

GAMBIT

Grandmaster Secrets

The Caro-Kann

Peter Wells

The inside story on a popular and rich opening complex



Contents

Symbols

Symbols	4
Introduction	5
1 Main Line with 4... f5	9
2 Main Line with 4... d7	36
3 Main Line with 4... f6	55
4 Advance Variation: Sharp Lines and Black's Early Alternatives	66
5 Advance Variation: Short System and Other Modern Treatments	92
6 Panov-Botvinnik Attack and 2 c4	118
7 Miscellaneous Systems for White	156
Index of Variations	173

Symbols

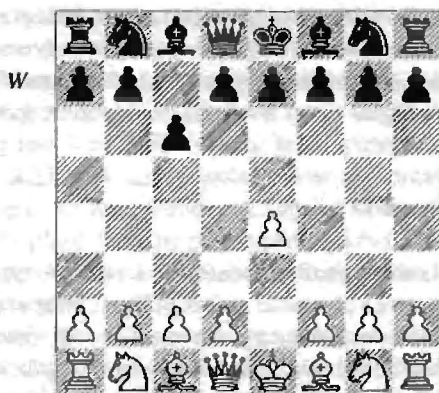
Contents

- +** check
- ++** double check
- #** checkmate
- !!** brilliant move
- !** good move
- !?** interesting move
- ?!** dubious move
- ?** bad move
- ??** blunder
- Ch** championship
- corr.** correspondence game
- 1-0** the game ends in a win for White
- 1/2-1/2** the game ends in a draw
- 0-1** the game ends in a win for Black
- (D)** see next diagram

Introduction

The Nature of the Caro-Kann

1 e4 c6 (D)



The Caro-Kann is an opening often described as 'solid' by its admirers and as 'passive' or 'drawish' by its detractors. My depiction of it here (as might be expected) will place me rather nearer to the former camp. These days, admittedly, my own prolific period as a practitioner of the opening has given way to more occasional outings. I was playing the solid 4... Δ d7 in the main line of this opening when the other kids were out playing Sicilian Najdorfs and Dragons with their friends, and there was bound to be some reaction in later life! Nonetheless, I remain sympathetic to the view that by playing the Caro-Kann, Black can often look forward to securing safe passage into a playable middlegame with an ease that would be the envy of those embarking upon more adventurous paths.

The prospect of obtaining a sound position from which it is simply possible to 'play chess' is an important part of this opening's appeal and notable contemporary devotees such as Anatoly Karpov, Alexei Dreev, Evgeny Bareev and Viktor Bologan all appear to be attracted by this. The fact that the theoretical burden required to achieve it is by most standards quite manageable is certainly a feather in the Caro-Kann's cap and provides an incentive, I suspect, for its occasional use by a further extensive group of the world's top players – Anand and Grishchuk to name but two.

Still, the charge that the Caro-Kann is a drawish, unambitious opening remains to be answered. On one level it may seem a bit strange. I hope that even a superficial glance through the material to come will reveal plenty of double-edged struggles full of tension, with Black able to claim a respectable share of the winning chances. Such sharp encounters will be especially prevalent in Chapters 4, 6 and 7. These have, arguably, been enhanced by a certain evolution of the opening, as in recent times Black seems to have afforded a higher priority than before to finding sources of dynamic counterplay. Thus has the opening come to have greater appeal for players with a quite universal style.

However, there does remain a sense in which the 'drawish' claim is not entirely without force. For while the opening can give rise to very sharp battles, these occur to a degree when both players are happy to play ball. In other words, it will be difficult for Black always to force a complicated game. This impression will be confirmed by my relative scepticism towards Black's theoretical prospects in the overtly ambitious 4...♘f6 and 5...gxf6 line of Chapter 3, for it is precisely the main line 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 dxe4 4 ♗xe4 which in my view offers White the best prospects of a sedate existence.

However, the significance of this should not be exaggerated. After all, it is not only Black who may struggle to find desired complications. Many of the most exciting games to come also reflect the stylistic preferences of the defender. For the most part in the Caro-Kann, Black tends to have solid options available if he cares to use them. Moreover, positions which are viewed as drawish in the hands of the world elite, armed as they are with outstanding technical proficiency, may nonetheless afford quite sufficient scope for battle among lesser mortals. This point is often lost in the literature, especially when, as here, the material for the book has been chosen primarily from top-level encounters. However, the thought is worth bearing in mind when considering assessments in general. To pronounce a position as 'equal' is by no means to declare it drawn.

The Rationale for 1...c6

It may be helpful to identify three types of responses to 1 e4. One type makes the claim that a pawn-centre is just as likely to prove vulnerable as it is to be an asset and hence places no priority upon trying to prevent White from establishing a pawn on d4 as well. Another treats the prospect of facing a pawn-centre more seriously, but concentrates on preventing the establishment of a second pawn on d4 – 1...e5 and the Sicilian both fall into this category. The Caro-Kann belongs to the third type, in which Black does not seek to prevent the move d4, but rather prepares to strike back in the centre with 2...d5, posing a question to White's e-pawn. By attacking the e-pawn, he intends either to entice it from e4 or to remove it by exchange. In either case this opens up possibilities for developing Black's light-squared bishop, which is of great importance to hopes for a harmonious deployment of the black pieces as a whole. This is perhaps the single most important motivation for 1...c6.

It is interesting to observe both contrasts and similarities within the group of defences I have identified. The Scandinavian (1...d5) has a related logic, but also the drawback that after 2 exd5 ♗xd5 3 ♘c3, Black loses time with his queen, although admittedly after 3...♗a5, with ...c6 and an early development of the queen's bishop to follow, there remain distinct similarities with the Caro-Kann. The French (1...e6) is also about *preparing* 2...d5, but it blocks the c8-bishop and thus tends in many cases to presage a more 'closed' type of position in general. After 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 (or 3 ♘d2) the release of the tension with 3...dxe4 is consequently something of a side-line in the French (the Rubinstein Variation) rather than the most principled approach.

Organization and Selection of Material

The breakdown of this book is hopefully quite straightforward. In Chapters 1-3 White simply defends e4 (i.e. 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 dxe4 4 ♗xe4). Although it is only in Chapter 1 that the move 4...♗f5 is utilized immediately, the development of this bishop then remains an ongoing theme throughout these chapters. Indeed, one idea behind 4...♗d7 is to attempt, by delaying the development of the bishop, to deploy it more effectively. Much hinges on White's attempts to hinder this by trying to force an early ...e6 move, after which the play again resembles the Rubinstein Variation of the

French. White enjoys a slight space advantage, with a pawn on d4 against a black pawn on e6, and there is a likely transformation if Black implements the logical pawn-break ...c5. This whole scenario is fundamental to the Caro-Kann and its implications will be referred to frequently throughout these chapters.

Chapters 4-5 reflect the great popularity of the Advance Variation (2 d4 d5 3 e5) at the top level. White can choose to handle this with great aggression or in positional style, seeking to exploit the advantage in space. In either case the move 3...♗f5 features in the majority of games and White has an interesting choice between trying to target this piece and, in some surprising modern treatments, simply celebrating its abandonment of the queenside. The latter approach is implicit in much of White's play in Chapter 5.

White's third major approach is to exchange on d5 (i.e. 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5). In conjunction with 4 c4 (Chapter 6) this constitutes a major weapon, an enduring threat in the hands of players with a good feeling for the initiative who are not afraid to take on a minor structural weakness in its pursuit. This too affects the fate of the c8-bishop – Black can try to keep its options open with 5...♘c6 (Game 20), but there are many who accept that a change of structure results in a change of priorities, and it is bolstering the centre with 5...e6 (Games 18-19), which enjoys the most solid reputation. It is worth noting that 2 c4 finds its place here, whereas the quieter treatment of the Exchange Variation with 4 ♗d3, still very popular below grandmaster level, is strategically quite separate and hence lines up in the miscellaneous Chapter 7. This also features lines in which White hopes to keep his e-pawn in place. Only by playing either 3 f3 (Game 25) or by avoiding 2 d4 in the first place (see Game 24) can White accomplish this. Each method arguably has its drawbacks, although I retain a sneaking regard for 2 d3.

I shall not attempt a further general strategic overview here. Some openings are particularly susceptible to such treatment, with ideas common to all variations which bear exposition in very general terms. The Queen's Indian, for example, my previous subject for Gambit, could be described throughout in terms of Black's attempts to control the squares e4 and d5. There is no such strategic unity in the Caro-Kann and hence it is the individual chapter introductions which provide the best venue for such detailed discussion. Personally, I do not see this as a drawback. Any loss in terms of overall strategic cohesion is more than compensated for by an enticing variety of types of position.

This is intended to be a book which provides fairly comprehensive coverage from a reasonably impartial perspective. There are two minor exceptions worth mentioning in terms of its comprehensiveness. Sometimes, a number of plausible moves have to be omitted. This is true of just about any opening book these days as databases continue to expand at an alarming rate. Those books which try to evade this reality usually end up by being a tough reading experience. Generally, where it has not been possible to cover everything, I have at least tried to draw attention to any moves which I think the reader needs to be aware of. The other is the omission of a few lines which can arise from a Caro-Kann move-order but which seem to me to belong more appropriately elsewhere. This has certainly not been an excuse to avoid all transpositional variations – in Game 18, for example, I have given detailed coverage of a line which seems to me fundamental even though it is just as often reached from other openings, such as the Semi-Tarrasch defence to 1 d4. However, in Game 19 I have given only light coverage of 7 ♗d3, because this feels spiritually really to belong more to the Nimzo-Indian. Similarly, after the 3 ♗c3 or 3 ♗d2 of Chapters 1-3 I have reached the pragmatic conclusion that 3...g6 is simply 'more Modern Defence than Caro-Kann'. I am even fairly agnostic about whether this possibility is an argument for 3 ♗d2 as many believe. To my mind 3 ♗c3 g6 4 h3!? ♗g7 5 ♗f3 is a perfectly decent line for White and this choice, like so many, is primarily one of style.

This is by no means the first book on the Caro-Kann, and the reader may reasonably wonder quite what one more has to offer. Well, the truth is that for all the useful enough repertoire books, specialist works on particular variations and so on, there still seems to have remained a rather

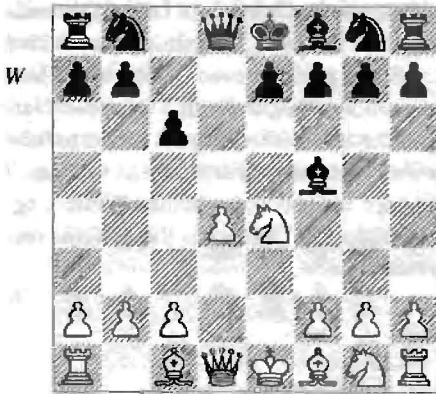
palpable gap in the market. My aim here has been to fill this by producing a work which lays emphasis upon a clear explanation of the main ideas of the opening for both sides based around games played at the highest level, while at the same time providing enough basic theoretical knowledge to enable the reader to face competitive encounters with confidence. I shall feel vindicated if readers with a large range of chess-playing experience feel that I have got the balance about right.

Finally I would like to thank Stuart Conquest for kindly sending me some comments on his excellent and instructive play in Game 10. I am also grateful to Gambit for showing patience and flexibility particularly as speed tended at times to become the victim of a little too much perfectionism. A word is due too to my parents for their support, as always far beyond that which I could reasonably expect. Lastly, it is impossible to do justice to Melanie's contribution in just a few words. Her help, encouragement and belief in me is something wonderful which I am very fortunate to enjoy.

*Peter Wells
Swindon, September 2007*

1 Main Line with 4...♗f5

There is something fundamentally important about the sequence 1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ♖c3 (or 3 ♖d2) 3...dxc4 4 ♖xc4 ♗f5 (D) which makes it an excellent place to start our discussion.



Whatever the attractions of the sharper systems of Chapters 4-7 – and as we shall see, they are many – there is great logic to White's simple defence of his centre, accepting the exchange of one centre pawn but satisfying himself with the modest space advantage which the other should ensure. This sensible, pragmatic approach tends to limit Black's counter-chances at least in the short term while still offering decent prospects of an edge based on easier piece-play.

The basic position after 4 ♖xc4 does in turn offer Black options and will be the starting point for all of Chapters 1-3. However, historically 4...♗f5 has been the most fundamental choice, and after a period when it was relatively unfashionable, it has once more become established as the main line. Furthermore, it feels logical that this is the move that should be tested first. It is, after all, so critical to the logic of Black's play that this bishop should be free to develop. If it simply becomes blocked in any way then the French player's implicit claim that

...c6 is just a more useful move than ...c6 might be rather plausible. It is true that after 4...♗f5, the tempo which Black appears to gain by hitting the knight is usually won back immediately by 5 ♖g3, but the bishop on the h7-b1 diagonal remains an excellent piece, and it is no coincidence that White's most respected approaches tend to involve exchanging it off.

Admittedly, 4...♗f5 has never had the reputation of being the most ambitious of opening systems. Black concentrates on completing development and avoiding the creation of weaknesses, usually deferring serious attempts to generate counterplay until a later stage, although he does have the useful and thematic pawn-break ...c5 at his disposal, and this frequently features even in conjunction with ...0-0-0. Nonetheless, whilst in many ways it would seem much less fair now than a generation ago, Botvinnik's reference to 4...♗f5 as a 'levelling' opening remains understandable. What is impressive is quite what a good job Black can do of refusing to offer up obvious points for his opponent to attack.

This is perhaps above all clear once we come to Game 4, which examines all of White's alternatives to 5 ♖g3 and 6 h4(!). It is easy to see quite how frustrating this opening system must have seemed to White before the force of the plan of advancing the h-pawn to provoke the slightly weakening ...h6 had been fully appreciated. Quite simply, exchanging the bishop on g6 lacks bite and the early advance of the f-pawn carries its own problems; but how else to generate play? In principle the move c4 is always an option, depriving Black of the d5-square and vaguely aspiring to open lines in the centre by advancing the pawn to d5 under the right circumstances. However, there remains the feeling that this plan too will be at its soundest in conjunction with exchanging off Black's splendid light-squared bishop.

Hence the considerable lead which the plan examined in Games 1-3 enjoys in the popularity stakes. Here the early moves are now well worked out but there are still a number of points at which Black in particular has interesting strategic choices. Even after the apparently modest (though impeccably logical) $7...d7$, there are three important and contrasting approaches:

1) Classical development with $...c7$ and a quick $...0-0$ (Game 1).

2) The more ambitious lines usually eschewing $...c7$, preferring development of the kingside and castling kingside. As might be expected of positions with castling on opposite wings, this has the potential to be much sharper. White will often release his g-pawn and then advance it, even as a sacrifice, while Black can look to various queenside pawn-thrusts ($...a5$ and $...a4$, $...c5$ or even $...b5$, especially as an answer to $c4$ by White). However, it has to be admitted that here too White has the option to

steer the game into quieter paths. All of this is considered in Game 2.

3) A variety of options which might fairly be described as 'disruptive'. These include a slightly unlikely-looking but quite popular manoeuvre with an early $...d5-b4$, and a variety of $...b4(+)$ moves. These are also considered in Game 2 and at least have the virtue of giving the game a new twist. There is life in $4...f5$ yet!

In addition, Game 3 examines the somewhat paradoxical option $7...e6$ (or similarly $7...d6$), issuing an invitation to the white knight to come to $e5$ with tempo in the hopes of later either making a target of the piece, or gaining play with a quick $...c5$ and perhaps even $...c6$ too. There was a tremendous vogue for this for some years starting in the mid-1990s, but this seems to have died down almost as dramatically as it began. I shall attempt to discover whether White's aggressive antidote in Game 3 is the genuine reason for this.

Game 1

Kiril Georgiev – Liviu-Dieter Nisipeanu

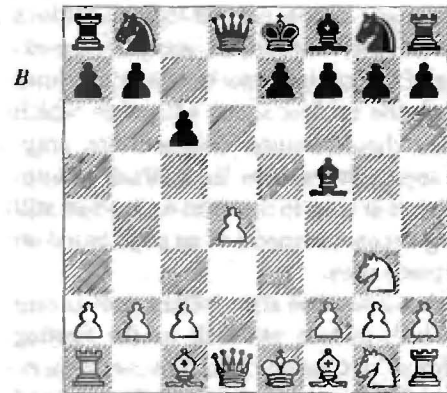
FIDE Knockout, New Delhi 2000

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 c3 dxe4 4 xe4 f5 5 g3
(D)

As I indicated above, this is the most logical reply, responding in kind to the attack on a piece. The fact that $5 d3?! xd4!$ is known to be an unpromising pawn sacrifice – gaining little more than one development tempo – means that the only real alternative therefore is $5 c5$, which will be considered in the notes to Game 4.

5...g6 6 h4

There is a good deal more subtlety to this than meets the eye. Of course the tactical threat of $h5$, when Black's pride and joy finds itself without a square to run to, is none too well disguised. However, the deeper point is that Black is all but obliged to move his h-pawn in turn and this, though essential to the bishop's preservation, does in a very concrete sense weaken it too. Without first forcing this move of Black's h-pawn, that is, if White plays an immediate



$d3$, there will only rarely be a 'threat', even in the thinnest positional sense, to exchange on $g6$. Indeed Black is likely to be more than happy to invite any exchange to occur there and enjoy the fruits of a half-open h-file. In fact, as we shall explore further in Game 4, even if White can organize capturing on $g6$ with a

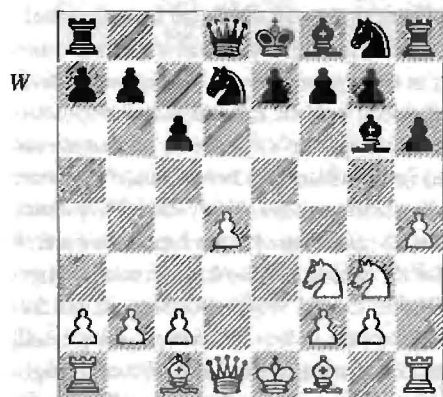
knight, this is rarely a serious blow for the defence. We are reminded of the point made in the chapter introduction: 4...♙f5 offers White precious few weaknesses to probe and 6 h4 is regarded as something of a key to creating something to aim at. Of course, on the downside, the text-move all but rules out the possibility of castling kingside, but this is a fairly small price to pay.

6...h6

Much better than 6...h5, which would immediately present a target to the white pieces. Specifically, 7 ♖h3 or 7 ♖1e2 coming to f4 would be awkward to meet.

7 ♜f3 ♜d7 (D)

Preventing 8 ♗e5, which for decades was taken to be a tangible threat. The alternatives 7...e6 and 7...♜f6 will be discussed in Game 3.



8 h5!

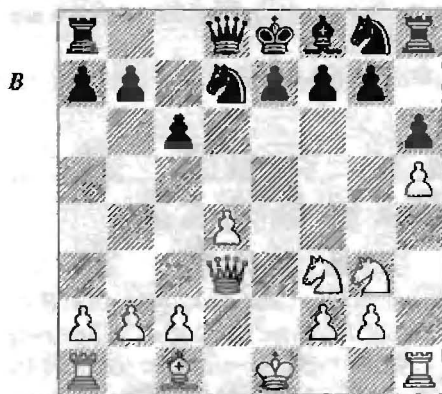
Again, a move which has not enjoyed universal acclaim throughout its career but which is now generally reckoned to be the most testing. Two positive points are customarily highlighted here. The first is the possibility of developing the king's rook by means of ♖h4 supporting the move ♙f4, which may bother Black's queen on its traditional c7-square. The second is the impact on Black's kingside. 8 h5 creates a potential weakness on g6 and strongly discourages any moves by the black g-pawn. This may in turn, especially in some endgames, mark out the g7-pawn as a potential target. To my mind the second of these is far more important and enduring. At the same time though, it is

quite possible that the white h-pawn itself may turn out to be a weakness in some endgames – at the very least its defence may prove to be a mild burden for the white pieces. On balance though, 8 h5 is easily the sternest test of Black's resources.

8...♙h7 9 ♙d3

It is testimony to the quality of Black's light-squared bishop that White should wish to exchange it off for the piece which might be viewed as a key attacker. In particular, White is mindful that this excellent piece needs to be traded as a preface to ensuring that he can castle on the queenside without any repercussions.

9...♙xd3 10 ♖xd3 (D)



10...e6

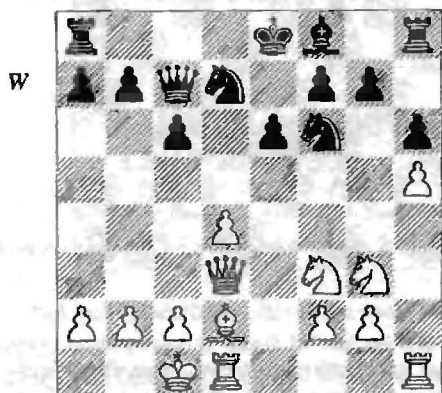
Black has three main moves here, the principal alternatives being 10...♜gf6 and 10...♖c7. However, it is conceptually much more important to be aware of his three main strategies as discussed in the chapter introduction. These broadly are: castling queenside as here; heading for the kingside and accepting a potential sharpening of the play; or attempting to avert the need to take this decision by first concentrating on disrupting the smooth flow of White's development. The latter two ideas are dealt with in Game 2. This game will consider the majority of cases featuring the solid plan of castling queenside, which certainly can claim the longest pedigree. These games are traditionally introduced by the moves 10...♖c7 11 ♙d2 and so on. The text-move, though, turns

out to be a reasonable modern route to a tried and tested position, perhaps also checking out along the way that White appreciates the claims of 11 ♖f4 over the less active 11 ♖d2 (see Game 2) and will also react appropriately to the check which follows on the next move. So far as I can see, there is no real drawback to the text-move.

11 ♖f4 ♗a5+ 12 ♖d2

This once again permits the queen to take up residence on c7. However, the move is rightly regarded as best. The trouble with the alternative 12 c3 is simply that a5 is a very promising posting for the black queen and letting her settle there is thus inadvisable. In particular the threat to White's a-pawn inhibits immediate castling on the queenside, while keeping a lateral eye on the e5-square and the h5-pawn are both useful too.

12... ♗c7 13 0-0-0 ♖gf6 (D)



14 ♖e4

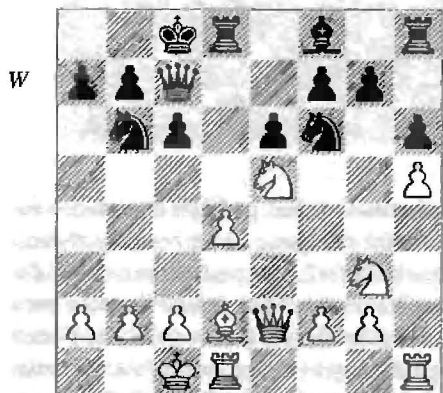
It might seem counter-intuitive for the player nursing his space advantage to offer an exchange of pieces. However, neither White's knight on g3 nor his queen are situated particularly well at present and the coming exchange on e4 will not involve any major loss of time since his queen, when driven from e4, will tend to head for more congenial positions, most likely on e2 (or c2 on occasions). Moreover, unblocking his g-pawn has the useful virtue of preparing g3, which will in turn 'threaten' ♖f4 and hence tend to force Black's hand. Nonetheless, there are alternatives which are worth a look:

a) 14 c4!? looks an admirably direct approach and possibilities such as 14...0-0-0 15 ♖b1 c5 16 ♖c3 ♖d6 17 ♖e4 ♖xe4 18 ♗xe4 ♖f6 19 ♗e2 – when White has reached virtually the main line below with the difference that the useful ♖b1 has been substituted for the less clearly valuable move g3 – seem rather to vindicate it. There is no disputing that ♖b1 is a useful tempo in these lines, with the c-file likely to become half-open. However, the move c4 seems slightly committal, not least since the c4-square is henceforth denied to White's major pieces, which can otherwise find it very fruitful territory for exploiting a premature ...c5 break. As regards Black's best response, it is difficult to be categorical, but it is worth noting that 16...♖d6 is not compulsory in the line above and 16...cxd4!? 17 ♖xd4 a6!, putting a stop to ♖b5 ideas, is probably a better version.

The point is that 18 ♖e4 can be met calmly by 18...♖c7!, perhaps with some ...♖e5 issues for White to keep an eye on. This is instructive: it is precisely one of the calm developments against which White's ♖e4 and g3 moves are directed in the main line below since they render ♖f4 a serious issue. With the bishop committed to c3, Black no longer has to beware of this. 18 ♖f3 ♖c5!? also looks OK, while otherwise, White should watch out for ...♖c5 followed by ...♖d6, when the knight on g3 will lack positive places to go. One further thought is that 14...b5!? – attempting to compete for the d5-square in a style more associated with the set-up in Game 2 – might also be a reasonable 'change of pace' against the immediate 14 c4, although it has to be admitted that playing 14 ♖b1 first and only then 15 c4 would circumvent this.

b) 14 ♗e2 0-0-0 (14...♖d6 15 ♖f5 ♖f4! might be reasonable too) 15 ♖e5! has been a serious option here ever since the tangible nature of White's space advantage in the structure arising from 15...♖xe5 16 dxe5 ♖d7 17 f4 was confirmed by Spassky at the highest level, in the 1966 World Championship match. Instead of exchanging the g3-knight, he has traded its colleague to offer the g3-piece an altogether rosier future. Since then though, Black's defence has been considerably honed, although an investment of time to learn a few more concrete

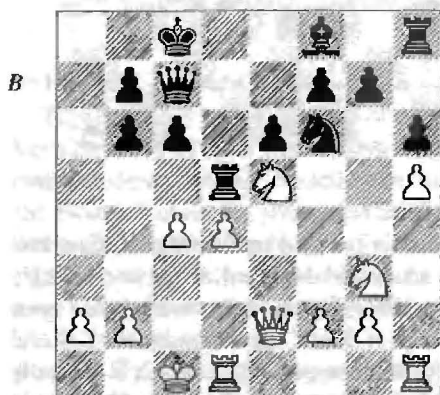
variations than usual as Black here might be very wise. Paradoxically the stronger move is probably 15...♟b6! (D) (of course the threat to f7 severely restricts Black's options) – a rare case of tolerating the knight on e5 and relying on counterplay against the d4-pawn. White then has two notable options:



b1) 16 c4 ♞xd4 17 ♜e3 ♞xd1+ 18 ♞xd1 is an interesting pawn sacrifice based initially on the brutal tactical trick 18...♞xe5? 19 ♞d8+! ♟xd8 20 ♟xb6+, winning material, and on the defender's very concrete problems in developing his remaining pieces. This is all very well, but the accurate 18...♞g8! leaves White struggling to improve his position without recourse to the move f4 (since 19 ♟f4 can be met with 19...♟bd7!) and this in turn ensures that White will not decide matters by simply invading on d8. After 19 f4 ♟b8!, 20 ♞d3 ♟c8! 21 ♞d8 ♟d6! is already in Black's favour; 20 ♟e4 is a better try, but 20...♟xe4 21 ♟xb6 axb6 22 ♞xe4 ♟d6 23 ♞h7 ♟c8! 24 ♞xg7 b5! again gives Black a fair share of the play.

b2) 16 ♟a5!? is another idea, when 16...♞d5! suggests itself, to force the issue before White can tighten the screws by playing c4. Now, although Gallagher writes "certainly not 17 b4 ♞xa5!" and it does for sure look an incongruously risky way to handle such a solid variation for White, it is not entirely clear to me that the assessment of 18 bxa5 ♟a3+ 19 ♟b1 ♟a4 should be so one-sided after 20 ♞f3!. It is handy for White that the bishop is hit and once it retreats there might even be an advance of

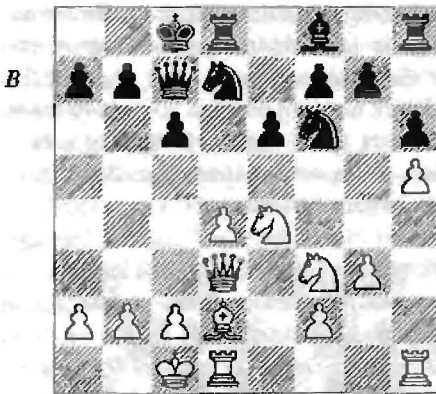
White's a-pawn in the air. Perhaps Black might wish to look at the safer 18...♟bd5, but in any case, given its forcing nature it is perhaps surprising that no really well-prepared player has sought to rehabilitate the white side. However, 17 ♟xb6 is logical, trading the 'minor exchange' for space and time. After 17...axb6 18 c4 (D) Black needs to respond actively to show that the extra space and the unusually secure knight on e5 do not constitute excellent value for such a minor 'investment'.



White's plan looks rather convincing after the passive 18...♞d8?! 19 ♟e4 ♟xe4 20 ♞xe4 ♟d6 21 f4, when the influence which White's knight exerts is really the key factor. However, Black can disrupt this smooth flow with 18...♟a5! 19 ♟b1 ♟d6 20 f4 ♞d8 21 ♟e4 ♟xe4 22 ♞xe4. Now there is a case, however counter-intuitive, for 22...f5!? just in order that ...♟xe5 should become a possibility without f7 automatically becoming a weakness as the f-file opens. Then by continuing to pursue activity at all costs, Black seems to be OK through 23 ♞e2 b5! 24 c5 ♟xe5 25 dxex5! ♟a4! with his rook re-entering the play through enticing squares such as e4. However, in VI.Gurevich-Erenburg, Kfar-Saba 2000, White sacrificed a pawn with 26 ♞d6! ♞xf4 27 ♞hd1 ♞xd6 28 exd6 ♞d7, which looks reasonable value since the d-pawn is powerful and will force Black's queen to be passive for a time. Nevertheless, a well-timed ...b6 break should hold the balance. Black's achievement in having kept the rook now on f4 so active is instructive and well worthy of careful study.

14...0-0-0 15 g3 (D)

As mentioned above, White threatens ♖f4 and thus forces his opponent's hand.



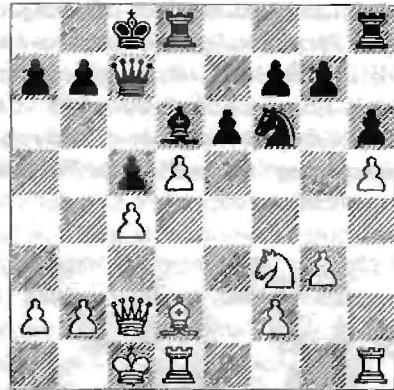
15...♖c5!?

A slightly unusual move-order. The normal way is 15...♖xe4 16 ♖xe4, when interestingly the natural 16...♖f6 is somewhat frowned upon by theory. It could appear to be very useful since, with the c-pawn still on c2, it virtually forces the queen to commit to e2, which in turn takes the sting out of the d5 ideas seen later in the note. However, it is criticized for ceding e5 to the white knight that bit too easily. 17 ♖e2 ♖d6 18 ♖e5 c5 (18...♖xe5 19 dxe5 ♖d5 20 c4 ♖e7 is possible, but there are no guarantees that this knight will reach a secure square on the kingside and will be clearly the worse minor piece if it fails) 19 ♖h4!?

is one promising idea, highlighting the possible wisdom of leaving c4 free for the major pieces to swing around to. Hence the main line is 16...♖d6, when 17 c4 c5 18 ♖c3 ♖f6 19 ♖e2 leads back to the game. However, there is an important alternative for White here which cannot be ignored since it presents a profound challenge to the viability of Black's whole structure. Instead of the modest 18 ♖c3, White can try 18 d5! ♖f6 19 ♖c2 (D) with the aim of ♖c3xf6, seriously compromising Black's kingside.

The problem is that the usual response to such an advance of White's d-pawn would be to exchange on d5 but in that case any successful subsequent doubling of Black's f-pawns has major implications not just for the health of the

B

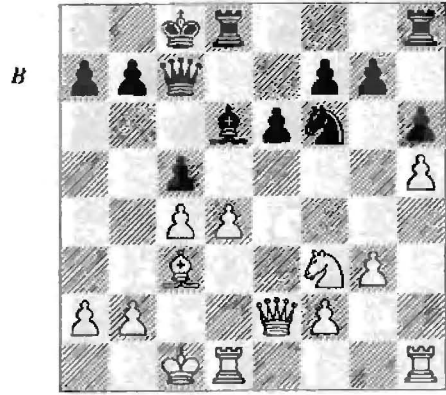
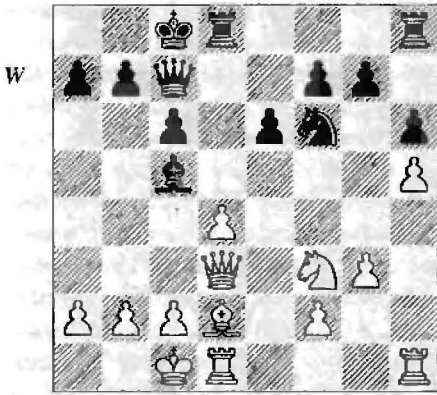


pawns themselves but perhaps even more urgently, for the f5-square which could be chronically weak. In fact, and perhaps unusually for the Caro-Kann, this once-feared line has been partly neutralized by Black's ability to obtain active piece-play in exchange for just the structural horrors I have been outlining. Recent practice strongly confirms that after 19...exd5! 20 cxd5 ♖he8 (and not 20...♖xd5?? 21 ♖f5+) 21 ♖c3 ♖d7 (21...♖g4!?, meeting 22 ♖f5+?! with 22...♖d7, might be playable too if Black is desperate to 'keep structure') 22 ♖xf6 gxf6 his position is much better than it looks. Critically, White cannot straightforwardly implement the textbook blockade of f5 with 23 ♖h4 due to the reply 23...♖e5!, which not only covers the critical square, but also provides us with a promised example of the h5-pawn proving to be vulnerable. In fact White can force Black to sacrifice a piece here by 24 f4 ♖xh5 25 ♖e2 ♖xd5 26 ♖xd5 ♖xf4+ 27 gxf4 ♖xd5 28 ♖d1 ♖xa2, but this is not regarded as too dangerous for Black. His extra pawns are split, but there are four of them! The queen returning to e6 largely prevents White's queen from entering the position too disastrously. Apologies for the complexity of all this, but it is a rare case in the Caro-Kann of detailed knowledge being required to reach even a playable position.

16 ♖xc5 ♖xc5 (D)

17 ♖e2?! ♖d6

White's 17th appears to me to be slightly inaccurate – simply 17 c4 ♖d6 (17...♖b6 is not bad either, but 18 ♖c3 ♖he8 19 ♖c2! prepares to meet 19...c5 with 20 d5 and thus leaves Black



a bit passive) 18 ♖c2 would have unambiguously kept the d-pawn covered – but it appears that whatever the grounds for Black's slightly unusual move-order, he was not aiming to confuse White in this way! In fact Black does appear to reach a rather safe and simplified, if none too exciting, position by means of 17...♙d4!, when 18 ♙f4 e5 19 ♙xe5 (19 ♘xe5? ♞he8) 19...♙xe5 20 ♘xe5 ♞xd1+ 21 ♞xd1 ♞d8 offers no thrills but did basically deliver equality in Kruppa-Khenkin, Minsk 1990.

18 c4

It is open to debate how much difference is made by the preparatory 18 ♖b1, but an interesting question is raised by Black's handling of the position in Cheparinov-Seirawan, Dutch Team Ch, Enschede 2006. The assumption that playing ...c5 at some stage is the only way to contest White's spatial advantage is pretty deeply ingrained in the psyche and I wouldn't strongly suggest trying to revise this. Somehow here, though, Black did just about OK by merely manoeuvring his pieces with great care. One argument he might make is that ...c5 also improves White's minor pieces and is therefore inherently double-edged. Black's idea – to shift his queen carefully to f7 while keeping a very watchful eye on the e5-square – merits attention. After 18...♖b8 19 c4 ♖e7 20 ♘e5 ♘d7 21 ♘d3 ♞he8 22 ♙c3 f6 23 ♞he1 ♖f7 24 ♖f3 ♙c7 25 b3 f5 26 ♞d2 ♘f6 27 ♞de2 ♖xh5 28 ♖xh5 ♘xh5 29 ♘c5 ♘f6 30 ♙xe6 ♞d7 31 ♘c5 ♞dd8 White still enjoyed an edge, but it was nothing too serious.

18...c5 19 ♙c3 (D)

19...cxd4 20 ♘xd4

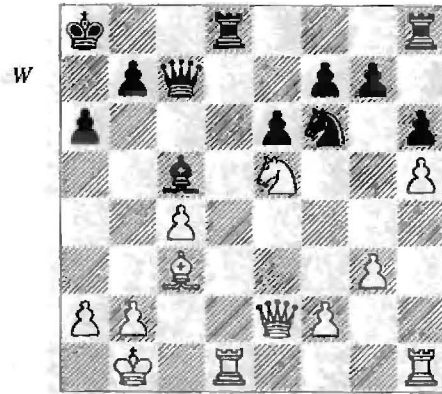
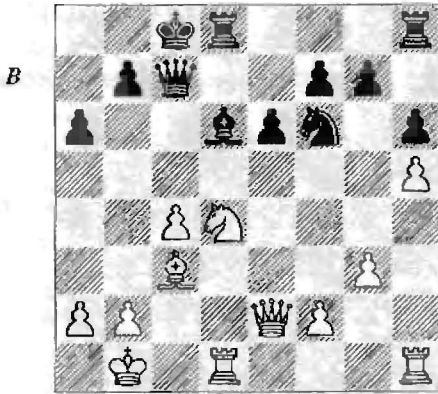
This recapture is quite natural of course and has a threat of 21 ♘b5 to add sting to its other common-sense virtues. Nonetheless, once we are aware of quite the proportion of games in which the knight will subsequently return to f3 en route to e5, it is inevitable that other recaptures will come into consideration. In fact, while 20 ♞xd4 is interesting, 20...♖c5!?, 21 ♘e5 ♙xe5 22 ♖xe5 ♖xe5 23 ♞xd8+ ♞xd8 24 ♙xe5 ♞d3! 25 ♞h4 ♞f3! 26 ♙d4 a6 27 ♘d2 ♞f5 28 ♖e3 ♞g5! again saw Black holding the balance through active means – once more using the weakness of the h5-pawn as a trump-card in Zubarev-Turov, Tula 2001. All the time Black is conscious that if his opponent fully consolidates and can painlessly effect the g4 advance then he is in grave danger of being squeezed. However, his creative rook manoeuvre ensures that he is in time to avert that fate.

There is nothing wrong with 20 ♙xd4 either, but however minor they appear, it does offer the defence new resources (...♙c5 or use of the a5-square) which rather lighten the defensive burden. Indeed 20...♖a5! is an interesting try straight away.

20...a6 21 ♖b1 (D)

21...♖b8

Black needs to be aware that while ♖b1 is generally a useful 'tidying move' now that the c-file is half-opened, it may be played with more sinister intentions. Plans involving ♞c1, perhaps supported by ♖b3 looking to promote the disruptive advance of White's c-pawn, have to be borne in mind, even though there can be



definite scope for counterplay once such an advance cedes the d5-square, perhaps to a black knight. All in all, I tend to see ...♖b8 and perhaps even ...♗a8 as prudent, but there is clearly a trade-off between the benefits of a king away from the action in the middlegame and the drawbacks given that simplification is never far from the agenda in these lines. Efimenko-Pavlović, Gibraltar 2006 nicely illustrates one typical scenario which Black should certainly avoid. After 21...♞d7 22 ♞c1 ♖b8 23 f4!? ♞c8 the neat tactic 24 ♗f3! ♞c6 (since if 24...♞xc4 25 ♞xc4 ♞xc4 then 26 ♗e5! can still claim to be a 'fork') 25 ♗e5! ♙xe5 26 ♙xe5+ ♗a8 27 ♞hd1 ♞cd8 28 ♞xd7 ♞xd7 29 g4 ♞d3+ 30 ♞xd3 ♞xd3 31 ♖c2 ♞d8 32 ♙g1! enabled White to reach the best of all possible worlds. There is one pair of rooks on the board, ideally complementing the advantage of bishop against knight, and Black is denied any useful entry-squares while his opponent's is perfectly poised to support his kingside play.

22 ♗f3 ♗a8 23 ♗e5 ♙c5 (D)

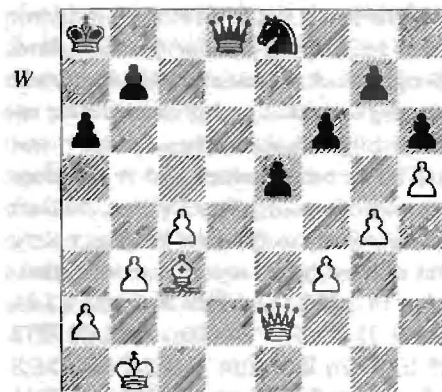
24 g4!

This move in the short run provides solid support for the b5-pawn, but in the longer term requires the defender constantly to reckon with the advance of this pawn to g5. This move is often an important by-product of a well-ensconced knight on e5 and my feeling is that if it can be made secure, it is usually a fair gauge that Black will be suffering at least some squeezing.

24...♞d6 25 ♞xd6 ♙xd6 26 ♞d1 ♞d8 27 f3 ♙xe5 28 ♞xd8+ ♞xd8 29 ♙xe5

I have already alluded to the likelihood of some simplification occurring in this variation. In a sense the defender can claim that it eases his task, while White may feel that it can equally clarify his advantage. In general, the rook and bishop vs rook and knight endings will be quite unpleasant for Black unless he is particularly active, especially if White's pawn is securely advanced to g4. However, both general chess theory, and claims about a slight looseness of some light squares around the white king, suggest that with queens on the board (and preferably no rooks) the defender's problems should be somewhat eased. Of course, the pure minor-piece ending also requires comment and as we shall see, raises some interesting dilemmas of its own.

