 and Black's greater activity will be very dangerous. For example, 22 Rfc1 Qe4! 23 Bf3 Qh4 24 Qh5 (24 g3? loses to 24 ... Bxg3) 24 ... Qxh5 25 Bxh5 Be5 and White will be tied down to defending the weak a-pawn.

**15 ... Qh4!**



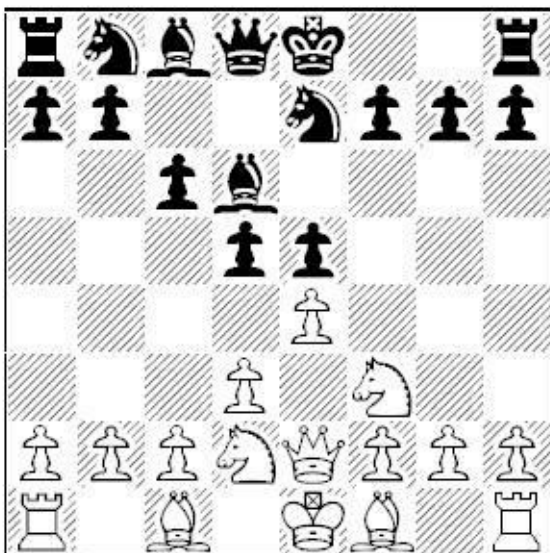
Making it difficult for White to castle. Now 16 g3? doesn't help: 16 ... Qe4 17 Rf1 Be5 18 Rd1 (18 f3 loses a pawn to 18 ... Bxg3+) 18 ... d4 19 cxd4 Bc7 20 Bd3 Qf3 21 Bxf5 Qxf5 22 Rc1 Re7 and big problems loom for White – his king is unsafe and only two members of his army can move!

### C) 5 Qe2

White intends to get an IQP position but with queens exchanged (5 ... Qe7 6 d4 exd4 7 exd5 cxd5 8 Nxd4), which should favour him.

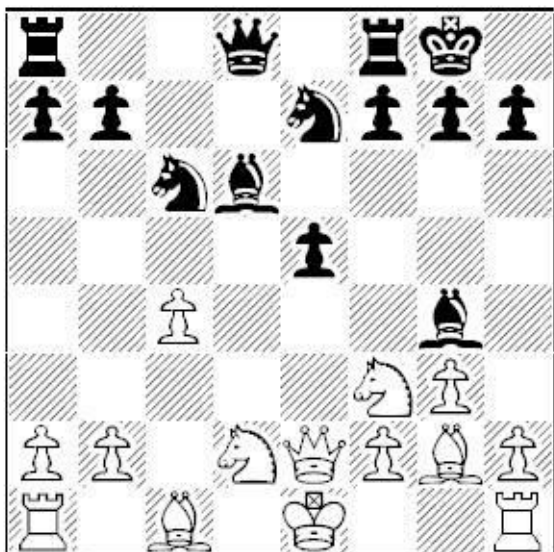
**5 ... Ne7!?**

A very interesting pawn sacrifice. As compensation Black obtains rapid development, heavy pressure on the e-file and tricks galore!

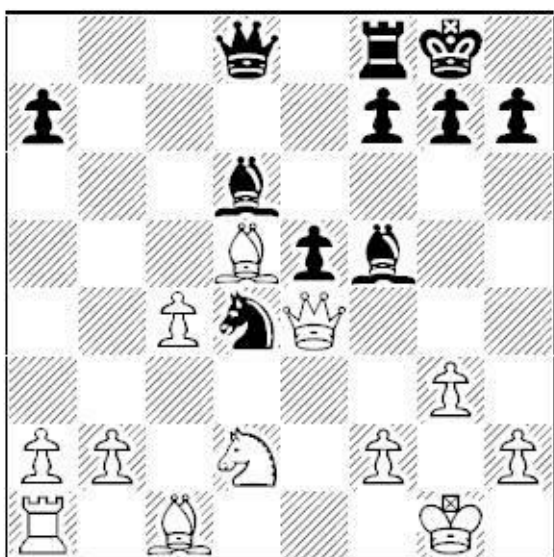


**6 exd5 cxd5 7 Nxe5**

This is a brave decision. If White continues with 7 c4, Black should model his play on the game

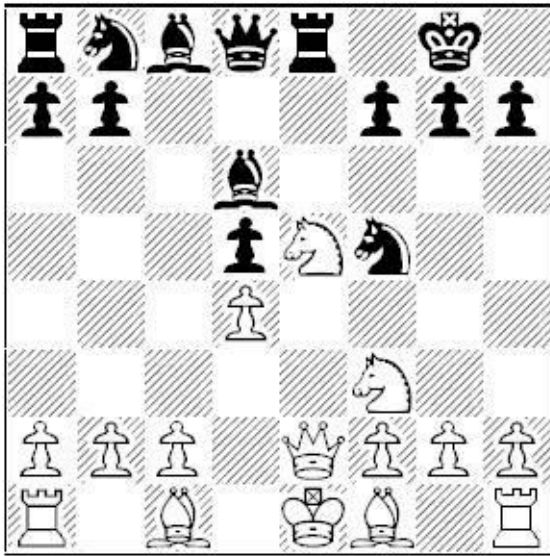


11 0-0 (or 11 Nb3 – trying to prevent the black knight from reaching d4 – 11 ... Bb4+ 12 Bd2 Bxd2+ 13 Qxd2 Qc7 14 0-0 Rfd8 and with the more active pieces Black is very slightly better) 11 ... Nd4 12 Qd3 (12 Qe4? is bad due to 12 ... f5 13 Qxb7 Rb8 14 Qxa7 Nec6 15 Qa4 Ra8 16 Qd1 e4, when Black wins a piece; although White gets three pawns for it, the position is better for Black since the queens remain on the board – if it were in an endgame White would be alright) 12 ... Nec6 13 Nxd4 Nxd4 14 Bxb7 Be2 15 Qe4 Bxf1 16 Bxa8 Bh3 17 Bd5 Bf5! (it suddenly becomes difficult for the queen to move to a decent square)



18 Qh1 (if 18 Qh4 Be7 19 Qh5 g6 20 Qd1 Nc2 21 Rb1 Nb4 22 Ra1 Nxd5 23 cxd5 Qxd5, the weak light squares and the complete lack of White's development makes this virtually winning for Black) 18 ... Qa5 19 Kg2 Nc2 20 Nb3 Qa4 21 Be3 Rb8 22 c5 Bc7 23 Qc1 Nxa1 and Black won.

**7 ... 0-0 8 d4 Re8 9 Ndf3 Nf5!**



Black keeps the idea of ... f6 in reserve and instead focuses on fast development.