29...♗e8 30 b3 f6 31 ♙c3 e5!? (D)



A hugely important trade-off has occurred with Black's last couple of moves. His pawn

advances have done a good job of blunting the c3-bishop; it could reroute through b4 to f8 but this is unlikely to be a problem so long as the knight can head for e6. However, at the same time serious weaknesses have been created on the light squares, and with them a potential path for the white king into the heart of his opponent's territory which will have to be impeded at all costs in a pure minor-piece ending. In this regard, the king's position on a8 is again something of an issue. Black's 31...e5!? is understandable though, partly in terms of holding up White's kingside pawns but also for the more positive reason that his knight is coming to an excellent square on e6, from where it might even aspire to a little active play.

32 ♖c2 ♗c7 33 ♖d3 ♖e7!

As I hope the previous note made clear, White is keen to exchange queens and Black, out of deference to his kingside weaknesses, must decline.

34 a4!? ♗e6 35 ♖d5 ♗d4+?!

This further manoeuvre looks a bit strange, and is probably a mistake although Black's reluctance to allow 35...♗f4! 36 ♖g8+ ♖a7 37 ♗d2 is, at first glance, understandable. After all, 'middlegame considerations' might not be irrelevant yet. However, the white king is not absolutely safe in these positions either (especially after the space-gaining but slightly loosening 34 a4) and the prudent 37...♗e6! 38 ♗c3+ ♗d4+ 39 ♖c3 ♖a3! reveals that Black has actually done well to lure the white queen deep into his camp and thus enable a switch to counterplay which should keep the balance.

36 ♖b2 ♗c6 37 a5 ♖b8 38 ♗d2 ♖d8

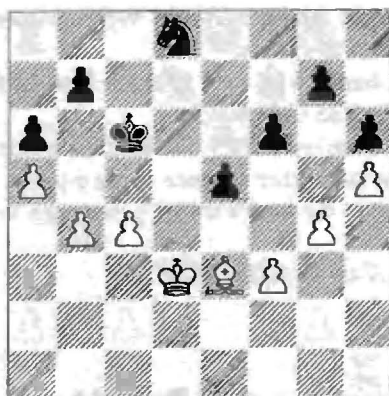
Black is probably right to be afraid that the white bishop *en route* for b6 will further restrict his game. Crucially the two kings have shifted a bit since move 33 so Black is thus no longer obliged to avoid the exchange of queens. Still, I feel that practically it is White's task rather than his opponent's defence which probably benefits from this.

39 ♖xd8+ ♗xd8 40 ♗e3 ♖c8 41 ♖c3 ♗d7 42 b4 ♖c6 43 ♖d3 (D)

43...♗f7

This apparently strange choice of square is highly suggestive of a major problem which

B



Black faces here. Playing to e6 instead looks natural, to discourage the f4 advance. However, now that White has used his queenside pawns to such excellent effect, not only restricting the black king but also keeping the threat of a breakthrough very much alive, the defender cannot rely on safety in a pawn ending. Hence 43...♗e6 44 ♖e4 ♗d6 45 f4! exf4 46 ♗xf4+ will win for White, who liquidates *his* weakness while keeping the plan of invasion to g7. It is not hard to see that after 46...♗xf4 47 ♖xf4 the black king cannot cope on both wings. However, otherwise, White's plan of ♗g3 followed by ♖f5, and then meeting the obligatory ...♗f8 with c5 and ♗d6 is elegant, but quite straightforward. In fact after the text-move too, 44 f4! would have been the most direct. Instead White embarks on various manoeuvres but must always rely on the f4 break in the end.

44 ♖c3?! ♗d8 45 ♖c2 ♗d7 46 ♖d3 ♗c6 47 ♗c5 ♖e6 48 ♖e4 ♗d8 49 b5 ♗f7 50 ♗f8 ♗g5+ 51 ♖e3 ♖f7 52 ♗b4 ♗e6 53 ♖e4 ♖e8 54 ♗d2 ♗e7 55 bxa6?!

An unusual technical inaccuracy from Kiril Georgiev. In spite of the reduction in the number of pawns for White to win with, it was more logical to play 55 f4! axb5 56 fxe5 fxe5 57 cxb5 ♗xb5 58 ♖xe5, since the black knight then lacks stable squares in the centre while White can threaten to break through on either side, with the need to keep contact with the weakness on g7 always limiting the scope of the black king. After the text-move, by contrast, Lukacs's suggestion of recapturing with

the knight would have left White without a clear path to victory.

55...bxa6 56 f4! exf4 57 ♖xf4 ♜e6 58 ♖d6 ♜d7 59 ♜d5 ♜d8 60 c5

The issue is clarified. The knight is needed to prevent the further advance of the c-pawn, and this leaves the backward g7-pawn open to the elements.

60...♜c6 61 ♖f8 ♜e5 62 g5!

This elegant breakthrough terminates the struggle.

62...hxg5 63 ♖xg7 g4 64 ♖xf6 ♜f7 65 ♖h4 ♜h6 66 c6+ ♜c8 67 ♖g3 ♜f5 68 ♜e5 ♜h6 69 ♜e4 1-0

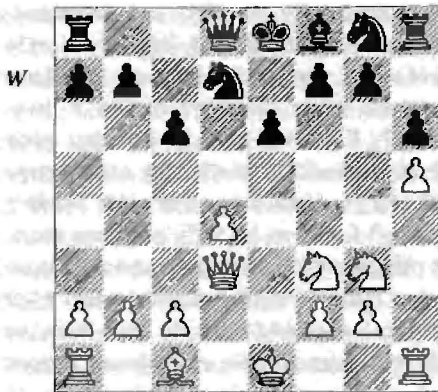
Avoiding the 'squeeze' in this line clearly requires reasonable accuracy. Black's defence could be improved, but it seems by no means plain sailing.

Game 2

Petr Haba – Zoltan Gyimesi

Bundesliga 2004/5

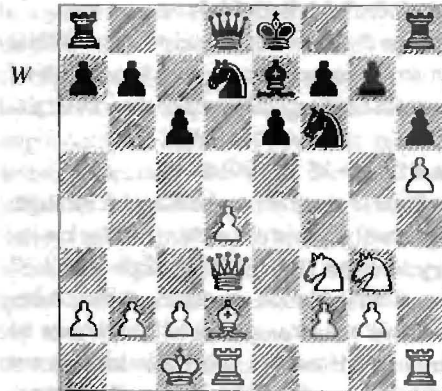
1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ♜d2 dxe4 4 ♜xe4 ♖f5 5 ♜g3 ♖g6 6 b4 h6 7 ♜f3 ♜d7 8 h5 ♖h7 9 ♖d3 ♖xd3 10 ♜xd3 e6 (D)



11 ♖f4

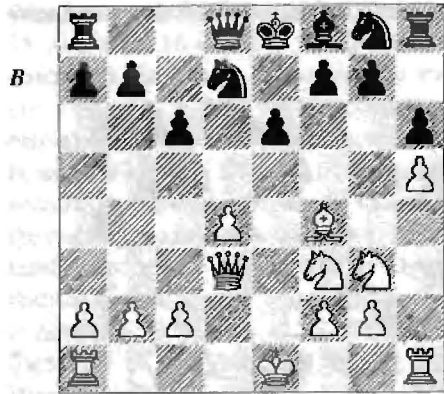
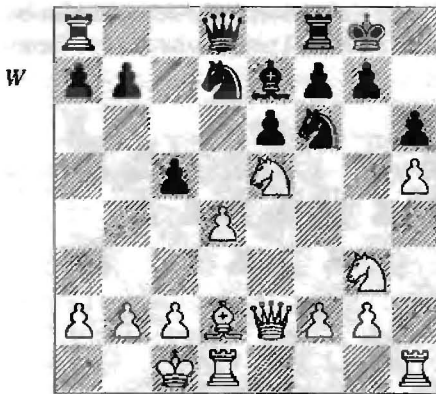
It is time to put a little flesh on the claim I made in Game 1 that this is more accurate than 11 ♖d2. The explanation belongs here, precisely because it is when Black castles kingside that the slightly less active d2-square starts to look less convincing. This is not a straightforward story and 11 ♖d2 is by no means a bad move, but after 11...♜g6 12 0-0-0 ♖e7 (D) there are subtle points counting in Black's favour in each of the main lines.

Unfortunately these will require some comparison with what is to come, but please bear with me. The first point is that the bishop to some degree blocks the rook on d1, which opens



up the possibility of the freeing move ...c5, in positions where it might otherwise be complicated by d-file embarrassments. This arises in a couple of places, both after 13 ♜b1 0-0 14 ♜c4, when, in contrast with the main game to come with the bishop on f4, 14...c5!? is regarded as close to a clean equalizer. Left alone, it is not impossible that the c-pawn might be used to promote some queenside aspirations (featuring ...♜xe4 and ...c4, for example – a very decent possibility against moves like 15 ♖e3 or 15 ♖c3). White's best is therefore probably 15 dxc5 ♜xc5 16 ♜xf6+ ♖xf6 17 ♜xd8 ♜fxd8 18 ♖e3, but he lacks the pull that we shall see in some later endings in this chapter and even 18...♜a4!? might put in a claim.

13 ♜e2 0-0 14 ♜e5 is another approach, worthy enough in the main line, but here rendered rather harmless by 14...c5! (D) again.



Note that this break is more than just ‘freeing’ in the general way – a file is being opened against the white king and a more ‘Sicilian-type’ structure will arise, without the reams of theory! Neither 15 ♖xd7 ♜xd7 16 dxc5 ♜a4 17 ♗b1 ♔xc5 with ...♕d5 at the ready to counter 18 ♔c3?! for example, nor 15 dxc5 ♔xc5 16 ♖xd7 ♜xd7! (again with ...♜a4! available as a full answer to such ‘discoveries’ as 17 ♔xh6?!) looks very promising for White. Once the secret that discovered attacks along the d-file may not be so potent here is unearthed, Black can even consider 15...♔xc5! since 16 ♔xh6 ♜a5! is effective too and in general his attacking chances are quite reasonable here. In particular, the knight on c5, keeping the a4-square in its sights, has a decent potential role to play.

This may look like a rather lengthy note. However, there was no very general way to make these points. Moreover, 11 ♔d2 *does* occur often in practice and it seems to me that an understanding of its drawbacks throws a lot of light on the respective strategies in this line and could reap a tangible practical harvest.

We now return to 11 ♔f4 (D):

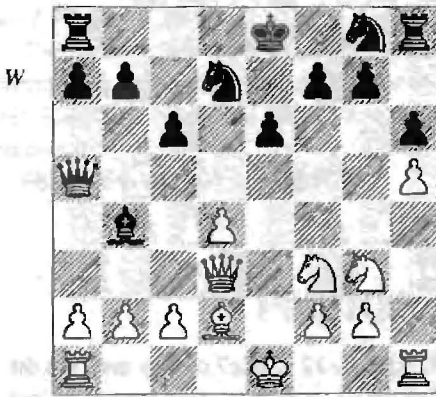
11...♗g6

It is time to take a look at a couple of Black’s ‘disruptive’ options, specific to the 10...e6 move-order, which I mentioned in the chapter introduction. We are already familiar with 11...♜a5+ from Game 1 but now this will appear in a new form as one of a couple of ideas designed to prevent White from mobilizing his forces with the customary smooth flow. In no particular order:

a) 11...♔b4+ 12 c3 ♔e7 clearly involves the claim that the c3 move is at a bare minimum ‘not helpful’ to White. Certainly it is true that in general there are positions in which the c-pawn is in no rush to advance to c4 and if the text-move were able to encourage that, it might be a feather in its cap. However, before checking analogies with the main line, the first thing to establish is that, while it looks critical, the very direct 13 ♔e4!? ♗g6 14 ♕d6+ ♔xd6 15 ♔xd6 is by no means clearly the best. In fact it may offer Black just the sort of original play he is looking for, and after 15...♜a5! 16 ♔b4 ♜c7 17 ♔a3 b5! followed by ...♕d5 and ...a5 it all looks quite good fun. So what if White settles for 13 0-0-0, the most natural alternative? Well, the difference made by the inclusion of c3 is less obvious here, but perhaps Black can at least encourage his opponent in the direction of set-ups involving ♔e5 rather than ♔e4. Specifically, 13 0-0-0 ♗g6 14 ♔e4!? ♔xe4 15 ♜xc4 ♗f6 all but forces the slightly clumsy 16 ♜c2 as 16 ♜e2?! ♜a5! hitting a5 is very awkward (17 ♗b1?? being ruled out by 17...♜f5+). This kind of potential problem on the h7-b1 diagonal is probably the main upside of forcing the c3 advance. 14 ♗b1 0-0 15 ♔e4 is a better version but 15...♜a5 still seems right. Whether after, say, 16 ♔e5 it is so different from the main line is open to question – but Black may have avoided the sharpest danger which the main game represents. At least, I see no pressing reason why 11...♔b4+! should not have the right to exist!

b) 11...♜a5+ 12 ♔d2 ♔b4! (D) is another intriguing eccentricity, a further product of the

last few years and Black's search for nuanced improvements.

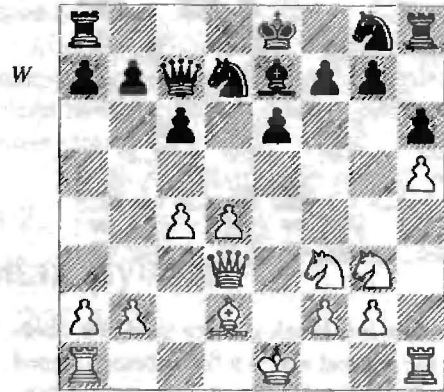


This is a much more direct attempt to provoke White's c-pawn to c4 and here the challenge is frequently accepted. There are two important tries:

b1) 13 ♖e4!? looks dangerous, but probably the calm 13...♗g6!? 14 ♔d6+ ♕e7 15 ♗xb7 ♙xd2+ 16 ♗xd2 ♖b4! is a theoretically adequate response. 17 ♖a3 ♖xa3 18 bxa3 ♜ab8 leaves White with a pretty irrelevant extra pawn, while 17 ♖b3 ♖xd4 18 0-0-0 ♖b6 19 ♖a3+ c5 20 ♗a5 ♖c7 should be playable enough too. The fact that so eminent a defensive force as Bareev erred almost immediately after 21 ♗dc4 with 21...♗b6? allowing 22 ♗e5! (Shetty-Barcev, Canada 2006) gives pause for thought, but 21...♜hd8 instead does indeed seem to be quite adequate.

b2) Much more attention has been lavished on 13 c3 ♗e7 14 c4. What seems reasonably clear is that the consistent but slightly offside 14...♖a6 provides White with a rare position for this variation in which castling kingside is quite potent. 15 0-0! ♗g6 16 ♜fe1 with ♗f5 in the offing looks like something Black should avoid, while an advance of the queenside pawns to target Black's queen can also be a promising idea. Thus 14...♖c7!?(D) looks safest, when in comparison with the main line of Game 1 we have simply inserted the moves c4 and ...♗e7 – an interesting trade-off. One effect of this is that the destinations of the respective kings are still very much up for grabs. Black's may still

head for the queenside, but there will also be cases where ...b5 is a useful source of counterplay.

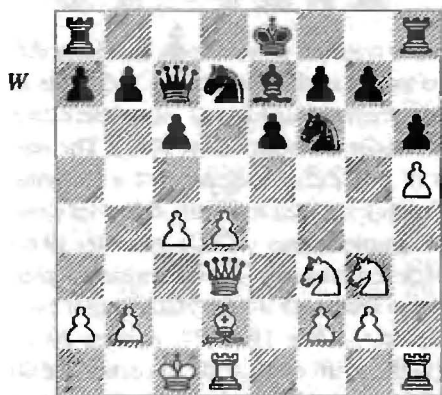


b21) Since it is unusual to have the advance of the c-pawn without a knight having time to come to f6, it is natural that White should have tested the attempt to break through very directly in the centre with 15 d5. However, once the antidote 15...cxd5 16 cxd5 ♖d6! was found, the excitement died down. It is interesting that White has tried 17 ♖b3 since 17...♖xd5?! 18 ♖xd5 exd5 19 ♗f5 in conjunction with 0-0 and ♜fe1 is regarded as unacceptable pressure. Another feather in the cap of 8 b5! However, 17...♗g6 18 dxe6 ♖xe6+ 19 ♖xe6 fxe6 is not seen to be anything much for White since the knight will sit well on d5.

b22) 15 0-0!? is a more modest, but by no means weaker try. 15...♗g6 16 ♜fe1 0-0 17 ♗f5 makes up in sound logic for what it lacks in subtlety. One possibility is 17...♗d6 although the 'minor exchange' should count for something here so long as White is mindful of the possibility of ...b5 breaks to carve out squares for the knights in the centre. 17...exf5 18 ♜xe7 ♖d8! (since if 18...♗e4 immediately, 19 ♗h4 is awkward) 19 ♜e2 ♗e4 looks a rather more interesting defence although after 20 ♜a1 ♗dc5 21 ♖c2 ♗e6 22 ♗e3 (Browne-L.B.Hansen, Philadelphia 2006) it seems that a well-timed d5 break should offer White something.

b23) The final option, 15 0-0-0, is both more interesting and a little more risky. Black's chief idea here is to use an early ...b5 break either to

open lines on the queenside or at least to secure the d5-square. 15...♗g6 (D) and now:



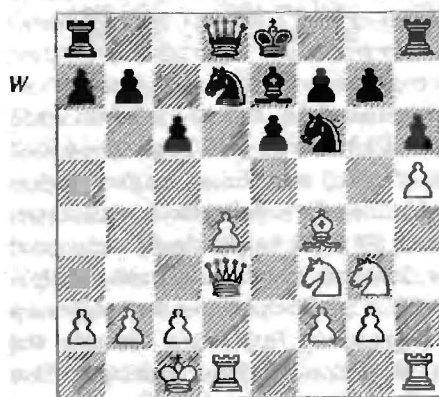
16 ♖b1 is one prudent way, when after 16...0-0 17 ♜h1 there may be a strong case for 17...♙ad8!?. On the one hand 18 ♕f5?! exf5 19 ♜xe7 ♕e4 leaves both the rook on e7 and the f2-pawn loose. On the other if 17...♜fe8 18 ♕e5!, there is already a very dangerous sacrifice on f7 in the air. White can also try to do without ♖b1. However, Karpov did OK against 16 ♜h1 with 16...b5!? (Leko-Karpov, Miskolc rapid (game 1) 2006) and this presumably inspired Anand to try 16 ♙de1!?. His idea of retaining the king's rook to support his kingside aspirations is instructive as, after 16...b5 17 c5 0-0 18 ♕e2 ♜fe8 19 g4!, White was well on the way to a strong attack in Anand-Macieja, Bundesliga 2006/7. Perhaps most of all this is a valuable reminder that securing the d5-square when ...b5 is answered with c5 is no panacea for Black. There may be a downside to the closing of the position and much depends upon the specific speed of the respective attacks thereafter.

12 0-0-0 ♗e7

This is the most natural developing move, but there is here too a further 'disruptive option' which has recently received some attention, although I must admit to being somewhat out of sympathy with it. Black can try 12...♕d5 13 ♗d2 ♕b4 hoping either to gain the 'minor exchange' – bishop for knight – or to force White's queen, in defending the a2-pawn, to offer itself as a target for immediate queenside play. In fact I suspect that White can achieve a small

edge by simply 14 ♗xb4 ♗xb4 15 ♖b1 and if 15...0-0 then 16 c4 ♗e7 17 ♕e4, when his space and chances to expand on the kingside are worth more than the concession of the bishop for knight. However, the more ambitious 14 ♖b3 a5 15 ♖b1! a4 16 ♖e3 also looks promising. Black's difficulty is to ensure that the queenside expansion will create real opportunities for attack against White's king rather than mere weaknesses. The tempting 16...♕b6 is not the way in view of 17 ♖e1! ♕d5 18 ♕e5 ♕d7 19 c4 ♕5f6 20 f4 ♖c7 21 ♗c3 and Black's pieces have been successively forced to retreat while White has constructed a model set-up in Marjanović-Logothetis, Ano Liosia 2000. 16...♕d5 is a better try, but after 17 ♖d3 b5 18 ♕e5 ♕xe5 19 dxex5 ♖c7 20 f4 Black's decision to castle queenside here in Leko-Dreev, Wijk aan Zee 2002 tends to confirm that the net effect of the queenside expansion has been to weaken his position.

We now return to 12...♗e7 (D):

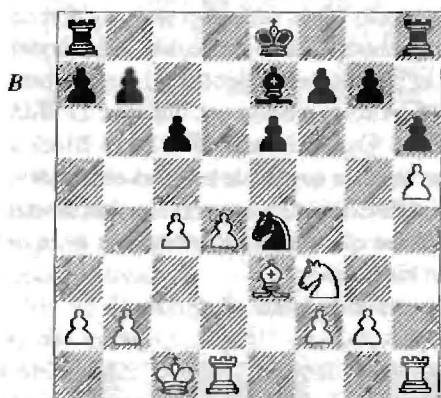


13 ♖b1

It seems to me logical both to defend a2 and to encourage Black to commit his king prior to committing to a plan. However, in terms of a plan, exchanging off the knight which blocks the advance of the g-pawn has always struck me as the most principled. Moreover, even though 13 ♕e4!? permits Black immediately to reach an endgame which theory does not find too daunting, it is difficult to ignore recent examples from the world's finest, who seem content as White to test this domain. The reason, at

least in part, should be that if Black does not fancy the ending, the tempo White gains avoiding $\text{c}4$ can give his attack a bit more bite.

In addition, if White likes the ending in general, he might well be less impressed by the small theoretical niceties which exercise theory. In any case it is instructive to see how White made something of the small advantage after 13 $\text{c}4$ $\text{c}4$ 14 $\text{c}4$ $\text{c}4$ 15 $\text{c}4$ $\text{c}4$ 16 $\text{c}4$ $\text{c}4$ 17 $\text{c}4$ $\text{c}4$ 18 $\text{c}4$ $\text{c}4$ (D) in Anand-Ponomarev, Sofia 2006.

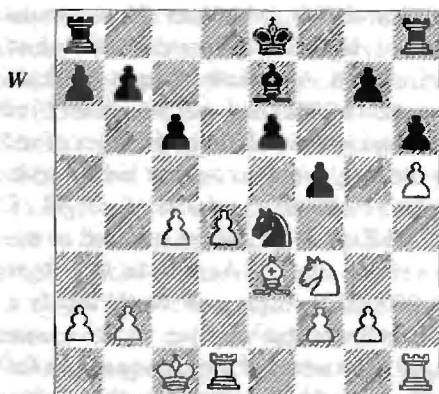


Play continued 18...0-0 19 $\text{c}4$ $\text{c}4$ 20 $\text{f}3$ $\text{g}3$?! 21 $\text{h}3$ $\text{f}5$ 22 $\text{f}2$ $\text{e}8$ 23 $\text{g}4$ $\text{c}7$ 24 $\text{d}3$ $\text{h}5$ 25 $\text{b}3$ and White's knight was perfectly placed on d3, keeping the opponent passive, while the black knight clearly lacks good squares. It seems that the apparently tempo-gaining 20... $\text{g}3$?! actually put the knight on a rather unpromising 'route' and therefore the modest 20... $\text{f}6$ would have been better. One point worth making pertinent to this and related endings is the role of the move ... $\text{c}5$. At first sight it might appear that successfully executing this advance would be the key to the defence. However, I have seen countless examples where such a break made prematurely actually accentuated Black's difficulties. For one thing, the 3 vs 2 majority may be easier to advance directly after this clarification of the pawn position. Moreover, Black needs to ensure that he is in a position to contest the d-file without making concessions. Nonetheless, a well-timed ... $\text{c}5$ advance can at the same time be crucial. Finesse is required because it is often both *mistaken to*

play ...c5, but also *mistaken to have the possibility taken away*. The latter, as Ponomarev discovered, can lead to uncomfortable passivity.

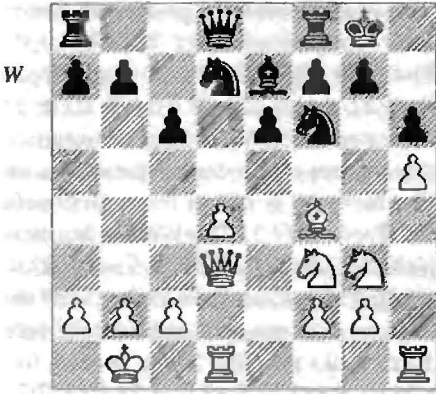
Another relevant pawn-break, similarly difficult to assess in the abstract, is ... $\text{b}5$. This in fact does suggest feasible and more interesting ways to handle the position for Black. The reputation of 18... $\text{d}6$?! took a bit of a battering after Kramnik handled the white side with some aplomb against Bareev in 2003, but after 19 $\text{b}3$ I would be tempted to go for the consistent plan of trying to secure d5 for the black knight even at some cost. After 19... $\text{b}5$!?, neither 20 $\text{c}5$ $\text{c}4$! (with ... $\text{f}6$ and ... $\text{d}5$ to come) nor 20 $\text{c}5$ $\text{bxc}4$ 21 $\text{bxc}4$ $\text{f}6$, nor even the aggressive 20 $\text{d}5$ $\text{cxd}5$ 21 $\text{cxd}5$ $\text{c}4$! intending to meet 22 $\text{dxe}6$ with 22... $\text{c}8$ + 23 $\text{c}2$ $\text{f}6$ + seems to cause Black any serious problems.

Also worthy of note is that the great Caro-Kann specialist Alexei Dreev adopted a quite new approach here, viz. 18... $\text{f}5$! (D).



This is partly to hold the knight on e4 for a while and also to give more concrete form to the weakness of h5 by preventing g4. In any case after 19 $\text{h}1$ 0-0 20 $\text{e}2$ $\text{d}6$ 21 $\text{c}5$ $\text{e}8$ 22 $\text{g}6$ $\text{f}8$ 23 $\text{f}4$ $\text{f}6$ 24 $\text{xd}6$ $\text{xd}6$ 25 $\text{f}4$ it looks as if Black is under light pressure, but after 25... $\text{e}8$! White in fact has nothing better than 26 $\text{c}6$ $\text{c}8$ 27 $\text{f}4$ $\text{xe}2$ 28 $\text{xe}2$ $\text{hx}5$, when the game is virtually equal. Indeed, Black was later pressing in Bologan-Dreev, Russian Team Ch, Sochi 2006.

13...0-0 (D)



14 ♔e4

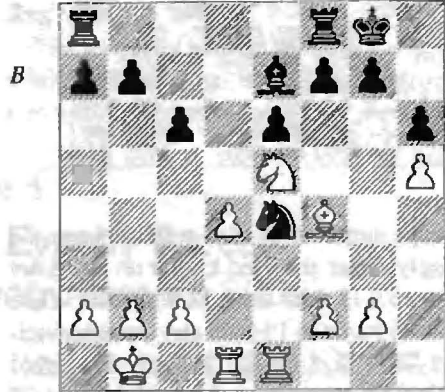
As I suggested above, this is my preferred plan. Moreover, in this position 14 ♔e5 can be met with 14...♔xe5 15 ♔xe5 ♔g4!? 16 ♖e2 ♔xe5 17 dxe5 ♗b6, which looks fairly safe. Liquidation on the d-file will reduce the impact of White's extra space. However, there are as usual alternative ways of attaining counterplay. 14...♗a5!? is similar to later notes, while 14...a5 15 c4 a4 16 ♔e4 ♔xe4 17 ♖xe4 a3 18 b3 ♔xe5 19 ♔xe5 ♔d6 20 ♖c2 ♗e7!, in *Lordachescu-Gyimesi, Vlissingen 2002*, was a typical method of prefacing exchanges with a little probe near to the white king which can prove useful later.

White also sometimes plays 14 c4. If strong, this would tend to reveal some of the early deviations we have considered (11...♔b4+ in particular) as a lot of rigmarole. In fact Black has a reasonable choice between 14...b5 and 14...♗a5, amongst others. The former to some degree runs into the kind of warning I threw in earlier. After 14...b5 15 c5 ♔d5 16 ♔c1! Black needs rapidly to drum up play to ensure that his opponent's simple plan of ♔e2, g4 and g5 does not create an attack which lands first. Therefore 14...♗a5!? may be more solid. In *Anand-Hantouchi, FIDE World Cup, Hyderabad 2002*, Black equalized easily after 15 ♔e5 ♔xe5 16 ♔xe5 ♔g4! 17 ♖e2 ♔xe5 18 dxe5 ♔fd8 19 f4 ♔xd1+ 20 ♔xd1 ♔d8 21 ♔xd8+ ♖xd8 22 ♔e4 ♖d4 although I suppose 15 ♖e2 might be slightly more testing.

14...♗a5!?

A major parting of the ways. The text-move is a rather more interesting but at the same time

risky means to avoid the ending arising after 14...♔xe4 15 ♖xe4 ♔f6 16 ♖e2 ♖d5 17 ♔e5 ♖e4 18 ♖xe4 ♔xe4 19 ♔he1! (D), which, according to theory at least, is a slightly more testing version of the ending considered in the note to White's 13th move.



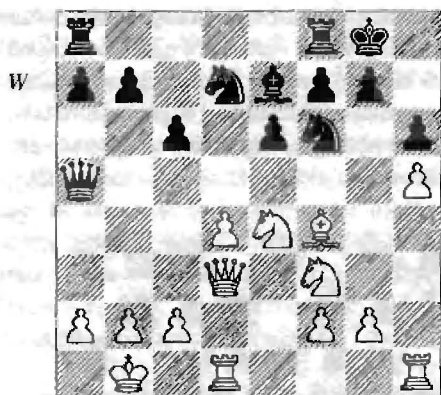
The first tactical point is that if 19...♔xf2?! 20 ♔d2 ♔h4 21 ♖e2 ♔h1 22 ♔d3 the knight cannot escape. The more profound questions are the positional ones. The remarks I made before about the generally double-edged contribution of the move ...c5 pertain here too – one reason why there is a good case for keeping the bishop on f4 for the moment (rather than playing 19 ♔e3). However, there are still chances to create some play. After 19...♔f6 20 g4! ♔d6 21 f3, I quite like 21...a5 and 22...a4 to create some queenside space. I suspect White in turn should just allow this since 22 a4?! b5! only serves to encourage Black's play. 23 ♔g6 ♔xf4 24 ♔xf4 bxa4 25 c3 ♔d5! 26 ♔xd5 cxd5 27 ♖c2 ♔fc8 28 ♔a1 ♔c4 29 ♔a2 ♔ac8 30 ♔d3 ♔b8! forced a quick draw in *Kotronias-Arutinian, European Ch, Kusadasi 2006* since if White rejects 31 ♖c2 again he faces disruption by means of ...a3.

We now return to 14...♗a5!? (D):

15 g4!

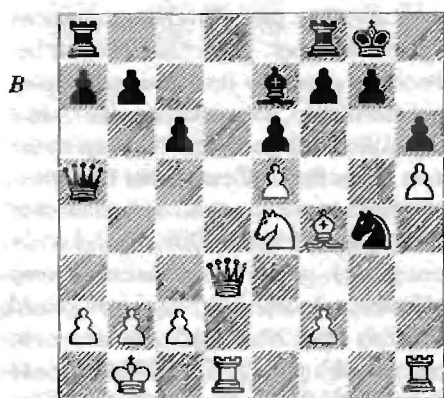
There is nothing obligatory about this pawn sacrifice, but having unblocked the g-pawn there is something appealingly direct about trying to open lines without delay, while Black's defence undeniably requires some precision too.

15...♔xg4 16 ♔e5! ♔dxe5!



Perhaps surprisingly it is right to keep the seemingly rather stranded knight on g4. After 16...dxe5?! 17 dxe5 fad8 18 g3 h8 White can choose between 19 d6 and the more incisive 19 hg1 g8 20 xd7! xd7 21 xh6! f8 22 c1, threatening both 23 h6 and 23 f6, with a tremendous attack.

17 dxe5 (D)



This looks at first sight very dangerous for Black whose knight is loose – since 17...dxe5? is a disaster in view of 18 g3 and xh6 – and whose resources for nullifying the coming pressure on the g-file are far from self-evident. Nonetheless, the theoretical verdict is by no means clear and Gyimesi's defence is pretty much 'state of the art'.

17...f5!?

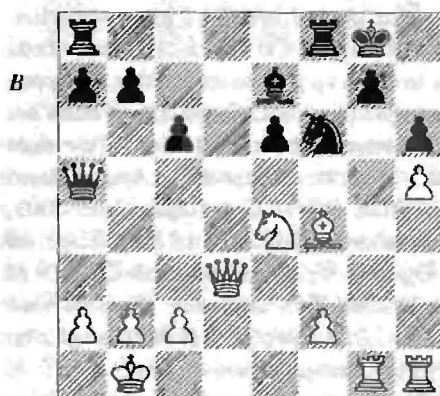
This move will clearly be the lynchpin of the defence. White will be able to win back his pawn, but maybe cannot claim more. However,

it may be also possible to preface this with 17...fad8 even though after 18 h3! f5! (18...b4?! 19 g2! xd1+ 20 xd1 f5 21 exf6 fxf6 22 xh6 f7 23 fxf6+ xxf6 24 c1! is very good for White since the return of the pawn has not really dented the attack for which the move h6 is still in reserve) 19 exf6 fxf6 20 xe6+ f7 21 dg1 White has won e6 with check. After 21...d5 22 fxf6+ xxf6 23 xd5 xd5 24 xh6 d4 25 e3 h7 the loss of a pawn does not seem to be crucial here as the black rooks are quite active. Indeed, following 26 b3 xe3 27 fxe3 e5 28 g3 fe7 29 hh3 7e6 30 f3 h6 Black does indeed seem to be about equal, P.Carlsson-Hermansson, Swedish Ch, Gothenburg 2005. While not full of enticing prospects for Black, this is of undeniable theoretical significance.

18 exf6

This is usually the right response to ...f5 and perhaps always so when Black has played ...fad8 first. However, here there is the additional and quite enticing possibility of playing the forcing 18 d7!?. Then 18...ae8! 19 hg1! (19 xe6+ h8 20 hg1 is less accurate due to 20...b4!) 19...h8 20 d6! xd6 21 exd6 e5 22 d2 b5 23 c3, for example, still looks difficult for Black. There remains potential pressure against g7, even if the white queen can be evicted by perpetual attack while the advanced d-pawn seems highly likely to reveal itself to be an asset.

18...xf6 19 dg1 (D)



19...xe4! 20 xe4

Black's resources are well illustrated after 20 ♙xh6 ♙g5! 21 ♙xg5 ♗xg5 22 h6 ♖f7 23 hxg7 ♖xg7 24 f4 ♖d5! 25 ♖g3 ♖f3! 26 ♖h4 ♗h3! 27 ♖xg7+ ♗xg7, when White has the choice of recapturing on h3 with an easily drawn ending, or giving perpetual check, but not more.

20...♙f5 21 ♖xf5

This is pretty well forced since if 21 ♖g2 g5! the bishop cannot be reasonably sacrificed and otherwise the attack largely disappears. Indeed

after 22 ♙e3 either 22...♖f3 or 22...e5 (parrying f4) leaves Black looking the more active.

21...♖xf5 22 ♙xh6 ♙f6 23 ♙xg7

This forcing line only secures a draw, but 23 ♙e3 ♗h7! prepares to meet h6 with ...g5! again, when Black has no problems.

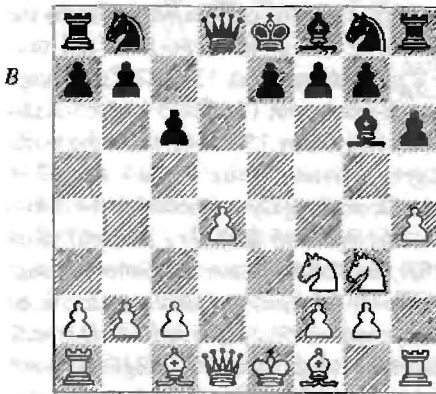
23...♙xg7 24 h6 ♖f7 25 ♗c1 ♖e8 26 hxg7 ♖xg7 27 ♗d2 ½-½

The game has reduced to full equality. Black is holding in this line, but the essentially defensive nature of his task would not suit all tastes.

Game 3

Lazaro Bruzon – Evgeny Bareev FIDE World Cup, Khanty-Mansiisk 2005

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ♗c3 dxe4 4 ♗xe4 ♙f5 5 ♗g3 ♙g6 6 h4 h6 7 ♗f3 (D)



7...c6

As I mentioned in the chapter introduction, it does look as if the fortunes of the text-move (and its sister variation 7...♗f6) are on the wane once more. Still, the transformation which occurred in the mid-1990s, when the idea of enticing the white knight to e5 went from being habitually criticized in opening books as a 'typical error' to being a sharpening enrichment of Black's strategy enjoying main-line status, was extraordinary indeed. The key question was and is 'Can it really be to Black's advantage to lure the knight to a strong central square on which it can be supported apparently at little cost?'

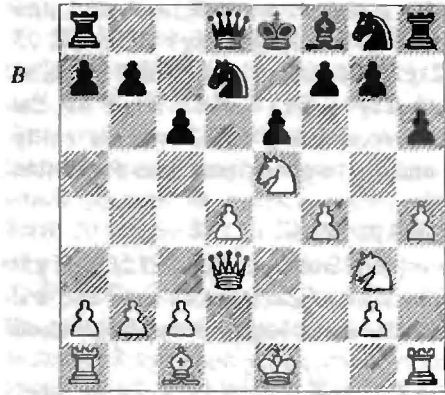
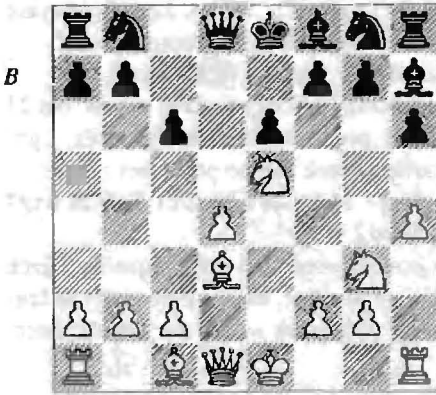
Similar questions apply to 7...♗f6 as well, and there seem to be few grounds for differentiating between them and creating an unnecessarily complex story. The simple treatment 8 ♗e5 ♙h7 9 ♙d3!, as in the game, convinces me that in this case too it is the most testing. Interestingly though, in the days when 7...♗f6 was simply dismissed as inferior, it was 9 ♙c4 e6 10 ♖e2, once again threatening a devastating 'sacrifice' on f7, that was generally quoted to 'prove' this. In fact 10...♗d5! seems a safe enough reply and although the structure after 11 ♙b3 ♗d7 12 ♙d2 ♗xe5 13 dxe5 could leave Black looking a bit cramped, with the b3-bishop to target he can immediately aspire to a bit of play on the queenside with 13...a5!?. Hence 11 ♖h5! might be preferable, but 11...♖c7 12 0-0 ♙d6 13 ♖e1 0-0 14 ♖g4 ♗f6 15 ♖f3 ♗bd7 also looked solid enough in Zapata-Am.Rodriguez, Capablanca memorial, Matanzas 1995.

8 ♗e5 ♙h7 9 ♙d3! (D)

This simple treatment, bearing obvious comparison with Games 1 and 2, is without doubt the reason why lines allowing 8 ♗e5 are under a bit of a cloud at present. The neat tactical point is that 9...♖xd4? fails to 10 ♗xf7!, when the knight is immune in view of ♙g6+ winning the queen.

9...♙xd3 10 ♖xd3 ♗d7

This is one thematic treatment, but having invited White's knight to e5 by holding back on



this move, it is at least consistent to investigate the viability of options involving an early ...c5 in which the b8-knight might have other plans. In any case 10...♘f6 is a popular option, not least by transposition since this is often chosen on move 7. The most interesting independent line is then 11 ♔d2 ♙e7 12 0-0-0 0-0. However, after 13 f4 c5!? 14 dxc5 ♜c7 (14...♙xc5 15 ♚e4! ♙e7 16 ♘xf6+ ♙xf6 17 ♜e2 favours White as is often the case if he can prepare the ground for an advance of the g-pawn without wasting tempi) 15 ♙c3! the fact that 15...♚d5 16 ♚h5! ♙xc5 17 ♜h3! (Khalifman-Solozhenkin, European Clubs Cup, Rethymnon 2003) threatening ♜g3 yields such a strong attack suggests that the opening of the position has rather been in White's favour. It is true that 15...♚c6!? probably limits the damage but 16 ♚e4! (Khalifman) again prepares an effective advance of the g-pawn and ensures the persistence of the attack. To drive home this lesson, it is also worth mentioning that Black's decision not to challenge the e5-knight means that such an early f4 advance is not compulsory. Thomas Luther's 13 ♚e2!?, freeing the g-pawn such that 13...c5 is met with 14 g4! and 13...♚bd7 with 14 ♘xd7 ♘xd7 15 g4!?, is a related and possibly significant addition to White's offensive armoury.

11 f4! (D)

The best way to secure the knight, all but guaranteeing that an early exchange on e5 will not be on the agenda for the defence.

11...♘gf6

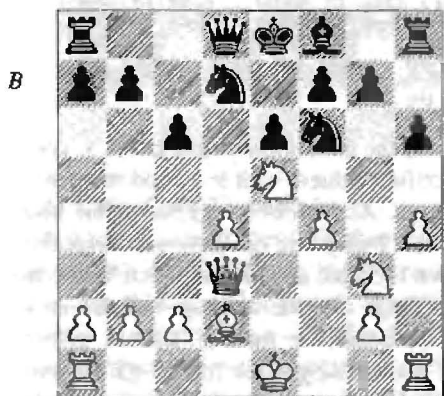
If, as seems plausible, the pawn sacrifice which Bruzon demonstrates here is really a

fundamental threat to Black's set-up, there is likely to be a major search for alternative treatments. In particular, mirroring the strategy we have already encountered in the notes to Game 2, Black has experimented with 11...♙b4+!? provoking the move 12 c3 before retiring with 12...♙e7. This certainly succeeds in eliminating the d5 pawn-sacrifice idea which forms the centrepiece of our main game here and thus makes it possible to meet 13 ♔d2 ♘gf6 (capturing the h-pawn with 13...♚xe5 14 fxe5 ♙xh4 looks very risky after 15 0-0-0, when the h-file will hugely enhance White's attack and g7 in particular looks highly vulnerable) 14 0-0-0 with 14...c5!. After 15 ♙e3 ♜c7 16 ♚e4!? ♚d8 17 ♘xf6+ ♙xf6 Khalifman and Soloviev suggest 18 ♜e4!? (to meet the threat to e5 caused by the pin on the d-file), meeting 18...0-0 with the customary 19 g4! recipe. It might be more active to choose 15...0-0 16 ♚e4 in order to play 16...♜a5!? but similar points pertain after 17 ♘xd7 ♘xd7 18 ♚b1 ♚ad8. This is by no means clear and such a system may be playable for Black. But the onus is still on him to show why he has equivalent counterplay when White again starts kingside operations with a well-timed push of the g-pawn.

There is another attempt to disrupt White's plans which also echoes Game 2. Black can try 11...c5 12 ♙e3 ♜a5+!? 13 ♔d2 ♜a4!?. After the thematic 14 d5 Black can try to show that White's centre is over-extended by 14...♚xe5 15 fxe5 0-0-0 16 d6 f6!?, although after 17 b4! (Nisipeanu-Zelčić, Dresden 2003), there are some risks involved for the black king too.

Alternatively there is the provocative move 14...♗e7?!. The hope here is that after 15 dxe6 ♗xe5 16 fxe5 fxe6 17 ♗c3 ♗d8 18 ♖e2 ♗d5 this marvellous square will compensate for the open lines and the slightly sluggish state of the rest of Black's development. However, after 19 0-0 ♗d7! 20 ♗e4 ♗c8 21 ♖f7 White has very active pieces which give him some advantage even after the black king has wisely fled the danger zone.

12 ♗d2! (D)



12...c5

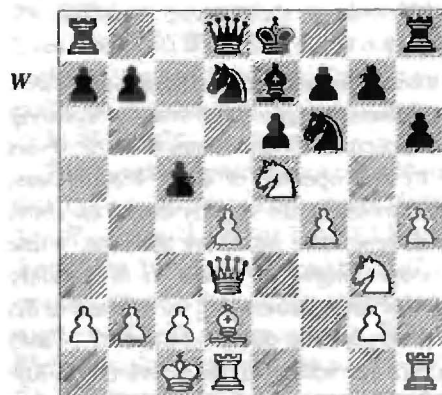
This is the last place to look for alternatives. If delaying the ...c5 move averts the pawn sacrifice, there is an obvious motivation for doing so. In fact, after 12...♗e7 13 0-0-0 0-0 White may still be able to play a version of his sacrifice after 14 ♖e2 c5 15 d5! according to Khalifman and Soloviev. However, there is also a case for 14 ♖f3 ♖c7 15 c4!?, when the freeing 15...c5 is met by a more watertight 16 d5! advance, while in the absence of such a break his position looks somewhat passive.

12...♗d6 is another reasonable development, but once again the plan of quickly advancing the g-pawn seems to cause some trouble. After 13 0-0-0 ♖c7, the simplest idea appears to be 14 ♗e4 ♗xe4 15 ♖xe4 ♗f6 16 ♖e2, when it is quite instructive to note that the advance of the g-pawn gains useful space and chances to create play on the kingside even if Black (prudently) elects to send his king to the other side with 16...0-0-0. In fact, ironically this very direct idea is less effective against 13...0-0 since

then after 14 ♗e4 ♗xc4 15 ♖xe4 f5! 16 ♖e2 ♗f6 Black has time to hinder the g4 advance. However, the plan of 14 ♗b1 followed by ♗e2 and g4 is still quite difficult to combat.

13 0-0-0! ♗e7 (D)

Having made the early challenge to White's centre, it may appear strange not to go for the immediate 13...cxd4?!, which might appear to enhance the f8-bishop's range of options. However, then White has the useful shot 14 ♗g6! and although Black can answer with 14...♗g8 with no imminent disaster, the simple 15 ♗xf8 ♗he1! ♖d7 17 ♖a3! ♗g6 18 ♗c3!, as in Motylev-Atalik, Lvov 1999, leaves him facing a strong attack and clearly missing his dark-squared bishop.



14 d5!?

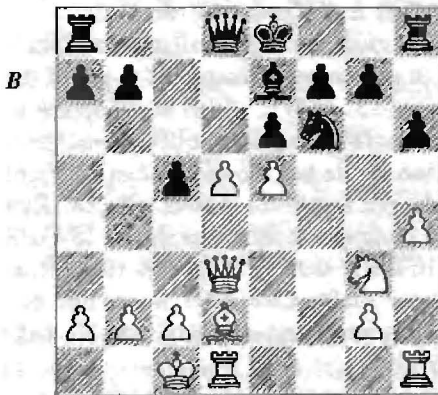
This extraordinary pawn sacrifice has in a fairly short time become the most feared line. It is no surprise that the f5-square, which White will gain whenever ...exd5 is the answer to such an offer, should prove excellent value. However, the consequences which flow from access to the h5-square when the knight captures were a revelation to many, myself included. At the time of writing it is far from clear how Black will strengthen his defence here.

14...♗xe5

There is apparently no safe reaction here. Black somehow got away with 14...♗xd5?! 15 ♗h5! ♗5f6 16 ♗xg7+ ♗f8 in Sandipan-Thej-kumar, Indian Ch, Visakhapatnam 2006, but 17 ♗xe6+! fxe6 18 ♗g6+ ♗f7 19 f5!, with ♖he1

and ♖c3 to add to the firepower, should really amount to a decisive attack.

15 fxe5 (D)



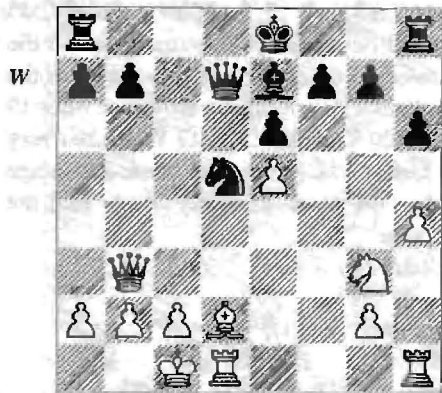
15...c4!?

An interesting 'counter-deflection sacrifice'. Black is looking to gain some time by capturing with his queen on d5 and hopes to improve his pieces by this opening of lines. Nonetheless, there is something just slightly desperate about the whole procedure and as we shall see, White is not even obliged to accept. It is certainly striking and very encouraging for White that his kingside attack is so powerful after 15...♞xd5 16 ♖h5! (a key square for the attack in this line and a reminder that here at last there were good grounds not to advance the h-pawn to h5!) 16...♙f8 17 ♖g3! g6, when 18 c4! gxh5 19 ♙c3 followed by cxd5 is horrible for Black.

16 ♖xc4

I prefer White after this thematic acceptance of Black's offer too, but I am really struck by quite how dangerous an attack White can whip up against the black king following just 16 ♖f3! too. After 16...♞xd5, 17 ♞hf1 0-0 18 ♖g4 ♖h7 19 ♖h5 g6 20 ♖f4 looks pretty tough on Black's defensive resources, as does 17 ♞df1! (trying to hold on to the h-pawn to prevent the defensive resource ...♙xh4-g5) 17...0-0 18 ♖g4 ♖h7, after which the spectacular 19 ♙xh6! gxh6 20 ♖h5 looks pretty nasty (20...♙g5+ 21 ♖b1!). If this idea holds up, then I suppose Black could prefer the move-order 14...c4, although in that case he also has to reckon with 15 ♖xc4!?

16...♞xd5 17 ♖a4+ ♖d7 18 ♖b3 ♖d5 (D)



This is the position at which Black's 'counter-sacrifice' aimed, so it is a good moment to take stock. As Golubev suggests in his notes for *Chess Today*, the position now resembles an Open Sicilian, and one in which White has quite a range of enticing ways to build an attack. As usual the move ...h6 has granted White a clear target for his g4-g5 advance, while the knight enjoys a choice of promising squares - e4 or h5 - from which to support this. Meanwhile, although in view of the half-open c-file the advance c4 should only be undertaken with some care, and Black may even be able to consider prevention by playing ...b5 himself, for the moment there is no guarantee that the happy position of the d5-knight will not be disturbed.

19 ♖e4! 0-0

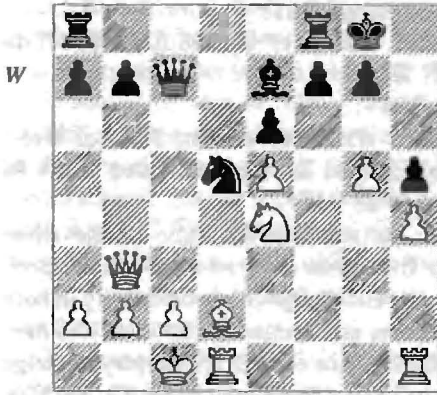
I wonder whether this is strictly essential. Of course the king will not be entirely safe on either e8 or c8 either, but declaring his hand so early does leave White in no doubt about his best plan. Having said that, it is probably the particular virtue of 19 ♖e4 that the alternative destinations for the king have been made less attractive. 19 ♖h5, for example, would have prevented 19...0-0? completely as 20 ♙xh6! is a devastating sacrifice. However, 19...0-0-0! might have been far more apposite in this case with the knight committed to the other wing.

20 g4! ♖c7 21 g5!

There is no need to waste time in preparation since 21...♞xe5 22 ♞de1! would threaten ♖f6+

and thus ensure serious damage to the pawns around Black's king.

21...h5 (D)



22 ♖f6+ ♙xf6 23 gxh6 g6

A typical trade-off between thematic attack and quality defence. Black has prevented the smashing of his kingside pawns, but only at the expense of permitting an open file with consequent dangers of a sacrifice on g6 in addition to the constant headache of a pawn wedged on f6 with consequent threats of landing a piece on g7. If this is the right piece, it will terminate proceedings! On the other hand, if he can survive, Black is well placed. His knight is further enhanced by this exchange of minor pieces and he may try to distract White from his attacking plans by making threats on the c-file (securing his knight at the same time). Nonetheless, if he can get organized, the smart money is on White.

24 ♖d1 ♖fc8 25 ♖e4!

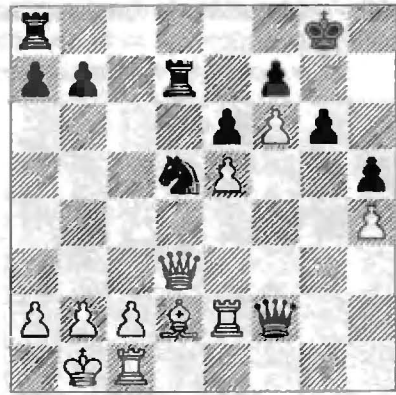
For all the reasons outlined above, White should be at great pains to avoid simplification. This strong move rules out 25...♙c4 and re-opens the possibility of later playing c4 to evict Black's best piece. Kicking this knight away is not purely defensive. It also opens up squares such as e3 for the white queen, which represent the most economical route towards the weakened black king.

25...♙c5 26 ♖b1 ♖c7 27 ♖c1 ♙f2! 28 ♙d3 ♖d7 29 ♖e2 (D)

29...♙xh4?!

Once White has covered c2 so effectively, I am prepared to believe that throwing the queen

B



into 'forward defence' was the most realistic practical strategy available. However, opening another file in this way seems a bit much. 29...♙f5 was more likely to slow White up. Even though 30 ♙xf5 exf5 might not be Black's preferred way to liquidate, almost any queen exchange is better than none at all here.

30 ♙f3 ♖c7?

The first clear consequence of grabbing h4 is that the g4-square is now out of bounds: if 30...♙g4? then 31 ♙xg4 hxg4 32 ♖h1! g3 33 ♙h6 ♖ad8 34 ♖c1! followed by ♙g7 is catastrophic. Nonetheless, it was imperative to run somewhere with the queen. 30...♙d4 31 c3! ♙c5 was relatively best, although here too 32 ♖h2! looks very dangerous.

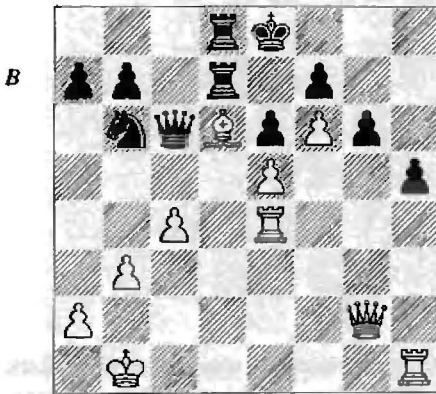
31 ♖h1?

By 31 ♖e4 ♙h2 32 ♙g5! threatening 33 ♖e2, the net would close in very suddenly on the incautious queen. The fast time-control probably took its toll in this phase.

31...♙c4 32 c3 ♖f8 33 ♖e4 ♙c6 34 c4 ♖b6 35 b3 ♖d8 36 ♙b4+ ♖e8 37 ♙d6 ♖cd7 38 ♙g2? (D)

Again there is a suspicion that time-trouble has intervened. Otherwise this major mistake is quite hard to explain. The last few moves have flowed pleasantly for White, who has evicted his opponent's once radiant minor piece and embedded his own on a key square. There may be an understandable reluctance to undo the first of these desirable processes, but the bishop now urgently needed supporting by 38 c5!. Once again granting the d5-square is a small price to pay for utterly engaging Black's rooks.

Now, for a small material investment, Black's pieces spring into life.



38...♞xd6! 39 exd6 ♠xd6 40 ♠he1 ♜d7 41 ♞g5 ♞c5 42 ♞h6?

White overestimates his position. It is nice to force the knight to f8, but sending the queen so far from the action gives Black's other pieces free rein.

42...♞f5! 43 ♞h8+ ♜f8 44 ♜c1 ♞g5+ 45 ♜b1 a5?

It would have been much stronger to seize the 7th rank with 45...♞d2!. Presumably Black saw ghosts after 46 ♠xe6+ fxe6 47 ♠xe6+ ♜d7, but if 48 ♞g7+ Black can safely capture the rook and escape via f5.

46 ♠e5 ♞d2 47 c5 ♠c6 48 ♠1e2 ♞f4?! 49 ♠5e4?! ♞f5?!

49...♞f1+!

50 ♜b2 ♞xc5 51 ♠c4 ♞h5 52 ♠ec2 ♞e5+ 53 ♜b1 ♞d5 54 ♠xc6 bxc6 55 ♜c1 ♞g5+ 56 ♜b1 c5 57 a3 h4?

With the self-imposed exile of the white queen, Black has enjoyed near-total control, safe in the knowledge of his superiority in both middlegame and endgame. However, this mistake allows White enough counterplay to oblige Black to force a perpetual check. 57...♞d5! or 57...♞e3! would have eliminated such irritating possibilities and sufficed for victory.

58 b4! ♞g3 59 bxc5 ♞b3+ 60 ♠h2 ♞d1+ 61 ♜a2 ♞d5+ 62 ♜b1 ♞d1+ 63 ♜a2 ½-½

A game filled with both interesting ideas and serious mistakes. However, the opening idea remains hugely important and is exerting substantial pressure on this variation.

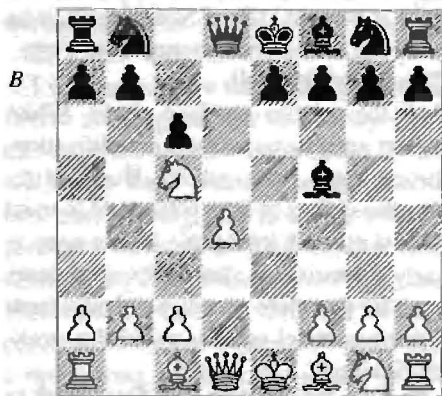
Game 4

Oleg Korneev – Robert Zelčić
European Ch, Warsaw 2005

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ♜c3 dxe4 4 ♜xe4 ♠f5 5 ♜g3

As I mentioned in Game 1, there is an interesting alternative in 5 ♜c5!?! (D), which has enjoyed a steady following as well as some high-powered regular devotees, such as the formidable Russian grandmaster Sergei Rublevsky. The move is best understood as a particularly distinctive positional approach. Conscious of the problems associated with provoking weaknesses in this opening, White hopes that Black's response to the threat against b7 will weaken some aspect of his hitherto rock-solid structure.

In fact, White performs quite well at that task, but sometimes at the cost of allowing his opponent more activity than we are accustomed to seeing after 4...♠f5. White has something to aim at after 5...b6 6 ♜b3 ♜f6 7 ♜f3 followed

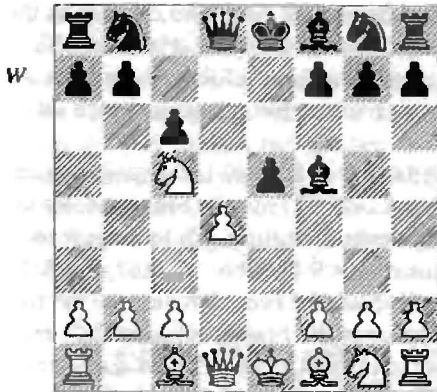


by g3 and ♠g2. It's not much, but Rublevsky's games provide an excellent model for making something of the slight weakness which ...b6

represents with the light-squared bishop already committed to f5.

Black can also try temporarily sacrificing the b-pawn with 5...♘d7 6 ♘xb7 ♖c7 7 ♘c5 ♘xc5 8 dxc5 ♜d8. Then 9 ♖e2?! is too 'purist', unjustifiably sacrificing development for structural nicety, and after 9 ♘d3 it looks as though Black should be able to recover the c5-pawn and inflict in turn on his opponent a weakness on d3. However, it is not so clear how Black should achieve this, for 9...e5 10 ♖e2 ♘xd3 11 cxd3 ♘xc5 12 ♘f3 forces the ugly ...f6 and creates potential new difficulties on the light squares, while 9...e6 10 ♘e3 still leaves doubt over the recovery of c5.

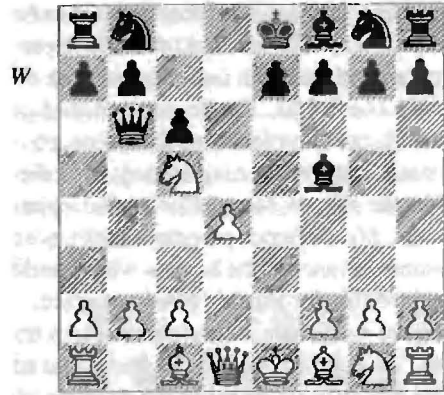
The combative 5...e5!?(D) is another way to seek active play at the expense of some structural concessions.



After 6 ♘xb7 ♖b6 7 ♘c5 exd4 8 ♘b3 ♘b4+ 9 ♘d2 ♘f6 10 ♘d3! ♘xd3 11 cxd3 0-0 12 ♘e2 c5 13 0-0 ♘xd2 14 ♖xd2 ♘bd7 15 ♘a5 ♜fe8 (Felgaer-Jobava, FIDE Knockout, Tripoli 2004) it does not feel as if Black should have real problems, but the c4-square and the c5-pawn do I suppose give something to aim at. White should also be ready for the tricky 6...♖e7, although I suspect that the pawn sacrifice 7 ♘a5 exd4+ 8 ♘e2 ♖b4+ 9 ♘d2! ♖xb2 10 ♘d3, meeting any ...♘b4 with the calm ♘f3, is really quite dangerous for Black.

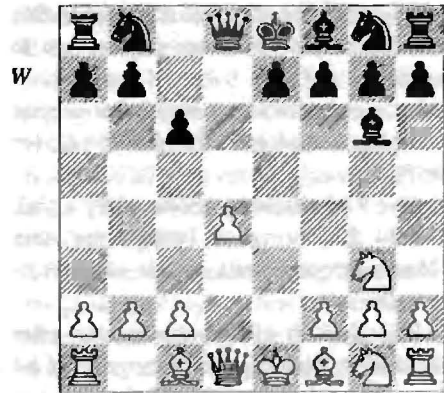
Black's best chance of avoiding weaknesses is to defend b7 with his queen. If 5...♖c7, White can try simply 6 ♘d3 ♘xd3 7 ♘xd3 with ♘f4 to come soon with a gain of tempo. 5...♖c8 looks a

bit passive, but is playable, while 5...♖b6 (D) would seem to be the best square if White just chooses to trade off the bishop on f5.



However, 6 g4!? has a rather more scary reputation. White's compensation for the pawn in Balogh-Gyimesi, Miskolc 2004 was quite attractive after 6...♘g6 7 f4 e6 8 ♖e2 ♘e7 (not 8...♘xc5 9 dxc5 ♖b4+ 10 c3 ♖e4 11 ♘e3! ♖xb1?! 12 ♘g2 ♖xb2 13 ♘xc6+) 9 h4 h5 10 f5! exf5 11 g5! ♘d7 12 ♘b3. Although the position is still a big mess, this technique for smothering both the black bishops is worth remembering, and the defender has tangible problems with his king since the queenside is no safe haven either. However, I am not aware that White has anything concrete after the passive 6...♘c8. My hunch is that he is not really going anywhere fast on the kingside here.

Now back to the main line 5 ♘g3.
5...♘g6 (D)



6 h4

So far, so familiar, although as we shall see, White's strategy in the current game, in contrast with Games 1-3, is to chase the bishop but not to exchange it. Arguably the text-move looks a slightly clumsy means to this end. An apparently more subtle version commences with either 6 $\text{Q}1\text{e}2$ or 6 $\text{Q}1\text{h}3$. The knight is indeed *en route* for f4, not in order to exchange on g6 – that is not a very threatening strategy as I discussed in the chapter introduction – but rather to prevent ...h6 and hence prepare a much more troublesome advance of the h-pawn which could spell real trouble for Black's pawn-structure.

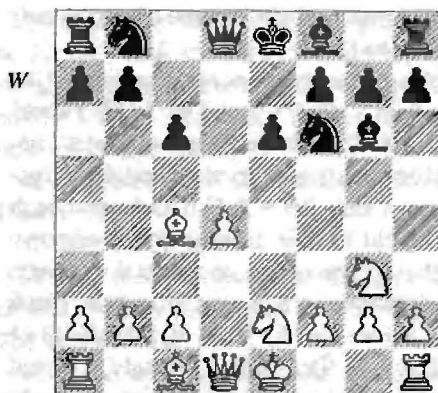
Black has two distinct antidotes. He can try 6... $\text{Q}1\text{f}6$ 7 $\text{Q}1\text{f}4$, when, faced with the threat of h4, there is a case for opening the centre with 7...e5!. The idea is to meet 8 dxe5 with 8... $\text{W}1\text{a}5+$ 9 c3 $\text{W}1\text{xe}5+$, when the open centre and Black's free development are likely to neutralize any advantage which the bishop-pair might represent, either with or without queens. In any case, any $\text{Q}1\text{xg}6$ will tend to strengthen Black's hold on f5. In Sutovsky-Jobava, European Clubs Cup, Rethymnon 2003, after 10 $\text{Q}1\text{e}2$ $\text{Q}1\text{bd}7$ 11 0-0 0-0-0 12 $\text{W}1\text{a}4$ $\text{Q}1\text{c}5$ White chose a different way to gain the bishop-pair but 13 $\text{Q}1\text{d}3$ $\text{Q}1\text{xd}3$ 14 $\text{Q}1\text{xd}3$ $\text{Q}1\text{b}6$ 15 $\text{W}1\text{c}2$ h5! also saw Black get a fair share of the active chances.

It is also possible to play 6...e6 7 $\text{Q}1\text{f}4$ $\text{Q}1\text{d}6$ so that in the event of 8 h4, Black has time to play 8... $\text{W}1\text{c}7$!?, when 9 $\text{Q}1\text{xg}6$ hxg6 10 $\text{Q}1\text{e}4$ $\text{Q}1\text{f}4$! is not dangerous and 9 h5 $\text{Q}1\text{xc}2$!, with the knight on f4 still attacked, is rather speculative. In fact, even 8... $\text{Q}1\text{xf}4$, with 9...h6 and then ... $\text{Q}1\text{f}6$ -d5 to come, is not so bad. Experience suggests that the bishop-pair is not at its most potent in this structure, a point to which we shall return in later notes.

Another way to initiate a somewhat similar plan is to play 6 $\text{Q}1\text{c}4$ e6 7 $\text{Q}1\text{e}2$ $\text{Q}1\text{f}6$ (D) (or 7... $\text{Q}1\text{d}6$!?).

The move 8 h4 would be answered by 8...h6, when 9 $\text{Q}1\text{f}4$ $\text{Q}1\text{h}7$ brings us back to the main game. However, there are a couple of interesting alternatives:

a) 8 $\text{Q}1\text{f}4$ $\text{Q}1\text{d}6$! 9 c3 is one way, but after 9... $\text{W}1\text{c}7$ 10 $\text{W}1\text{f}3$ $\text{Q}1\text{bd}7$ 11 0-0 (strangely, 11 h4 is one version of the idea which is hardly ever



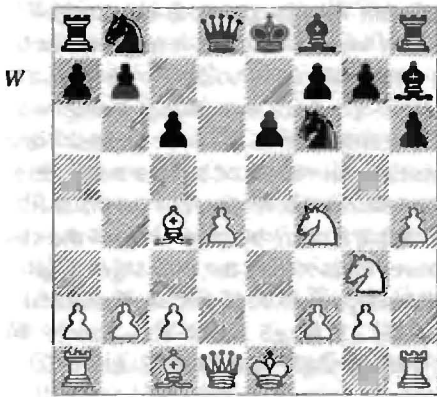
played; my hunch is that this is the moment for Black to strike in the centre with 11...e5! even though f7 is admittedly weakened a little – Black will stand well on the dark squares) 11... $\text{Q}1\text{b}6$ 12 $\text{Q}1\text{h}3$ $\text{Q}1\text{bd}5$ 13 $\text{Q}1\text{xg}6$ hxg6 14 $\text{Q}1\text{d}2$ 0-0-0 and Black may even have chances on the h-file and using the f4-square. However, White could at least check out 12 $\text{Q}1\text{xe}6$ here since the queen on c7 somewhat encourages such sacrifices.

b) After 8 0-0, 8... $\text{Q}1\text{d}6$ is the most popular reply, but 8... $\text{Q}1\text{bd}7$! may be better, at least for the purposes of meeting White's aggressive idea, since then 9 f4 $\text{Q}1\text{b}6$! 10 $\text{Q}1\text{d}3$ $\text{Q}1\text{xd}3$ 11 $\text{W}1\text{xd}3$ g6! should be enough to prevent the further advance of the f-pawn because 12 f5 exf5 13 $\text{Q}1\text{xf}5$ gxf5 14 $\text{Q}1\text{g}5$ h6! 15 $\text{Q}1\text{h}4$ $\text{Q}1\text{e}7$ should not be enough for the piece.

By way of contrast, there is also the unpretentious 6 $\text{Q}1\text{f}3$, which has already been referred to in the notes to Game 1. The problem is that after, for example, 6... $\text{Q}1\text{d}7$ 7 $\text{Q}1\text{d}3$, there is no need to capture since a later exchange of bishops on g6 will tend to improve both Black's king-safety and square coverage. Consequently a typical sequence runs 7... $\text{Q}1\text{g}6$ 8 0-0 e6 9 $\text{W}1\text{e}1$ $\text{Q}1\text{e}7$ 10 c4 0-0 11 $\text{Q}1\text{xg}6$ hxg6 and White sorely lacks any target, which in turn renders finding an effective plan quite a challenge.

6...h6 7 $\text{Q}1\text{h}3$ e6 8 $\text{Q}1\text{f}4$ $\text{Q}1\text{h}7$ 9 $\text{Q}1\text{c}4$ $\text{Q}1\text{f}6$ (D)
10 $\text{Q}1\text{fh}5$

A very interesting moment. White in effect declares his belief that a violent assault on e6 alone cannot bring success and switches attention to another potentially vulnerable spot on



Black's kingside, the g7-pawn. At least this way he hopes to keep the f8-bishop at home for a while. Compared with the attractions of trying to sacrifice on e6, there is a slightly artificial flavour to all this, but sadly for the assessment of the whole system, 10 ♖e2 can be safely answered by 10...♙d6, while 10 0-0 ♙d6 11 ♗xe6 fxe6 12 ♙xe6 is of course dangerous, but not fully sound. Botvinnik showed the right way back in 1960 against the greatest devotee of such attacking mayhem: 12...♙c7 (12...♗bd7 might be more accurate) 13 ♙e1 (13 ♗h5!?) 13...♗bd7! 14 ♙g8+ ♖f8 15 ♙xh7 ♗xh7 16 ♗f5 (D).



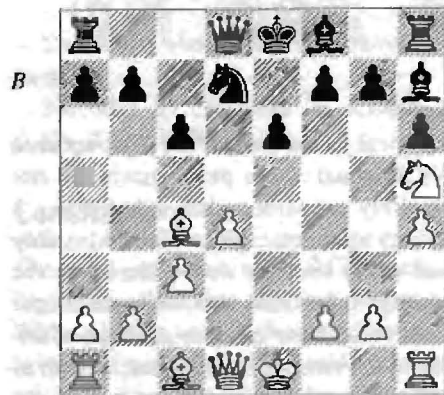
Now with 16...g6! 17 ♙xh6+ ♖g8 18 ♗xd6 ♗xd6! 19 ♙g5 ♙e7, Tal-Botvinnik, World Ch (game 9), Moscow 1960, Black deftly gives up a third pawn to nullify White's attacking prospects. White is far from lost, but he is still some way from the endgame where his three pawns

would have a far greater impact, and thus now rather on the defensive. This reference could be updated, but I rather doubt that there has been a more instructive demonstration of how to handle Black's position in the meantime.

10...♗bd7 11 e3 ♗xh5

In general Black is quite content to castle queenside here. So 11...♙g8!? was also worthy of consideration, since 12 ♙f4 can be well met with 12...♗d5! and it may even be that the white knight on h5 will begin to look a bit irrelevant.

12 ♗xh5 (D)



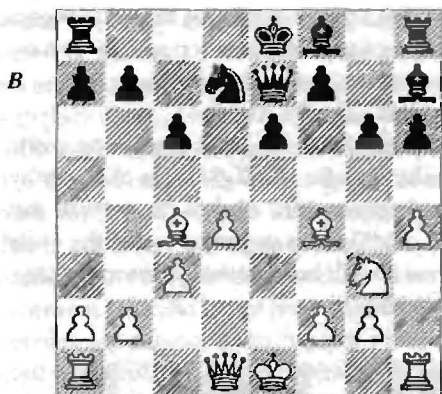
12...♙e7(!?)

Not a bad move in itself, but certainly I would argue that it transforms a relatively simple task into a complex one – with extra possibilities, but significant attendant dangers too. Of course, after 12...♗f6 13 ♙f4 ♗xh5 14 ♗xh5 ♙d6 15 ♙xd6 ♗xd6 the game would have been substantially less interesting and I probably would not be discussing it! However, Black must be very close to full equality there. Even the plan of a well-timed ...b5 and ...b4 should not be ruled out. The familiar weighing-up of activity against structural purity is involved as usual in selecting such a plan, but the bishop on h7 is an encouragement to look to the b-file for counter-chances.

13 ♙f4 g6!?

A crime against Black's light-squared bishop, his pride and joy? A few moves later we may have to conclude that, on the contrary it is, paradoxically, all in keeping with a rather clever plan to maximize his light-square control.

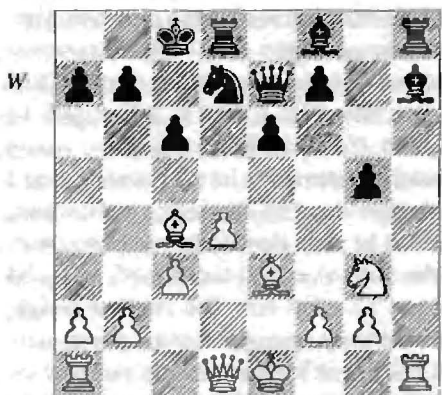
14 ♖g3 (D)



14...g5!?

The logical re-opening of the light-squared bishop's diagonal. Such pawn moves do not come entirely cost-free – Black is placing a high priority upon active pieces, but undeniably g5 could easily become weak. Moreover, the h-file, though it becomes an asset in the longer term, does complicate the defender's job of unravelling in the short term. However, hats off to Zelčić; this is enterprising stuff and he initially gives a good account of it in what is to come.

15 hxg5 hxg5 16 ♔e3 0-0-0 (D)

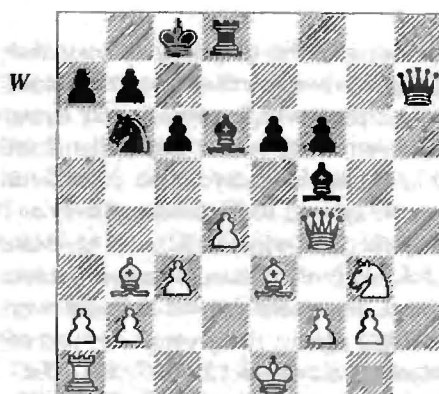


17 ♖g4

Rather bizarrely, this is the first new move of the game! In Varavin-Filipenko, Ufa 1999 White had tested 17 ♖h5! and obtained a very pleasant game immediately after the dubious 17...f6?! 18 ♖b3!, with every chance of forcing

his opponent into passivity. I suspect Zelčić would have known this, and it may be that he had in mind simply 17...♖b6!? 18 ♔d3 f6, when although there is nothing wrong with White's position, it is also not crystal clear what his next move should be. Furthermore, if Black can unravel from the pin on the h-file, which I think he can, he might regard the circumstances surrounding the exchange of light-squared bishops as more propitious than usual.

17...♔f5! 18 ♖xg5 f6 19 ♖f4 ♖xh1+ 20 ♖xh1 ♖h7 21 ♖g3 ♖b6 22 ♔b3 ♔d6! (D)



Black can make two plausible and optimistic claims about the flow of events. Firstly, he will get to cripple White's kingside pawns by exchanging on g3 since check on the 8th rank will rule out recapture by the queen. Secondly, this exchange enhances his prospects on the light squares in general and stabilizes his glorious bishop on f5 in particular. It is a shame that Black stumbles in a moment, since he had chances here of showing with rare vividness quite what a fine piece this bishop can be in the main-line Caro-Kann and how well motivated White may have been in Games 1-3 in exchanging it off!

23 ♖f3 ♔xg3! 24 fxg3 ♖d5?

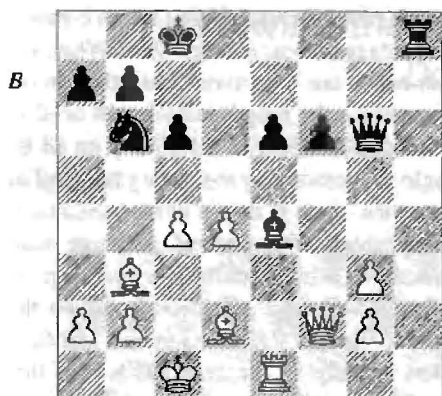
A pity. Black may have felt that the queenside was no water-tight haven for his opponent's king, but it turns out to have serious advantages over the centre. For this reason 24...♖g6! was the right way, exerting unpleasant pressure so long as the king remains on e1, and preparing to meet 25 0-0-0?! with 25...♔g4. It might be that

if White could get away with 26 ♖f1 ♟xd1 27 ♟xe6+ and retain his suddenly activated bishops, he would have no great cause for concern. However, in fact after 27...♞d7 28 ♖xd1 Black has the nasty shot 28...♞e4! forcing White to exchange on d7, after which the light squares will once more clearly be Black's domain, this time with a dark-squared bishop proving no match for his easily activated rook.

25 0-0-0! ♟e4?! 26 ♖f2 ♞g6 27 ♟d2 ♜h8 28 c4!

There is of course, for many players, much truth in the claim that it is easier to attack than defend. However, handling the kind of initiative which Black has enjoyed here is far from straightforward. A couple of inaccuracies and the once proud minor pieces begin to be driven back from their powerful squares.

28...♞b6 29 ♞e1 (D)



29...♞h2?

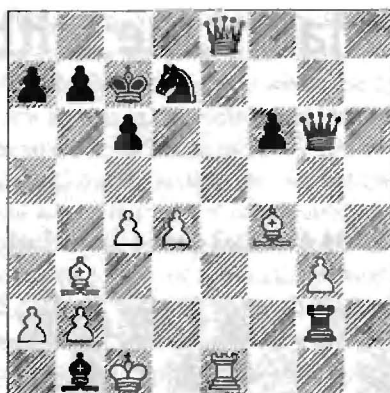
An overambitious move which gravely mis-assesses the flow of the play. It was time to settle down to defend with 29...♞d7.

30 ♖f4!

Superiority on the squares of one colour is often accompanied by inferiority on those of the other colour. In many cases the initiative may tend to disguise this, but when this is no longer the case then the consequences can be graphic.

30...♟b1 31 ♖d6 ♜xg2 32 ♖xe6+ ♞d7 33 ♖e8+ ♟c7 34 ♟f4+ (D)

B



The rest is slaughter and requires no comment.

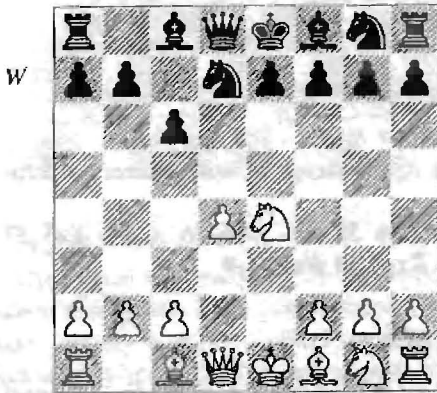
34...♟b6 35 c5+ ♟a6 36 ♟c4+ ♟a5 37 ♟d2+ ♜xd2 38 ♖xg6 1-0

Conclusion

The solid reputation of 4...♟f5 remains intact despite the fact that the fashion for inviting White's knight to e5 in the main lines (Game 3) is, with some justification, under a cloud. The minor lines in Game 4 may have the simple appeal of variety and a measure of potential entertainment, but from the theoretical point of view the main line here is such for the very good reason that White's h4-h5 plan really does help to carve out something to aim at. Black does not enjoy simple equality in either of the first two games in this chapter, but in both cases his position is quite playable and the choice between them is largely one of taste rather than objective merit. Those seeking sharper play will be attracted to castling kingside, although it is fair to say that those seeking a real dogfight should probably be looking elsewhere in the first place! However, a special mention is deserved for those ideas in Game 2 and more controversially perhaps even in Game 3, where Black tries to disrupt the smooth flow of his opponent's play by ...♟b4+ and related tries. These may well justify the recent attention lavished upon them and look like the most likely source of valuable and fresh ideas for the defence.

2 Main Line with 4...♞d7

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 dxe4 4 ♗xe4 ♞d7 (D)



Once the poor relation of 4...♞f5, this modest knight move, which appears to have solid intentions written all over it, was moulded into a highly respected system in the course of the 1980s and 1990s. It would be difficult to argue that, in essence, the variation was particularly ambitious. After all, its short-term goal is to ease development by the early trade of a pair of knights without creating any of the structural imbalance to be found in Chapter 3. Certainly, if White reacts appropriately aggressively, it can lead to very sharp play with plenty of counter-chances. However, those seeking a sharp game with 4...♞d7 need to be realistic. Though it may lead to fireworks, this is largely up to the opponent!

By simply preparing 5...♗g6 and not immediately 'engaging' with the white forces, Black's 4th move does permit his opponent an unusually wide degree of choice in terms of how to pursue his development. Perhaps the best way to categorize these options is in terms of how White will react to the arrival of the knight on f6:

a) He can simply exchange it off, settling for trying to make something out of a relatively modest spatial plus.

b) In the more ambitious lines, he is ready to accept what is potentially a slight misplacement of his e4-knight – whether played to g3 or g5 – for the prize of retaining a certain 'stymied' feel to Black's development. For if there is no exchange on f6, then a solution still needs to be found to the problem of the d7-knight and just where it is headed.

Black's great claim about this variation in comparison with the analogous line in the Rubinstein French (1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 dxe4 4 ♗xe4 ♞d7) is, as so often in the Caro-Kann, that the c8-bishop is not blocked by his e-pawn. This advantage is clear enough when White exchanges on f6, but if he avoids this, then in order to convince the sceptic, Black will need to show that the blocking of the bishop on c8 by his knight is a reasonably temporary matter. For these reasons, there is now a heavy concentration on approach 'b' in general. All three main games here see White avoiding the exchange on f6 and there will be a particular focus on the tactical and tricky 5 ♗g5! (Games 5 and 6).