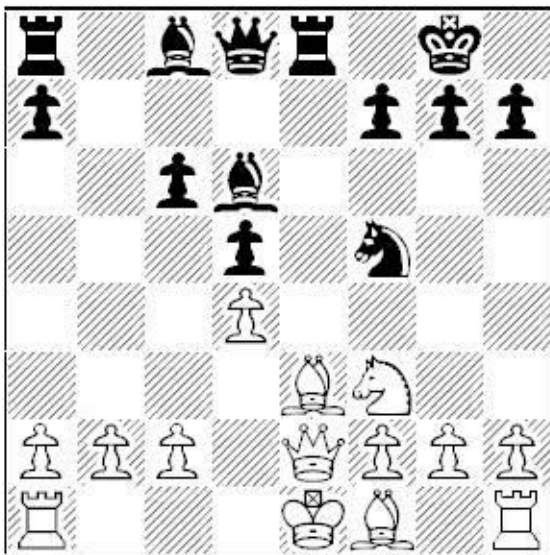
Another idea is to play the direct 9 ... f6. For example, 10 Nd3 Bg4 (planning to put heavy pressure on the d4-pawn) 11 c3 Nf5 12 Be3 Nxe3 13 fxe3 Qa5 14 Qd2 Nc6 15 Be2 Re7 (now that it is not easy for White to castle either side, Black switches to targeting the weak e3-pawn) 16 Nh4 Bxe2 17 Kxe2 g6 18 Kf2 Rae8 19 Rhe1 Re4 20 Nf3 Ne7 21 Kg1 Nf5 22 c4 Qxd2 23 Nxd2 Rxe3 24 cxd5 Kf7 and Black will regain the pawn.

### 10 Be3

The only move as Black was really threatening ... f7-f6 winning a piece.

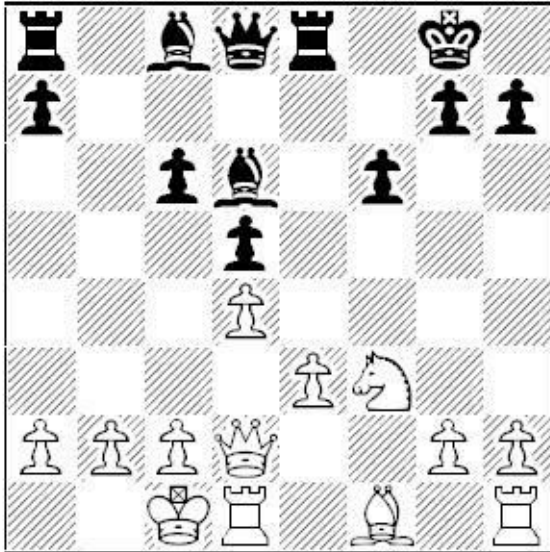
### 10 ... Nc6 11 0-0-0

Another possibility is 11 Nxc6 bxc6.



When I showed this position to one of my young students, it became apparent how quickly White can go wrong. For example, 12 g3? (White tries to make some logical sense of his queen's position – natural enough but incorrect) 12 ... Rb8 (targeting the b-pawn) 13 0-0-0?? Nxe3 14 fxe3 Qa5! 15 Kb1 (15 a3 is just as bad: 15 ... Rxb2 16 Kxb2 Bxa3+ 17 Ka2 Bb4+ 18 Kb2 Bc3+ 19 Kb3 Qb4+ 20 Ka2 Qb2 mate) 15 ... Rxb2+!! 16 Kxb2 Ba3+ 17 Kb1 Qb4+ 18 Ka1 Qb2 mate.

11 ... f6 12 Nxc6 bxc6 13 Qd2 Nxe3 14 fxe3



Material is not so important here. White has an extra pawn, but that pawn on b2 will simply be a target for the black rooks on the open b-file. Black has some options here. He can first advance the pawn to a4 to prevent the move b2-b3. He should also bear in mind potential rook sacrifices on b2 followed by ... Ba3 and mates on b1 or b2. Another plan to consider is to push the a-pawn all the way to a3 in order to get a grip on the dark squares. Here's a sample line: 14 ... a5 15 Bd3 a4 16 h4 Qe7 17 Rde1 Rb8 18 h5 Qb7 19 c3 Be6 (preventing any e3-e4 breaks White may have) 20 h6 (20 Kb1 Ba3 21 Re2 Bxb2 22 Qxb2 Qc7! picks up the queen) 20 ... g6 21 a3 Qb3 22 Qc2 Qa2 23 Qb1 Rxb2!! 24 Qxa2 (or 24 Qxb2 Bxa3 and Black wins the queen) 24 ... Rxa2 and Black is winning.

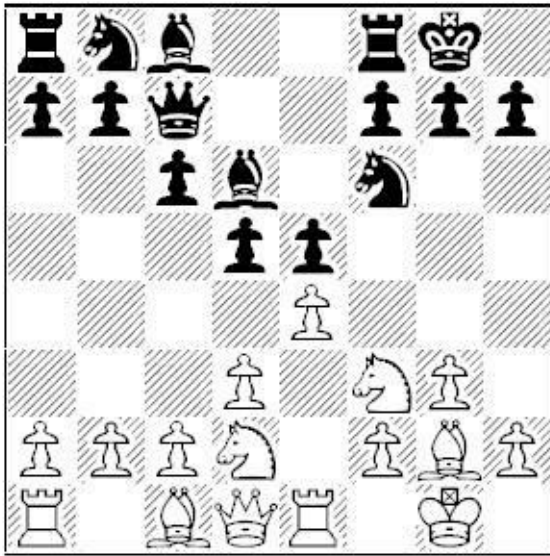
#### D) 5 g3

The main continuation for White.

**5 ... Nf6 6 Bg2 0-0 7 0-0 Qc7!?**

Sidestepping some of the 'drawing' lines White has after 7 ... Re8. The idea behind this move is to develop the f8-rook to the d-file rather than the customary e-file.

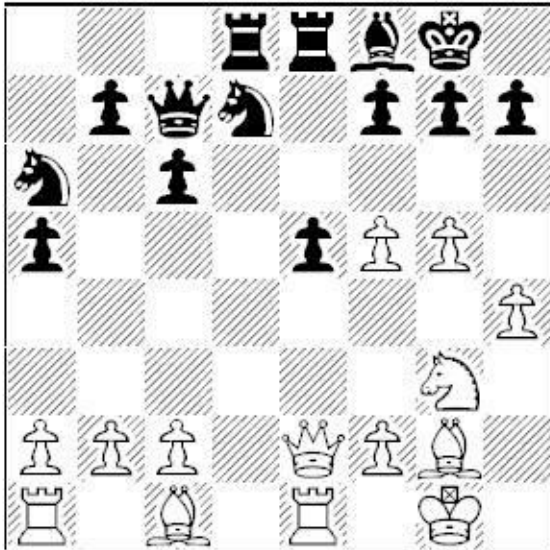
**8 Re1**



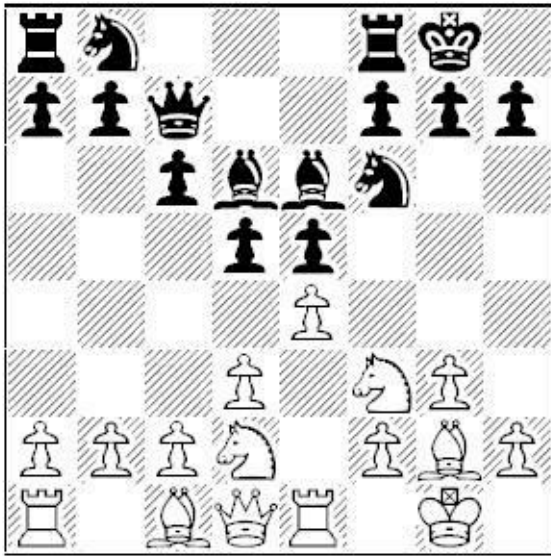
### 8 ... Be6!

This is Grandmaster Peter Wells's idea. Black normally delays developing this bishop, preferring to secure a location for the queen's knight first.

8 ... Be6 is better than 8 ... Bg4?!. Although it's played very often I feel that this move only helps White, who gets to kick back the bishop with tempo. If Black is not careful then he can easily slip into a bad position. Take a look at what happened to me very recently (note that I have altered the move order to make it fit here; I actually played 7 ... Re8 instead of 7 ... Qc7): 9 h3 Bh5 (9 ... Bxf3! is better) 10 Nf1 dxe4 11 dxe4 Re8 12 g4 Bg6 13 Ng3 a5 14 Nh4 Na6 15 Nhf5 Bf8 16 g5! Rad8 17 Qe2 Nd7 18 h4! Bxf5 19 exf5.



(J.White-J.Houska, Fuegen 2006) White's play has been very crude here, yet it is extremely difficult for Black to defend. In the team post-mortem we discovered that Black could hold the position with some sophisticated moves but this can hardly be recommended.



### 9 c3?!

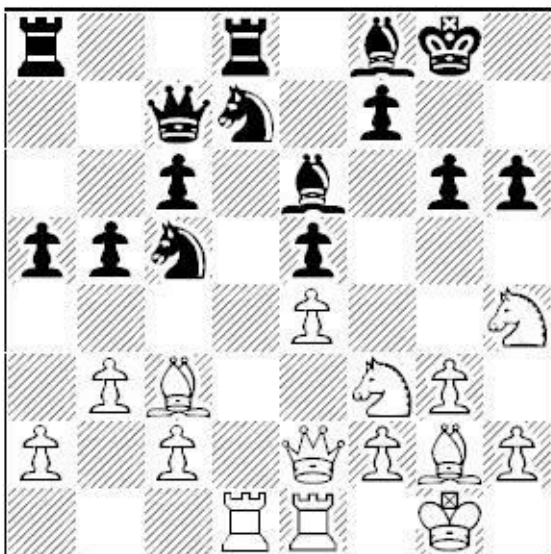
Although this move looks harmless enough, it is a serious positional concession. Black immediately has an entry square on d3 for the knight/rook/queen, something that should not be underestimated. A knight on d3 harasses the b2-pawn and forces White either onto the defensive or to make a concession. Equally, a rook or queen on d3 can cut the white position in two or allow Black simply to achieve the Alekhine Cannon (trebling on the d-file with the queen behind the rooks).

Let's look at alternatives:

a) 9 Ng5 is met by 9 ... Bg4!, when the best move for White is probably to retreat the knight.

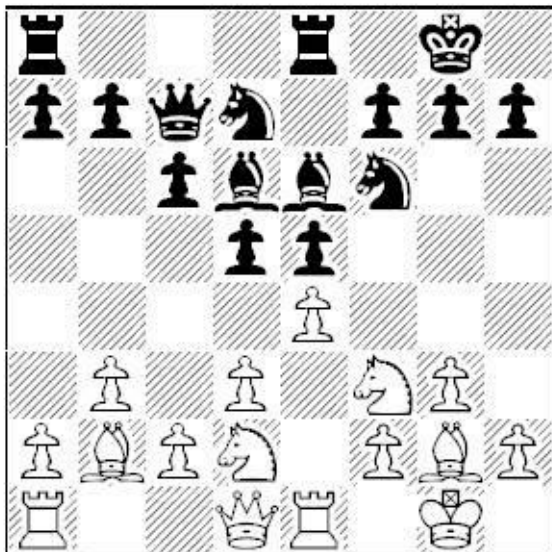
b) 9 d4 simply leads to a drawish position after 9 ... Nbd7 10 dxe5 Nxe5 11 Nxe5 Bxe5 12 exd5 Bxd5 although I would prefer to play Black, mainly because of the weakness of the light squares around the white king and the fact that Black will be first to get his rooks to the centre.

c) 9 Nf1 (planning to route the knight via e3 to f5) 9 ... dxe4 10 dxe4 Rd8 11 Qe2 h6 12 Ne3 Nbd7 13 Nf5 Bf8 14 Bd2 Nc5 15 Bc3 Nfd7 16 b3 g6 17 N5h4 a5 18 Rad1 b5



and it is Black who is pressing for the advantage. White has been driven back, and all that Black should do is make small improvements and concentrate on playing in the centre and on the queenside.

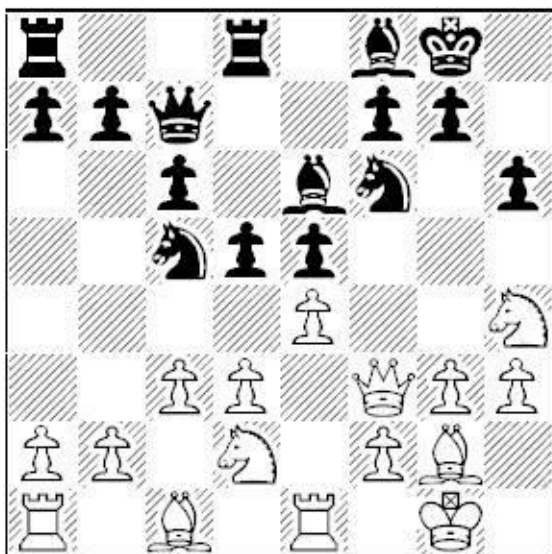
d) 9 b3 (the best set-up for White) 9 ... Nbd7 10 Bb2 Rfe8 and now:



d1) 11 h3 dxe4 12 dxe4 Rad8 13 Ng5 (13 Qe2!?) 13 ... Nf8 14 Qe2 Bc5 15 Nc4 Bc8 16 Rad1 Rxd1 17 Rxd1 b5 18 Nd2 Rd8 19 a3 a5 and Black is pressing.

d2) 11 exd5 cxd5 12 c4 d4 13 Ne4 Nxe4 14 Rxe4 Bf5 15 Re2 Nc5 16 Rd2 a5 (securing the c5-square for the knight) 17 Ng5 Bg6 18 Bd5 Be7 19 Ne4 a4 20 b4 Nxe4 21 dxe4 Bxb4 22 Rd3 and the situation is complicated but White must be the one taking more care. While the bishop on d5 is a powerhouse, in no way can it get back to defend the king. With that in mind Black should be seeking to control those squares around White's king, although he must be careful to secure the queenside – especially the potentially weak pawn on b7.