It was already in the mid-1980s that this awkward customer hit the scene and there were some embarrassing early moments for the defence before the safe handling of at least the next few moves became well worked-out. The point is that not only Black's development is an issue in this position, but also the potential weakness of the f7-square (and through this the possibility of sacrifices on e6 or f7 itself). Of course there are compensations. If Black negotiates the next few moves successfully, then when the g5-knight is subsequently attacked it is likely to have no more exciting option than retracing its steps back to e4. The question then is whether the slight loss of time this entails outweighs the concessions which White is able to elicit along the way. The heavy preference of top grandmaster practice for this move at

present suggests that it probably does. There is no doubting either that it was this concentration which did for a time lead to something of a crisis of confidence in the line, although I am in no doubt that 4...♟d7 must be fundamentally sound. The centrepiece of this line (featured especially in Game 6) is a set of rather complex positions in which the white queen forces the misplacement of the black king, but at some cost to her own comfort. The mutual slight misfortune of these pieces ensures that such positions are never dull, but again require a careful handling which needs to be more than usually well rehearsed.

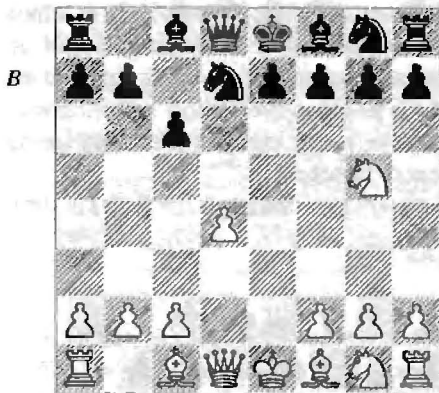
Some readers may be surprised to see two games with such similar opening moves in a relatively short section. But in this book I am

seeking to explain the opening with the help of contemporary top-level practice and so far as 4...♟d7 is concerned, this is where the top players are almost exclusively concentrated. Lines with an early exchange on f6 are covered in the notes to Game 7, but these are in the main negotiable with a fair degree of common sense. By contrast, trying to rely on common sense when faced with 5 ♟g5, or indeed the related idea of 5 ♟c4 ♟gf6 6 ♟g5 (Game 7) from which it sprung, would be fraught with danger. In the latter case too there is an obvious piling-up on f7 and e6 (made more explicit when 6...e6 is met with 7 ♟e2!) which needs to be carefully handled. However, here too, with initial alertness and a degree of subtlety later on, Black's position looks quite viable.

Game 5

Viswanathan Anand – Viktor Bologan
Dortmund 2003

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ♟c3 dxe4 4 ♟xe4 ♟d7 5 ♟g5! (D)



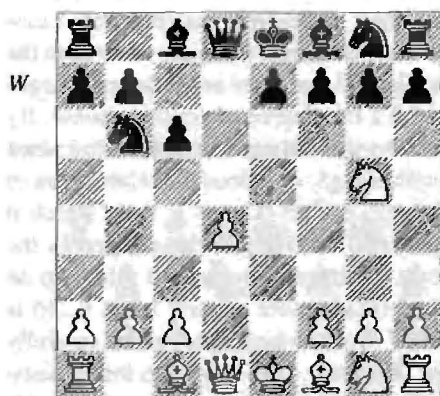
Virtually unknown until about 20 years ago, this move has in recent years almost totally dominated developments after 4...♟d7 among the world's top players. The temporary weakness of Black's kingside which the move aims to exploit becomes a little more tangible when it is observed that 5...h6? fails rather dramatically to 6 ♟e6!. As we shall see, this vulnerability on the

h5-e8 diagonal is more than just a one-trick wonder!

5...♟g6

There has from time to time been a temptation, given that White has 'pre-emptively side-stepped' an exchange on f6 in this way, to cover e6 and free the c8-bishop with 5...♟df6. The move looks a bit unnatural and it is possible that the g8-knight will suffer. Nonetheless, the idea of continuing development with ...♟d6 and ...♟e7 has some merit. However, concretely after 6 ♟c4 e6 7 ♟1f3 ♟d6, Bezdgodov's suggestion 8 ♟e5!, recommended in *The Opening for White According to Anand (3)*, seems to pose some serious problems. The nice point is that after 8...♟xe5 9 dxe5, neither 9...♟a5+ 10 ♟f1! ♟xe5?! 11 ♟d8+! ♟xd8 12 ♟xf7+, winning back the queen with the bishop-pair and structural advantages, nor 9...♟xd1+ 10 ♟xd1 ♟g4 11 ♟e1 ♟xf2+ 12 ♟e2 ♟g4 13 ♟f3 leaves an easy task for the defence, although in the latter case 13...h5! (or 13...h6!?) might be more resilient than 13...♟h6?! 14 g4!, when White has a massive bind and can utilize the d6-square almost at leisure.

I am also sceptical about the similarly artificial $5... \text{♟b6}$ (D).



The problem is that after 6 ♟f3 the intended development of the c8-bishop turns out to be scarcely viable – $6... \text{♟g4?}$ rather blatantly due to 7 ♟xf7! and 8 ♟g5+ , $6... \text{♟f5}$ less obviously but utilizing the same motif as 7 g4! . ♟g6 8 ♟e5 yields White a handy initiative. Developing this piece is really the *raison d'être* of Black's 5th move. Without this he is reduced to ideas such as $6... \text{♟g6}$, but it is no wonder that immediate aggression with 7 h4! is powerful given that, as so often, $7... \text{h6}$ is still well met by 8 ♟xf7! ♟xf7 9 ♟e5+ , in fact with a second deadly sacrifice on g6 in the offing.

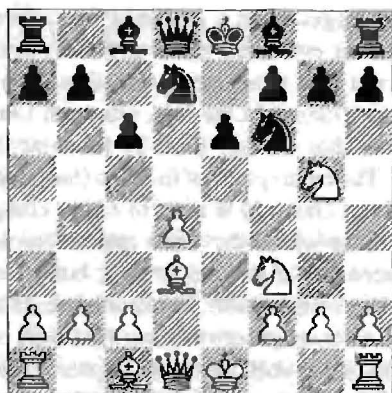
Lastly, having considered moves which promote the development of the c8-bishop prior to playing $... \text{e6}$, it is worth, by way of contrast, considering the move $5... \text{e6}$ without further delay. This looks passive and to an extent it is. However, there is one argument for it in that after 6 ♟d3 $\text{♟e7!?$ 7 ♟f3 h6 the sacrifice on e6 is not viable here. However, after 8 ♟e4 ♟g6 $9 \text{ ♟e2!?$ this looks like a Rubinstein Variation of the French, and not an especially enticing one for Black.

6 ♟d3 e6 7 ♟f3! (D)

$7... \text{♟d6!}$

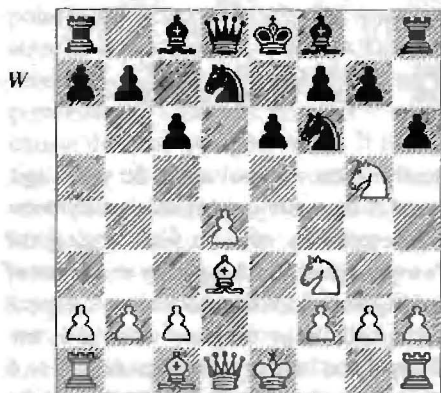
It took a while to establish this as clearly the safest move. There are very many related positions in which Black intends to castle kingside and in which this bishop is generally thought to belong on e7 and perhaps this threw players

B



off the scent. In any case, the alternatives are not attractive here. $7... \text{♟e7}$ is a move I remember vividly from the game Z. Almasi-Kumaran, Kopavogur 1994. This entered folklore as a couple of spectators felt sure that after 8 ♟e2 h6 they caught White sneak a confident glance at his watch before playing the powerful sacrifice 9 ♟xe6! . In fact after $9... \text{fxe6}$ 10 ♟g6+ ♟f8 11 0-0 ♟b6 12 ♟e5 ♟g8 his $13 \text{ a4?!$ was somewhat inaccurate and as Almasi pointed out in his notes 13 c4! (restricting Black's knight) $13... \text{♟d7}$ 14 ♟e3 ♟e8 15 ♟c2 would have been much more convincing. This is the first of several piece sacrifices we shall see in which White's compensation is certainly bound up with the poor position of the black king, but the defender's plight is one of slow suffering with very passive minor pieces rather than facing some quick knockout.

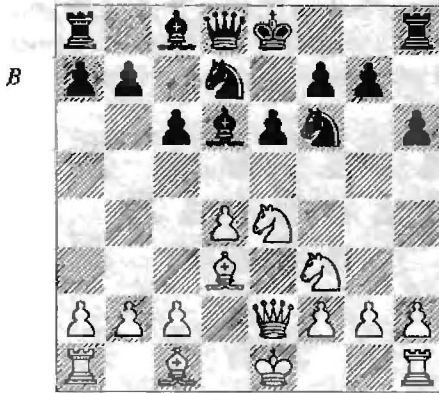
The highly provocative $7... \text{h6?!}$ (D) is similarly risky.



This move acquired far greater infamy than is usually the fate of far worse moves when Garry Kasparov shocked expert opinion by essaying it and being duly slaughtered in the final game of his match with Deep Blue in 1997. Again, the sacrifice is the problem. After 8 dxe6 fxe6 (8...e7 was Kasparov's choice, but it is even worse after 9 0-0 fxe6 10 g6+ d8 11 f4 since the queen is also very badly placed on e7) 9 g6+ e7 10 0-0 c7 11 e1 d8! is similar to the sacrifice we saw earlier in the note. Black does not face immediate threats and indeed after 12 c4 b4! 13 c2 f8 he is even managing some basic coordination. However, after 14 e2 followed by e5 or even instead the immediate 12 e5!? there should be no doubt that Black's passivity offers full value for the piece.

8 e2 h6 9 e4 (D)

9 dxe6?! no longer makes sense since after 9...fxe6 10 g6+ e7 followed by ...f8 Black is relatively well organized.



9...dxe4 10 e4 c7

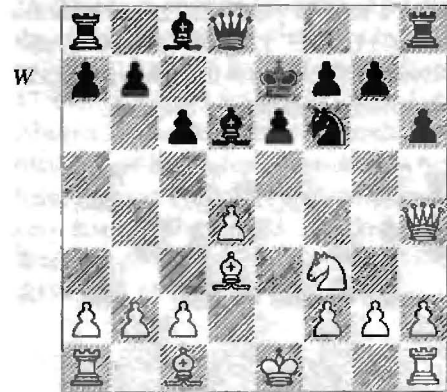
This is the most popular choice among the top-flight players, despite the fact that White has a choice of ways to use the possibility of e4 to force a concession. However, there are other moves, notably the natural 10...d7, which, while not by any means the panacea it might appear to be at first sight, does at least offer chances of a simpler and quieter life. We shall consider:

a) 10...c5 implements Black's principal pawn-break immediately, but as so often in this

line it is his ability to find safety for his king which will determine whether this is a sound idea. After 11 0-0 f6 it does render 12 h4! a better move than in 'b' below and after 12...cxd4 13 e1 d7 14 dxd4 a5 15 e3 g5!? 16 h3 0-0-0 it still seems that Black's king is not entirely happy. After Lautier's suggestion 17 b3 a4 18 d4 e5 19 f3!, while Black's position is reasonably active, it also feels rather loose.

b) After 10...f6 White can choose between:

b1) 11 h4 looks natural, but has found fame principally as a consequence of Anatoly Karpov's marvellously imaginative response 11...e7! (D).

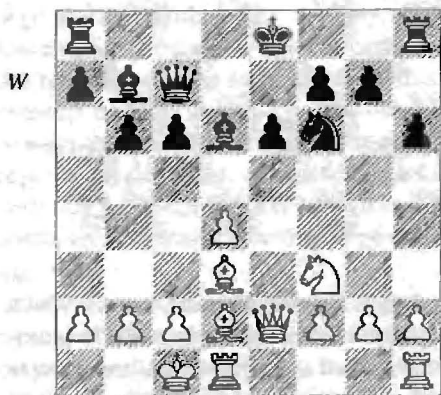


This might be one of those moves which once explained look terribly plausible. In a variation I have billed as frequently boiling down to a battle between the respective vulnerabilities of the white queen and the black king, this move provides a particularly vivid example. Black is connecting his back rank by radical means and the consequent threat of 12...g5 needs to be taken very seriously.

In fact this is not so simple. 12 f4 scores very badly after 12...b4+! 13 d2 xd2+ since, if White recaptures with the knight he wins d4 directly with 14...g5, while if he takes with the king, 14...g5! and 15...g4 also leaves White short on compensation. The best move is 12 e5!, sacrificing a pawn in an altogether more promising manner. After 12...xe5 13 dxe5 a5+ 14 c3 xe5+ 15 e3 b6 (to control

the c5-square as much as to fianchetto the bishop) 16 0-0-0 g5 17 ♖h3! c5 18 ♜he1 ♙b7 19 ♙c4! White exerts maximum pressure along the open files in the centre and has managed to build threatening pressure against e6 as well as on the dark squares. However, 19...♗e4!? strikes me as an appealing organization of the defence. This is not so much to meet 20 f3 with 20...♗f2?! since 21 ♙xf2 ♖f4+ 22 ♙e3 ♖xc4 23 ♖g3! ♙d5 24 ♖c7+ ♗f6 25 f4! is a useful reminder that with king safety an issue, the opposite-coloured bishops may be a more potent factor in support of an attack even than the bishop-pair. Rather it is 20...♗d6! which appeals, hitting the bishop and gaining a tempo for 21...♙ad8, with reasonable defensive chances.

b2) 11 ♖e2!? is more solid and offers fair chances of a modest plus. The critical position arises after 11...♖c7 12 ♙d2 (12 0-0 is also quite playable) 12...b6 13 0-0-0 ♙b7 (D), reaching an interesting moment of decision.

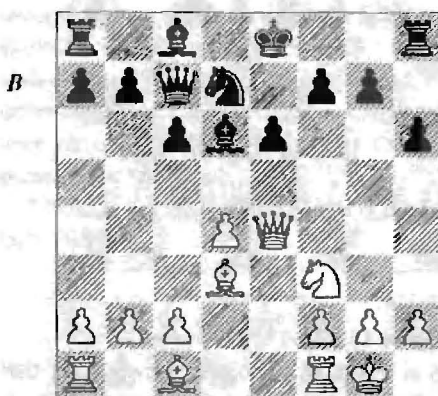


White can just head for a quiet life with 14 ♗b1 0-0-0 and now either 15 ♙a6!? hoping to show that the exchange of light-squared bishops leaves Black's king rather exposed once the play opens up, or simply 15 c4, meeting 15...c5 with 16 ♙c3 followed by ♜he1, keeping reasonable control of the central squares. However, with 14 ♗e5!? White can effectively provoke immediate complications, since 14...0-0-0?! 15 f4! nicely entrenches the knight on a good square. So 14...c5 is indicated, producing after 15 ♙b5+ ♗e7 16 dxc5! another position in which the black king's position is a major

feature. 16...♙xc5? 17 cxb6 ♖c5 18 ♖xe5!, with ♙b4+ to come, is the elegant tactical justification, while the superior 16...♖xc5 is met by the neat 17 a3!, threatening ♙b4 with the same tactical defence of e5 in play (though not 17 ♙c6?! ♙ac8!). After 17...♙d5 18 ♗b1 ♖c7 19 f4, for example, White has fair attacking chances. However, Black can also consider 16...bxc5!? since 17 ♗c4 can be effectively met with 17...♙f4!.

11 0-0!? (D)

In the early days of this variation, 11 ♖g4 was an almost automatic response. However, once it appeared that White could probably expect to misplace his opponent's king after the text-move too – a realization in which the current game played a pivotal role – there were definite attractions in first encouraging Black to play ...b6. Whilst it is generally a useful move, it is perhaps not as universally desirable as castling is for White and hence the trade-off has promise from White's perspective. In fact, the direct 11 ♖g4 retains a following, but since 11...♗f8! is the best reply, as is 12...♗f8! after 11 0-0 b6 12 ♖g4, there are enough similarities to deal with these together under Game 6.



11...b6

Bearing in mind potential transpositions with the note about 11 ♖g4 in Game 6, there might seem to be a case for 11...c5. However, after the flexible 12 ♜e1! it is hard to develop without 12...♗f6, when the queen is again rather optimally placed on h4. After 13 ♖h4 ♙d7, 14 ♗e5 cxd4 15 ♖xd4 ♙c6 16 ♗xc6 bxc6 17 ♖h4 ♗e7

18 g3 left White standing well in terms of piece activity, king position and structure in Kveinys-Speelman, Bled Olympiad 2002, while Negi recently chose 14 dxc5 ♖xc5 15 ♙e3, which is also simple and strong.

12 ♖g4! g5?!

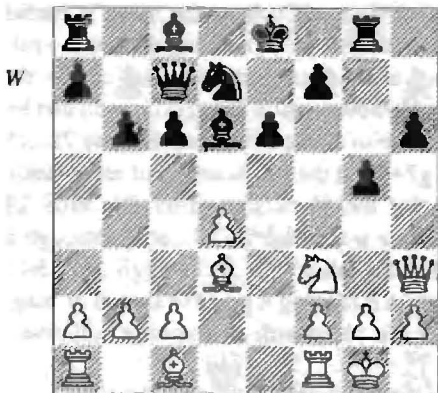
It is perhaps only slightly frivolous to say of this move that the only problem with it is that it doesn't work. Black's motivation is clear enough; he wants to keep the option of castling queenside, while exploring the potential of the ...g5 move to exacerbate the problems faced by the queen on g4. Prior to Anand's fireworks, the move was acquiring some respectability, but as a consequence it has all but died out.

For 12...♙f8!, see Game 6.

13 ♖h3!

Clearly best. White meets the threat of ...♙f6 followed by ...g4 and simultaneously attacks the g5-pawn.

13...♙g8! (D)



Black in turn defends g5 with a dual-purpose response. The g-pawn is also given new purpose with the threat of ...g4 requiring attention. Meanwhile, the h-pawn is immune to capture as 14 ♖xh6?? ♙f8 15 ♖h5 ♙f6 forces 16 ♖h3, when 16...g4 wins a piece.

14 ♙e1!

A superb tactical solution to what is essentially an issue of maintaining momentum. Other moves have varying merit. 14 ♙h7 probably aims at no more than a draw after 14...♙h8 15 ♙d3 and might even run into trouble against 14...g4!? 15 ♖xh6 ♙f8 16 ♖f4 ♖x4 17 ♙xf4

gxf3 18 ♙xg8 fxg2 19 ♖xg2 ♙f6 20 ♙xf7+ ♖xf7, when the material balance is reasonable but Black's light-squared bishop looks a particularly good minor piece to have. 14 ♙d2 is more interesting and had previously been the focus of much attention, but while positionally worthy it is also less punchy. Compared with 11 ♖g4 g5?! (see Game 6), Black benefits from being a tempo nearer to castling queenside since even in this quieter treatment his king safety is the main issue.

14...♙f8

This was best according to Anand, although it has not repeated by any of 14 ♙e1's more recent 'victims'. Black defends h6 at least and thus once more threatens ...g4, although whether he convincingly defends against the other threat of 15 ♙xe6+ is open to question. That this is a threat at the moment is confirmed by the devastating 14...♙b7? 15 ♙xc6+ fxe6 16 ♖xe6+ ♙f8 17 ♖xh6+ ♙g7 18 ♙c4! of Kovaliov-Ushenina, Alushta 2003. Meanwhile, although Black has tried 14...g4 here a few times, no one has challenged Anand's excellent analysis or his conclusion that 15 ♖xh6 gxf3 16 ♙xe6+! fxe6 17 ♖xe6+ ♙e7 18 ♖xg8+ ♙f8 19 ♙g6+ ♙d7 20 ♙f5+ ♙e8 21 ♙h6!! (D) is strong.



Indeed Black has always lost trivially from here with 21...♙xf5?. For example, V.Ivanov-Bachin, Moscow 2005 ended 22 ♙e1! ♙d7 23 ♙xe7+! ♖xe7 24 ♖g7+ ♙d8 25 ♖xf8+ ♙d7 26 ♖xf5+ 1-0. In fact, as again Anand points out, 21...♖d6! does put up a bit more resistance. However, after 22 ♙xf8 ♙xf8 23 ♙e1+

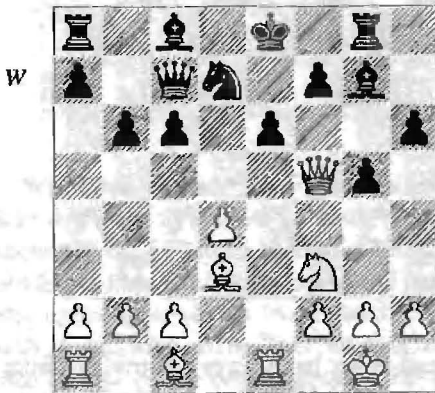
♙d8 24 ♖f7 ♕e7 25 ♖xc8 ♗xc8 26 ♖xf3 it is beyond dispute that the four pawns, three of them passed and united, are heavy favourites against Black's piece.

15 ♖f5

Quite a modest continuation compared with the fireworks of the last note. White prevents ...g4 and also prepares an assault against the g5-pawn, reminding us that even in this adventurous era such moves as Black's 12th still come at a positional price. However, it is an interesting question as to whether at a theoretical level 15 ♗xc6+!? would have been more convincing. The intention is to meet 15...♙d8 with 16 ♗xh6!, preparing to cede a modest amount of material in exchange for making a real mess of Black's kingside pawns. The hopelessness of 16...♙xh6 17 ♖xh6 is not hard to assess, and after Anand's 16...♘e5 (also 16...♙f6 17 ♕f5 g4 18 ♖h4 ♙xh6 19 ♙xh6 gxf3 20 ♖xf6+ ♖e7 21 ♖xc6 and although Black can capture with check on g2, his king remains the worse of the two), the reply 17 ♖g3 looks good for White.

Fascinating variations indeed (and they are only the tip of the iceberg) but it seems reasonable not only to conclude that Anand made the right practical choice but also that it probably remains the appropriate one for most purposes.

15...♙g7 (D)



16 h4!

Sacrifices are for the moment off the agenda now that Black's king has the f8-square. However, they still play a role. 16...gxf4 would now

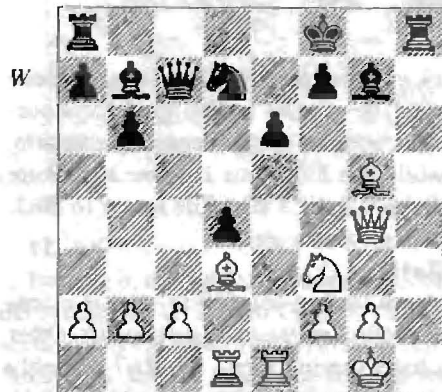
lose for precisely that reason as 17 ♕f4 ♖d8 18 ♗xe6+ wins with the bishop poised to enter on d6.

16...♙f8 17 ♖h3

The queen can retreat, with the job of unblocking the h-pawn performed and the opponent's bishop on g7 hindering the influence of its own rook. However, even in this variation no longer seen as playable for Black, there is still a sense that White's queen is potentially vulnerable. Certainly 17 ♗xe6? ♘c5! is asking for too much. In general, one of the virtues of White throwing in the moves 11 0-0 b6 is the slight weakness of e6, which can become a good deal pronounced once ...♙b7 is played. So long as it is not, White's queen should proceed with caution.

17...♗h8! 18 hxf5 hxf5 19 ♖g4 c5 20 ♙xg5 cxd4 21 ♗ad1! ♙b7?! (D)

Very much as described in the previous note. It can be taken as an indication that all is not well when ...b6 is fine but such a natural corollary is not appropriate. Of course the move is useful both in itself and for connecting the rooks – ruling out, as it does, the important ♕e7+ resource. However, while 21...♘c5 is well met by 22 ♕f4 due to the neat tactical response 22...e5 23 ♖xg7+! and the implications of an invasion on d6 for the black king after 22...♖d8 23 ♖g3!, there was a case for 21...a6!? although it does nothing about 22 ♕e7+ ♙g8 23 ♙h4!, once again arranging a positive switch of diagonal for this piece with an enduring initiative.



22 ♗xe6!!

The start of a glorious combination which marks this game out as something of a modern classic.

22...fxe6 23 ♖e7+! ♜xc7 24 ♚xg7+

Forcing the king to the d-file, when the quality of 21 ♖ad1 as a preparatory move will come to speak for itself.

24...♜d6 25 ♜xd4 ♚c5 26 ♖f5

There was an even quicker solution with 26 ♜b5+! ♜c6 and the admirably restrained 27 ♖e2!, but the text-move also offers precious little by way of respite.

26...♚e5

26...exf5 27 ♜b5+ ♜e6 28 ♚xd7+ ♜f6 29 ♖d6+ is also crushing.

27 ♜f3+ ♚d5 28 ♚g3+ ♜e7 29 ♖xd5 ♖xd5 30 ♚g5+ ♜d6 31 ♚f4+ ♜e7 32 ♖e4

White has both a material advantage and a powerful continuing initiative.

32...♖h5 33 ♜h4 ♖g8 34 ♜g6+ ♜d8 35 ♚f7 ♖e8 36 ♖d3 1-0

Black has all but run out of reasonable moves. After 36...♖c6 37 c4! it would be very difficult to offer any further advice.

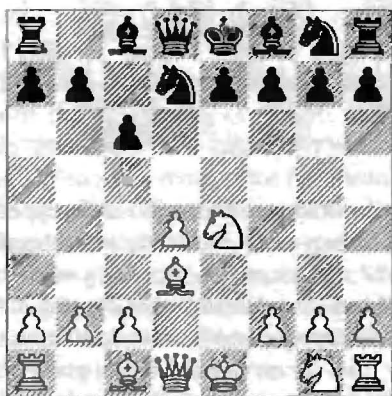
Game 6

Igor Nataf – Jean Pierre Le Roux

French Ch, Val d'Isère 2004

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ♜d2 dxe4 4 ♜xe4 ♜d7 5 ♖d3!? (D)

B



5...dxf6

White's 5th move is often seen as quite interchangeable with 5 ♜g5, but it has never been as frequently played. This might be because 5 ♜g5 practitioners live in hope of such blunders as 5...h6?, but the possibility of meeting 5 ♖d3 with 5...dxf6!? could be a reasonable theoretical explanation too. This apparently awkward development – which could risk leaving the g8-knight without an apparent role – might prove sound if the pawn sacrifice 6 ♜g3 ♚xd4 does not, as I suspect, result in full compensation for White.

6 ♜g5 e6 7 ♜f3 ♖d6 8 ♚e2 h6 9 ♜e4 ♜xe4 10 ♚xe4 ♚c7 11 0-0

Game 5 hopefully served as a good introduction to the potency of this apparently unpretentious developing move. However, since the validity of Black's decision to keep his knight on d7 lies in his ability to cope with the attack on his g7-pawn, the older move 11 ♚g4!? (D), which dominated this line's early years, clearly deserves a mention.

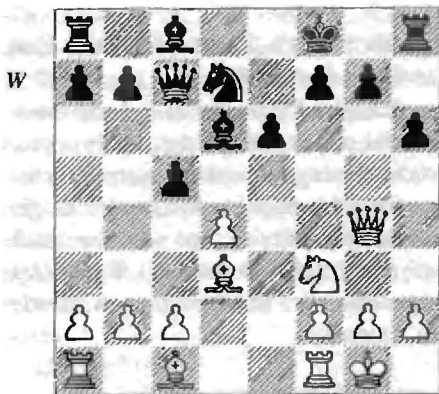
B



Here too there is general suspicion regarding the ambitious 11...g5?!, although the response has none of the drastic brutality seen in Game 5. After the analogous 12 ♚h3 ♖g8 White does best to settle for 13 ♜d2!, when 13...♖f8 14

♖e4 is a pleasant positional plus, whilst after the sharper 13...g4?!, 14 ♖h5 might be a solid response but 14 ♖xh6!? ♕f4 15 ♖h7 ♖f6 16 ♖h4 ♕g5 17 ♖g3 ♕f4 18 ♖h4 ♕g5 19 ♖g3 ♕f4 20 ♖e4! is also a promising way to avoid Black's attempts to force a draw. White gets a strong attack after 20...♗xg3 21 ♖xf6+ ♖d8 (21...♗f8? 22 ♕h6+ ♖g7 23 hxg3 was immediately decisive in Nebolsina-Dmitrenko, Serpukhov 2004) 22 hxg3 ♖f8 23 ♕h6. It is not totally clear after 23...♖e7, but I still fancy White's excellent active pieces to deliver.

Hence, the main focus of attention has been on 11...♗f8 and the claim implicit in Black's play that the queen on g4 can be every bit as awkwardly placed as his own king. After 12 0-0 c5!? (D) White has various tries:

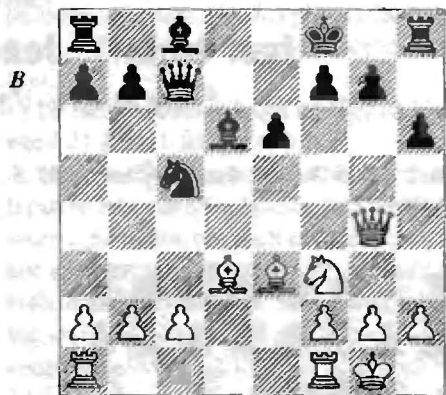


a) 13 ♖h4 raises interesting questions. For one, this is a rare moment where 13...c4!? comes into consideration since the bishop has only e2 rather than the more harmonious c2 or f1 to retreat to. Indeed after 14 ♕e2 b5 15 a4!? b4 White has tended to play 16 ♕xc4!?, tactically justified by the mate on d8, but subject to 16...g5! 17 ♖e4 ♕b7 18 ♖e2 g4 with good compensation. The real issue would appear rather to be 16 ♖d2!?, when Black does indeed look over-extended. So Black should probably prefer 13...b6 14 ♕e4!? ♖b8!?! (the exchange of light-squared bishops deflects the queen and probably reduces Black's counter-chances) 15 ♖d1 c4 (Black could be vulnerable on the d-file here) 16 d5 e5! 17 ♕f5 ♗g8 18 ♕e3 ♖f6 19 ♕xc8 ♖xc8 20 a4 ♖d7 21 c3 ♖c7 22 ♖d2 ♖g4

23 h3 ♖xe3 24 fxe3 f5. when his king will find safety and c4 remains indirectly but effectively defended, Timman-Galkin, Hoogeveen 2000.

b) Neither does 13 b3 seem terribly problematic for Black here as he can strike immediately with 13...e5!. It is true that this move tends to risk some weakness on f5, which 14 dxc5 ♖xc5 15 ♕f5 seeks to exploit, but 15...h5 16 ♖h3 ♖e6 (or even 16...e4) does not look too problematic for Black.

c) Perhaps it is 13 dxc5 ♖xc5 14 ♕e3 (D), a relatively recent addition to White's repertoire, which packs the most punch.

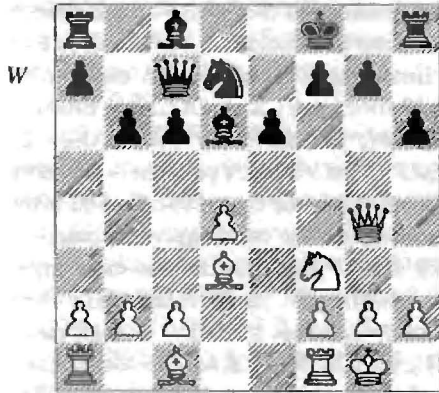


It looks strange to permit the exchange of the healthy bishop on d3, especially when this piece covers h7, a key square in securing a safer future for the black king. However, the opening of files is also treacherous for Black while his rooks are still far from connecting and the knight was also a strong defensive piece which can be missed. After 14...♖xd3 15 cxd3, 15...e5?! seems to court trouble since the e-pawn itself becomes a target after 16 ♖e4, while Black also needs to beware of granting his opponent a new and disruptive d4 pawn-break. However, 15...♕d7!? seems relatively solid. White can create significant complications through 16 ♖ac1 ♕c6 17 ♖d4 ♕xh2+ 18 ♖h1 ♕e5 19 b4! but while after 19...h5! White can force a draw with 20 ♖xe6+ fxe6 21 ♖xe6 ♖d8! 22 ♕c5+ ♕d6 23 ♖c4 ♕xc5 24 ♖xc5 ♖h6 25 ♖f5+, etc., it is not clear that he objectively has more. Moreover, it is not clear to me why Black cannot politely decline the challenge and pursue development with 14...b6. All

in all, White's tendency as in the main game to seek the same position with ...b6 substituted for ...c5 seems broadly well justified.

11...b6 12 ♖g4 ♕f8! (D)

Wisely avoiding all the entertainment of Game 5. Whilst there is no denying that the position of the king can prove a long-term headache, this is nonetheless clearly the safer move.



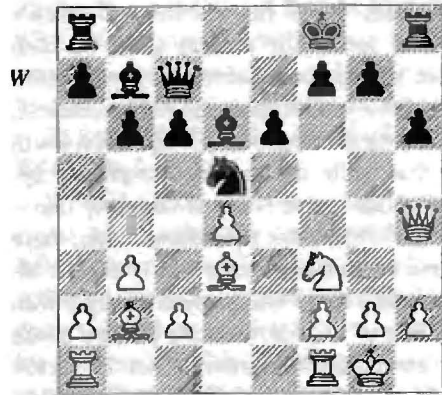
13 b3!

This is the move which, in my opinion, best exploits the inflexibility of 11...b6. White assumes that Black will subsequently need the move ...c5 to make sense of the fianchetto of his light-squared bishop, but this will in turn open the diagonal from b2 to g7. Whereas most alternatives bear great similarity to the note about 11 ♖g4, White's fianchetto was much less effective there with the ...c5 break already achieved.

13...c5

This move raises issues of timing as well as the whole question of whether opening the long diagonal for White is just too risky. The principal alternative is 13...♞b7 14 ♞b2 ♞f6 15 ♖h4 and now instead of 15...c5 transposing to the game, Black can try 15...♞d5! (D).

This continues to target the opponent's queen, keeping the long dark-square diagonal closed and reintroducing the possibility of ...g5. Black is also clearly interested in f4 as a square for his knight. However, the intention to advance his kingside pawns tends to show that while he is avoiding one set of risks, he will be obliged to take on another. White can immediately try 16 ♞e5, but Black has done OK with the seemingly



almost reckless 16...g5!? 17 ♖g4 f5!?. The point is that the sacrifice 18 ♞xf5 is far from clear when Black flicks in the exchange 18...♞xe5! before recapturing. 18 ♖g3 is playable, but then probably 18...♞xe5! is safe enough with e5 blocking the b2-bishop and a good square still beckoning on f4 for Black's knight. Hence there is a case for the more patient 16 ♞e1!? ♞f4 and now either 17 ♞e5 or simply 17 ♞ad1. The former was Anand's recent choice, but I am a bit uncertain why 17...♞xe5 (17...♞xd3 18 ♞xd3 does indeed look uncomfortable for Black) 18 dxe5 ♞xd3 19 cxd3 ♖e7 is so terrible for the defence. After 17 ♞ad1 Black normally keeps the tension with 17...♞g8!?, when White must pay particular attention to the condition of his queen. 18 c4? g5! forces White to sacrifice a piece for insufficient compensation, but the move 18 ♞e5! is once again logical and may indeed represent White's most promising sequence in this line. Black still needs to break out without creating excessive danger for his king.

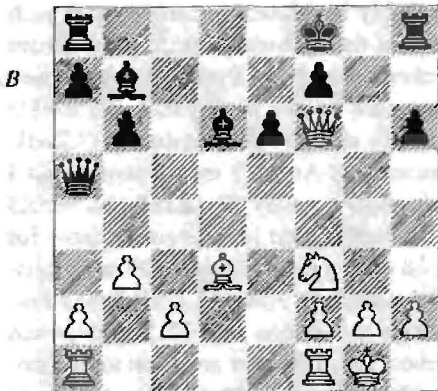
14 ♞b2 ♞f6 15 ♖h4 ♞b7 16 dxc5 ♖xc5 17 ♞d4!? ♖a5 18 ♞xf6 gxf6

Black can also try 18...♞xf3, although 19 ♖d4! ♞xh2+ 20 ♞xh2 gxf6 21 ♖d6+ ♞e8 22 ♞fe1! does not look very appealing. Black will need to find very accurate moves to survive into an ending which itself holds only the prospect of further defence.

19 ♖xf6! (D)

At one level we are in the realm of the very concrete and to make generalities might seem rather artificial. The text-move is certainly a

critical challenge to the viability of Black's set-up and some fine tactical shots on both sides are still to come before we can contemplate the luxury of an assessment. Nonetheless, from a practical standpoint it is certainly worth noting that while the coming complexity appeals to those – and Nataf is certainly one – who really relish a hot theoretical tussle, there is a sound alternative for others in 19 $\text{\textcircled{Q}}e4$!?. Indeed, it is this move which gains strength with the addition of 17 $\text{\textcircled{Q}}d4$!?, forcing Black's queen further away from the action. After 19... $\text{\textcircled{Q}}xe4$ 20 $\text{\textcircled{W}}xe4$ $\text{\textcircled{G}}g7$ 21 $\text{\textcircled{A}}d1$!?, $\text{\textcircled{A}}d8$ 22 $\text{\textcircled{E}}d4$ f5 23 $\text{\textcircled{W}}h4$ I would slightly prefer to be White, whose king is rather the safer without any countervailing difficulties. However, there is nothing clear here and a long hard grind lies ahead.



19... $\text{\textcircled{W}}h5$!

This marvellous resource is the point of Black's play. The queen, which appeared rather to have been pushed to the side, reveals that in fact the 5th rank is a terrain with excellent potential for switching between wings. The first point to note is that 20 $\text{\textcircled{W}}xh8+$ $\text{\textcircled{Q}}e7$ now gives Black a ferocious attack, or at least, it would were White not to have one last desperate resource, 21 $\text{\textcircled{Q}}g6$!. It is in fact this superb deflection which Nataf implements, albeit by a less dramatic move-order. The extent to which other quieter solutions have succeeded in damaging Black's idea is still open to debate.

20 $\text{\textcircled{Q}}g6$!?

I find this a very beautiful idea, although it is, at the same time, perhaps vulnerable to the

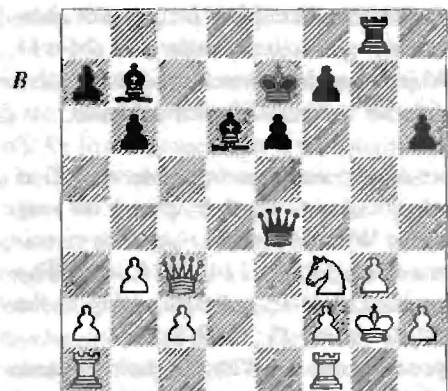
charge of excessive materialism. White's queen can return to defend against immediate threats, but Black's pieces remain so active that he can probably almost choose how much of his material to recoup!

But what of the alternatives? They merit a brief look:

a) 20 $\text{\textcircled{E}}f1$ was played in the stem game Leko-Bologan, Wijk aan Zee 2004 but this is largely an indication that it was all a bit much for even Leko to calculate at the board. In fact Black immediately tried for too much with 20... $\text{\textcircled{E}}g8$? allowing 21 $\text{\textcircled{Q}}e4$. Of course, after the more realistic 20... $\text{\textcircled{Q}}xf3$ 21 $\text{\textcircled{W}}xf3$ $\text{\textcircled{Q}}xh2+$ 22 $\text{\textcircled{G}}f1$ $\text{\textcircled{W}}xf3$ 23 $\text{\textcircled{G}}xf3$ Black's position is the more aesthetic although the opposite-coloured bishops render a draw the most likely outcome.

b) 20 $\text{\textcircled{Q}}e2$!?. seems to me the most ingenious try, meeting 20... $\text{\textcircled{Q}}xf3$ with 21 $\text{\textcircled{h}}3$!. Then White really does net a healthy enough pawn after 21... $\text{\textcircled{W}}e5$ 22 $\text{\textcircled{W}}xe5$ $\text{\textcircled{Q}}xe5$ 23 $\text{\textcircled{Q}}xf3$ $\text{\textcircled{Q}}xa1$ 24 $\text{\textcircled{Q}}xa8$ $\text{\textcircled{Q}}c3$ 25 $\text{\textcircled{Q}}e4$ with reasonable winning chances, Kariakin-Bologan, Tomsk 2006. This is probably the stiffest test for Black, but 20... $\text{\textcircled{E}}g8$!?. looks a better way to aim for enduring compensation.

20... $\text{\textcircled{W}}xg6$ 21 $\text{\textcircled{W}}xh8+$ $\text{\textcircled{Q}}e7$ 22 $\text{\textcircled{W}}c3$ $\text{\textcircled{E}}g8$ 23 $\text{\textcircled{G}}3$ $\text{\textcircled{W}}e4$ 24 $\text{\textcircled{G}}2$ (D)



24... $\text{\textcircled{Q}}e5$

Until now the play has been quite forced. However, at this highly instructive moment it is far from clear to me that Black has to rush to recoup his material in this way. There might be no easy way to evict the black rook after 24... $\text{\textcircled{R}}c8$!?

25 ♖d3 ♜xc2 26 ♜xe4 ♙xe4 27 ♜fc1 ♜b2, when his pieces are tremendously active. This could be at least a way to keep some winning chances for Black.

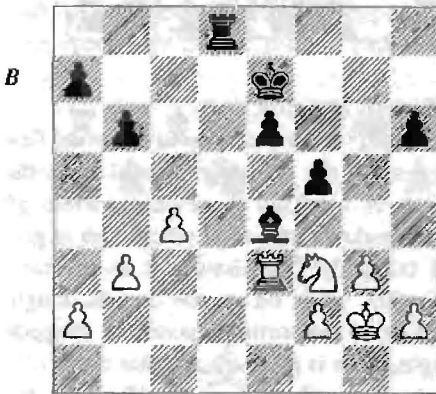
25 ♜e3 ♙xa1 26 ♜xa1 ♜c8?

This unfortunate and curious slip goes a long way to costing Black the game. The dissonance between this move and Black's next can only be accounted for by a simple change of mind. Of course, it was better to keep the pawn on c2, and after 26...♜d8! it is difficult to see how White could retain his slight material lead.

27 c4 ♜d8

Sadly for Black, with the pawn no longer *en prise* on c2, this ceases to be a clean equalizer for all that he retains some compensation. I can only assume that he intended instead 27...b5, but thought better of it when calculating the ending arising from 28 ♜xe4 ♙xe4 29 ♜e1 ♙xf3+ (29...f5 30 cxb5 ♜c3 31 ♜e3) 30 ♙xf3 bxc4 31 ♜c1 c3 32 ♙e3, when the c-pawn is a liability rather than an asset.

28 ♜xe4 ♙xe4 29 ♜e1 f5 30 ♜e3! (D)



This is the difference. Freeing himself is still no easy matter, but it is clearly White who can now claim the upper hand.

30...♜d1 31 g4! ♜a1?!

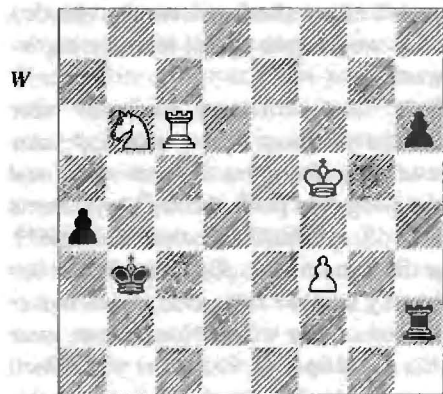
It is always difficult to make sound judgments when the bind that has been enjoyed over a position is first slipping away. The bishop still has the aura of a good piece, but its power of constriction has been lost and this is probably the moment to seek counterplay in a pure rook ending. The defensive task after 31...♙xf3+!?

32 ♙xf3 ♜g4+ 33 ♙xg4 ♜d2 34 ♜f3! ♜xa2 35 ♙h5 is not very desirable, but by making waves on the queenside with 35...a5! followed by ...a4, it should not be hopeless either.

32 gxf5 exf5 33 ♜e2 ♙d6!? 34 ♙g3 ♙c5 35 ♙f4 a5 36 ♙e5 ♙b4 37 f3

White's pieces are improving with every move and finally the once-proud bishop is driven back, since 37...♙b1? 38 ♜e1! is very awkward. Nonetheless, although Black's abandonment of his kingside pawns in order to dash for the base of White's queenside pawn-chain with his king smacks of desperation, the most surprising thing for me in the massive liquidation that follows is that it misses as narrowly as it does.

37...♙b7 38 ♙d7 ♙a3 39 ♙xb6 ♜xa2 40 ♜e7! ♙c6 41 ♜e6 ♙b7 42 c5 ♙xb3 43 c6 ♙xc6 44 ♜xc6 ♜xh2 45 ♙xf5 a4 (D)



46 ♙xa4!

The simplest solution, at the very least in practical terms. The rook ending will be decided in terms of the relative standing of the two kings.

46...♙xa4 47 ♜b6! h5 48 f4 h4 49 ♙g4 ♜f2 50 ♜f6

The black king has to be partially released from its confinement for progress to be made. However, it is severely cut off from the action by rank as well as file.

50...♙b5 51 ♙xh4 ♙c5 52 ♙g5 ♜g2+ 53 ♙f5 ♙d5 54 ♜f8 ♙d6 55 ♙f6 ♙d7 56 f5 ♜a2 57 ♙f7 ♜f2

A classic illustration of why the king must head for the 'short side' in such endings. The

vital defensive technique of checking from the side is blocked off and victory is quite straightforward.

58 f6 ♖g2 59 ♜e8 ♜f2 60 ♜e1 ♜g2 61 ♜d1+ ♚c7 62 ♚e7 ♜e2+ 63 ♚f8 ♜f2 64 f7 ♜g2 65 ♜d4

We even get treated to 'building a bridge', another page out of the basic endgame manuals. When the white king is checked back to f5, the rook can block and the pawn queens.

65...♚c6 66 ♚e7 ♜e2+ 67 ♚f6 ♜f2+ 68 ♚e6 1-0

Game 7

Nick de Firmian – Lars Schandorff

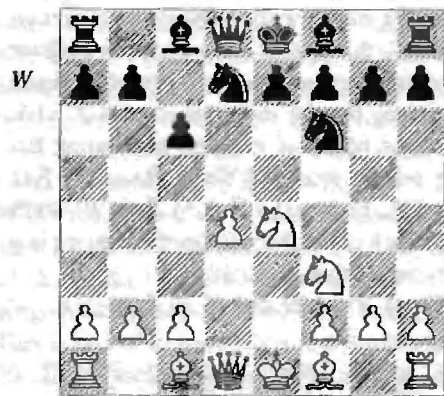
Copenhagen 2002

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 dxe4 4 ♗xe4 ♘d7 5 ♙c4

Not yet committing to a particular treatment, but giving warning that again the potential weaknesses of f7 and e6 are likely to be a major target of White's operations. The text-move probably could have claimed to be the most dangerous line prior to the '5 ♘g5 revolution', but there is a minor alternative worth a mention here too as well as one simple but very important variation.

5 ♚e2?! can claim some humorous value and potentially a great deal of practical value against an opponent prone to carelessness and routine moving. The point of course is the threat of mate on d6, and the likely culprit 5...♘g6??. It is in the nature of 4...♘d7 that White has some leeway to make imprecise moves before he really risks being worse. Nonetheless, once Black has wised up to 5...♘d6!, he will be well on the way to a healthy game. In other lines this 'taking away' of the natural square for the g8-knight has its drawbacks, but here White has blocked in his f1-bishop and since d4 is additionally *en prise*, there is the likelihood of an exchange of knights and easy play for Black.

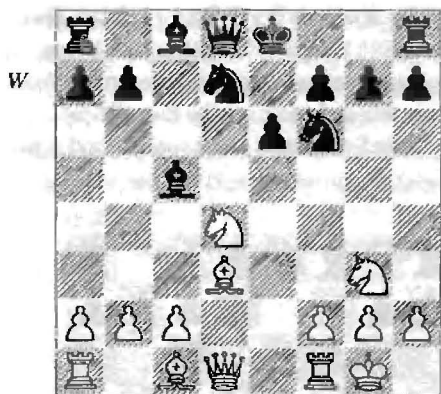
The natural and logical developing move 5 ♘f3 is however a very serious option. After 5...♘g6 (D) White faces in rather a pure form the decision outlined in the introduction – either to avoid exchanging on f6 and seek to show that the d7-knight somehow renders meaningless Black's efforts to keep the c8-bishop unblocked by pawns, or to exchange on f6 and try to show that despite the 'freeing' of his position, the defender will still have difficulties developing his queen's bishop optimally.



Both merit attention:

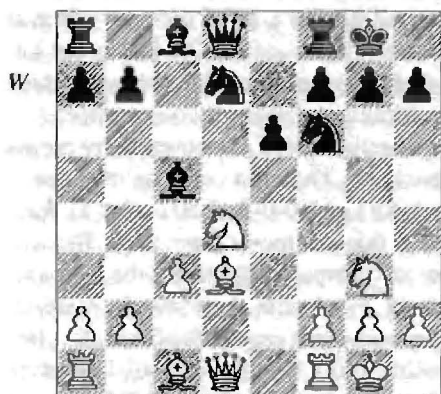
a) 6 ♘g3!? is the best way to effect the first strategy since the c3-square would have the drawback of blocking the c-pawn, while g5 normally makes sense only when ...h6 is prevented tactically. The drawback to the text-move is that, while on a good day the knight ends up on h5 supporting a powerful kingside onslaught, there is no guarantee that it will otherwise be very effective on g3. However, the question remains how Black should develop and time his natural ...c5 break correctly. The c8-bishop is well covered since 6...♘b6?! is well met by 7 ♘e5!, so it is time to look to the kingside – and 6...e6 is still the most popular way. 7 ♘d3 c5 8 0-0 cxd4 9 ♘xd4 ♙c5 (D) seems logical.

Then 10 ♘b3 ♙e7 11 ♜e1 0-0 12 ♚f3!? is a reasonable deployment aimed against Black's development via ...b6. In Tiviakov-Adams, PCA Candidates (game 1), New York 1994, Black came up with the interesting plan of 12...a5!?,



designed to weaken the b4-square, for which his knight headed after 13 a4 ♘b6 14 ♗d2 ♘bd5. However, White obtains a nice square too on h5 and I wonder whether aiming there with 15 ♘d4!?

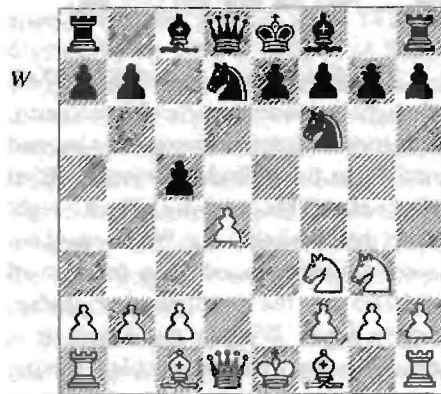
Alternatively, it is also attractive to look at 10 c3!?, holding the knight in the centre, since I do not believe that ceding the bishop-pair in exchange for isolating White's d-pawn is entirely sound. White's dark-squared bishop can usefully play either to g5 or f4 in support of kingside operations. So 10...0-0 (D) looks better.



Then 11 ♖e2 b6 12 ♘e4 ♗b7! 13 ♘xc5 ♘xc5! was an interesting example of apparently plausible play which in fact grants Black something of a model set-up. In DvoirysEpishin, USSR Ch, Moscow 1991 after the further natural moves 14 ♗c4 a6 15 ♖e5?! (15 a4!) 15...♘fd7 16 ♖h5 b5 17 ♗e2 ♖c8 18 ♗d1 ♖e7 it was already easier for Black to think in terms

of a coherent plan. However, again of several plausible moves, 11 ♖e1!? looks rather flexible. One interesting question, with wider implications for 4...♘d7 positions in general, is whether 11...b6!? is then playable. After 12 ♖f3!? it is no good to play 12...♗b8? 13 ♘c6 ♗b7 14 ♘xd8 ♗xf3 15 ♘xc6!, but the calm 12...♖c7! 13 ♖xa8 ♗b7 14 ♖xa7 ♗a8 15 ♖xa8+ ♗xa8 raises very intriguing questions. Such a material imbalance occurs elsewhere in this opening, often resulting in decent counterplay for Black on the kingside. The issue here is whether the knight on g3 might now perform a valuable function in shielding White's king and taking the sting out of counterplay based upon ...♗g4.

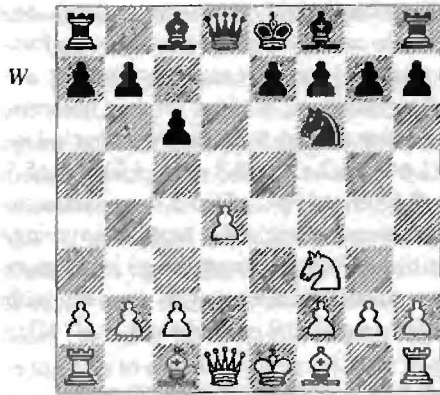
In general there seem to be grounds for White to claim a slight edge after 9...♗c5. Hence there has been something of a trend for looking elsewhere. One possibility is 6...g6!?, aimed specifically at covering the f5- and h5-squares, to which the white knight often aspires after 6...c6. Since White can cover his d4-pawn so comfortably with c3, it is no easy matter to drum up active play. However, similar set-ups are now quite popular arising from the Alekhine's Defence (1 e4 ♘f6 2 e5 ♘d5 3 d4 d6 4 ♘f3 dxe5 5 ♘xe5 c6 followed by ...g6) and there seems no specific argument against it here. If anything, the position of White's knight on g3 is rather an encouragement. Another way to dispense with ...c6 is just to play the immediate 6...c5!?



If White continues with 7 ♗d3 anyway, it is certainly reasonable to take on d4 and then to

play ...g6. However, the critical response is 7 dxc5!?, when 7...e6 can be met with the ambitious 8 b4!?. In Tiviakov-Adams, Ischia 1995, Black obtained interesting play after 8...b6 9 e2 bxc5 10 b5 e6 11 c4 c7 12 e2 b2 e6 13 a4 a5 14 c2 by switching attention to the kingside with 14...h5!?. However, there is also the positional 8 c6!?, trying to extract a slight concession as the pawn is recovered. Karpov is the kind of player I would expect to be effective on the white side with such a structure, but his willingness to defend 8...bxc6 9 e2 e7 10 0-0 b6 11 b1 0-0 12 c4 d8 13 c2 c5 14 d2 b7 (in Ye Jiangchuan-Karpov, match (game 1), Shenyang 2000) is encouraging, although personally I think c7 looks a better square for Black's queen. In either case, Black's position is very harmonious aside from the minor damage to his queenside structure.

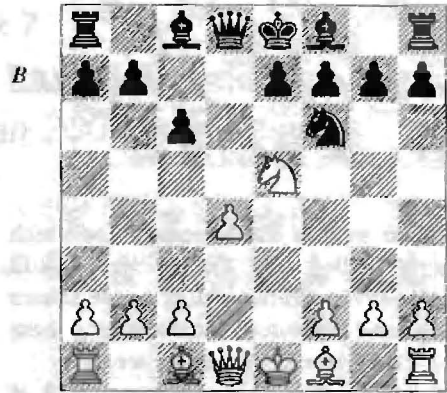
b) 6 dxf6+ dxf6 (D) and now:



b1) 7 e4 e5! (not 7...g4?? 8 e4xf7+!) is still thought to cause no particular problems. The single most instructive lesson to be learned here is still that from Fischer-Petrosian, Bled 1961, where after 8 e2 e6 9 e5 Black sought to pre-empt the possibility that White could develop some initiative based upon the plan of 0-0-0 and e5 with the very shrewd prophylactic move 9...g4!. Without this knight it is strangely difficult to generate any play. Having ceded the bishop-pair, Black proceeded immediately to exchange one of them off and even declined to castle queenside in a bid to generate some counterplay on that wing with 10 0-0-0

e7 11 h3 e4xf3 12 cxf3 d5 13 e7 cxe7 14 b1 d8! 15 e4 b5! with a well-balanced game – an excellent defensive treatment from Petrosian which has stood the test of time.

b2) 7 e5 (D) once had a really good reputation.

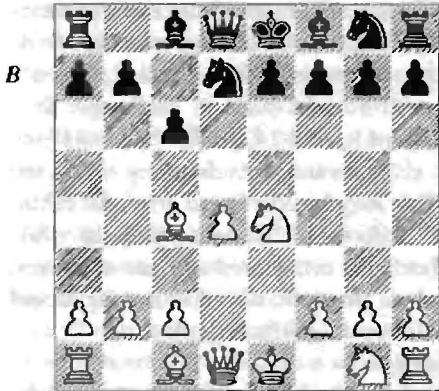


Moving this piece a second time could be sanctioned if it really left Black stuck for a good bishop development since now 7...e5 8 c3! e6 9 g4! was rightly thought to be awkward.

However, it is now probably almost fair to say that Black has a choice between a fairly clean equalizer and a more complex game at only a small disadvantage. 7...e6 is the latter, a slightly unorthodox development which shields f7 and envisages the very reasonable further mobilization of the kingside by means of a fianchetto. The most common response is to play 8 e2 g6 9 0-0 e7 10 c4 0-0 11 e3. However, this c4 move does offer Black a glimpse of counterplay against the d4-pawn through 11...e4 with the idea of ...d6-f5. This seems pleasant enough for Black. It is less fashionable to opt for the more solid structure with c3, but I suspect Black has a harder time of it finding play after 10 c3 0-0 11 e1 d7 (11...c8!?) 12 d3! with e5 and e1 to come and light pressure against e7. This is not exactly terrifying for Black, but might well frustrate his hopes of activity. It is therefore worth knowing that 7...d7! might dampen White's initiative more convincingly. If 8 d3 g6 9 c3 e7 10 e4 then after 10...a5! (intending to capture on d4) it is hard to see how

White avoids 11 ♖d2 0-0 12 ♙e2 e5, when an equalizing liquidation is likely in the centre. Neither does 8 ♙f4 keep much in the position after 8...♗xc5 9 ♙xc5 ♖d5!, when the well-placed queen threatens to frustrate White's development, while 10 c4 ♗a5+ also offers Black an easy game.

It is high time to return to the main game and 5 ♙c4 (D).



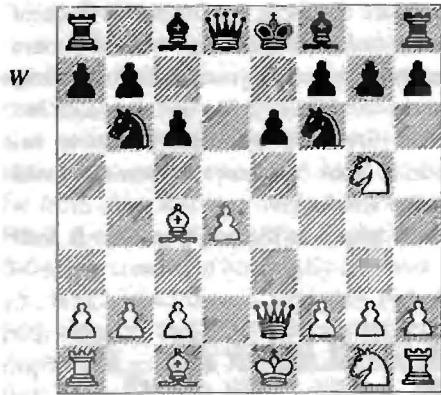
5...♗g6 6 ♘g5

Here too, ideas familiar from Games 5 and 6 come to the fore. White puts immediate pressure on f7, all but forcing the move ...e6, after which that pawn will become the focus of sacrificial threats. There is still a quieter alternative in 6 ♗xf6+ ♗xf6 7 c3!?, finding a new way to prevent 7...♙f5? by preparing the reply 8 ♗b3! forking f7 and b7. This is therefore slightly more challenging than the version with ♗f3 instead of c3, but Black has a choice of reasonable replies, with 7...♗c7 and 7...♗d5! at the forefront. If White reverts to ♗f3, he furthermore runs the risk of Black being able to play his bishop to g4 in one go.

6...e6 7 ♗e2!

White renews the threat to e6 and consequently threatens 8 ♗xf7. The main point is to force Black's knight to b6, whereas it would probably prefer to stay put since the aim is to play ...c5 and often to be in a position to recapture with a knight on c5. By contrast, straightforward development with 7 ♗e2 h6 8 ♗f3 ♙d6 9 ♙f4 ♗c7 feels quite insipid.

7...♗b6 (D)



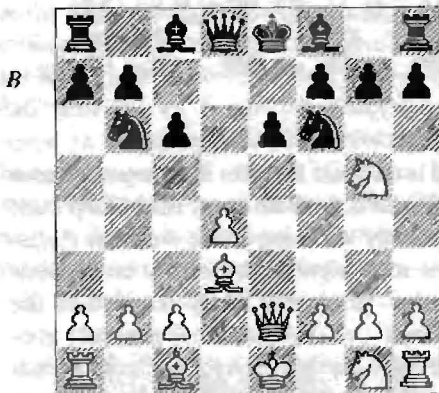
8 ♙d3

This is the main line, but the choice between it and 8 ♙b3 is far from easy. The bishop itself is not exactly wreaking havoc on either diagonal. The most significant element in the decision rather lies in the likely reaction to the pawn-break ...c5. The text-move generally goes together with capturing on c5, while ♙b3 tends to mix with leaving the c5-pawn alone. For example, after 8 ♙b3 h6 9 ♗f3 c5!? there is little mileage in 10 dxc5, when 10...♗bd7! with ...♗xc5 to come is a fully adequate response, since the h3-bishop blocks the possibility of defending c5 with a pawn. The most popular move is 10 ♙f4, but in this case Black has the resourceful defence 10...♗bd5 11 ♙e5 ♗a5+, taking advantage of the fact that the bishop can no longer retreat to d2 and that 12 c3?! can be met with 12...♗xc3 13 ♖d2 ♗fe4. Moreover, after 12 ♗d2 b5! 13 dxc5 ♙xc5 14 c3 ♙b7 15 ♗gf3 ♗b6 16 0-0 0-0 17 ♗fe1 a6 Black's development is faster and more harmonious than can always be expected in these lines, Anand-Ivanchuk, Wijk aan Zee 2001. For this reason I would prefer 10 c3 although both 10...♗c7 and 10...a6 look like reasonable responses. There is no need to rush with ...cxd4, which may enable the white knights to sort out their competition for the f3-square.

The other possibility to which 8 ♙b3 gives rise is the advance of Black's a-pawn with 8...a5. This is theoretically quite respectable. However, Black should take note that 9 c3! is a valid alternative to either of the a-pawn moves as a means to preserve the bishop. He should

also be aware that both the further advance of the a-pawn and the weakening of the b5-square that ...a5 and ...c5 in conjunction involve carry some dangers. Black gains some space, but should be careful about which pieces to exchange as in some endgames a pawn on a4 will prove to be vulnerable.

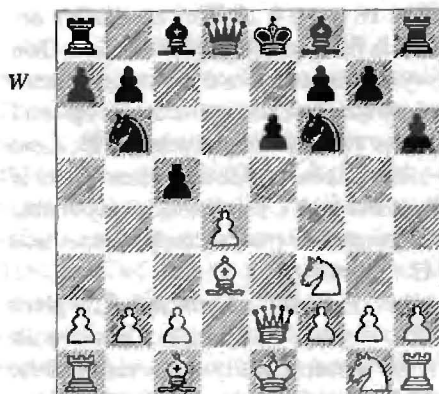
We now return to the position after 8 Qd3 (D):



8...h6!

Black should avoid 8... $\text{Wxd4}?! 9 \text{Qf3 Wd5} 10 \text{Qe5}$, with serious pressure against f7. However, it is precisely this threat to d4, which drives the knight back to occupy, at least temporarily, the most desirable square for its g1-colleague since now 9 $\text{Qe4 Wxd4}!$ should give White insufficient play for a pawn.

9 Qf3 c5! (D)



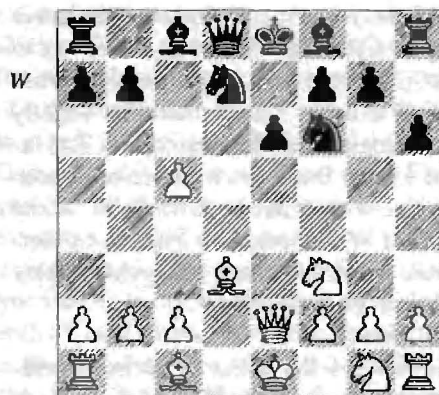
10 dxc5

This appears to be guilty of promoting Black's development for him. However, it is also the simplest way to expedite the untangling of the white knights through Qe5 and Qf3 . It might also be claimed that Black's bishop is likely to have to retreat in the coming moves in any case.

10 Qe3 is an interesting alternative, when after 10... $\text{Qbd5} 11 \text{Qe5}$ there are a couple of useful guidelines which Black should observe. Firstly, not to capture on e3 too early since after fxe3 White can often make use of the f-file while his centre is well supported. His e5-knight will also be hard to challenge. Secondly, after 11...a6 12 $\text{Qgf3 Wc7} 13 0-0$ Black should also beware of exchanging on d4 too early. This may be equally so after, for example, 13... $\text{Qd6} 14 \text{c3}$, when opening the c-file should only be considered once development is complete. However, with due care, he should be able to reach satisfactory play.

10... Qxc5

This is natural of course, but the potential desirability both of recapturing on c5 with the knight and trying again to assert control over the e5-square has, over the years, encouraged some more enterprising souls to try the more ambitious 10... $\text{Qbd7}!?$ (D).



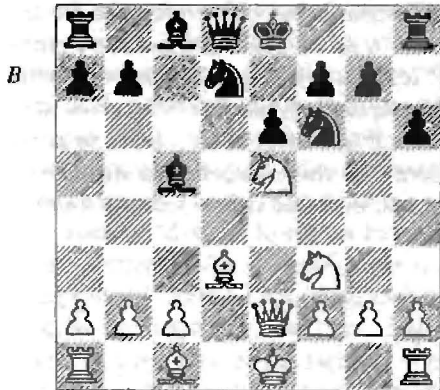
The move probably involves a willingness to sacrifice a pawn and this is certainly not the only risk. After 11 b4, the incautious 11...b6?! 12 $\text{Qd4 bxc5}?? 13 \text{Qc6 Wc7} 14 \text{Wxe6+!}$ with mate on g6 graphically illustrates another. However, Black has attempts to make trouble on the long

dark-square diagonal after 11 b4. It looks tempting to play 11...♖d5 12 ♖d2 ♖f6 13 ♖b1 a5 14 a3 g5!? but in fact the detail of 15 ♖e4! ♖c3 16 ♖xc3 ♖xc3+ 17 ♖d2 ♖xa3 18 ♖d4! tends to work out quite well for White. However, while 11...a5 permits 12 c3, it may be that Black need not apply immediate pressure with 12...♖d5, but can instead adopt Meduna's more subtle plan of 12...♖e7!? and ...0-0 keeping the option not only of ...♖d5, but also of a quick ...e5 with the white king in the centre. Of course White is not obliged to accept the challenge of playing 11 b4, but as usual Black is active enough that he need not fear 11 c6, while if he can painlessly play ...♖xc5 this looks like an attractive line.

11 ♖c5

This has always been the main line, but the temptation for White to castle queenside and play very sharply on the kingside against the black king is ever present. To this end 11 ♖d2 has attractions, but was dealt a serious blow by Adams's 11...0-0 12 0-0-0 ♖a4!. It is both rare and pleasing to see such a clear and enticing solution to the question of the b6-knight's future. Black can target b2 quickly, not least in the key variation 13 ♖b5 ♖d7 14 ♖xd7 ♖xd7!, when 15 ♖xb6 is well met by either 15...♖c7 or 15...♖e7. The latter case offers us the clean variation 16 ♖f4 ♖a3! 17 ♖e5 ♖xb2 18 ♖xb2 ♖xb2+ 19 ♖xb2 ♖b4+, with perpetual check. It may be that 15...♖c7 can offer even more, but as an illustration of Black's possibilities against b2 this can boast a certain clarity.

11...♖bd7! 12 ♖gf3 (D)



12...♖c7!?

A refinement originally designed to discourage White from pursuing the dangerous plan of castling queenside. In fact, it succeeds in this aim quite well, although ironically after the older continuation 12...♖xe5 13 ♖xe5 0-0 it is far from clear that it is queenside castling that Black should most fear. After 14 ♖d2 ♖d5!, 15 0-0-0!? is consistent but hugely complex. After 15...♖xa2 16 c3 there is probably fight left in both 16...♖a3 and 16...b5 17 ♖xh6! ♖b7 (and maybe 17...gxh6!?). Also the more modest 15 0-0, hoping to exploit the potentially exposed position of Black's queen, can be met with the interesting pawn sacrifice 15...b5!, when 16 ♖g4!? ♖xg4 17 ♖xg4 f5! and 16 ♖xb5 ♖b7 17 ♖f3 ♖d6 both promise Black quite acceptable counterplay. However, the simple 14 0-0!? has the interesting point that 14...b6?! can be well met with 15 b4!, so Black may instead have to look at 14...♖c7, when he has allowed a mass of extra possibilities to end up in a slightly less accurate version of the main line.

13 0-0

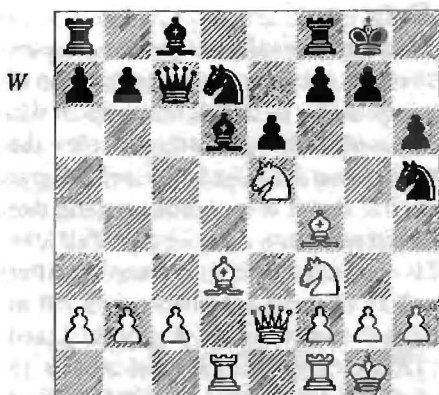
Probably the best move. The tactical point behind Black's last move is revealed after 13 ♖d2? ♖xf2+! 14 ♖xf2 ♖xe5 15 ♖xe5 ♖xe5!, which wins a pretty clean pawn. This one has amassed quite a few victims over the years! A subsidiary point to the move is revealed after 13 ♖f4, when 13...♖b4+! is far from a clear refutation, but nonetheless quite irritating. 14 c3? ♖xc3+! works tactically for Black, while 14 ♖f1 ♖d6 is similar to the main line in all respects except the misplacement of White's king.

13...0-0 14 ♖f4 ♖d6 15 ♖ad1 ♖h5!? (D)

Black always has the option of 15...♖xe5, but avoiding this exchange has the great advantage of refusing White's queen useful coverage along the d1-h5 diagonal. The text-move is rather forcing and the ending which ensues seems to me quite tenable for Black.

16 ♖h7+! ♖xb7 17 ♖d3+ ♖g8 18 ♖xd6 ♖xd6!

But not the unnecessarily risky 18...♖xc2?!, which in view of 19 ♖xh6! fails even to net a pawn. After 19...gxh6 20 ♖xd7 ♖xd7 21 ♖e5! the kind of position is reached in which a

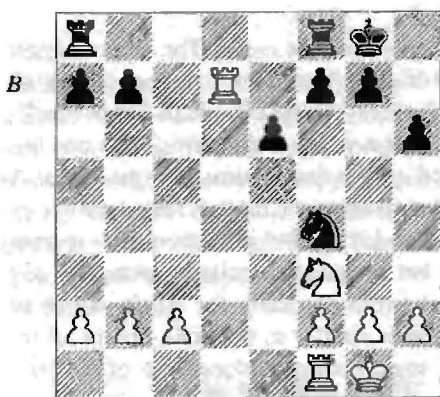


weakened king's position can be a serious draw for the major pieces.

19 Nxd6 Qxf4

Principled, but as Lukacs points out, there is not much wrong with 19... Qxe5 20 Qxe5 f6 21 Qc3 e5 , with ... Qf5 to come and a perfectly playable position.

20 Qxd7 Qxd7 21 Nxd7 (D)



21...b5!

Not just preserving the b-pawn but securing a very useful square on d5 for his knight.

22 Nfd1 Qd5 23 Qe5 a6 24 Qc6 Nc8 25 Nd6 Nc7 26 c3 a5 27 g3 Qb7 ??

A really strange move which is very difficult to account for. Black has scarcely put a foot

wrong until now, but it seems clear enough that the king should head towards the centre in this simplified position. The best I can say is that the fact that Black is subsequently able to retrace his steps and survive to tell the tale strongly suggests that his position is already quite comfortable at this stage.

28 Qe5 g5 29 a3 Qg7 30 Nd4 Qf8 31 Qd7+ Qe8 32 Qb6 Qxb6 33 Nxb6 Nc5 34 Nb7 Nac8 35 Ndd7 Nf5 36 Nd6 Qf8 37 h3 h5 38 Qg2 Ncc5 39 Na7 b4 40 axb4 1/2-1/2

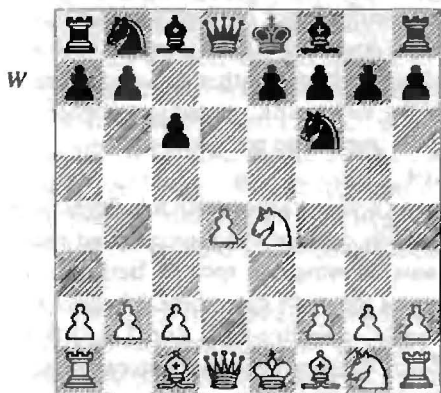
Conclusion

4... Qd7 is under something of a cloud at the very highest levels and 5 Qg5 (!) almost entirely accounts for this. The plethora of alternatives considered in Game 7 are quite playable for White of course, but are no more (nor less) threatening than they have always been. As usual, Black can enjoy active counter-chances (for example, in the note about 10... Qbd7 !?) if White plays ball.

The question is whether scepticism towards 4... Qd7 is similarly justified at all levels. I am inclined to say no. For one thing, even the theoretical debate is not yet closed. In Game 6, the note about 13... Qb7 with 15... Qd5 !?, though carrying risks, is by no means clearly bad for Black. Of course playing ... Qf8 rather than castling is not to everyone's taste, but these positions certainly demand precision from White too. Moreover, though clearly less ambitious, 10... Qf6 (note to White's 10th move in Game 5) is not such a bad practical move either. However, more importantly such considerations pertain only when facing a well-prepared player. If there is a more general argument against 4... Qd7 it is the difficulty generating much fun if White responds without ambition. Nonetheless, if Black is content to be solid or to allow his opponent to choose whether to engage in a sharp tussle, then this system remains a sound choice.

3 Main Line with 4...♞f6

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ♖c3 dxe4 4 ♗xe4 ♗f6 (D)



Here we discuss a line in which Black invites the doubling of his pawns following 5 ♗xf6+. Opening theory tends to classify according to the opening moves rather than thematic considerations. Often the two coincide. Sometimes, however, they do not and this I would argue is one such case. Of course the two games found in this chapter have one thing in common. Black is willing to make a structural concession right away, accepting doubled pawns as the price for proposing an exchange of knights without the kind of preparation we witnessed in Chapter 2. Moreover, in both cases it is possible to identify some kind of dynamic motivation for this decision. Game 8 is largely about securing free development for the pieces, while in Game 9 Black is particularly enthusiastic to make something of his open lines – especially the half-open g-file consequent upon 5...gxf6. However, this seems to be about as far as the resemblance carries.

Somehow (despite Korchnoi having occasionally adopted the system!) there is something about 5...exf6 which suggests that Black is keen to match his opponent, freeing his pieces as a response to the fact that White enjoys such easy development, rather than trying

to create something distinctive and different. This feels, in short, like a system aimed primarily at equalizing. If so, it has a tragic flaw, for as I discuss in more detail in the game, the fact that Black's doubled pawns lie on his *majority* side renders them a particularly serious problem and one that will often endure, or indeed become magnified, as the endgame approaches. Of course, there are examples in which the doubled f-pawns are used to control key squares – where Black is, for example, able to play ...g6 and ...f5 to spearhead play on the kingside. However, these cases are frankly few and far between. In particular, if White chooses 6 c3(!), probably in conjunction with the unpretentious 9 0-0!?, it is hard to see where Black's counterplay will come from. The defensive task here looks quite unenviable.

By contrast, whether sound or not, the motivation for 5...gxf6!? is much easier to comprehend. This is the most aggressive of Black's choices in the main-line Caro-Kann, intrinsically built around dynamic imbalance, seeking thematic counter-chances on the g- and d-files. Its association with such free spirits as Larsen and Bronstein thus presents no mystery.

At the same time, there is little doubt that the set-up which White employs in Game 9 represents a very sensible way of dampening down Black's aggressive intentions. Far from looking like 'castling into an attack', the system based upon the fianchetto here looks a quite effective means to neutralize pressure on the g-file. There is no promise of a clear advantage, but a sense nonetheless that part of Black's compensation for his weaknesses has had its sting removed.

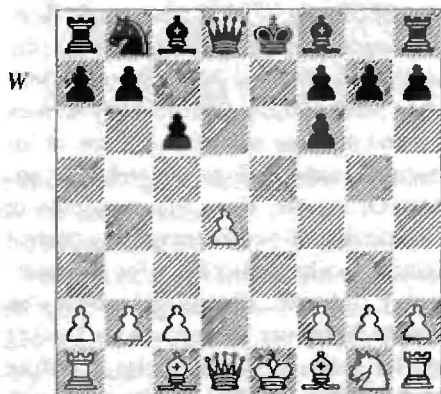
Before moving on to the specifics of our two main lines, we should note that 5 ♗d3? is an unsound gambit, and that the harmless 5 ♗g3 can be met by 5...c5, 5...e5!? or 5...h5!?.

Game 8

Ferenc Berkes – Lajos Portisch

George Marx Memorial, Paks 2004

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ♘c3 dxe4 4 ♖xe4 ♗f6 5
 ♗xf6+ exf6 (D)



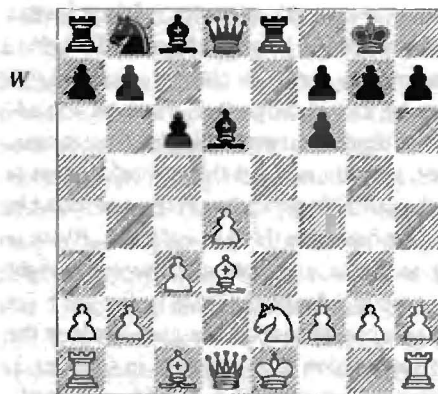
By recapturing in this way, Black frees his king's bishop and ensures that his development should proceed with few complications. He also has hopes of using the centre files, perhaps putting pressure on d4, while looking to his extra f-pawn to provide some additional cover for his king. On a good day, this pawn can even advance and become a source of counterplay, although practice suggests that reliance on this would be a little naïve.

However, all this comes at a fairly severe price. The main problem for Black is that the doubled pawns fall on his *majority side*. This ensures that as the position becomes simplified, so the importance of this structural impairment is likely to magnify. Although endings with a couple of minor pieces on either side might prove tenable depending upon the specifics, reasonably plausible pawn endings will tend simply to be lost for Black. White can create a passed pawn by eventually advancing the d-pawn to d5. Black has no equivalent hopes. This places a burden upon the defence which explains the limited popularity of the line. In essence the defender is volunteering to accept the pawn-structure for which White is willing

to relinquish the bishop-pair in the Exchange Variation of the Spanish. Here, however, he has been required to make no such concession. Furthermore, whilst Black has hopes of free development, so does White. Both sides can mobilize their bishops without further ado, and White is still on the move with consequent chances to dictate the immediate pattern of events.

6 ♗c4

There is nothing wrong with this developing move, which once enjoyed uncontested main-line status. However, in spite of Berkes's fine handling of the main game here, I believe that the 'modern' main line 6 c3 ♗d6 7 ♗d3 0-0 8 ♗e2 ♖e8 (D) still represents the sternest test of Black's resources.

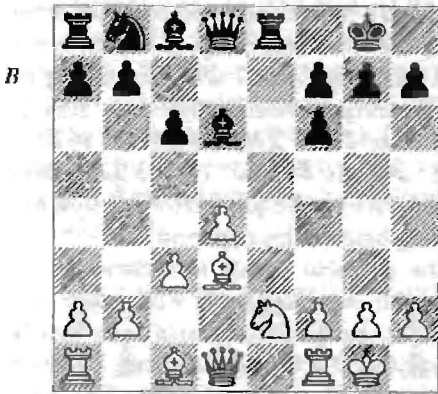


However, it is not easy to decide whether to attack h7 and try to force a concession, or simply settle for castling kingside:

a) 9 ♖c2 would be clearly the best if Black were to take fright at the prospect of his opponent's kingside attack. For example, 9...h6?! is precisely the concession on the kingside which Black does not want to make. It merely weakens the light squares, whereas the dynamic hopes of his formation instead require ...g6 to support the advance of the f-pawn. Now, the modest-looking 10 0-0! appears in tremendously enhanced form.

10...♞c7 11 ♟g3 ♟c6 12 ♟d2 ♟d7 13 f4! ♟b6 14 c4 ♟f8 15 b3 ♟ad8 16 ♟c3 resulted in a very harmonious set-up for White in Zapata-Cuartas, Medellin 2003. Neither am I overly impressed with 9...♟h8. The h7-pawn is indeed immune then, but the move is scarcely useful in itself. Black retains the option of ...g6, but of course 9 ♞c2 is worth throwing in if this is the best response. The critical reply is 9...g6!?. There is no denying that White's attack proceeding with 10 h4 carries a punch. The old defence 10...♟d7 11 h5 ♟f8 12 ♟h6 was rather passive, but the more combative 10...♟e6 11 h5 f5! is not faring too badly. Now White should avoid 12 ♟h6!?, when 12...g5! with ...♞f6 to follow is a rather nasty jolt. He should prefer 12 hxg6 fxg6 13 ♟h6, but the position is still quite a mess after 13...♞f6!.

b) 9 (0-0)!? (D) has been something of a beneficiary of this realization not only that a precise treatment of 9 ♞c2 g6 requires a good deal of study but that it even appears to guarantee Black some share of the fun.

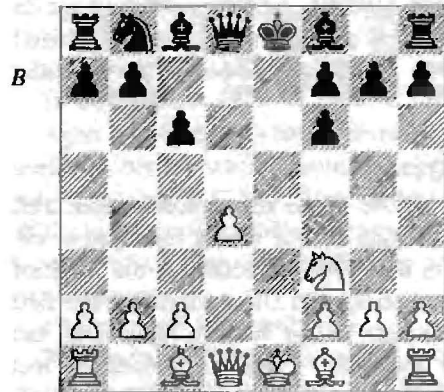


Certainly among those who do not relish a good sharp scrap for its own sake, there could be a strong practical argument for it. The modest text-move, while not as strong as the lines above with 9 ♞c2 h6?! thrown in, nonetheless looks a relatively lifeless prospect for the defender. Black's first problem is that the exchange of dark-squared bishops is a simplification which dampens his aspirations of counterplay.