**9 ... Rd8 10 Qe2 Nbd7 11 h3 h6 12 Nh4 Bf8 13 Qf3 Nc5!**



Targeting the d3-square. From this position the game J.Howell-P.Wells, British Ch., Swansea 1987, continued 14 Nf5? (a natural mistake: White superficially improves the placement of his knight only to fall foul of a tactic) 14 ... Bxf5 15 exf5 e4! 16 dxe4 dxe4 17 Qe2 Nd3 18 Rf1 e3! 19 Qxe3 Bc5 20 Qe2 Qxg3 21 Qf3 Qxf3 22 Nxf3 and Black managed to convert his material advantage.

## Summary

With 3 ... e5! Black grabs as much central space as possible and has nothing to fear. He should concentrate on contesting the d-file and aim to provoke White into playing c2-c3, weakening d3.

# Chapter Thirteen

## Unusual Lines and the Plain Bizarre

To be honest, in this final chapter some of the lines I came across were unorthodox but somewhat logical; others were plain bizarre. But I will mention them all for completeness sake. I must add a few words on the best way to deal with these opening surprises psychologically. The first thing to do is to react calmly and logically. Natural developing moves are rarely bad, but you should not fall into the trap of thinking that Black stands better immediately. Whilst in a small minority of cases this is true, in most variations all White has achieved is to deflate his own advantage, nothing less.

We will look at the following tries from White:

**A: 2 Nc3 d5 3 Qf3**

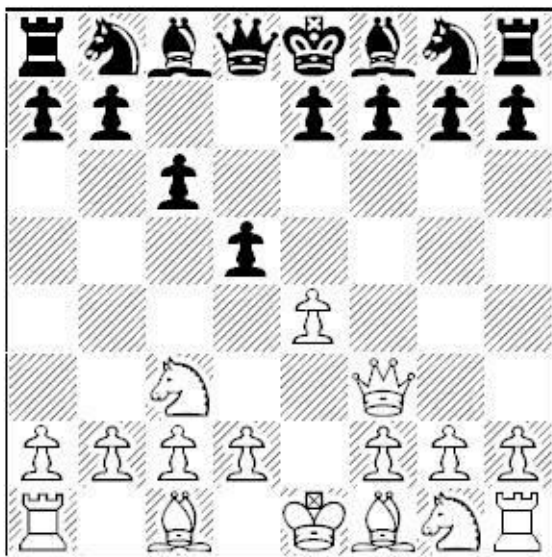
**B: 2 Nf3 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 Ne5!?**

**C: 2 b3**

**D: 2 Ne2**

**E: 2 f4**

**A) 1 e4 c6 2 Nc3 d5 3 Qf3**



Bringing the queen out straight away is not without its risks for Black, but if dealt with correctly it should be harmless.

**3 ... Nf6**

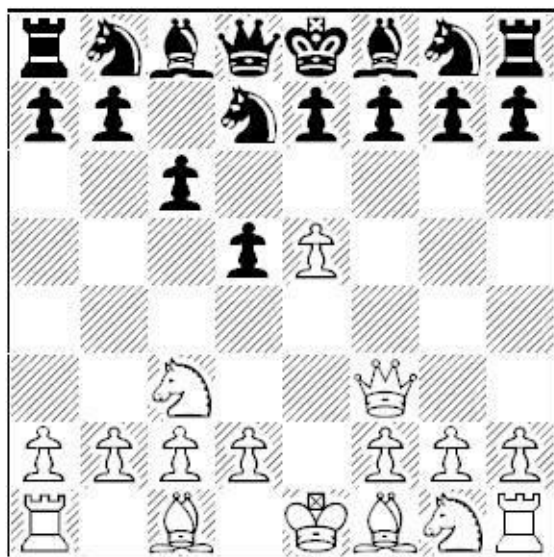
3 ... dxe4 4 Nxe4 Nd7 5 d4 Ndf6 is a very solid way to play.

**4 e5**

After 4 h3, preventing Black from developing the bishop to g4, Black can play 4 ... d4. Advancing this pawn one step further is always a committal approach, and one must be careful that it does not encourage f2-f4 pawn attacks typically seen in the King's Indian. All the same, given that White must waste time by moving the queen away, it looks like a good idea. For example, 5 Nce2 e5 6 Ng3 Be6 7 b3

Nbd7 8 Bc4 Bxc4 9 bxc4 g6 10 Qe2 Bh6! (controlling the key square f4) 11 Nf3 Qc7 12 0-0 Nc5 13 d3 Bxc1 14 Raxc1 Nfd7 15 Qd2 Ne6 16 Ne2 0-0 and Black was doing well in D.Semcesen-D.Palo, Hallsberg 2004.

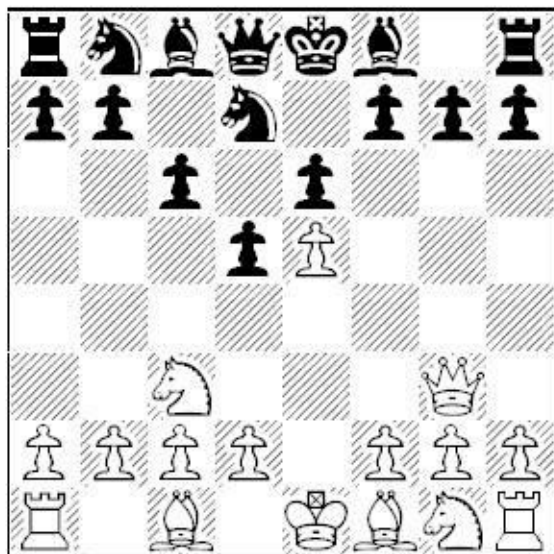
**4 ... Nfd7**



**5 Qg3**

Another line is 5 d4 e6 6 Qg3 a6 (adding power to the advance ... c5, since there will be no bishop move to b5) 7 f4 g6 (Black is playing very prophylactically; she is simply stopping White's plans, in this case any future f4-f5 thrust) 8 Nf3 c5 9 Be2 Nc6 10 Be3 Qb6 11 0-0-0? (this runs into immediate problems) 11 ... c4 12 Qf2 Qa5 13 g4 b5 14 f5 b4 and Black soon won in R.Gonzalez Custodio-S.Lalic, Ceuta 1993.

**5 ... e6**



**6 Nf3**

Or 6 f4 c5! (seizing space) 7 Nf3 Nc6 8 Bb5 a6 9 Bxc6 bxc6 10 0-0 g6 11 d3 a5 12 Kh1 Bg7 13 Bd2 0-0 14 Rae1 a4 15 Nh4 Qc7 and White is much worse, M.White-K.Arkill, Wakefield 1999.

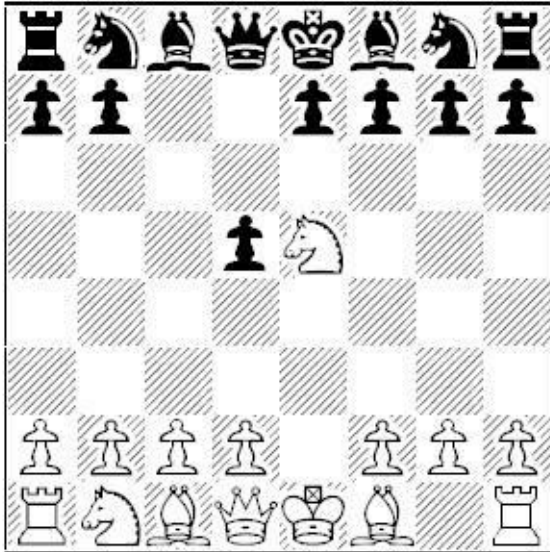
**6 ... a6**

Preparing to launch the queenside.

## 7 d4 c5

Black's position is preferable. White's queen looks slightly lost on g3, and Black has a straightforward plan of expanding on the queenside and targeting the vulnerable pawn on e5.

## B) 2 Nf3 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 Ne5!?

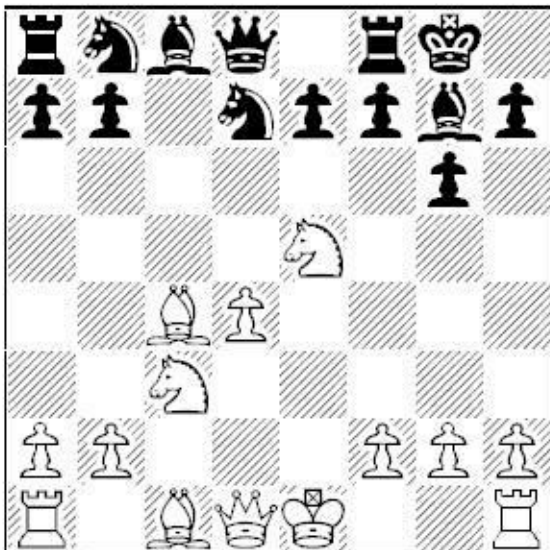


This strange-looking move has become rather popular of late. The idea is that the check on b5 can be rather uncomfortable to meet.

## 4 ... Nf6 5 d4 g6 6 c4

6 Nd2 is too passive. In the game M.Sebag-H.Vogel, Dresden 2004, the lower-rated player reacted very well and indeed after a few moves even stood better: 6 ... Bg7 7 Bd3 Nc6 8 Ndf3 0-0 9 c3 Nd7 (Black removes the strong knight and prepares an ... f6/ ... e5 pawn break) 10 Nxd7 Bxd7 11 Bf4 Bg4 12 0-0 f6! 13 Be2 e5 14 dxe5 fxe5 15 Bg3 and Black had a very promising position.

## 6 ... Bg7 7 Nc3 0-0 8 Be2 dxc4 9 Bxc4 Nfd7!

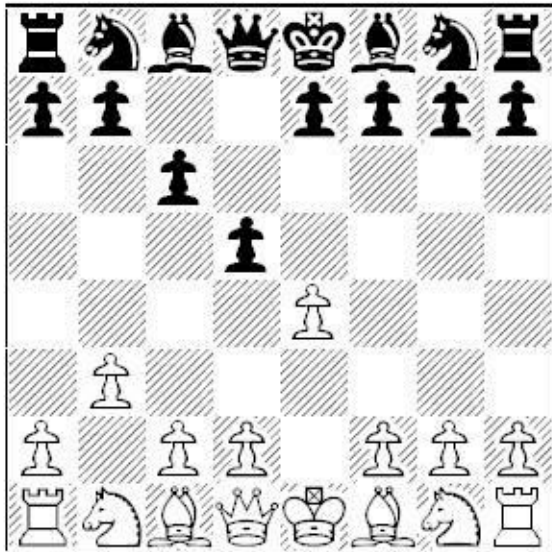


Black exchanges the strong knight, the only positive feature of White's position. Black has effectively equalized and more, e.g. 10. Nxd7 Qxd7 11. Be3 Nc6 12. d5 Ne5 13. Be2 Ng4 14. Bd4 Qf5 15.

### C) 2 b3

Garry Kasparov, annotating former World Champion Max Euwe's game against Richard Réti (Amsterdam 1920), calls this line 'imaginative but incorrect'. There is a certain truth to this; by not establishing a strong pawn centre and concentrating on the flank, White does not set Black any opening challenges.

2 ... d5

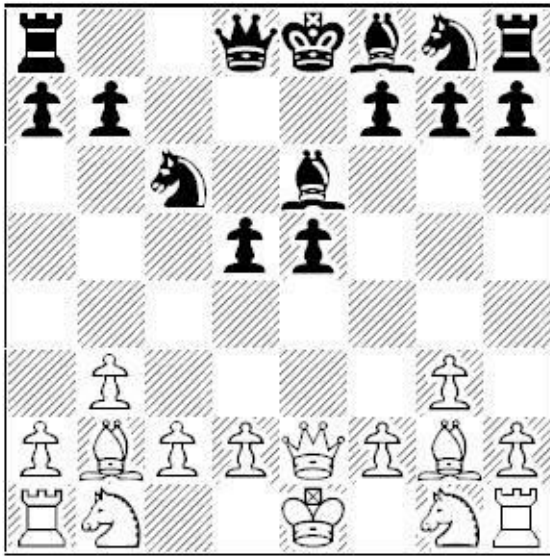


### 3 Bb2

The idea of this line is that White gambits a pawn (although generally he can recover it quite easily) to obtain fast development and attacking prospects on the long diagonal.

3 exd5?! concedes the centre to Black (it doesn't make too much sense for White to play d2-d4 as this seems to imprison the bishop on b2). Play continues 3 ... cxd5 4 Bb2 Nc6 and now:

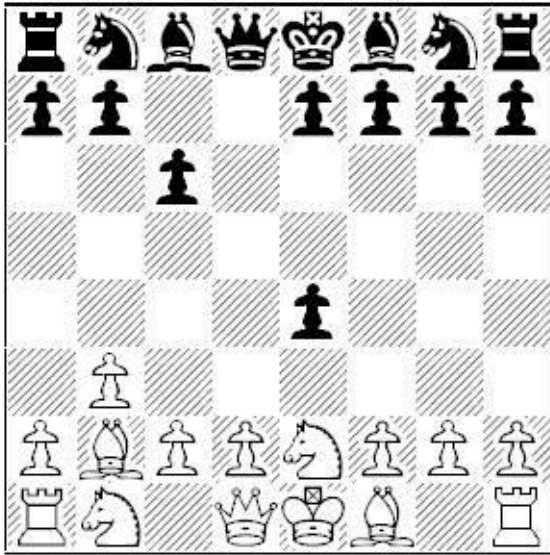
a) 5 g3?! (as my father used to say in a disparaging manner when trying to show me the disadvantages of developing on the flank rather than in the centre, White 'fianchettoes here, fianchettoes there ... ') 5 ... e5! (Black occupies the centre) 6 Bg2 Be6 7 Qe2?.