That is not to say that 9...♟d7 10 ♟f4 ♟f8 11 ♟xd6 ♞xd6 12 ♟g3 g6 13 ♟e4 ♞d8 14 ♟e1

♟g7 15 ♞f3 f5 16 ♟c5 (Gross-Lechtynsky, Czech Team Ch 2003) is necessarily disastrous for Black, nor is 12...g6 strictly essential, although keeping White out of f5 is a reasonable impulse. However, it does look pretty thankless, with a tough fight ahead for half a point and realistically little prospect of more. However, it is not even clear that preventing ♟f4 with 9...♞c7 is an improvement. White then has 10 ♟g3 ♟e6 (if 10...c5 11 dxc5 ♟xc5 12 ♟e4 White may even follow up with ♞h5 and create real threats on the kingside; 10...g6?! is also well met with 11 ♟e4!) 11 f4! c5 12 d5! ♟d7 13 c4 with a tremendous advantage in space and well-placed pieces in Khalifman-Seirawan, Wijk aan Zee 1991. Again, Black should be able to improve, but White's simple set-up creates a powerful impression.

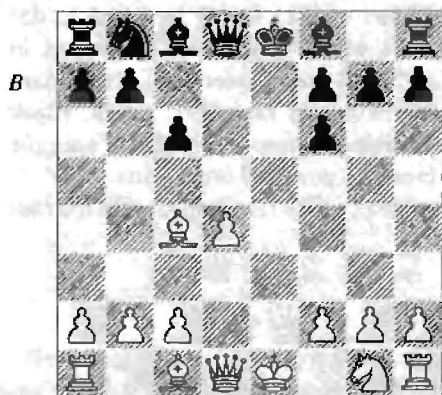
By contrast, 6 ♟f3 (D) simply looks too routine.



Strong players hardly touch it at all these days, although it does arise from time to time after 3...dxe4 and 4...♟f6 as a defence against the Two Knights Variation (see Game 24). After 6...♟d6, it is not even entirely clear where White's king's bishop belongs. 7 ♟d3 is vulnerable to a mildly irritating ...♟g4 pin at some point, while 7 ♟e2 looks a shade passive. Amidst a generally negative appraisal of Black's prospects in this line, it is worth recounting here one of the classic success stories. In Torre-Korchnoi, Buenos Aires Olympiad 1978, Black met 7 ♟c2 with the interesting 7...♟a6!? 8 0-0 ♟c7 9 c4 0-0 10 ♟e3 ♟e8 11

♖d2?! ♕f5 12 ♜ad1 ♕e4. There is already something a bit planless about White's deployment and he has needlessly allowed Black's bishop to reach an active square. After 13 ♜c1?! h6! 14 ♘d2 ♕h7 15 ♕f3 f5! 16 ♘b3 g5! we are treated to a model exposition of the dynamic potential in the black structure. However, it would not be gravely unfair to observe that there is a reason for trawling right back to 1978 for a high-level example of this!

We now return to 6 ♕c4 (D):



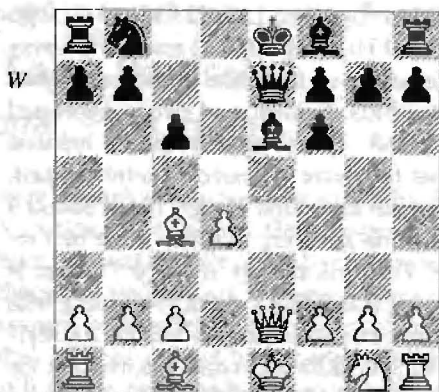
6...♖e7+!?

This is one of the key resources associated with the mini-revival which this system enjoyed in the 1970s, especially in the hands of endgame aficionado Ulf Andersson. The first point to note is that White's reply is all but forced since either 7 ♕e3?? or 7 ♘e2?? is met with 7...♖b4+ and major embarrassment!

Interestingly, after the older move 6...♕d6, it is White who is first to the e-file. 7 ♖e2+! is annoying, since 7...♕e7 loses a fair proportion of a tempo (the white queen is not too bad at all on e2) while 7...♖e7 8 ♖xe7+ ♗xe7 9 ♘e2 ♕e6 10 ♕d3?! ♘d7 11 ♕f4 ♘b6 12 ♕xd6+ ♗xd6 is another simplification which leaves Black with a dull defensive task.

7 ♖e2 ♕e6! (D)

This is Black's idea. Once again an exchange of queens would be another step towards a thankless endgame, while the text-move, by renewing the threat of ...♖b4+, forces White to address the tension between the respective light-squared bishops.



8 ♕b3!?

It is worth noting that after 8 ♕xe6, Black does not yet 'correct' his formation, since 8...fxe6 merely leaves his e-pawn a target. Such simple straightforward moves as 9 ♘f3 ♘d7 10 0-0 0-0-0 11 ♖e1 already force Black to react passively. Rather, by playing 8...♖xe6! it soon becomes clear that the tension along the e-file now works in Black's favour. After 9 ♕f4 ♘a6 10 0-0-0 0-0-0, White's decision to exchange in Spangenberg-Soppe, Villa Gesell 1996 is not just impatience. There are good objective reasons, 11 a3? ♖a2! and 11 ♗b1 ♘b4 having little to recommend them. In any case, after 11 ♖xe6+ fxe6 12 ♘f3 ♕d6 13 ♕g3 ♘c7 14 ♖he1 ♖he8 15 c4 b6 16 ♗c2 ♘d7 17 ♗c3 ♖ed8 Black was every bit as well equipped for this slow manoeuvring battle as his opponent.

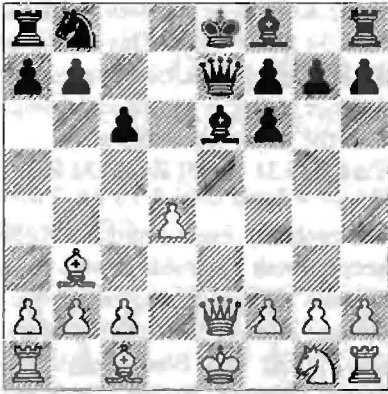
White can also decide to eschew the exchange of bishops altogether with 8 ♕d3, trying to claim that the opposition of queens on the e-file inhibits Black's development. However, this argument does not convince. Black can choose the active 8...c5!?, but there is nothing wrong with the simple 8...♖c7 either, followed by ...♕d6, unless White attempts immediate aggression on the e-file with 9 f4!?, when 9...♕e7 looks fine. In general, the early shadow-boxing does not seem to enhance White's coordination compared with other variations.

We now return to 8 ♕b3! (D):

8...♘d7

Black has a couple of plausible alternatives here. 8...a5!? follows a consistent plan of trying to entice the exchange on e6 with the

B

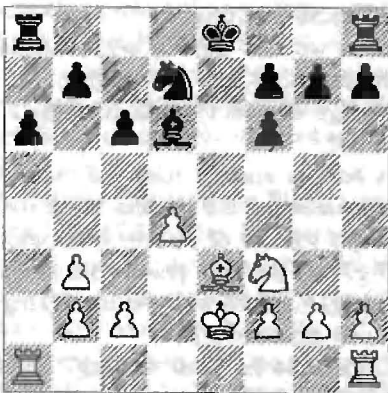


aforementioned benign implications for Black's structure. However, I am a bit sceptical that the expenditure of time can be justified after 9 ♟f4! a4?! 10 ♟xe6 ♟xe6 11 0-0-0 and it is already too late to avoid a quick d5 advance by White, with the generally positive implications which we shall see well illustrated by the main game.

8...♟a6!? by contrast is quite appealing, and looks a more purposeful route to d5. 9 ♟e3 ♟b4! 10 ♟f3 ♟xb3 11 axb3 ♟e4! 12 ♟c1 ♟d6 was comfortable for Black in Geller-Seirawan, New York 1990. If, by floating the possibility of ...♟b4, the defender can induce his opponent into playing 9 c3, then, after 9...♟c7 there is an appealing logic and economy to Black's set-up.

9 ♟f3 ♟xb3 10 axb3 ♟xe2+ 11 ♟xe2 ♟d6 12 ♟e3 a6 (D)

W



Time to take stock. In spite of the fact that White has also acquired a doubled pawn, the

structure continues to be in his favour. For although these doubled pawns are found on his majority side, they are not relevant to that part of the majority – the c- and d-pawns – which crucially affects his ability to create a passed pawn. However, to suggest that the conversion of such an advantage into victory could be straightforward would be deeply misleading. The decision which White makes next is fascinating and bold. He opens up the position, enhances his bishop, gives himself chances of a bind on the light squares and an initiative on the queenside into the bargain. However, at the same time, as well as granting his opponent some squares too (not least e5) he exchanges off the very d-pawn upon which his hopes of eventually creating a passed pawn rested.

13 d5! cxd5 14 ♟hd1 0-0-0 15 ♟xd5 ♟c7

Not a mistake by any means, but a first sign that the venerable Hungarian grandmaster might be slightly undervaluing the resource which the e5-square represents here. I would have preferred 15...♟e5, which seems to keep White's initiative within tolerable bounds.

16 b4 ♟b6

Again 16...♟e5 looks better, proposing some useful exchanges while keeping 17...b6 in reserve as a reply to 17 ♟c5. After the text-move, White will at least guarantee the advance of his b-pawn, which further intensifies the pressure on the queenside.

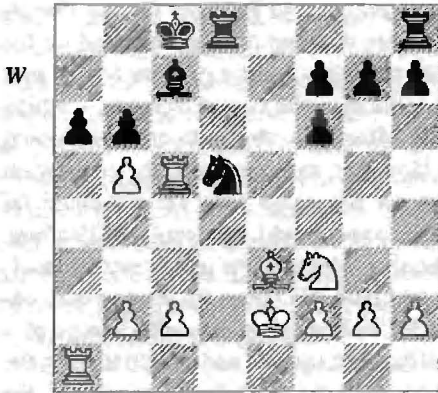
17 ♟c5! ♟d5 18 b5 b6!? (D)

Provocative in a sense, but still it is wise to reject the pseudo-activity which 18...♟he8 19 bxa6 bxa6 20 ♟xa6 ♟f4+ 21 ♟f1 ♟d1+ 22 ♟e1 represents. Black cannot intensify the pressure before his pieces are driven back.

19 ♟xd5!

A refreshingly direct and thematic sacrifice. For the exchange, White will obtain not just a dangerous passed a-pawn, but excellent squares for his knight which bring to the fore again his focus on the light squares. However, a great deal of precision is still needed. First of all his 20th move is of enormous significance since he *must* remove the rook from the 5th rank to prevent the resource ...♟a5.

19...♟xd5 20 c4! ♟dd8 21 bxa6 ♟he8 22 ♟f1!

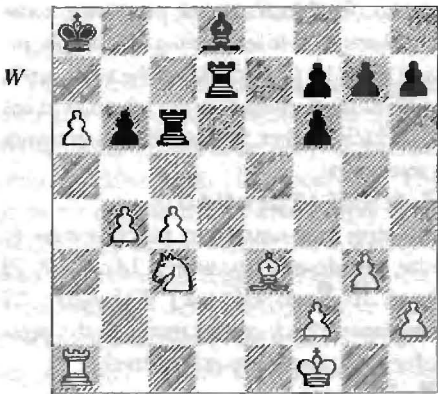


Preventing the exchange of bishops by ...♙f4 and at the same time preparing to improve his knight. Enticing light squares beckon, b5 and c6 in particular.

22...♙b8 23 ♖d4 ♗d7 24 ♖b5!?

Playing 24 ♖c6+ in conjunction with an advance of the b-pawn was another tempting option.

24...♙d8 25 g3 ♙a8 26 b4 ♗e6 27 ♖c3 ♗c6 (D)



28 c5!

The third well-timed breakthrough of the game. White finally achieves connected passed pawns, through an elegant temporary pawn sacrifice which again appeals to the light-square theme.

28...bxc5 29 b5! ♗e6

Even now there were better chances of a successful defence with Lukacs's suggestion 29...♗c8 30 ♖a4 ♗b8! 31 ♗b1 ♗d6 with the

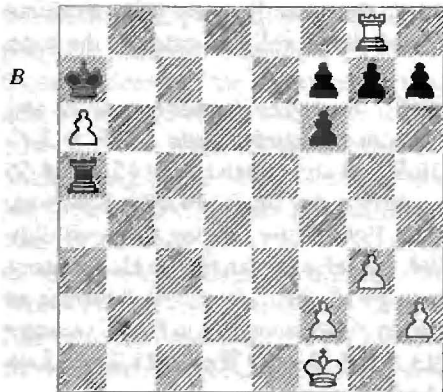
idea that 32 ♙f4 can be met with 32...♗xa6! 33 ♖xc5 ♗a2 34 ♙xb8 ♙xb8. This ending should still pose some problems, but the presence of a pair of minor pieces is a substantial improvement over the game continuation.

30 ♖a4 ♗d5 31 ♙xc5! ♗xc5! 32 ♖xc5 ♗e5 33 ♗d1

It was probably even stronger to play 33 ♖b7, keeping both queenside pawns. However, the toughness of Black's resources in the rook ending could have understandably come as a surprise to White. Both Black's rook and king are extremely passive, but the win is still not straightforward.

33...♙a5 34 ♖b7 ♗xb5 35 ♖xa5 ♗xa5 36 ♗d8+ ♙a7 37 ♗g8?! (D)

It looks better to play 37 ♗d7+ picking up the rear f-pawn.



37...♗g5 38 ♙g2 h5?

This, as we shall quickly see, constitutes a fresh weakness. 38...f5! was tougher.

39 f4 ♗g6 40 ♗h8 f5 41 ♗xh5 ♗f6 42 ♗h7 ♗g6 43 h4!

This heralds another round of misery and embarrassment for the hapless black rook. It will simply run out of squares from which to defend g7 and the final phase will, at last, be quite straightforward with the black king still so far away from the action.

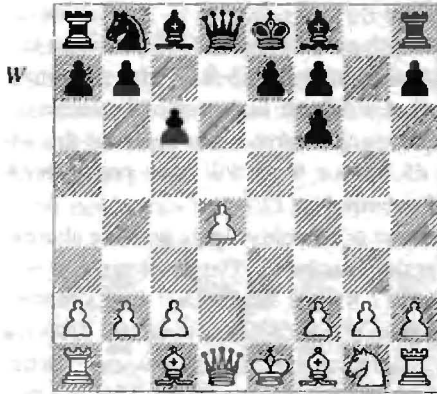
43...♙xa6 44 h5 ♗h6 45 ♗xg7 ♗xh5 46 ♗xf7 ♙b6 47 g4! fxg4 48 ♙g3 ♙c6 49 ♙xg4 ♗h8 50 ♙g5 ♙d6 51 f5 ♗g8+ 52 ♙f6 ♗h8 53 ♙g6 ♗h1 54 ♗a7 ♗g1+ 55 ♙f7 ♗f1 56 f6 ♗f2 57 ♗a1 1-0

Game 9

Oleg Korneev – Javier Gil Capape

Spanish Team Ch, Mondariz Balneario 2002

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 ♟c3 dxe4 4 ♟xe4 ♟f6 5 ♟xf6+ gxf6 (D)



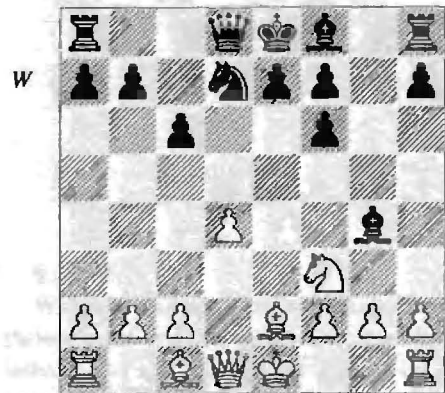
This is arguably Black's sharpest and most ambitious handling of the main-line Caro-Kann. Here the compensation he is claiming for the damage to his structure is much more built around specific sources of counterplay than a general satisfaction with 'free mobilization'. Black hopes to drum up play on the g-file as well as to castle queenside with pressure against d4, perhaps even in conjunction with the ...e5 break. However, such a pawn move is undeniably problematic – rendering the f-pawns and the square in front of them significantly weaker – and is typical of the judgements between piece activity and structural weaknesses which Black is routinely required to make.

6 c3

A variety of systems for White continue to see the light of day here, but there is nonetheless quite a widely held view that the kingside fianchetto is a very sensible way to try to nullify Black's aspirations on the g-file and that the text-move is the most accurate way to initiate it. Both 6 ♟f3 ♟g4! 7 g3 and 6 g3 ♟d5 7 ♟f3 allow Black unnecessary opportunities to create inconvenience. Since c3 has its role in White's system anyway, there is no need consider these.

Rather, I shall take a look here at alternatives to the fianchetto, which is itself very much a modern phenomenon as any quick reference to Caro-Kann material from the early 1980s will reveal:

a) 6 ♟f3 is now often dismissed in the literature for allowing the pin, but was once a main line and still appears with some regularity. Alongside encouraging 6...♟g4, it also discourages the alternative development since 6...♟f5 7 ♟d3! helps White, who may gather larger than usual dividends if he can subsequently organize the d5 pawn-break, whether Black exchanges or drops back with 7...♟g6. After 6...♟g4 7 ♟e2 ♟d7 (D) White often proceeds with an early ♟e3, which is quite playable, but seems less critical than two alternative approaches.



One is, after 8 0-0 ♟c7, to play 9 ♟h4!? ♟xe2 10 ♟xe2. The plan is to effect the d5 advance, supported by c4 and probably prepared with g3. This, as discussed above, is enhanced in the context of the exchange of light-squared bishops. Ideally, it may even be possible for the knight to make use of the f5-square although it will not be easy to induce Black to play ...cxd5. In fact, so long as he avoids that, Black may benefit from the offside position of the knight,

but the idea is still one that needs to be taken seriously.

Another possibility is to play 8 h3!? ♙h5 9 0-0, intending to meet 9...♖c7 with the immediate 10 d5!? or 9...e6 with 10 c4 ♖c7 11 d5. This version has the advantage that the exchange of bishops may be invited with the more centralizing ♗d4. Again, Black has resources. One interesting response is anyway to play 11...0-0-0 12 ♗d4 ♙g6!?, and hope that White may prove to be overextended in the centre and on the d-file in particular – a claim which appears to have validity after 13 dxc6?! ♗h8!?. However, some move like 13 ♙e3 will keep the tension and the potential for attacking Black's king remains. I am not claiming an advantage here, merely that 6 ♗f3 tends to be a bit harshly dismissed by contemporary theory.

b) 6 ♗e2 ♙f5 7 ♗g3 is also quite logical, but White generally needs c3 included in his set-up so I shall explore this under the note to White's 7th move, which will also, hopefully, reveal the value of c3 at the same time.

We now return to 6 c3 (D):



6...♙f5

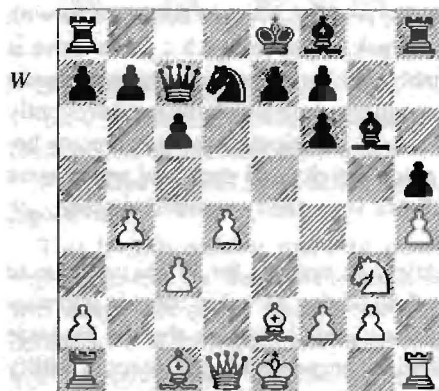
The natural development. Devotees of this system for Black are well aware that an unwillingness to countenance the move c4 on the grounds that it weakens d4 can often result in Black enjoying a useful 'working' hold on the d5-square. However, no such conclusions can be drawn from 6 c3 and 6...♖d5?! strikes me as premature precisely because of 7 c4!, when after 7...♖e4+ 8 ♙e3 e5 9 ♗e2 ♙b4+ 10 ♗c3 f5

Black finds that keeping his initiative alive involves weakening himself further. In Charbonneau-Rombaldoni, La Roche-sur-Yon 2006 White neatly consolidated with 11 ♖e2 f4 12 ♙d2 ♖xe2+ 13 ♗xe2 ♙xd2+ 14 ♗xd2 f6 and enjoyed good chances to exploit his opponent's structural problems, to which end 15 ♗c3!, according to Ftačnik, would have been particularly apposite.

7 ♗f3

It is worth mentioning that 7 ♙d3 is here less effective than after 6 ♗f3 ♙f5?! for the simple reason that in order to make use of the exchange White needs the move c4 to promote the advance d5. Hence 6 c3 will have pretty much wasted a tempo.

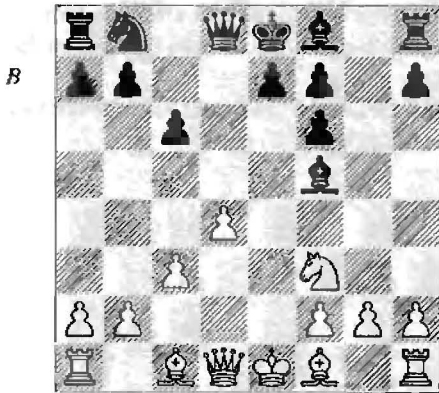
There are nonetheless again sensible alternatives to the fianchetto. The most notable is 7 ♗e2!? ♗d7 8 ♗g3 ♙g6 9 h4! (the structure arising from 9 f4?! f5! tends to be bad news for Black's light-squared bishop but even better news for his other minor pieces). This is a thematic plan which appears to make positional sense, although after 9...h5! it is unclear that this operation on the side of the board where Black himself has aspirations will have much point unless White exploits the weakness of h5 with brutal directness. Hence the variation usually turns into a pawn-grab after 10 ♙e2 ♖a5! 11 b4 ♖c7 (D).



White's pursuit of the h-pawn is about to bear fruit. However, it comes at a cost – primarily the realization that expansion on both wings has implications for the king since Black is also

ready to undertake undermining action both in the centre and against b4. Now 12 f5 f6 13 f6 a5 ! looks to me quite dubious for White, with ...0-0 and ...e5 coming rapidly. The exchange of the light-squared bishop loosens the white position. Therefore, 12 f6 looks preferable, when Black has a choice between 12...a5 13 f4 ! axb4 14 f6 fxg6 15 cxb4 e5 and 12...e5!?, putting pressure on the centre as well as retaining the g6-bishop. In general, this position seems to exemplify precisely the sort of counter-chances which attract Black to the line in the first place. This must at least detract from its value as a practical choice.

We now return to 7 f3 (D):



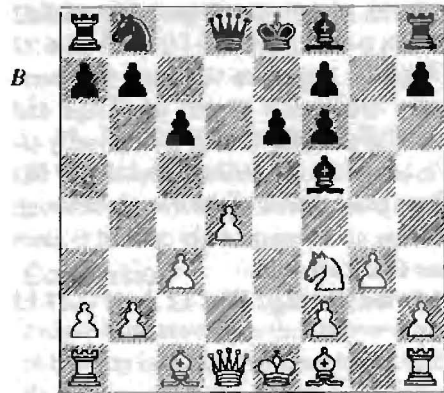
7...e6

There are various reasons why Black could consider alternatives. One is to try to break with ...e5 directly. However, the consequent weakness of f5 seems likely to outweigh other factors; for example, after 7... c7 8 g3 d7 9 g2 0-0-0 10 0-0 e5 11 b3 !? b6 12 c1 d6 13 h6 hg8 14 dxe5 ! fxe5 15 h4 e6 16 c2 Black is a bit vulnerable on the light squares, Dvoirys-Orlov, St Petersburg 1995. As is often the case with doubled pawns, it is the squares around them which are more of a concrete weakness than the pawns themselves.

Another reason is to try to organize ...h3, for example by 7... d7 (7... d7 of course makes little sense when White is not yet committed to g3) 8 g3 b6 9 g2 d7 10 0-0 h3 . However, whilst this is a common method for

fighting against a fianchetto, there is a sense here that any resulting problems for White's king will not be too severe. Moreover, the exchange of light-squared bishops in positional terms tends to favour White as we have seen in previous notes. After 11 f6 f6 12 a4 f5 13 a5 d5 14 c4 c7 15 f4 0-0-0 16 xc7 ! xc7 17 e2 g8 18 b4 White's attack looks the more likely to cause trouble, Schlindwein-D.Roos, 2nd Bundesliga 1996/7. Finally, the version of the 'strategy of disruption' initiated by 7... d7 8 g3 b6 9 g2 a6 does not convince after the straightforward 10 h4 ! d3 11 b3! e6 12 c4. However, this is not the last we shall see of this approach – especially those who have respect for White's set-up are often keen to disrupt its flow in this way.

8 g3 (D)



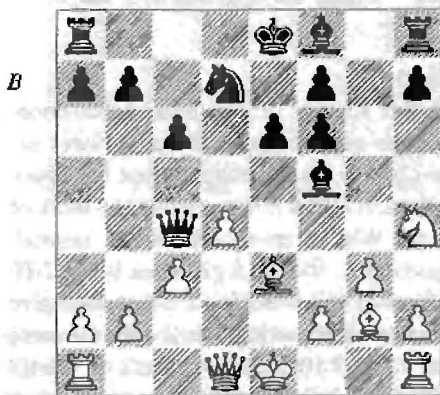
8...d5

With this slightly strange-looking but nonetheless quite popular move, Black declares his intention to use his queen to disrupt his opponent's plans. It seems fair to see this as a mark of respect for White's set-up after some 'normal' move such as 8... d7 9 g2 , when 9... c7 10 h4 ! g6 11 0-0 0-0?! 12 b4! should give White a very strong attack, while after the more cautious 9... g7 10 0-0 0-0 Adams's 11 h4 !? g6 12 a4 a5 13 f4 should be worth an edge. This latter case is in fact not so clear-cut, although it is awkward for Black that the move which would liberate the g7-bishop would at the same time block in its colleague.

9 g2 c4

So it becomes clear that the strategy is to interfere with White's development by preventing castling. However, even assuming that objective is right, it might be better to try $9... \text{♝b5}!$?, since as we shall see the queen is relatively effortlessly evicted from c4. A similar idea can also be implemented by $8... \text{♝b6}$ and $9... \text{♝a6}!$?, although in that case Black will also have to reckon with $9 \text{ ♜e2}!$? crossing his intentions. I am less impressed by the alternative plan $9... \text{♝e4} + 10 \text{ ♙e3} \text{ ♝c2} 11 \text{ ♗h4} \text{ ♝xd1} + 12 \text{ ♜xd1}$, not least as such an exchange of queens does not really seem in the spirit of Black's opening. After $12... \text{♙g4} 13 \text{ f3} \text{ ♙h5} 14 \text{ g4} \text{ ♙g6} 15 \text{ f4} \text{ ♗d7}$, for example, White has the better-developed forces and the plan of f5. However, the handling of such a plus requires some delicacy and a precise notion of what implementation of the plan White is aiming at. Perhaps fearing $16 \text{ 0-0} \text{ ♙c2}!$? White rushed in with $16 \text{ f5}!$? $\text{exf5} 17 \text{ gxf5} \text{ ♙h5} 18 \text{ ♞d2} \text{ ♗b6} 19 \text{ ♙f4} \text{ 0-0-0} 20 \text{ ♗f2} \text{ ♗c4} 21 \text{ ♞c2} \text{ ♙d6} 22 \text{ ♙xd6} \text{ ♗xd6}$ in Pugachov-Vasiukov, St Petersburg 1994, dissipating all this advantage and more. For one thing the f5 plan is only really effective in conjunction with the occupation of this square by a *piece* thereafter. Moreover, although the g-file has now become fully open, it is more than ever Black's terrain.

$10 \text{ ♙f1} \text{ ♝d5} 11 \text{ ♙g2} \text{ ♝c4} 12 \text{ ♙e3!} \text{ ♗d7} 13 \text{ ♗h4} (D)$



$13... \text{♙g6}$

Black has no long-term prospects of preventing White from castling kingside; if $13... \text{♙d3} 14 \text{ ♝d2!} \text{ a5} 15 \text{ b3} \text{ ♝a6} 16 \text{ ♞d1!}$ Black is only

making concessions in pursuit of an unattainable goal.

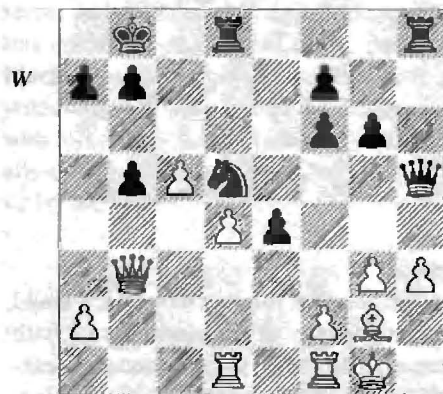
$14 \text{ ♝d2} \text{ 0-0-0} 15 \text{ ♗xg6} \text{ hxg6} 16 \text{ b3} \text{ ♝b5}$

There is good sense in Black's queen trying to redeploy to the kingside. However, if (and only if) Black uses the tempo saved by $16... \text{♝a6}!$? 17 c4 to strike back in the centre – perhaps with $17... \text{c5}$, although $17... \text{e5}$ is not implausible either – then this might have been a better source of potential counterplay.

$17 \text{ c4} \text{ ♝h5} 18 \text{ h3} \text{ ♙h6} 19 \text{ 0-0} \text{ ♙xe3} 20 \text{ ♝xe3} \text{ ♗b8} 21 \text{ b4}$

In positional terms, Black should be happy with the exchange of dark-squared bishops. However, the dynamics of the position are now looking rather bleaker. It is unclear how Black can achieve anything on the kingside to match White's rather automatic and effective plan of pushing his b-pawn. So he tries his luck in the centre.

$21... \text{e5} 22 \text{ ♞ad1} \text{ ♗b6} 23 \text{ c5!} \text{ ♗d5} 24 \text{ ♝b3} \text{ e4} 25 \text{ b5} \text{ exb5} (D)$



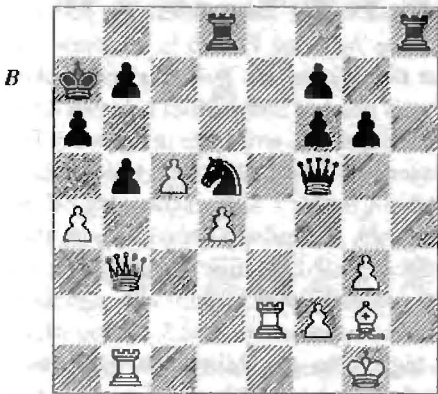
$26 \text{ ♙xe4}!$

My initial reaction to this move was very favourable. White makes the claim that opening up the h1–a8 diagonal counts for more than partially allowing Black in on the h-file. This looks like a straight comparison of attacking force and White emerges victorious. However, a closer look reveals that this is not so clear. The thematic point is that while Black will not deliver mate on the h-file, $... \text{♝xh3}$ will nonetheless enable the queen to reconnect with the defence. By contrast, even were Black able to

give e4 the firm defence it needs with ...f5, there would be no time for the black queen to scramble home. Thus, it appears that 26 ♖xb5! is even stronger. As usual, tactics mesh with these general considerations. Here it is 26...♕c3 27 ♖b4! ♕xd1? 28 c6! which would convincingly see Black off, while 27...♕d5 28 ♖b3 f5 29 ♖b1 b6 30 cxb6 ♕xb6 31 a4 is also straightforward and convincing.

26...♖xh3 27 ♖fe1 ♖h2+ 28 ♖f1 ♖h3+ 29 ♖g2! ♖d7 30 ♖g1 a6 31 ♖b1 ♖a7 32 ♖c2 ♖f5 33 a4 (D)

So far, so thematic. It is not hard to see why White placed such priority upon on the sweeping h1-a8 diagonal.



33...♕c3?
 Black sets a trap, but is in a sense himself falling into one. There is no doubt that he is under some pressure anyway, but 33...b4! was nonetheless a thematic and much tougher defence. There are only two barriers against annihilation on b7, the d5-knight and the front b-pawn and it is essential to hold onto both. Interestingly, it is not clear how White makes progress here without ceding his pride and joy – the g2-bishop. He is more active for sure after 34 ♕xd5 ♖xd5 35 ♖xd5 ♖xd5 36 ♖xb4 ♖d7 and now perhaps 37 ♖g2 ♖hd8 38 ♖eb2.

However, since even here an immediate advance of the d-pawn is not threatened as the calm ...♖c8 will tend to be a good counter, there is clearly much work to be done to convert this plus into victory.

34 ♖e7 ♖d7
 There is no respite in 34...♖xb1+ 35 ♖xb1 ♕xb1 36 ♖xb7+ ♖a8 37 ♖xb5+ ♖a7 38 ♖b7+ ♖a8 39 ♖xb1+ ♖a7 40 ♖b7+, when White will minimally pick up a second pawn for the exchange while his bishop remains a glorious piece.

35 ♖bel!
 But not, of course, 35 ♖xd7? ♕e2+ 36 ♖f1 ♕xg3+, when White will have to bail out with half a point by returning to g1.

35...♕xa4 36 ♖xf7
 A decisive intensification of pressure along the 7th rank is the price for the d5-knight deserting its central square.

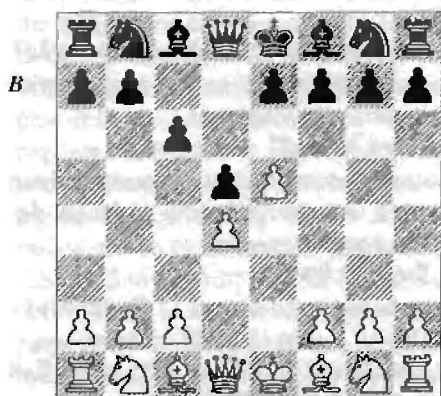
36...♖xe7 37 ♖xe7!
 A last chance to go wrong: 37 ♖xe7? ♖b1+ 38 ♖f1 ♖h1+! would allow Black to escape.
 37...♖b8 38 d5! ♖c8 39 c6 ♖f8 40 c7 ♖c8 41 d6 ♕c5 42 ♖xf8 ♖xf8 43 ♖c1! 1-0
 After 43...b6 44 ♖xc5 the pawns crash home.

Conclusion

I made little attempt in the chapter introduction to hide my lack of enthusiasm for 5...exf6 (Game 8). Of course, strong players have adopted this, fully conscious of the enduring structural disadvantage it entails, but for myself I would want to see much more in terms of concrete compensation. By contrast, the return which Black expects to find for his positional concession after 5...gxf6 is much clearer. Sadly, the antidote is now also widely acknowledged and Game 9 exemplifies this. Still, for those seeking to unbalance the play and willing to take some risks to achieve this end, there remains an occasional place for 5...gxf6 in the repertoire.

4 Advance Variation: Sharp Lines and Black's Early Alternatives

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 (D)



There is an inescapable element of paradox concerning the Advance Variation which is worth mentioning right away. On the one hand it is the obvious territory for those who relish blocked positions – it is after all one of few methods available of avoiding the partial opening of the centre associated with the basic structure of Chapters 1-3. At the same time though, it has also proven attractive to those who are principally looking for chances to attack. It will take just a brief glance through the material here to ascertain that there are more tactical battles, wild, even at times irrational positions than anywhere else in the book. In essence, White chooses to close the position, often with the intention not to manoeuvre endlessly behind the lines, but to blast it open with all the more ferocity when the occasion presents itself. It is true that the Advance Variation has attracted the attention of many of the world's top players at one time or another in recent years. However, it is no coincidence that we find such tacticians as Alexei Shirov and Emil Sutovsky

among the most enthusiastic advocates of the white cause. Even in Chapter 5, where we will find that the resurgence of interest in 3 e5 is by no means exclusively the product of such a desire to hack, there will still be fireworks.

Enough of stylistic considerations; let us get back to basics. The main difference between this and the Advance French is of course the fact that Black's queen's bishop is not blocked in – a basic point of comparison between these openings in general, writ large in this case. For this reason the h7-b1 diagonal, which Black captured in Chapter 1 after exchanging off the white e-pawn, is similarly attractive here after its advance. Only in Game 10 does Black eschew the natural move 3...♗f5, although there is an implicit argument behind 3...c5 too which values highly the possibility that this bishop will be free to develop. It is OK to take two moves with the c-pawn to undermine White's centre so long as this piece remains liberated.

Great piece though the bishop is on f5, it may also be vulnerable to attack. It is this insight which underlies White's play in Games 11 and 12. He is willing to make the definite concession of blocking his c-pawn in order to take away the e4-square and use the bishop to gain time for a radical kingside expansion. In line with good classical principles, it is often incumbent upon Black to respond to such flank play by striking back in the centre. However, since White can at least initially claim superior development, the creation of play in the centre can demand a good deal of finesse from the defender. This may go some way to explain the appeal of 6...f6, although I feel sure that there is enough pedigree underlying 6...c5 too as a response to White's highly committal aggression.

Game 13 considers 4 h4, which in terms of sharpness has some appeal as a sort of halfway house between the less controlled aggression of 4 ♖e3 and 5 g4 and the more positional lines

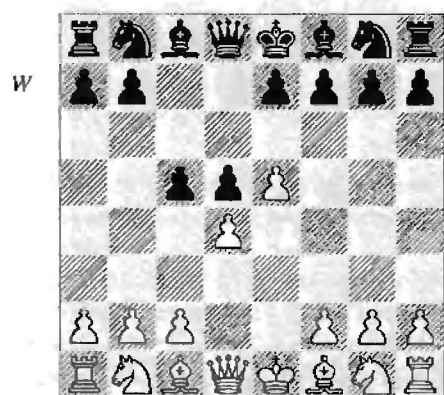
(with some caveats) of Chapter 5. Nigel Short makes it look very effective, but the truth lies here rather in the notes and Black's resources seem acceptable.

Game 10

Dimitrios Mastrovasilis – Stuart Conquest

French Team Ch, Asnieres sur Seine 2006

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5!? (D)



There can be little disputing that this second move with the c-pawn out of the very first three makes a rather bizarre impression. Nonetheless the move does have a quite compelling logic too and the fierce and extended debate over its full respectability is showing few signs of dying down. Black is in tune with well-established strategic thinking in directing his pressure to the base of White's pawn-chain. He also keeps his queen's bishop flexible – retaining the option of development to g4 in answer to an early ♗f3. However, discussion of the development of the light-squared bishop, especially in the context of the Advance Variation, invites an almost automatic comparison with the French Defence. The diagram position is indeed the 'purest' point of resemblance – we simply have the main line of the Advance French with the move ...e6 omitted. As we shall see, the ability still to develop the c8-bishop broadly looks like an asset if White merely supports d4. Hence White tends to opt for a more open position,

even at the expense of apparently making concessions in the centre.

Aside from the main line 3...♗f5 of Games 11-17, there are few viable alternatives. The inappropriateness of 3...e6?! should I hope be clear from the above comments. Black will have no real alternative to creating counterplay with ...c5 in due course and would thus virtually condemn himself to an Advance French with a tempo less. There have also been occasional vogues for 3...♗a6?! although presumably mostly among those who see an element of humour in their chess. 4 ♗xa6?! ♖a5+! is worth avoiding and 4 ♗d3 ♗b4!? is probably not the most accurate either. However, common-sense development such as 4 c3 ♗c7 5 ♗d3 g6 6 ♗e2 looks reasonable, when White often effects an early manoeuvre of his queen's knight to e3 (♗d2-f1-e3) in order to challenge for the f5-square, on which again Black has blockading aspirations. The whole thing looks rather artificial for the defender and it is far from easy to explain quite what the knight on e6 contributes to his light-square plan.

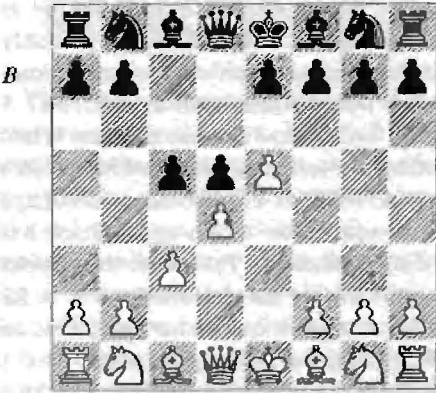
4 dxc5

This can be played in conjunction with a choice of one or more distinct ideas and has proven to be of durable popularity. White may have in mind a grand strategy – known from Nimzowitsch's treatment of the Advance French – in which the squares d4 and perhaps later e5 too are cleared of centre pawns in order to free them up for use by the pieces instead. However, there may be two other simpler motivations at work. The pawn may simply be tricky to win back – especially in the main line with 4...♗e6 we shall see that it may on occasion be necessary to treat this line in gambit style. Moreover,

the attempts to recoup the material are likely to involve an early ...e6 by Black and there is no guarantee that there will be time to develop the c8-bishop first in this case. Black is running the risk of ending up in a kind of French with a tempo deficit. However, it is still open to question whether the dxc5 French lines themselves are critical enough for this to be especially problematic.

To understand fully what is going on here and to be aware of latest fashions, three other moves should be mentioned, bearing in mind that variations 'b' and 'c' are replete with transpositional possibilities.

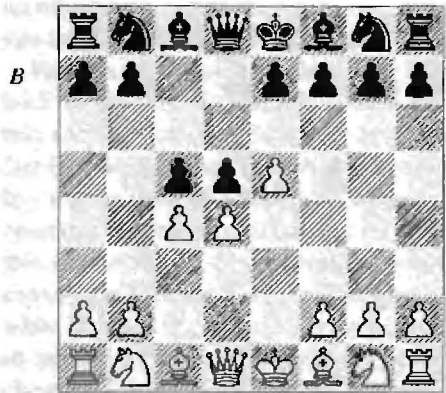
a) 4 c3 (D) is not regarded as a great challenge, although the possibility of treating such positions in this way was given something of a moral boost by Nigel Short's modest but far from innocuous handling of the Advance to be discussed in Game 14 – and in some ways this is analogous to the structure from Game 13 too.