White is really being reckless with his development. Now in M.Euwe-R.Réti, Amsterdam 1920, Black played 7 ... Qc7, but he should play 7 ... Rc8! targeting the c2-pawn. For example: 8 Nc3 Nd4 9 Qd1 Nf6 10 Nf3 Bg4 11 h3 Bxf3 12 Bxf3 Nxf3+ 13 Qxf3 d4 14 Ne4 Rxc2 15 Nxf6+ gxf6 and Black is simply a pawn up; and 8 Nf3 e4! 9 Nd4 fails after 9 ... Qf6 (pinning the knight) 10 Qe3 Nh6 (threatening ... Nf5) 11 c3 Bc5, when White has an awful position.

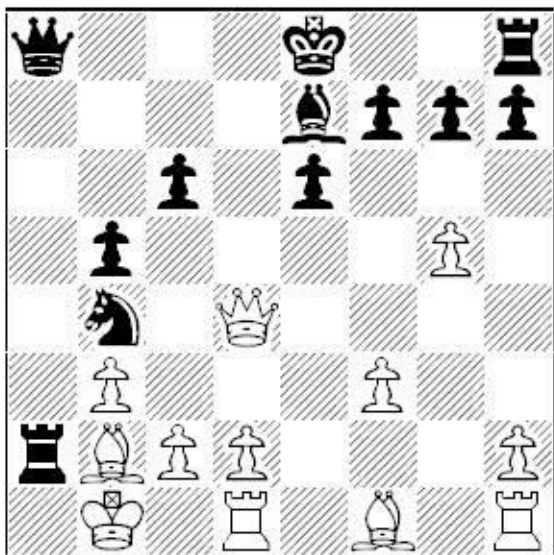
b) 5 Nf3, preventing ... e5, is a much better move although White only achieves an equal position for his efforts: 5 ... Nf6 6 Bb5 Bg4 7 0-0 e6 8 h3 Bh5 9 d4 Bd6 (Black develops his pieces on their natural and logical squares; as White has hemmed in his own bishop with d2-d4 the onus is on him to demonstrate whether he has equality) 10 c4 0-0 11 c5 Bc7 12 Nbd2 Ne4! (this knight activation is a theme we have seen in some of the Panov-Botvinnik lines; Black also may have plans of undermining the queenside pawns with a timely ... b6 break) 13 Be2 Bg6 14 Ne5? Nxe5 15 dxe5 and here a draw was agreed in M.Silveira-H.Coutinho, Brazil 1990. However, I am not sure what White would have done after 15 ... Nxc5! 16 Ba3 Bb6 17 Rc1 Rc8, as Black is simply a pawn up.

**3 ... dxe4 4 Ne2**



The knight is heading for g3 to recapture the e4-pawn.

If White attacks the e-pawn directly with 4 Nc3, Black should hold on to the pawn for as long as he can since White must place his pieces on awkward places in order to recapture: 4 ... Nf6 5 Nge2 Bf5 6 Ng3 e6 7 Qe2 Nbd7 8 Ngxe4 Be7 9 0-0-0 a5! (White's strategy has been very committal and it makes sense for Black to commence a queenside attack: his pieces all point in that direction and the black king is perfectly happy in the centre for the time being) 10 f3 a4! (Black is bold, sacrificing a pawn to open up lines and attack the white king) 11 Nxa4 b5 (instead of 11 ... 0-0, which was played in the game A.Reprintsev-A.Dreev, Internet blitz 2003) 12 Nac3 Nb6 13 g4 Bxe4 14 Nxe4 Rxa2 15 Kb1 Qa8 16 g5 Nxe4 17 Qxe4 Nd5 18 Qd4 (18 Bxg7? f6! shuts out the bishop and Black wins) 18 ... Nb4 (threatening mate in three with 19 ... Ra1+! 20 Bxa1 Qa2+ 21 Kc1 Qxc2; White parries this by defending c2)



19 Bd3 f6 20 Rhe1 e5! (deflecting the queen from its protection of the bishop on b2) 21 Qe4 (or 21 Qc3 Nd5!) 21 ... Ra1+ 22 Bxa1 Qa2+ and Black checkmates.

#### 4 ... Nf6

4 ... Bf5 allows 5 Ng3 Bg6 6 h4!. If White is planning to castle queenside then he may as well first play some moves that attack the kingside with tempo: 6 ... h6 7 Nc3 Nf6 8 h5 Bh7 9 Qe2 e6 10 0-0-0 Nbd7 11 Ngxe4 Qa5! 12 Kb1 Be7 13 g3 0-0-0 14 Bg2 Nd5 with an equal position, B.Mazalon-P.Jaroch, Solec Kuj 2003.

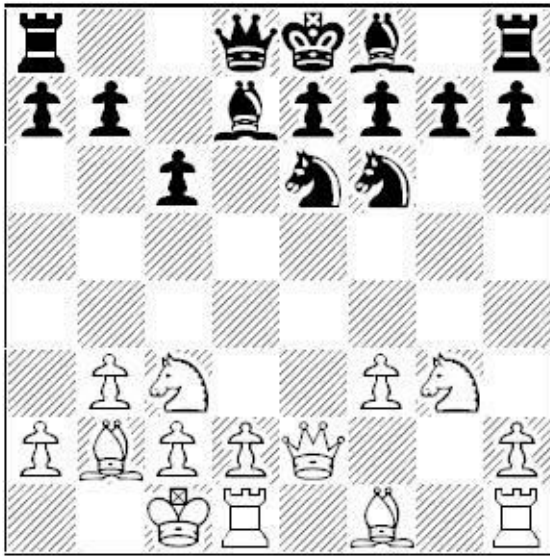
#### 5 Ng3 Nbd7 6 Nc3 Nc5

Black protects the e4-pawn with as many pieces as possible, as this pawn does a good job restricting White's natural development.

#### 7 Qe2 Bg4

White is forced to gambit the pawn now.

#### 8 f3 exf3 9 gxf3 Bd7 10 0-0-0 Ne6



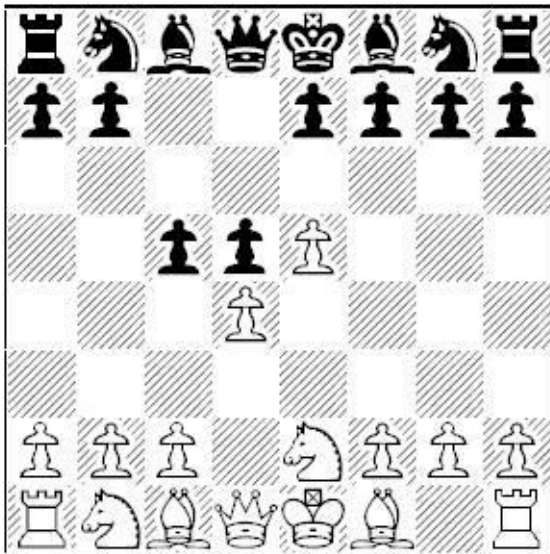
### 11 Bh3?

This allows Black to force some exchanges. If 11 d4 Nf4! 12 Qe3 Qc7 Black gets ready to castle queenside.

**11 ... Nd4! 12 Bxd7+ Qxd7 13 Qf2 0-0-0 14 Nce4 e6**

Black has the much better position, A.Bokuchava-B.Gurgenidze, USSR 1974.

### D) 2 Ne2 d5 3 e5 c5 4 d4

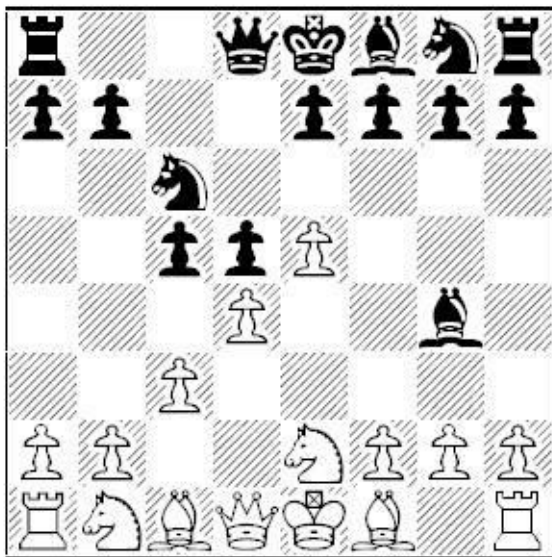


This position can also be reached in the Advance Variation via 1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5!? 4 Ne2.

The wing gambit with 4 b4?!, often seen in the French and the Sicilian, does not work well here at all: 4 ... cxb4! 5 a3 Nc6! 6 d4 e6 7 axb4 Bxb4+ 8 c3 (forcing Black to decide between retreating the bishop to e7 or a5; pulling it back to e7 looks safe, but it is easier to play the position when leaving this square free for the knight) 8 ... Ba5 9 Ng3 (the idea behind Ng3 is to launch a quick kingside attack with pieces) 9 ... Nge7 10 Qg4 (10 Nh5 is not dangerous after 10 ... 0-0 11 Qg4 Ng6 12 Bd3 Qh4) 10 ... Ng6 11 Bd3 (11 h4 can be met by 11 ... f5 12 exf6 e5 13 f7+ Kxf7 14 Qf3+ Kg8 15 h5 Nxd4 16 Qd3 Nf4 17 Bxf4 exf4 18 Qxd4 fxg3 19 fxg3 Bb6, which is very good for Black – after 20 Qa4 Bd7 White's king is

worse off than Black's) 11 ... Qh4 (forcing White to give up the attack by either retreating or exchanging queens) 12 Qxh4 Nxh4 13 0-0 0-0 and with the queens off it is very difficult for White to generate a big enough attack to compensate for the pawn deficit.

**4 ... Nc6! 5 c3 Bg4!?**



With the aim of forcing White to play 6 f3, a positional concession.

**6 f3**

Or:

a) Giving up the centre with 6 dxc5 is not to be recommended: 6 ... Nxe5 7 Qd4 f6 8 Nf4 e6 9 Bb5+ Kf7 10 Nd3 Bf5 11 Nxe5+ fxe5 12 Qxe5 Bxc5 13 0-0 Nf6 and Black does not have any problems. Black's king is under no threat and his minor pieces are excellently located.

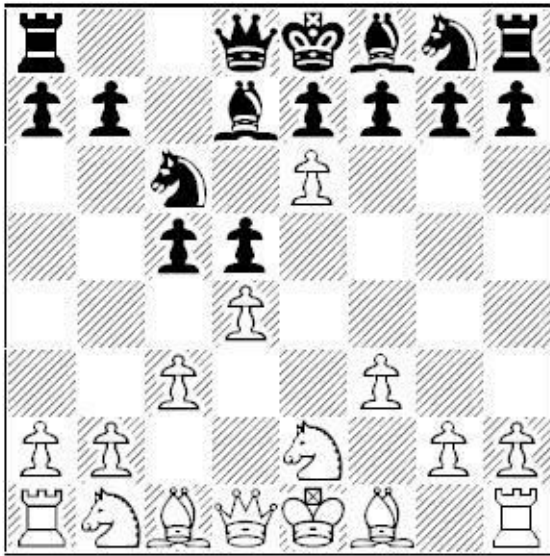
b) 6 Be3 has been played by Nigel Short: 6 ... Qc7 (instead of 6 ... Qb6, N.Short-A.Dreev, Hyderabad 2002) 7 Qb3 0-0-0!? (I don't really think that Black should exchange pawns on d4 since this seems to free up White's development – in particular he can play the knight to c3 instead of the more passive square d2) 7 ... Qb6 8 Nd2 (8 Ng3? would give away a pawn after 8 ... cxd4+ 9 cxd4 Nxd4, as White cannot take the knight on d4 due to 10 ... Qc1+; 8 f3 Bf5 9 Ng3 Bg6 10 Bb5 is equal) 8 ... Kb8 9 Ng3 h5! (Black begins active operations on the kingside in order to discourage White from castling short) 10 h3 Bc8 11 Bb5 h4 12 Ne2 Nh6 (the knight is heading to f5 where it will put pressure on the d4-pawn) 13 0-0 (13 e6 does not work after 13 ... fxe6 14 Bf4 e5! 15 Bh2 Nf7 16 0-0 g5 17 Bxc6 Qxc6 18 dxe5 Be6, when Black has a ready made attack down the g-file) 13 ... Nf5 14 Bf4 e6 15 Qa4 Bd7 16 Bg5 Rc8 17 Nf3 a6 18 Bxc6 Bxc6 19 Qc2 Be7 20 Bxe7 Qxe7 21 dxc5 Qxc5 22 b4 Qc4. Play is very complicated: Black will be aiming for a quick ... g7-g5 pawn advance whilst White will devote his attentions to the queenside. All in all, Black has the better chances as White's c-pawn is very weak.