This slow manoeuvring does not feel like the way to punish Black's apparent disregard for tempi, but there remains the claim that the more active bishop on f5 may prove to be rather missed from the queenside. After 4...dxc6, the most popular response 5 dxf3?! makes limited sense after the natural 5...g4!, since the pressure on d4 is already quite annoying. 5 e3 is possible, but 5 e2!? looks better to me. Direct pressure on d4 by 5...cxd4 6 cxd4 Bb6 then rebounds a bit after 7 dxc3!, which all but forces the ...e6 move which Black has been trying to

avoid. 5...g5 is better, but by only now playing 6 dxf3 e6 7 0-0 White succeeds in transposing to the note to White's 6th move (6 0-0 dxc6 7 c3!?) in Game 14 (Chapter 5). Interestingly, not only do Karpov and Podgaets consider this same position from the two move-orders and reach quite diverse conclusions, but much of the chess world appears to have followed their example in condemning 4 c3.

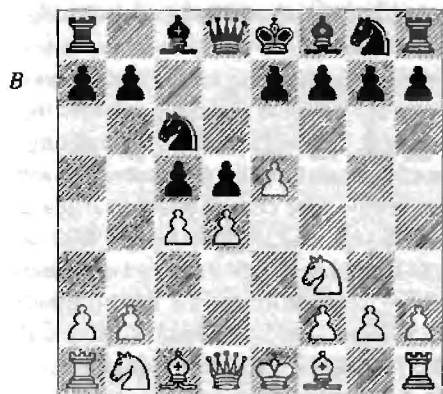
b) 4 c4!? (D) seeks an altogether more open position and White's lead in development provides some logical justification for this.



4...cxd4 5 Bxd4!? looks quite decent for White since after 5...e6 6 cxd5 exd5 7 dxc3 e6 8 dxf3 White will always have the pin on b5 to avoid losing time as a response to ...dxc6, while he enjoys both better development and the sounder structure. So 4...dxc6 looks a better bet, when forcing the development of the opponent's queen by 5 cxd5 Bxd5 looks premature. It can be played as a sacrifice with 6 dxc3 Bxd4 7 e3 Bb4 but White's development is not so impressive and in Topalović-Mikhailchishin, Varazdin 2003 Black instructively returned the pawn after 8 a3 Ba5 9 e6 b5 10 exb6+ bxc6 11 Ba4 Bb6 12 b4 Ba6! 13 Bxa6 e6 14 bxc5 dxe7 to obtain excellent chances on the light squares. Hence White should rather keep maximum tension with 5 dxf3!, which is covered below under the more popular move-order 4 dxf3.

c) 4 dxf3 keeps an extra element of flexibility, although a subsequent attack on the centre with c4 remains White's most potent resource.

c1) Here too 4...♘c6 is the most natural, but once again White should initiate sharp play in the centre with 5 c4! (D).



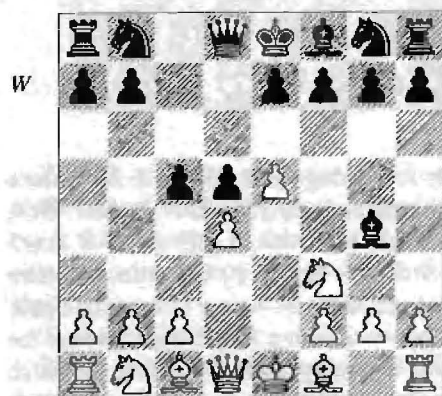
There is no quiet life for the defender here, but he seems to be wise not to encourage undue complexity.

c11) 5...♙g4?! is perhaps guilty of this. 6 cxd5 ♖xd5 (or 6...♙xf3 7 ♗xf3 ♘xd4 8 ♗d1 ♗xd5 9 ♙b5+! ♔d8 10 0-0, when the displacement of Black's king guarantees good compensation) 7 ♘c3 ♙xf3 8 ♘xd5! ♙xd1 9 ♘c7+ ♔d8 10 ♘xa8 ♙h5 11 d5 ♘b4 12 ♙e3 b6!? 13 ♙c4!? ♘c2+ 14 ♔d2 should be in White's favour. Black can take the rook and attempt to embarrass the white knight under conditions of material equality. However, his development is so poor that even if the piece is trapped, a high price can be exacted for its capture. 14...♘xa1 15 ♙xa1 ♔c8 16 b4!? ♔b8 17 ♘xb6 axb6 18 bxc5 is one example in which White obtains a vicious attack while the opponent's forces mainly rest in their beds. 14...♘xe3 15 ♘xe3 ♘b6 16 h3 ♘f5+ 17 ♘d2 ♘d4 was thus the choice in Edouard-Khenkin, Andorra la Vella 2006 and after 18 b4! e6 19 d6 there is a route out via c7 and at this stage White's chances looked preferable.

c12) Perhaps therefore Black should prefer 5...cxd4. However, after 6 ♘xd4, 6...♘xe5?! 7 cxd5 ♘f6 (7...♗xd5 8 ♘c3 ♗a5 9 ♙b5+ ♙d7 10 0-0 looks quite perilous for Black) 8 ♘c3 a6 9 ♗a4+ ♙d7 10 ♗b3 b5 11 ♙f4 gave White much the better development in Solovjov-Kharitonov, St Petersburg-Moscow match 2005. Certainly

6...dxc4!? is a safer alternative and it may be that the defender's hold on the d5-square and his ability to bring a knight there quickly can compensate for his structural weaknesses after 7 ♘xc6 ♗xd1+ 8 ♔xd1 bxc6 9 ♙xc4 ♙f5 10 ♘c3 e6 11 ♙e3 ♙b4 12 ♙c1 ♘e7, but this would not be to everybody's taste.

c2) There is an alternative in 4...♙g4!? (D).



Then 5 dxc5 ♘c6 (5...e6 looks sensible too) leads to a position to be considered in the notes to White's 5th move in the main game. Once again, 5 c4!? might be the most testing, but I am inclined towards Zelčić's treatment of the position with 5...cxd4!? 6 ♗a4+ ♙d7 7 ♗b3 dxc4 8 ♙xc4 e6 9 ♘xd4 ♘c6 10 ♘xc6 ♙xc6, when White has a slight lead in development, but Black has some positional trumps, not least his excellent bishop on c6 and perhaps hopes of using the d5-square.

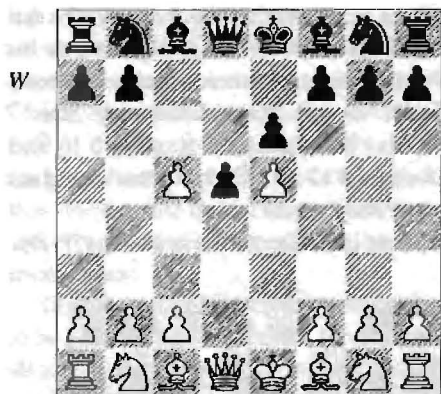
However, this may amount to an argument for the move-order 4 c4!? ♘c6 5 ♘f3, and this remains a tough challenge to 3...c5 to which a really convincing antidote remains to be found.

Now back to the position after 4 dxc5.

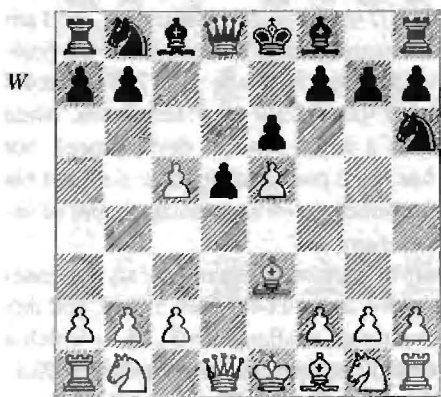
4...♘c6!?

This is the most ambitious response and also the one which indicates a greater willingness on Black's part to treat the position in gambit style. The alternative is the immediate 4...e6 (D), by which Black reaches a French Defence in which he has traded a tempo for his opponent's adoption of a relatively uncritical line.

This does not feel like the moment for White to try to cling onto his spoils. Nonetheless,



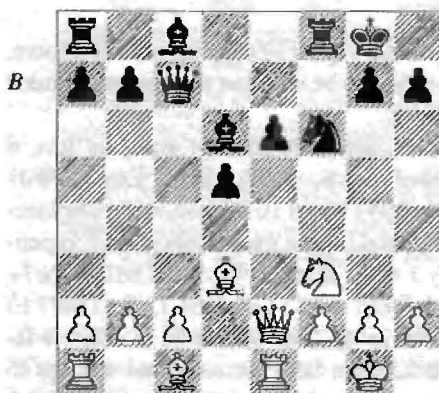
there is something to be said for 5 e3, since after the natural reply 5...d7 6 e5 c7, White might try either 7 f3 xc5 8 xc5 xc5 9 xd7+ xd7 10 0-0 with the claim that his hold on the d4-square offers a light pull, or the more interesting 7 b4!?, hoping to use the c5-pawn to cramp Black's pieces, to which Karpov and Podgaets gave their stamp of approval. After 7...xe5, the developing 8 d2!? looks fun for White. However, 5...h6!? (D) instead makes a good deal of sense.



It highlights two drawbacks of 5 e3 – the vulnerability of this piece to attack by ...f5 and White's own reluctance to move this piece a second time to break up Black's kingside. In fact there has been something of a vogue for 6 f3 d7 7 xh6!? gxh6 8 c4, hoping to create some space and access to e4 in particular as a means to attack the black king. However, after 8...dxc4 9 xc4 g7! 10 e2 c7! White is

faced with a thematic caving-in of his dark squares in the centre unless he settles for 11 e5 0-0 12 xd7 (Rabiega-Khenkin, Bundesliga 2000/1), after which Black's bishop-pair against two knights must offer him fair chances.

Of course White can also play in the style of Nimzowitsch, exchanging off his centre pawns in order to control with pieces the squares they have vacated. Curiously though, maintaining a grip on e5 appears to be problematic even with the extra tempo. The critical position arises after 5 f3 xc5 6 d3 c6 7 0-0 f6 8 e2 (after 8 e4 Black has 8...g5! 9 g3 g4 or perhaps 8...fxe5 9 Qxe5?! e6! for the faint-hearted!) 8...fxe5 9 Qxe5 Qxe5 10 xe5 f6 11 d2 0-0 12 f3 d6 13 e2 c7 14 e1 (D).

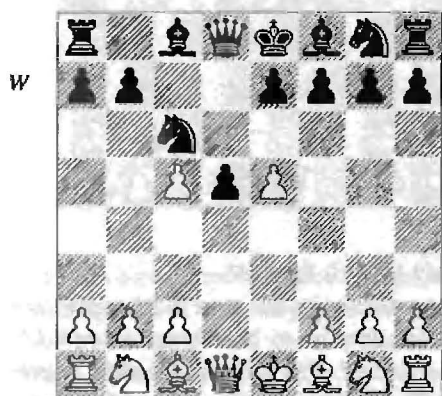


White is one tempo away from occupying e5, which would constitute some kind of positional achievement. However, Black can strike first with 14...e5 15 Qxe5 e8 16 f4! Qg4 17 f1!?, when both 17...e5!? 18 fxe5 e5 19 f3 f5! 20 e4 b6+ 21 h1 e5 and 17...Qxe5 18 fxe5 e5 19 f3 e6 20 e4 f8 21 g3 xf4 22 xf4 h5 23 af1 (Yagupov-Evseev, St Petersburg 2002) 23...g5!? look about equal.

One of the most interesting alternatives available is to expand on the queenside with 5 a3!?, which in itself gains space and also helps to contest the e5-square. After 5...c6 6 f3 xc5 7 b4 e6 8 d3 ge7 9 h2! (it is more important to discourage an effective ...f6 break than to prevent ...f4; White's control of more space seems to outweigh the loss of the bishop-pair) 9...d6 10 0-0 f4 11 c4 0-0 12 c3

♞e7 13 ♖d2 ♜xd3 14 ♖xd3 dxc4 15 ♖xc4 ♜c7 16 ♖g4! ♔d7 17 ♞e4 White succeeded in drumming up a dangerous attack on the king-side in Smirnov-Kharitonov, Moscow 2007.

Back to the main line 4...♞c6 (D).



5 ♟b5 e6 6 ♟e3

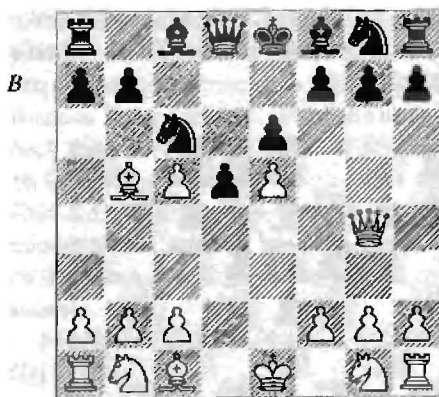
As usual, White needs to be cautious about trying to retain the c5-pawn too directly by playing 6 b4?!. If Black has available some combination of the pawn-levers ...a5 and ...b6, then White's queenside can be liable to rapid disintegration. Such is the case here: 6...a5! 7 c3 ♟d7 8 ♟xc6 ♟xc6 9 ♞f3 (otherwise ...d4 might be an issue) 9...axb4 10 cxb4 b6! with good play for Black.

An awareness of the significance of the move ...b6 might cause one to wonder why not to try 6 ♟xc6+ immediately, when Black cannot recapture with a piece. After 6...bxc6 7 ♟e3 the problem is that 7...♞b8! 8 b3 ♞e7, with ...♞f5 to come and perhaps ...a5 and ...♟a6, gives White palpable problems on the dark squares.

But 6 ♖g4! (D), eyeing g7, is an interesting idea.

The best reply seems to be 6...♟d7!? 7 ♟xc6 ♟xc6 8 ♞f3 h5!, driving the queen away in order after 9 ♖f4 to be able finally, with 9...♟xc5, to recoup the pawn. As so often in this line, White can still try to maintain that his control of d4 is worth something by playing 10 ♟e3, but after 10...♟xe3 11 ♖xe3 ♞e7, with perhaps a quick ...♞f5 to come, even the fate of the d4-square is still up for grabs.

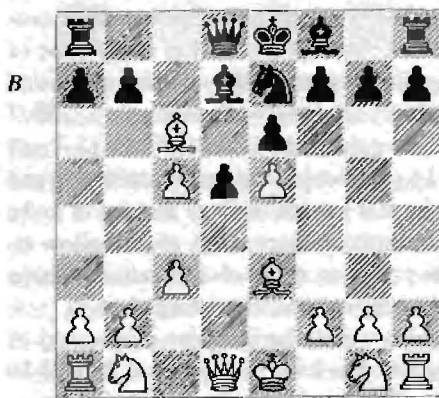
6...♞e7 7 c3



White's strategy is primarily one of exacting concessions from his opponent as he tries to recover the c5-pawn. To this end the strategy of cementing his bishop on d4 has undeniable logic.

7...♟d7 8 ♟xc6 (D)

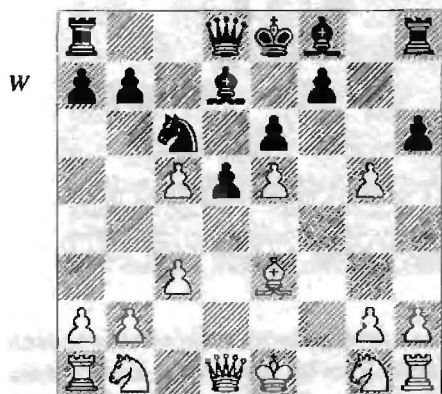
There is little choice any more. Black was threatening 8...♞xe5 and moves such as 8 f4? and 8 ♞f3?! do not adequately counter this.



8...♟xc6!?

Until recently this appeared to be the less promising recapture since the assumption was made that pressure should be put on the white e-pawn. Indeed, 8...♟xc6 remains interesting since by meeting 9 f4 with 9...g5! Black can initiate an undermining of White's centre somewhat reminiscent of an inverse Benko Gambit. However, I have long been sceptical about Black's position after 10 fxg5! ♞xe5 11 ♞f3 since I suspect that he needs a knight to

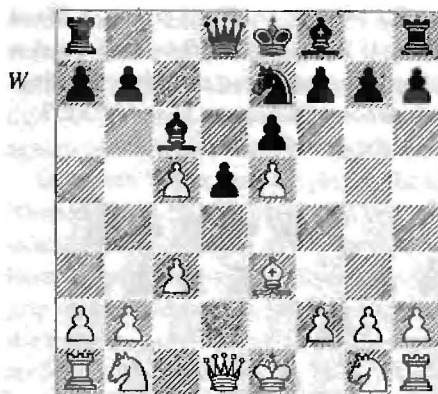
emphasize the dynamic potential of his structure. However, there is also Keith Arkell's 10...h6!? (D).



This has resulted in a good deal of fun when White has been tempted into the very risky 11 gxh6? but it is again much more rational to develop with 11 ♖f3!. Arkell has done well out of 11...hgx5 12 ♙xg5 ♙e7 13 ♙xe7 ♗xe7, but after the simple 14 ♗e2 ♗xc5 15 ♖bd2! it is not so much White's extra pawn that counts as, crucially, his control of d4. He has every hope of tucking his king into safety on the queenside with a clear plus. For a while I thought 11...♗c7 might be tougher but 12 ♗e2!? ♖xe5 13 ♖xe5 ♗xe5 14 gxh6 looks a bit better for White, and otherwise it is hard to see how Black will make progress since any capture on g5 will allow either the exchange of the dark-squared bishops or a white bishop becoming lodged on f6.

It is also worth clarifying the inadequacy of the more modest 9 ♖f3. The natural 9...♗c7 10 ♙d4?! offers Black his queenside compensation after 10...♖xd4 11 cxd4 b6! with which we are now becoming quite familiar. Moreover, in this particular case after 10 0-0 ♖xe5 11 ♖xe5 ♗xe5 12 ♙d4 ♗f5 13 ♗e2 Black can cover the critical e5-square with 13...f6 (Krakops-Khalifman, Ubeda 1997), when his position holds together nicely. This is a structure which Black should be wary of dismissing too lightly though. If his pieces are less optimally deployed, he can easily suffer from the effects of White's queenside clamp.

We now return to 8...♙xc6!? (D):



9 ♖f3 ♖f5 10 ♙d4 a5!

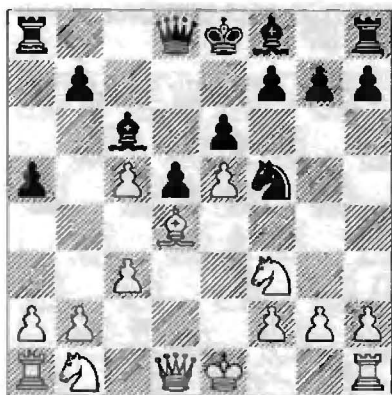
A very important move in Black's plan and one which appears to have breathed new life into 8...♙xc6!?. The plan is of course to prevent the immediate b4 and continue to discourage it in the longer run. The first aim is pretty much secure since 11 b4?! can be effectively met with either 11...axb4 12 cxb4 b6! or perhaps even more accurately the immediate 11...b6!, which does less to weaken White's hold on the d4-square, but should render the recovery of the c5-pawn even more straightforward. The point in all of this is that the b4-pawn enjoys no protection. Contrast that with the older move 10...♖xd4?! 11 ♗xd4! (but not 11 cxd4, when as usual 11...b6! 12 cxb6 ♗xb6 results in a position where the two bishops, combined with the open c- and b-files and the weakness of b2 in particular give Black ample play) 11...♗a5 12 b4 ♗a6 13 a4 b6. It seems strange that Black felt the need to resort to this rather contorted approach but it was only really Movsesian's excellent 14 ♗f4!, threatening to bring his knight to either g5 or d4 according to circumstance, but with great effect in either case, which brought home the degree to which this decentralization of Black's pieces really matters.

We return to 10...a5! (D):

11 a4!:

Denied the possibility to advance his b-pawn, White is concerned to prevent the further advance of the a-pawn since ...a4 and ...♗a5 represents a harmonious plan for the recovery of the c5-pawn. Nonetheless, the text-move weakens the queenside in a very fundamental

W



way. The a-pawn itself will be a target, and its weakness will in turn complicate any efforts to resolve the 'backward' status of the b2-pawn. Hence White should prefer 11 0-0! when both the 11...xd4 12 cxd4 b6 13 cxb6 14 14 ♖d2 of Van der Weide-C.Hanley, Liverpool 2006, and 11...a4 12 ♘bd2 offer him some chances to fight for a plus.

11...xd4 12 ♖d2 ♗e7!

Black needed to take on d4 before his opponent could consolidate sufficiently to be able to recapture with the pawn. However, his subsequent strategy, as we shall see, is one of admirable patience. White's queenside weaknesses are not going away.

13 0-0 0-0 (D)

W



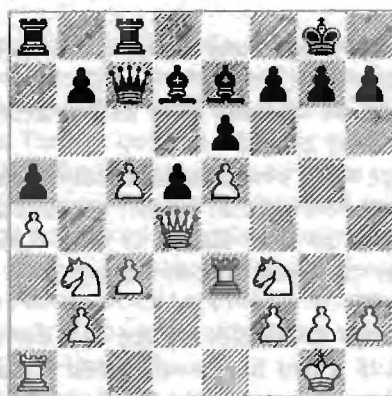
14 ♘bd2

I suspect White is already slightly worse here. He needs either to drum up some play on the kingside, or to find a way to return a pawn

on the queenside that causes his opponent's pieces some embarrassment. Failing this, Black can reorganize at leisure. In Movsesian-Zelčić, Bosnian Team Ch 2005, White did elect to give back the a-pawn after 14 ♖e3 ♗d7 15 b3 ♜fc8 16 ♘bd2 ♖e8 17 h3 ♙d7 with 18 b4 ♙xa4 19 ♘d4 ♙d7 20 ♜fb1. However, 20...♗d8! is a reminder that Black still has hopes to open files on the queenside and his chances look very reasonable.

14...♖e7 15 ♜fe1 ♙d7 16 ♘b3 ♜fc8 17 ♖e3 (D)

B



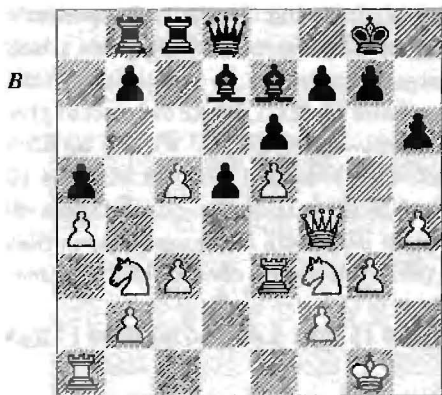
Perhaps the game's most instructive lesson is that, once 11 a4 has been played, it is never really Black's intention simply to recapture on c5. It is not just that subsequent exchanges on c5 would enable the remaining white knight to nestle comfortably on d4. It is more precisely that, given White's vulnerable queenside, the c5-pawn is a permanent invitation to open files with ...b6 and this will invariably be a more promising source of counter-chances.

17...♜ab8 18 ♖f4 h6 19 h4 ♗d8 20 g3?! (D)

A natural enough prelude to bringing the f3-knight to d4. However, closing the third rank seems almost to rule out the kingside as a source of potential play. I am tempted to think that White should have avoided this even if this means the sacrifice of the h4-pawn.

20...b6! 21 cxb6?!

It would be difficult for White to reconcile himself to returning the extra pawn without even exchanging off either bishop, but by this stage 21 c6! might have been the only, albeit



regrettable, way to keep the key queenside files closed.

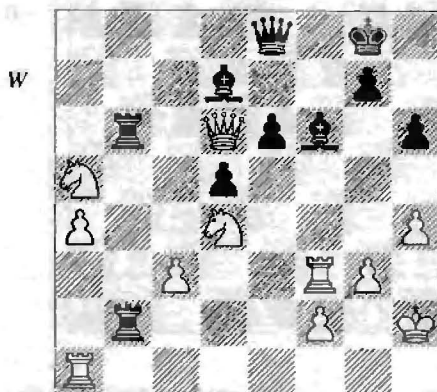
21... fxb6 22 Qfd4 We8! 23 f3 fcb8 24 Qxa5 fxb2 25 wh2

Since White's knight is awkwardly stranded, he might have tried 25 $\text{Qac6!?$ although after 25... fb1+ 26 fxb1 fxb1+ 27 wh2 fc5 his knights still appear uncomfortable.

25... f5!

Perhaps not technically the best move as 25... fd8 would have netted some material. However, it is simultaneously safe and punchy and hence a good time-trouble instinct.

26 exf6?! fx6 27 wd6 f8b6 (D)



28 wc7

Now a further drawback of 20 g3 will be revealed. However, there was no further holding up the ... e5 advance since 28 wc5? fe7 29 wc7 fd6 30 wa7 fb8! (Conquest) wins the white queen.

28... e5 29 fb5 we6

There is no respite for White any more. Still, what happens next, in extreme mutual time-trouble, is quite horrific!

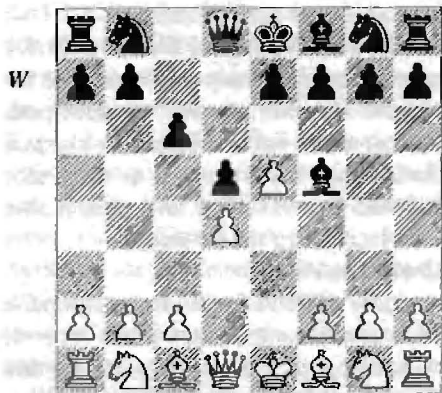
30 c4? e4 31 cxd5? wh3+ 32 wg1 exf3 0-1

Game 11

Veselin Topalov – Boris Gelfand

Dortmund 2002

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 cf5 (D)



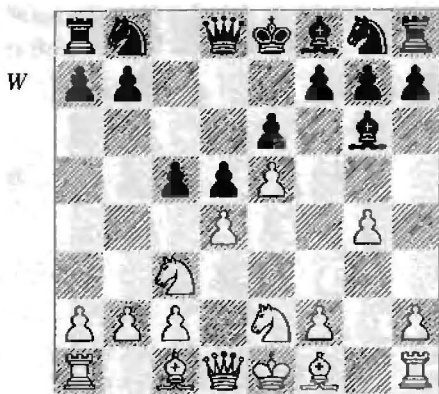
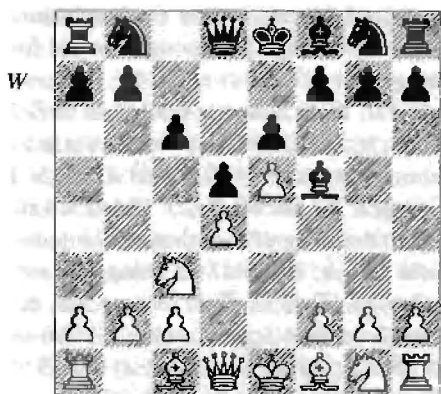
4 $\text{Qc3!?$

This move eliminates one source of potential dynamism from the white position – the chance to open lines by advancing the c-pawn. Nonetheless, it is rightly associated with the sharpest, most aggressive strategy perhaps in the entire book. As we shall see, White's plan is to advance his kingside pawns with tempo, leaving Black with questions to answer about the appropriate remedies to employ in the centre.

4... e6 (D)

Logical and critical. Alternatives are considered in Game 13.

5 g4!



This is the point. With the e4-square covered and the retreat along the h3-c8 diagonal cut off, White is able to lay chase to the bishop and seize a good deal of space into the bargain. There are some key questions to bear in mind in what follows. Will White's pawn advances generate a genuine initiative, or are they just as likely to leave gaping weaknesses in their wake? Furthermore, is there a justification for commencing such action on the wings when Black may still strike back in the centre? This in turn raises a further consideration: is Black's development such that he too should think twice about opening the centre? What follows may tentatively supply some answers, but these will tend to be wrapped up in a good deal of specific tactical niceties. One thing is for sure: if White's aggression is not justified it is back at move four that he should seek alternatives.

5...c5 6 dge2

A useful developing move, indeed the only one appropriate to furthering White's designs. For the moment 6 h4?! would be positionally dubious as Black can simply reply 6...h5!, winning the f5-square at no cost. Hence White prepares this further aggressive kingside advance, bringing the possibility of f4 into the equation.

6...c5 (D)

Supremely logical in terms of classical theory, this 'strike in the centre in response to an early attack on the wing' is once again firmly established as the main line here. The amount of space which the exchange of White's d-pawn might capture back for the black pieces should

never be underestimated and with the knight on c3 blocking the c-pawn, White's centre is genuinely vulnerable to such an undermining process. The key question though is whether, for all this, Black is fully prepared for an opening of the centre – 'weakening the a4-e8 diagonal' might feel like a very academic observation on this move, but there have been countless examples where it would have been prudent to take it seriously! Once again, alternatives will be discussed in Game 12.

7 h4!?

White wants to create maximum mayhem on the kingside and is willing to accept what appears to be a rather unmitigated break-up of his centre in return. Quite simply, the knight on e2 has a choice of significant potential roles – as we know, the possibility of its playing to f4 is critical to the efficacy of the text-move, but this may 'drag' it away from its other important role as the obvious piece to recapture in the event of an exchange on d4. The major alternative 7 e3 (D) envisages and seeks to expedite just such an exchange, but even if Black resists this, White's knight is likely to use this alternative route which gives an entirely different feel to the whole of his deployment.

Black then has several replies worthy of attention:

a) 7...Bb6(!?) looks a bit too brave and further practical outings for the splendidly forceful reply 8 f4!? d6 9 f5 exf5 10 g2!? may well reveal that this is a good way to prove it. Certainly after 10...cxd4 11 dxd4 fxg4 12 dxd5 Ba5+ 13 c3 dxd4 14 Bxd4 Black was

B



already in a serious mess in Aroshidze-I.Nikolaïdis, Athens 2006, with much inferior development in a very open position. Perhaps 10...0-0-0 is a better try, but still 11 Qxd5 looks quite promising.

b) 7...cxd4!? 8 Qxd4 appears at first glance to run the risk of accelerating White's development just as the position is opening up. However, there is a way of making sense of this early release of the central tension, namely 8... Bb4! (D). It is almost always worthy of some attention whenever Black finds a way to 'threaten' the painless mobilization of his kingside in this variation.

W



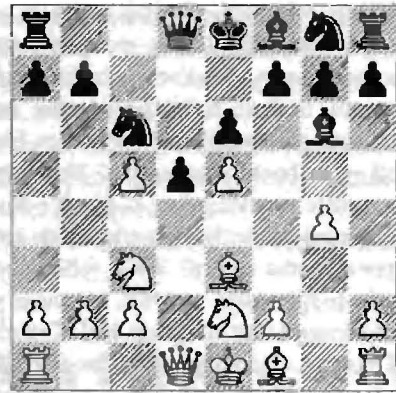
b1) Now 9 Bb5+ Qd7 10 f4 is very direct. However, Black can force the bishop into a decision with 10...a6!? 11 Qxd7+ Wxd7 12 0-0 and now simply 12... Qxc3 13 bxc3 Qe7 . My feeling is that although White can still aspire to kingside chances with f5 at some stage, the

e4-square looks pretty secure for the bishop and the sickly weak c-pawns must count for something.

b2) For all these reasons, White has turned to 9 $\text{Wd2!?$, keeping the structure intact at least for the moment. After 9... Qd7 10 a3 Wa5! I would suggest 11 $\text{Bb5!?$ Qxc3 12 bxc3! (the pin is much more significant than the king displacement which 12 Qxd7+?! brings about), when after 12... Bc8 13 Bb1! , White has the useful resource Bb4 against either 13...b6 or 13... Bc7 . Svidler gives instead 12...0-0-0 13 f4 Qe7 as unclear, but again the b-file will ensure that White always has counterplay.

c) 7... $\text{Qc6!?$ has long been the main line, but a new twist may have further strengthened its claims. After 8 dxc5 (D), Black has an interesting alternative to the once automatic line 'c1'.

B

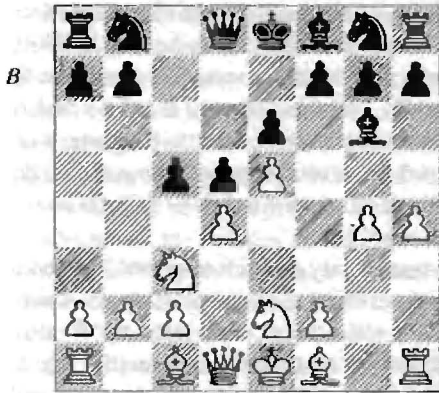


c1) 8... Qxe5 9 Qd4 (9 Qf4 $\text{Qc6!?$ 10 Bb5 Qe7 11 We2 Wc7 looks OK for Black, who is ready to get his king out of the centre and has a good structure in the centre if he can consolidate) 9... Qd7! (trying to force White to weaken his queenside) 10 b4 (10 f4 Qxc5! 11 f5 c5! is fine for Black) 10... Qe7 11 h4 h6 12 Qg2 and now the key undermining move 12...a5! shows the drawback to White's 10th and gives fair counterplay. 13 a3 axb4 14 axb4 Bxa1 15 Wxa1 Qgf6 has nothing special to offer White, while after 13 Qcb5 , Lukacs's tricky suggestion 13...axb4!? 14 c6 e5! seems to hold up.

c2) 8...h5!? is a fascinating new version of a theme we shall revisit in the main game. Black wants to confront White on the kingside at a

moment of his choosing, and his great positional goal is control of f5, which can be of tremendous defensive value. The idea is that after 9 ♖f4 ♙h7! (better than 9...d4?! 10 ♖xg6 fxg6 11 ♙d3! ♜xe5 12 ♙f4! although it is important for White to be aware of this since 12 ♙xd4?? fails to 12...♞xd4 13 ♙xg6+ ♜e7!, based on the knight fork on f3) 10 ♖b5! (to meet the threat of ...d4 and eye d6) 10...hxg4, the check on d6 is no help and White's forces are rather incoherently dispersed. Therefore, I would be inclined towards 9 ♖d4 a6! (a useful move to hinder ♙b5 in particular) 10 ♖xc6!? bxc6, when Anand mentions simply 11 gxh5!?, which at least opens lines on the kingside although there is no denying that f5 will be a useful square for the defence. This approach for White has the practical advantage of being applicable against 8...a6!? 9 ♖d4 h5 too.

So back to the equally sharp continuation 7 h4 (D).

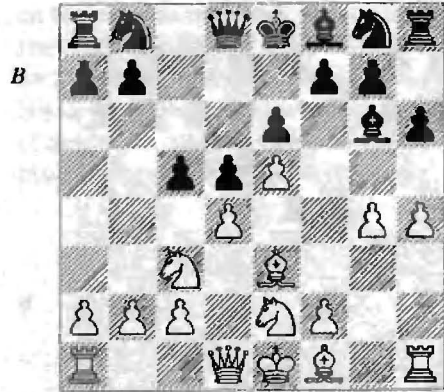


7...h5(!)

Played with an admirable modern sense of the interplay between defensive and dynamic ideas. Black is willing to part with his h-pawn in order to distract White's knight from the central squares. In much of the 4 ♖c3 variation as we have seen, Black enjoys the tighter pawn-structure, but is threatened by a good deal of immediate firepower. If he can dampen some of this initiative then his longer-term pluses may come into play.

7...h6!? is much more active than would appear at first sight. It is also quite popular and

White should know that reverting to 8 ♙e3! (D) is the tried and tested way.



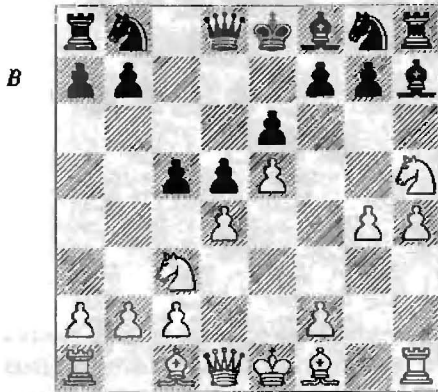
The critical line is probably 8...♞b6 9 f4! ♖c6 10 f5 ♙h7! (the material difference between this and the position from the note about 7 ♙e3 ♞b6?! above with the respective h-pawns still at home) 11 ♞d2 0-0-0 12 0-0-0 c4! 13 ♖f4 ♞a6!, when although e6 is collapsing, the move fx6 liberates the bishop on h7 and in conjunction with the possibility of ...b5 and ...b4, Black can gain some genuine counterplay.

What can be stated with some certainty is that the older recipe, preparing ...h5 by first dragging White's knight to d4, is extremely risky. In a line which is all about rapid mobilization and early attack, preventing ♖f4 is an insufficient ground for developing White's pieces for him! 7...cxd4 8 ♖xd4 b5 9 ♙b5+ ♖d7 10 f4 hxg4 11 f5! ♞xh4 12 ♞f1!? exf5 13 e6 may not be totally clear; for example, 13...fxe6 14 ♖xc6 (14 ♞e2!?) 14...♞e7 15 ♞e2 ♖f7 might be just sufficient to draw. But to undergo such suffering and risk makes little sense when there are other decent options on the table.

8 ♖f4 ♙h7 9 ♖xh5 (D)

This is very much the main move, but 9 g5!? is an intriguing attempt to eschew the pawn and regain the initiative. Although f5 is weakened, both ♞xh5 and g6 are useful resources for the attack. However, concretely, 9...cxd4!? looks a sensible reaction since 10 ♖b5 ♙e4! 11 f3 ♙f5 12 ♖xd4 ♖e7 looks stable enough, while the aggressive 10 g6!? ♙xg6! 11 ♖xg6 fxg6 12 ♖e2 ♖c6 13 ♖f4 ♙b4+! 14 ♙d2 ♞a5 15 ♖xe6

♖xe5 16 ♜xd4 ♙xd2+ 17 ♜xd2 ♜xd2+ 18 ♜xd2 ♜f6 fell short in Soloviov-Lastin, St Petersburg 2006.

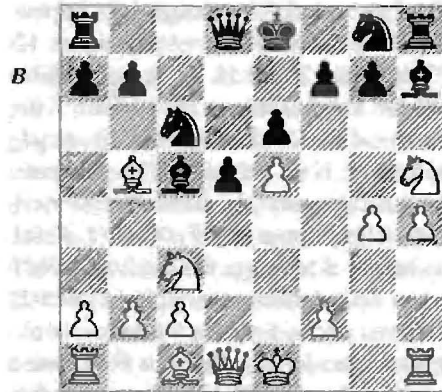


9...♗c6!?

While risky at first sight, since the f8-bishop will be required to abandon g7 as it recaptures on c5, it is at the same time principled to put maximum pressure on the centre in this way. Still, the alternative 9...cxd4! is interesting. After 10 ♖b5! ♗c6 11 ♜xd4 ♗e7, the brutal 12 ♙g5 may tend to backfire after 12...♜a5+ 13 c3 ♜xd4 14 ♜xd4 ♗c6! 15 ♜f4 ♜b6 (Fedorov-Dreev, Moscow 2003), when in every sphere except the kingside I find Black's game very healthy. The fact that 16 0-0-0 has been recommended here, when 16...♗b4!? 17 ♜xg7+! ♙xg7 18 ♜xb4 ♜xb4 19 cxb4 ♗c8+ 20 ♗d2 ♗c2+ seems to offer excellent counterplay, vindicates this judgement. Rather the question is whether White can seek a modicum of stability through 12 c3!?. Then I suspect that 12...♗xe5! is a bit brazen although the gains from grabbing such key centre pawns are certainly high as well as the risks. After 13 ♙b5+ ♗d7 Black can respond to the flashy – and for this variation quite typical – idea 14 ♙h6 with the calm 14...♗g8!. However, 14 ♙g5! a6 15 ♙a4! might be more dangerous as encouraging ...b5 has the advantage of rendering the queenside anything but a safe haven for Black's king. So perhaps 12...a6! is a better try although after 13 ♙g2! (cutting out ...♙e4 and toying again with ♙h6 ideas) 13...♗xe5! 14 0-0 (Shomoev-Galkin, Russian Ch, Krasnodar 1992) 14...♙g6

White is undeniably scoring on bringing his pieces to battle with maximum speed.

10 dxc5 ♙xc5 11 ♙b5 (D)



11...♜c7

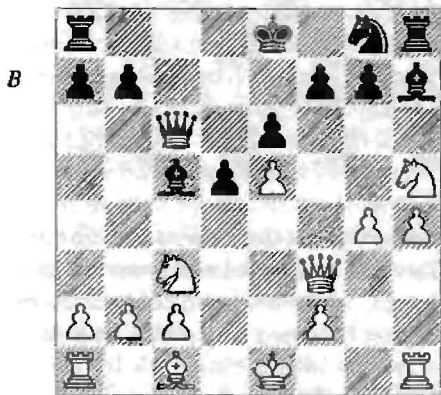
This looks logical although in fact the threat of ...d4 has as much bearing on the g-pawn's immunity as the counterattack against e5. However, it is worth noting that the immediate 11...d4?! falls short to the *zwischenzug* 12 ♜f3!. The only reasonable alternative therefore is probably 11...♜b6 but after 12 ♙xc6+ it makes more sense to transpose back to the game with 12...♜xc6, since recapture with the pawn might leave Black vulnerable to a later fork on a4.

12 ♙xc6+!?

It is notoriously difficult to generalize about the sharp positions to which this line gives rise. There is a sense here, underlined by White's last two moves, that, perhaps unusually, it is he who is trying to catch up on development and thereby consolidate his gains while holding the centre together. His achievement, incidentally, should not just be seen in terms of an extra pawn – I would quite fancy Black's bishop-pair, especially the raking specimen on h7, to provide decent value for that on its own. It is rather that, especially in the absence of queens, White's unorthodox deployment on the kingside can prove quite effective in challenging his opponent's chances of developing without making further concessions. I suspect that 12 0-0 might be playable too, but not 12 ♙f4!, which rather extraordinarily was not just played in the high-level game Kobaliya-Macieja, European Clubs

Cup, Kallithea 2002, but met with the lackadaisical 12...0-0-0?. The previous note should have given a clue concerning Black's main threat. Sure enough 12...d4! would have been severely embarrassing!