**6 ... Bd7 7 e6!?**

Alternatively:

a) 7 dxc5 e6!, winning back the pawn on either e5 or c5.

b) 7 Na3 cxd4 8 cxd4 e6 9 Nc2 Nge7 10 Ng3 Qb6 11 Rb1 Rc8 12 Be3 Ng6 13 Bd3 Nb4 (Black utilizes an idea normally seen in the French Advance: he wishes to get rid of a defender of the d4-pawn and also displace White's king so that it cannot castle) 14 Nxb4 Bxb4+ 15 Kf2 Bb5. Black has equalized already. He is getting rid of the bad bishop, and the next stage will be to castle and then to either begin controlling the c-file or to undermine the white centre with ... f7-f6.



7 ... Bxe6 8 dxc5 Nf6 9 b4

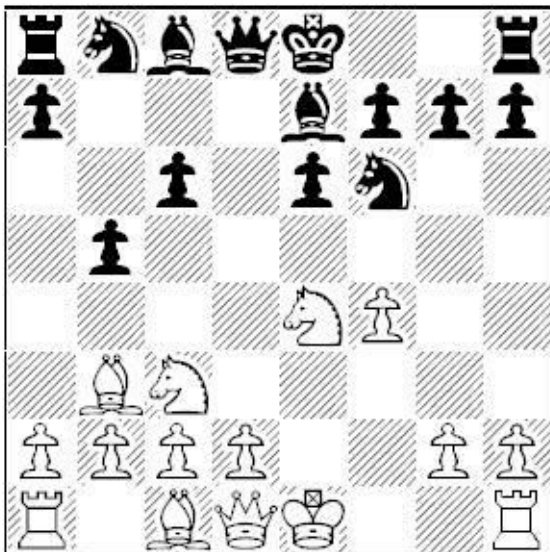
9 Nd4 Bd7 10 b4 e5 11 Nxc6 Bxc6 looks good for Black.

9 ... g6 10 Bf4 Bg7 11 Nd4 0-0 12 Nxc6 bxc6

Black has the simple plan of retreating his minor pieces to make way for the pawn pushes ... e7-e5 and ... f7-f5. After 13 Be5 Bh6 14 Bd3 Nd7 15 Bd4 f6 16 0-0 Bf7 17 a4 e5 18 Bf2 f5! Black reached a superb position in J.Barendregt-M.Botvinnik, Amsterdam 1966.

E) 2 f4 d5 3 e5

Another option is 3 Nf3. I must confess that before writing this book I had never seen this idea before. However, all I can say is that its only real merits are its enormous surprise value and the fact that it will cause Black players to wonder what on earth is happening! 3 ... dxe4 4 Ng5 Nf6 5 Bc4 (this is the whole point of the idea: White is willing to sacrifice a queen to gain a massive initiative) 5 ... e6 (the situation after 5 ... Bg4 6 Bxf7+ Kd7 7 Qxg4+ Nxg4 8 Be6+ Kc7 9 Bxg4 is very complicated and I would recommend steering clear of it, especially when Black can play simply and achieve an advantage anyway) 6 Nc3 b5! 7 Bb3 Be7 8 Ngxe4.



Black should not be afraid of White winning back the pawn as he has saddled himself with a giant weakness, the pawn on f4 being more a nuisance than an asset. After 8 ... 0-0, the natural 9 d4? would be bad: 9 ... b4 10 Nxf6+ Bxf6 11 Ne2 Ba6 12 0-0 c5 13 c3 bxc3 14 bxc3 cxd4 15 cxd4 Bxe2 16 Qxe2 and the joke is on White.

**3 ... Bf5 4 Nf3 e6 5 g3**

5 d4 c5 6 c3 Nc6 is a good version of the French Advance: 7 Be3 Qb6 8 Qd2 cxd4 9 Nxd4 Nxd4 10 Bxd4 Bc5 11 Na3 a6 12 Bxc5 Qxc5 13 b4 Qc7 14 c4 Ne7! (Black secures the d5-square for his knight) 15 cxd5 Nxd5 16 Nc4 0-0 and the game is equal, T.Duran-J.Sykora, Czechia 1998.

**5 ... h5!?**

Securing the f5-square.

**6 h3 Be4 7 Bg2 Ne7 8 d3 Bxf3!**

Knights are better than bishops in the closed positions that arise here.

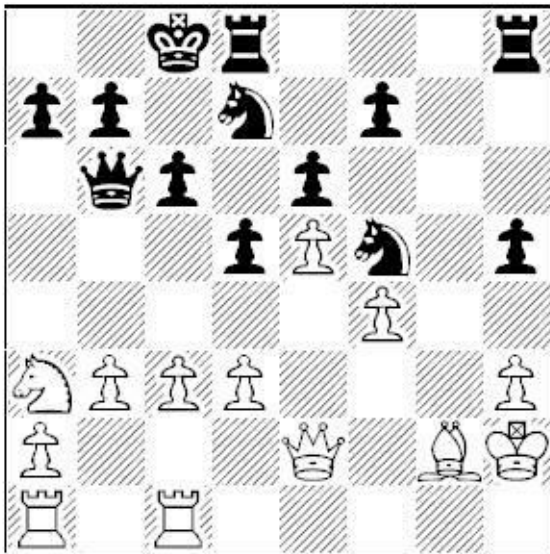
**9 Qxf3 Nf5 10 0-0 Qb6+ 11 Kh2 Bc5 12 c3 Be3!**

Black has the foresight to realize that his bishop will become bad should he retreat it. Instead he exchanges it, so that he is left with two good knights in a closed position.

**13 b3 Nd7 14 Na3 Bxc1 15 Rfxc1 g5!**

Breaking up White's centre.

**16 Qe2 gxf4 17 gxf4 0-0-0!**



Black has a stable advantage here. His pieces are better located than their counterparts, and the white king is decidedly shaky. Indeed Black won very quickly after 18 Bf3 Rdg8 19 Rg1 Qc5 20 Rxc8+ Rxc8 21 Bxh5 Nh4 22 Bg4 Qxa3 in V.Akopian-S.Shevelev, Las Vegas 1993.

## Summary

If White plays any of the lines in this chapter then generally Black can be happy. After 2 Nc3 d5 3 Qf3 Black should provoke White into playing e4-e5 before beginning operations in the centre with ... c5. The trendy sideline

2 Nf3 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 Ne5 is well met by a plan of ... g6 and ... Nf6-d7, aiming to chase the knight away from its strong square. If White gambits a pawn with 2 b3, the best approach is to hold on to the pawn as long as possible, to force White's pieces onto awkward squares. 2 Ne2 is the most reputable of the sidelines and the positions have many similarities to the Caro Advance with 3 ... c5. Black should develop the light-squared bishop to its optimum square g4 and place pressure on the d4-pawn or, if White relinquishes the centre, play for ... e7-e5. Finally, after the committal 2 f4 Black should follow the same plans seen in Chapter 7.