12...♖xc6 13 ♖f3 (D)



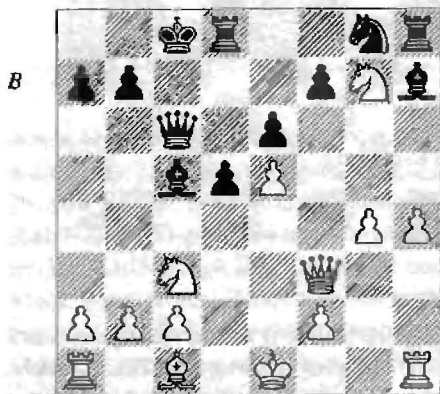
13...0-0-0!

Even if this falls short, my feeling is that the passive alternative 13...♖f8 is unlikely to supply the improvement. 14 ♔g5! looks the most purposeful development, when 14...♞c8!? supports the queen on c6 with a view to using one of the main strengths of Black's position, viz. the possibility of dislodging the knight from c3 to accentuate his chances on the light squares. However, this does not seem to cure all ills: Naiditsch-Galkin, Moscow 2006 seemed to favour White after 15 0-0 d4 16 ♖xc6 ♞xc6 17 ♞ad1! although there was no need for the sudden collapse with 17...♟h6?! 18 ♟a4 ♔e7? 19 ♞xd4 ♔xc2 20 ♞d7 1-0. 13...♖f8 makes a worse than ambiguous contribution to the already thorny issue of how to get Black's kingside pieces into play.

14 ♟xg7! (D)

This looks somewhat risky given the dual resources of ...d4 and ...♔e4, but in terms of both the evaluation of the former and the calculation of the latter, Topalov's position seems to hold up reasonably well. In any case, winning the g-pawn has implications for White's kingside phalanx which go well beyond the purely material. Moreover, there is by now no safe 'consolidating' option as the very sharp counter to 14

♔g5 with 14...f6! 15 exf6 gxf6 16 ♔xf6 ♔e4! 17 ♟xe4 dxe4 18 ♞c3 ♟xf6 19 ♟xf6 ♞d4! (Gelfand) shows. White's very committal play on the kingside inevitably results in a very fine line between nurturing a powerful pawn-majority and simple suffering from over-extension. His development is unconvincing and opening of the centre, while his king so visibly lacks a plausible haven, is fraught with danger.

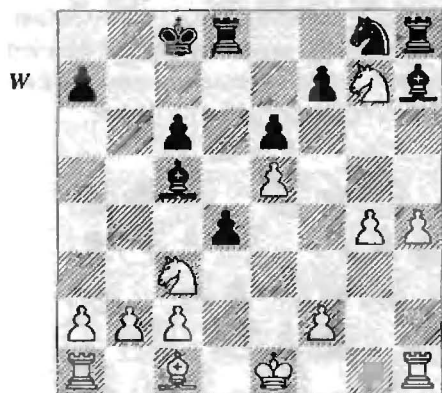


14...d4!?

Permitting the exchange of queens seems curious at first sight, given the continuing issues surrounding the safety of White's king. However, there seems to be no way to intensify Black's initiative here without making some concession. At least the text-move greatly enhances the key bishop on h7. Tempting though it appears to open lines with 14...♔e4?!, it is a great shame to jettison this marvellous piece and in fact Black's attack peters out dramatically after 15 ♟xe4 dxe4 16 ♞xf7! ♔b4+ 17 c3 ♔xc3+ 18 bxc3! ♞xc3+ 19 ♟f1 ♞xa1? 20 ♟g2, when his material gains have come at a quite exorbitant price. In fact, apart from a lesson in the value of the h7-bishop, this variation also draws attention to another interesting feature of the position – the fact that the apparently risky capture on f7 can be a very useful resource for White. For example, Gelfand's suggestion of 14...♞d4!? might be simply met with 15 ♟e2 and if 15...♔xc5 then 16 ♞xf7! is by no means out of the question. All in all, in this theoretical age, the fact that nobody has been moved with Black to return to a position so

susceptible of concrete analysis suggests that White's game probably holds up fairly well to scrutiny after these alternatives.

15 ♖xc6+ bxc6 (D)



16 ♘a4

Hitting the bishop is not the main point since c2 will be dropping anyway after Black's reply. Still, in positional terms there seem to be very decent arguments for keeping in touch with either the c5-square, or heading for c4 via b2. However, Black does drum up reasonable play in the game and the specifics may well point to 16 ♘e2! as an interesting alternative. The reason is quite simple – White will not have to waste a tempo covering his knight with b3 as in the game, and this affords him the opportunity by 16... ♗xc2 17 ♙g5! ♞d5 18 f4 (Gelfand) both to develop his bishop outside the pawn-chain and thereby enable his e-pawn to be given more enduring protection. It is crucial, in comparing with the note about 19 f4? below, that in the event of any subsequent ... ♘h6 here, White can simply hack this piece off and preserve the integrity of his excellent kingside pawns.

16... ♗f8 17 ♘h5 ♗xc2 18 b3 (D)

This is a good moment to draw breath after a fairly forced sequence of moves. White still has an extra pawn, but the black d-pawn is quite an imposing sight while his light-squared bishop continues to enjoy a lot of scope in general in addition to providing invaluable coverage of the d-pawn's queening square. Moreover, as we shall see, the white pawn on e5 can prove something of a headache too. However, it is of special

B



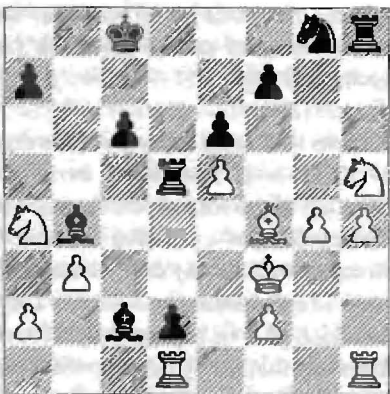
interest that White's two knights 'on the edge' are in fact both fine pieces which cover a lot of key squares, while his pawn-phalanx on the kingside may become a very potent weapon indeed.

18... ♞d5! 19 ♙f4!

An excellent decision! With the bishop stuck defending e5 it will no longer be able to impede the advance of the d-pawn by playing to d2, and thus White is all but committed to the forthcoming sacrifice of the exchange. However, the move retains an essential dynamism on the kingside which 19 f4? would by contrast radically fail to do. The g4-pawn will be vulnerable, the f5-square consequently potentially weak and simple moves like 19... ♗e7! (to cover f6) 20 ♗d2 ♘h6! 21 ♞c1 ♗e4! (Gelfand) suddenly leave the white kingside looking like one big target rather than the trump-card we had expected.

19... ♗b4+ 20 ♗e2! d3+ 21 ♖f3 d2 22 ♞ad1 (D)

B



Forced of course, but White's strategy is justified precisely because it is Black's best minor piece which must ultimately cash itself in for the rook. Black's best hopes rest upon delaying this transition and inflicting maximum tactical damage in the meantime.

22...♖e7! 23 ♖f6 ♔d3+

23...♗xh4!? (Gelfand) was an interesting chance for Black here although not his last, and to my mind not clearly his best. After 24 ♖xd5 ♖xd5 (24...♗xh1 25 ♖xc7+!) 25 ♖b2! ♕xd1+ 26 ♔xd1 ♖xf4 27 ♖xf4 ♗h3 28 f3 ♗h2 29 ♖e3 Black can secure the white f-pawn in exchange for his d-pawn by 29...♕c5+ 30 ♖d3 ♔f2 31 ♔xd2 ♗xf3+ 32 ♖e4, when he can maybe still boast the smallest of structural pluses, but the honours are likely to be shared.

24 ♖e2 ♖d5!

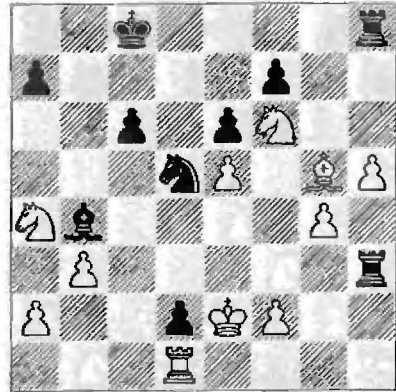
Gelfand also points out the inferior alternative 24...♖g6?! 25 ♕g3 ♕xd1+ 26 ♔xd1 ♔d4 27 h5 ♖e7 28 f3. I mention this only because it serves as a nice 'ideal' position for White's exchange sacrifice – mobile yet secure kingside pawns, an absence of counterplay, and optimal minor pieces all adding up to a decisive advantage.

25 ♕g5 ♕xd1+ 26 ♔xd1 ♗h3 27 h5 (D)

27...♕e7?

Strangely relinquishing the d-pawn with far too little fight. White's position looks very attractive to me, especially since Black was moved to 'cash in' by winning the exchange. Nonetheless, for all that his kingside looks so imposing, it does appear that by 27...♔d8! Black's rooks

B



would be active enough to save the game. The point is that 28 ♕xd2 can be met with 28...♖xf6 29 exf6 ♗hd3!, when it is fascinating that 30 ♕xb4! ♔xd1 31 g5 is still far from clear, but after 31...♔d5! 32 g6 ♔f5 I am fairly confident Black is not worse. Hence 28 ♖e4 looks best, but then 28...♗g8! threatens to capture on g5 and there is nothing more than 29 f3 ♗h2+ 30 ♖d3 ♗h3! with a likely repetition.

28 ♔xd2 ♕xf6 29 ♕xf6 ♖f4+ 30 ♖d1 ♗g8 31 ♖c5!

Utilizing a long-dormant asset to switch from a kingside assault to spinning a mating-net around Black's king.

31...♗xg4 32 ♔d8+ ♖c7 33 ♔d7+ ♖b6

33...♖b8 34 ♕e7! was no better.

34 ♕e7 ♖d5 35 ♗b7+ ♖a5 36 ♔xa7+ ♖b5 37 ♗b7+ ♖b6 38 a4+ ♖a5 39 ♖c2 1-0

Black is quite helpless against the threat of 40 ♔a7+ and 41 ♖d3#.

Game 12

Stefan Bromberger – Sergei Erenburg

Budapest 2004

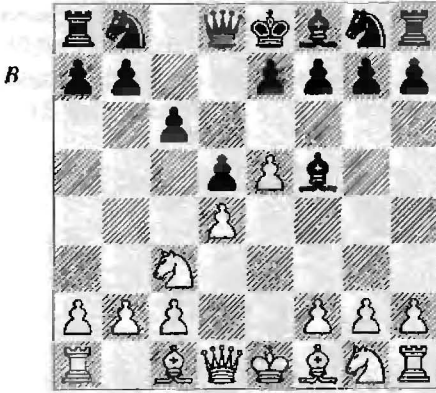
1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 ♕f5 4 ♖c3 (D)

4...e6

This must be the move that Black really wants to play. Nonetheless, attempting to cross White's brutal intentions has, not surprisingly, proved tempting to some. Three alternatives merit a mention, although in each case there is to a degree an inescapable sense that 'avoiding

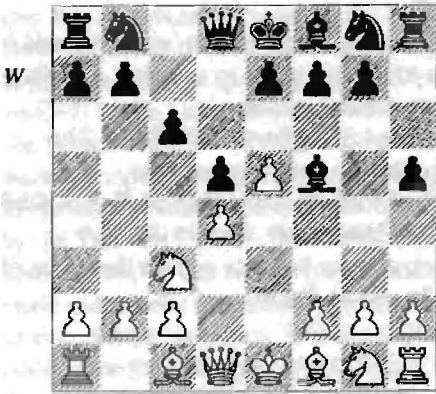
...e6' is the chief idea. Can White's set-up be so inflexible following the blocking of his c-pawn that, deprived of his standard g4 plan, he has little to fall back on? I doubt it:

a) 4...a6!? makes a curious impression, but with Game 11 in mind the motivation for taking the b5-square away from White's pieces is no mystery. However, after 5 ♕e3! it is hard to



see how Black can again profitably avoid 5...e6. It is true that then after 6 g4 ♖g6 7 ♗ge2, the move ...a6 continues to have its uses, but it represents neither an improvement for Black nor a great success in avoiding the heavy tactical battles arising from the main line 4...e6.

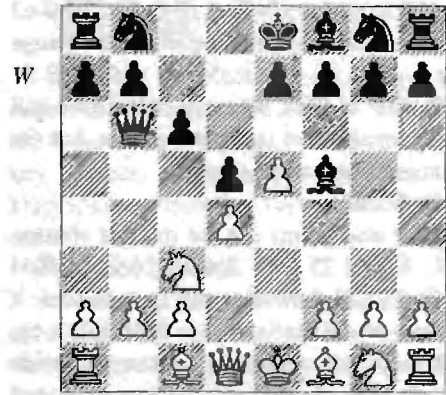
b) 4...h5 (D) at least shows a determination to prevent g4 once and for all and to pursue a light-squared blockade.



Again part of the implicit claim is that there is only really one dimension to 4 ♖c3. In fact it is reasonable to grant Black his 'French without the problem bishop' by 5 ♗d3 ♗xd3 6 ♗xd3 e6 7 ♖f3 ♗e7 (7...♗h6 may be met with 8 ♗g5!?) 8 0-0 ♖d7 9 ♗e2 ♗h6 10 b3 with c4 to follow and the space perhaps means more than Black's possession of a 'good' bishop which has limited scope anyway. However, this is far from a clear advantage and for those seeking something different I am also inclined

to commend 5 ♗g5!?. There is something pleasing about punishing the omission of ...e6 by preventing it. Certainly 5...f6 6 ♗f4 is no unambiguous gain for the defender. White is well placed to conduct a subsequent battle for the e5-square should Black exchange.

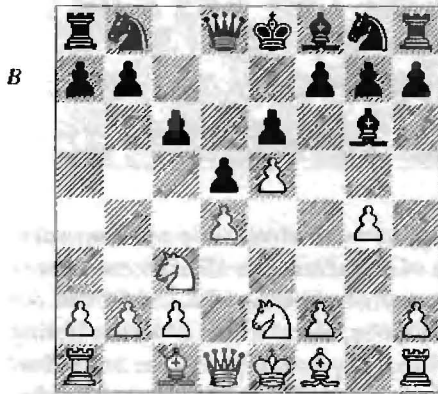
c) 4...♗b6 (D) is also a developing move whose intent – apart from the inevitable virtues of leaving open retreat from f5 towards c8 – is not entirely clear.



It invites the thought that playing in the spirit of the Short system with 5 ♖f3! and 6 ♗e2 cannot be so bad. Though blocking the c-pawn is not optimal there, the possibility of unblocking it with gain of time by a subsequent ♗a4 is attractive. However, I have always had a soft spot for 5 ♗d3!?, when the greedy 5...♗xd4 6 ♖f3 ♗g4 7 h3! ♗h5 (but not 7...♗xg2? 8 ♗g1 ♗xb3 9 ♗f1 ♗xc2 10 ♗e2! ♗f5 11 ♖d4, when White wins a piece for three pawns and retains a serious initiative) 8 0-0 (8 ♗e2! also looks interesting, targeting the queen quite directly) 8...♗xd3 9 cxd3 is very risky for Black, who must try 9...♖d7 10 ♗b3 ♗b8 but will suffer after 11 ♗e3!. Instead both 9...e6?! 10 ♗e2! and 9...♗f5?! 10 ♗c1 followed by e6, which cannot be prevented since 10...e6? 11 ♗h4! traps the queen, serve to illustrate quite how many pitfalls Black must negotiate. It is much safer to play 5...♗xd3 6 ♗xd3 e6 7 ♗ge2 ♗a6, a manoeuvre which will be revisited in Chapter 5 when we briefly consider 4 ♗d3. This comparison does not sound like a ringing endorsement of White's play, but so long as he avoids the

ending and chooses 8 ♖h3!, this is a very good version for him. He can, for example, meet 8...♟e7 9 0-0 ♟d7 with 10 a4!?, when the possibility of ♟b5 is a severe hindrance to Black's efforts to organize his ...c5 break.

5 g4 ♟g6 6 ♟ge2 (D)



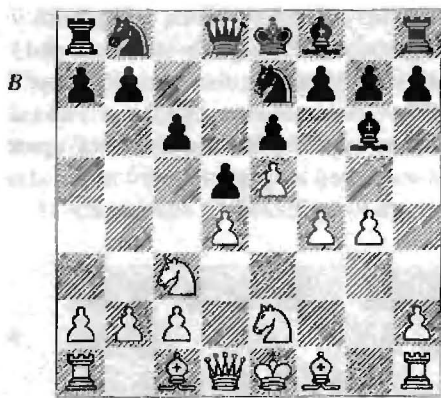
6...f6!?

As I wrote of this move in *ChessBase Magazine* some years ago, "whacking a pawn-chain on the head rather than undermining its base goes against the grain" and this perhaps accounts for the relatively unfashionable status of the text-move over the years. In fact, back in 2000 when I played it, I was not entirely convinced, but my opinion of the move continues to improve. Looking first at alternatives, the big 'story' of the last few years remains the decline of 6...♟e7 from main-line to also-ran status. One clear virtue of the move is that, by supporting the g6-bishop it prepares to meet 7 h4?! with 7...h5!

The 'old main line' was therefore 7 ♟f4, but as usual this offers grist to the 7...c5 mill, and 8 h4 cxd4 9 ♟b5 ♟ec6 10 h5 ♟e4 led to immense complications in which Black tended to have to part with a piece in exchange for very strong central pawns. Recently though another aspect of playing the knight to e7 has been highlighted – its blocking of the d8-h4 diagonal and its potential to stymie Black's development more generally.

The move which reveals this is 7 f4! (D).

This has the positionally and dynamically admirable intention to meet 7...h5 with 8 f5!



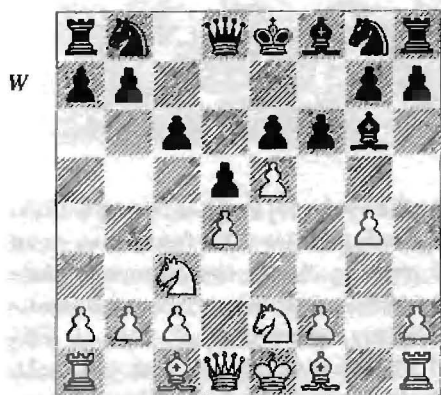
exf5 (8...♟h7 9 ♟g5!) 9 g5!. It is simply difficult for Black to unravel his forces and, in an idea of pleasing clarity, the attempt to challenge the white knight as it arrives at the beautiful blockading square f4 by 9...♟a6 10 ♟f4 ♟c7 11 h4 ♟e6 is simply met with 12 ♟ce2!, when the blockade is maintained. I am not saying that there is no fight left, but the passivity which Black will suffer has proven quite off-putting. Perhaps Black has a playable alternative in 7...♟a6!? 8 ♟g3 ♟b4 9 f5 exf5 10 a3 f4! (if 10...♟a6, then 11 ♟b5! cxb5 12 ♟xb5+ ♟c6 13 ♟xc6+ bxc6 14 gxh5 and White recovers the piece with interest) !1 axb4 fxg3 12 hxg3 a6, but this obscure position, especially after 13 ♟g5! (Bruzon-Y.Gonzalez, Cuban Ch, Holguin City 2002), also does not seem to be what 6...♟e7 devotees had in mind.

A couple of other moves also merit a quick mention. 6...♟b4 is probably best answered by 7 h4, when 7...h6 looks rather passive, but 7...♟xc3+! at least has the virtue of preparing to meet 8 ♟xc3 with 8...h5!. However, I am sceptical about Black's position after 8 bxc3!, still ready to meet ...h5 with ♟f4, and otherwise tending towards a kind of French structure in which although Black has his light-squared bishop on a fine diagonal, his opponent has amassed a good deal of useful space.

One further idea directed against the ubiquitous h4 move is 6...♟e7. Then 7 ♟e3 ♟d7 8 ♟d2 is one plausible mode of development, putting the question to Black as to how he is to mobilize his own forces. Perhaps surprisingly, the most popular answer is to play 8...h5! and

accept the ugly structure which arises from 9 f4 hxg4 10 d3 fxg6 , ready to meet 11 d3 with 11... f8 . However, there is also Natal's 11 e2 !?, which prevents ... a5 and looks a more subtle way of initiating an attack upon Black's weakened kingside.

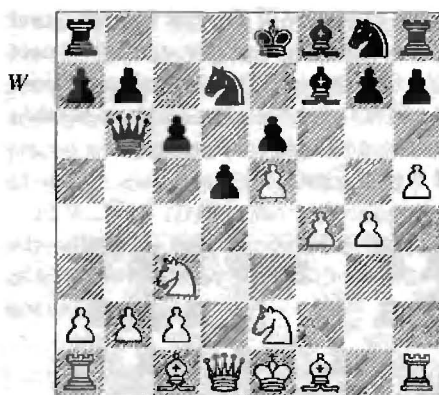
We return to 6... f6 ! (D):



7 f4

It is natural to hit both e6 and g6 but if, as I suspect, Black is simply doing OK in the rather forcing main line that follows, this could be the moment to look elsewhere. Interestingly, in a recent prominent encounter, Naiditsch-Dautov, French Team Ch 2005, White in his notes awarded 6... f6 a '?!' and his reply 7 h4 an '!'. I think at least the second part of this is nearer the mark than the first! The point is to permit the unusual pawn-structure consequent upon an exchange on e5, but at the same time to drive the bishop to the incongruous-looking square f7. However, after 7... fxe5 8 h5 (and not 8 dxe5 d7 9 h5 xe5 ! threatening mate on f3) 8... f7 9 dxe5 d7 10 f4 b6 ! (D) Black can create some inconvenience on the a7-g1 diagonal to counteract his opponent's imposing kingside phalanx.

White can react merely by creating a square for his king on f1, after which there will be little point in trying directly to exploit the diagonal with ... c5 . However, after 11 g2 0-0-0 12 b3 e7 13 a4 c7 14 e3 c5 15 c4 d4 ? (15... dxc4 16 c1 !) 16 f2 although White has succeeded in fixing his opponent's centre he is subject to a further characteristic pawn-break



in 16... g5 !, when White can avoid the undermining of his centre with 17 hxg6 , but only at the expense of allowing 17... fxg6 (Van der Wiel-Timman, Amsterdam 1987), offering fresh life to the passed d-pawn. The more usual reaction has been 11 d4 !?. However, after 11... c5 ! 12 d3 e7 13 g5 g8 , Sax had claimed that White should have an edge after 14 b5 c6 15 c4 , a claim that would surely be vindicated if Black were required to meet the pressure on his d-pawn by pushing it, giving his opponent use of the vital e4-square. However, while preparing this position I became convinced that there is no threat to capture on d5 since the dynamism this would add to the black position – and to the bishop in g8 in particular – would more than outweigh any threat from the passed e-pawn. Hence 15...0-0-0! is playable and has since received successful tests.

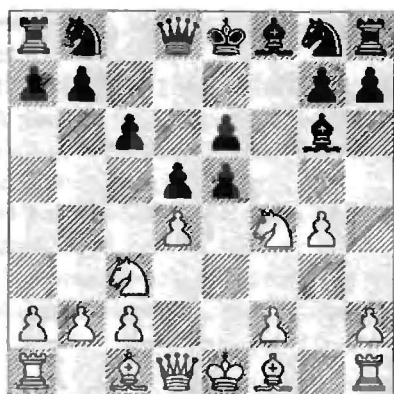
7... fxe5 ! (D)

Fearlessly offering a choice of captures on e6 or g6 now looks stronger than the more popular but rather passive 7... f7 , after which White can prepare to recapture on e5 with a piece by either 8 e2 or 8 d3 .

8 dxe6

This move has the best reputation, but since it starts a rather forcing sequence after which it seems to me the ball is very much in White's court, other moves deserve a mention. The damage which can be inflicted to Black's structure by 8 fxg6 hxg6 9 dxe5 might look alarming at first sight, but my sense is that e5 is also weak and the gash which the g4 advance represents

W

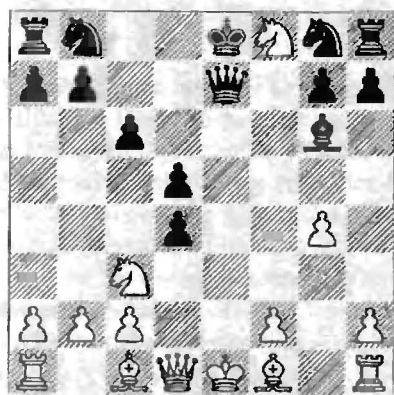


in the neatness of White's structure probably counts for more. After 9...d7 10 e4, any of 10...b6!?, 10...b4 or perhaps most enticing of all Evseev's 10...c7 11 e2 g5!? look fine for Black.

It is also possible to play the immediate 8 dxe5 but 8...e7 is fine now that there is no longer an imminent piece contest for the e5-square. Having said that, I believe White can attain better coordination than in the above line by, for example, 9 e2 d7 10 e2 d2 c7 11 d3, when even here I would be cautious about playing 11...d4 ceding the e4-square. Instead perhaps 11...h5!? generates quite reasonable play.

8...e7 9 dxf8 exd4+! (D)

W



10 e2

White could try interposing by 10 e2, but in fact 10...e4! might be a quite annoying zwischenzug.

10...dxc3!

Again Black wisely puts the damage which dxc3 will cause to his kingside structure firmly in perspective. In return he will ensure that White loses either time or the promise of a safe haven for his king.

11 dxc3 hxg6 12 d3 (D)

B

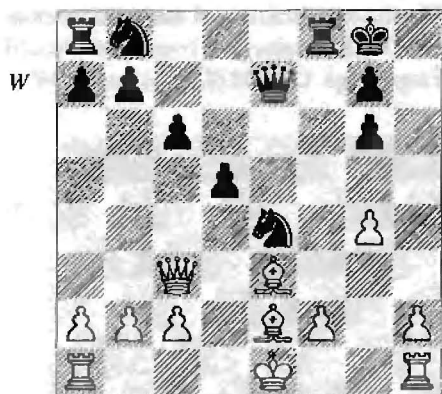


12...f6! 13 dxc3

Ensuring the integrity of his queenside structure in this way feels as if it should be the 'safe' option, although the course of the game hereafter somewhat puts the question to this. Still, after 13 dxc3 hxg6+ e7f8! too, perhaps ironically, it is White's lack of king safety which tends to be a salient factor, accentuated by a compromised pawn-structure on both wings. After 14 bxc3 d7 15 e3 (15 f5 g8 or 15 g5 e8 16 e3 e4 does not appear to change the fundamentals) 15...g8!? 16 d3 e5 17 d4 h4 18 g1 hx2 19 b1 e4 20 c4 dxf2! Black had constructed a massive attack by playing natural thematic moves in Amonatov-Riazantsev, Moscow Ch 2006. White's 20th move sums up for me the lack of concrete structural targets for his pieces. Moreover, this whole section reminds us again that the move 5 g4 is likely to be a serious wound in White's structure once the play 'calms down'. Such moves rest to a large degree upon maintaining the momentum of the early initiative, and/or inflicting some measure of tangible damage. The evidence is that the doubling of Black's g-pawns does not constitute such a major problem for the defence, and the fact that removing one of

them with check does not alter this assessment should be food for thought.

13...0-0!? 14 ♖e3 ♕e4! (D)



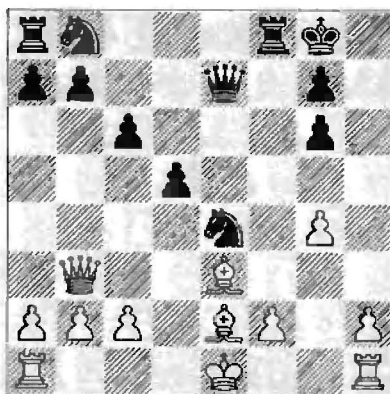
Black enjoys a healthy initiative in exchange for the bishop-pair and this move constitutes an important element of that. Since it is virtually inconceivable that White will be able to consider the move f3 in the foreseeable future, this square effectively constitutes something of an outpost. The rest of the game will speak eloquently for the pressure against f2, but suffice to say that the thorny task of finding a safe haven for White's king is made no easier by his next move.

15 ♖b3?! (D)

Natural enough, but I wonder whether White can seek a square less vulnerable to his opponent's simple plan of bringing his queen's knight to c5 with tempo. Erenburg mentions that 15 ♖d4!? might suffer its own drawbacks in view of 15...♗e6 planning ...c5. However, this seems unconvincing since by 16 c4! White gets his central strike in first, with prospects of creating some sort of central pawn weakness in Black's position. This appears to be a rare luxury in this variation and carries hope that fresh life may be breathed into his hitherto unconvincing bishop-pair.

For this reason 15...♕d7 looks prudent instead, but then it may be that White just has to grit his teeth and opt for 16 0-0. His opponent can increase the pressure with ...♞ae8 and ...♗h4 while he should attempt, probably via ♞ae1 and ♔g2, to be eventually in a position to evict the irritating beast with f3.

B



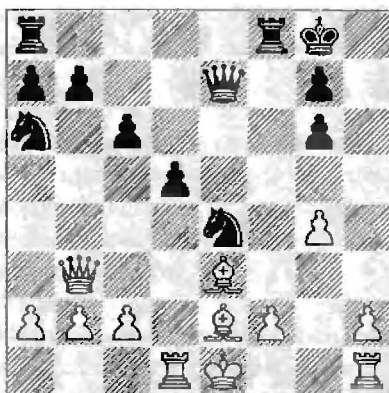
15...♕a6!

More quality flexible development and a good reason to prefer 13...0-0 over the older move 13...♕bd7.

16 ♜d1?! (D)

Played reluctantly, I am sure. I tend to believe Erenburg that after 16 ♖xa6 bxa6 the b-file is likely to prove a valuable asset to Black – quite aside from any merit attaching to the *zwischenzug* 16...♕xf2!? – and that 16 0-0? ♕d2! 17 ♖xd2 ♗xe2 is hopeless. However, given the travails about to befall White, I have to wonder whether 16 0-0-0 ♕xf2 17 ♖xf2 ♗xe2 18 ♖d4 is really the end of the world, and also if 16 ♞f1 ♞ae8 17 ♖xa6 bxa6 18 0-0-0 might have been playable.

B



16...♕xf2!

This thematic and forceful use of the active pieces emphasizes the tragic situation of White's king on the end of the open central files. In what

follows Black uses each and every piece to maximum effect.

17 ♖xf2 ♜ae8 18 ♜d2 ♜xf2!

A pleasing follow-up. Black is left with limited forces to finish the job but they will each be used with extreme efficiency.

19 ♖xf2 ♜c5 20 ♜a3?! ♜e4+ 21 ♖e1 ♜h4+ 22 ♜d1 ♜g5!

Once more Erenburg's solution is both elegant and supremely accurate. Cashing in with

22...♜f2+ would have resulted in only a small advantage, but now if the rook moves then the king is cut off from e1, which renders ...♜f2+ an altogether more deadly proposition, while the queen cannot maintain defence of the rook.

23 ♜a5 b6 24 ♜xd5 ♜f2+! 25 ♖e1 ♜c1+ 26 ♖xf2 ♜e3+ 0-1

A very crisply conducted attack by Black which also raises interesting theoretical questions.

Game 13

Nigel Short – Leif Johannessen

Turin Olympiad 2006

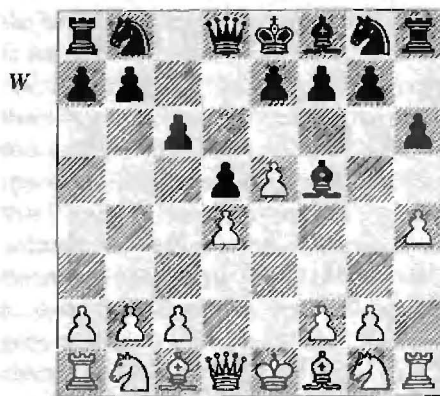
1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 ♖f5 4 h4!? (D)



A dual-purpose move. The more apparent and familiar intention is once again to lay siege to the oft-targeted bishop on f5. If Black neglects to take preventative steps then this for sure will dominate the next phase. However, cunningly disguised behind this more obvious aim may be the desire to generate play in the centre with the break c4. This tends to come into play in the main line when Black takes radical steps to prevent the kingside expansion with 4...h5 and thereby tests White's claim that control of the g5-square and possibly the weakness of the h5-pawn itself will count in his favour once the position becomes opened up.

4...h5

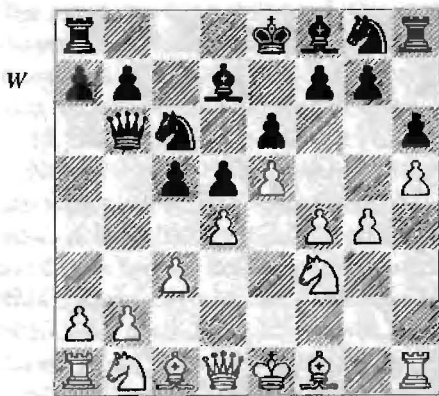
Since 4...e6? is for once really unplayable with 5 g4! trapping the bishop, the main alternative has been 4...h6 (D), which saves the material and keeps Black's kingside structure tighter but does not prevent White's kingside expansion.



The key question here is known to us from Games 12 and 13. Will the space and initiative which accrue from 5 g4 outweigh any weaknesses created? The first point in White's favour might be thought to be the fact that alternatives to 5...♖d7 are deemed just a bit too risky by theory. The desirability in principle of keeping the bishop on the more active h7-b1 diagonal is not hard to comprehend but even after 5...♖e4!? 6 f3 ♖h7, the most sophisticated of these retreats, it seems that the weakening of g3 and the

blocking of the most natural route for White's king's knight notwithstanding, the customary 7 e6! retains sufficient sting. Neither 7...fxe6 8 d3 dxd3 (8...d6 9 dxh7 dxh7 10 d3!) 9 dxd3 d6 10 f4! nor 7...d6 8 exf7+ exf7 really makes the grade, although the latter requires more accuracy from White. 9 d3?! e5! rather turns the tables, but 9 f4! immediately targets the crucial e5-square and rightly gives it priority over any worries about e4 in turn. 9...e6+ 10 e2 e4 is not completely clear, but after 11 f3 exd2 12 e5+ e8 13 exd2 exd2 14 e3!?, threatening f5 and meeting 14...d7?! with 15 g5!, White should have full and rich compensation.

Consequently, 5...d7! looks the right move. It appears passive for sure, but in the French-type positions which arise after 6 h5 e6 (the immediate 6...c5 might be worth a look although Black always has to bear dxc5 in mind until he commits to ...e6 too) 7 f4 c5 8 c3 d6 9 d3 e6 (D) it also feels quite appropriate to have this bishop covering the queenside.

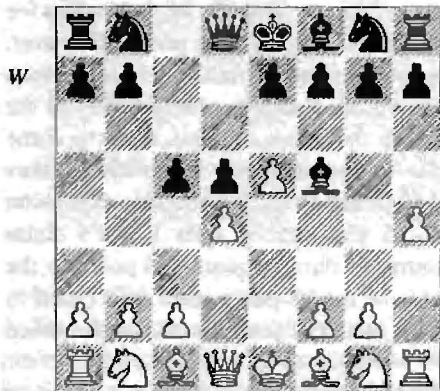


This is a variation in which White hardly develops. Only on move 9 does he finally reveal a wider knowledge of how the pieces move and even here the most popular move has been the paradoxical 10 e2, using the tremendous spatial gains made on the kingside to find unusual shelter on g3. In fact, this looks as if it may be a liberty too far. In Mariano-Adianto, Minneapolis 2005 Black repeated an elegant pawn sacrifice first played by Burmakin to devastating effect: 10...c8! (interesting above all for the

divergence it represents from the older move 10...0-0) 11 g3 f5! 12 gxf5 d7e7! 13 h3 (Lukacs prefers 13 fxe6 d7f5+ 14 h2 dxh6 but this looks quite uncomfortable enough for White, who faces both the undeniable harmony of his opponent's vastly superior development and a fair degree of initiative) 13...dxf5+ 14 exf5 exf5 15 dxc5 dxc5 16 b4 e7 17 dxd5 d8! 18 d3 g5!, when White's king faces a terrible onslaught. Perhaps needless to say, White's belief that his opponent's early lead in development is not too critical in a closed position is blown apart if things get opened up. Ironically though, the very nature of Black's success in this sequence provides an insight into his difficulties in general terms. His position came to life when he was able to activate his king's knight. However, in general terms the very lack of squares for this piece – by far the most significant achievement of White's kingside advances – gives his spatial deficit an unusual acuteness. Consequently I would prefer leaving the king on e1 and proceeding with the apparently only slightly less clumsy development 10 h2!?

The attentive and principled reader might at this stage feel a little uncomfortable about Black's 4th move. The combination of wasting a tempo moving the h-pawn with retreating along the h3-c8 diagonal in any case does create a certain feeling of dissatisfaction. Could Black have not reached similar positions with a more constructive use of this tempo?

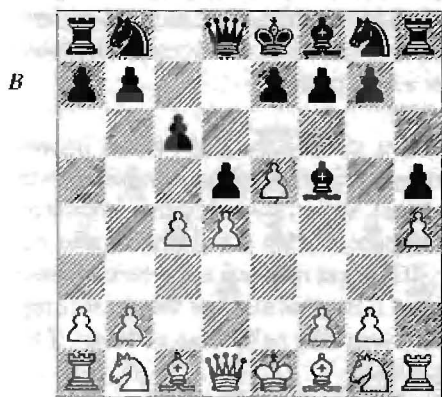
The alternative 4...c5 (D) has some intuitive appeal.



If 3...c5!? is playable, then can the insertion of the developing 3...♗f5 and the non-developing 4 h4 be such a bad deal for Black? The reputation of the line may well have suffered since, at least in the variation 5 dxc5 ♘c6 6 ♗b5! ♖a5+ 7 ♘c3 0-0-0 8 ♗xc6! bxc6 9 ♖d4, White does indeed obtain an unpleasant bind on the dark squares fairly directly as a consequence of the bishop's active development and a consequent reluctance to play the move ...♗d7. Whether this is the full story though is unclear. Black can try instead 6...♗c7!? 7 ♗f4 0-0-0, when the threat of ...♖a5+ and ...d4 probably induces 8 ♗xc6 ♖xc6 with reasonable play. In addition, 4...♗b6!? may be tricky since if White just proceeds with 5 g4 ♗d7 6 h5 e6 7 f4 c5 Black may really gain by dispensing with ...h6. These ideas deserve more tests.

Time to return to 4...h5!?, which can perhaps still claim some objective basis for its main-line status.

5 c4! (D)



It is this pawn-break which gives these variations such a distinctive flavour. White in my view succeeds at least in reaching a slightly improved version of 4 c4. Without jumping ahead too much, it is possible even now to outline the principal ways in which this newly-injected central tension may resolve itself.

1) Black may capture on c4. This results in positions in which potentially weak squares dominate the landscape – Black will look to a blockading knight on d5 while White will hope that the still more advanced outpost d6 will one

day become available to his knights too. In addition, Black can hope to show that the backward pawn on d4 is weak. However, there is in turn the danger that White's extra space will be the more important factor.

2) White may exchange on d5. This results in an open c-file and a structure similar to the Advance French in which Black exchanges early on d4. As there, all hangs on the piece deployment and speed of development.

3) White advances to c5. This is definitely the rarest of the three, but so long as the pawn can be securely bolstered with b4, White can sometimes accrue considerable space which should not be discounted by the defender.

5...e6

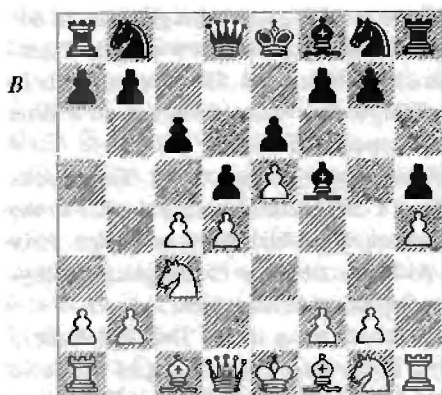
Logical, although if Black is really strongly in favour of structure '2', there is nothing in principle wrong with 5...dxc4. On the other hand, 5...♗xb1?! is now rightly out of favour. After 6 ♗xb1, 6...♖a5+? 7 ♗d2 ♖xa2? is really disastrous as 8 ♗h3! e6 9 c5 will trap the queen. However, even the more prudent treatment with 6...e6 is based on an exaggerated belief that in the coming structure with the exchange on c4 it is knights which are more valuable than bishops. However, 7 c5! looks a good move here as there are no problems organizing the defence of this pawn, while White grabs a fair amount of space, utilizing modern insights which suggest that if knights lack outposts then they are very unlikely to outshine the bishop-pair merely because a position is closed. Moreover, since 6...dxc4 is well met by 7 e6!, the pattern of general misery for Black after the rash exchange on b1 is completed.

6 ♘c3 (D)

6...♗d7?!

This is by no means 'officially' an error and permitting White to modify the structure by exchanging on d5 is not always wrong. Moreover, whilst it seems fairly clear that a black knight really wants to be on c6 after the exchange of pawns on d5, he can claim that the king's knight is able to perform this function with minimal loss of time. Nevertheless, I am sceptical.

Not least, it is surprisingly difficult to offer Black any good advice against Short's relentlessly logical treatment. Hence this is a key



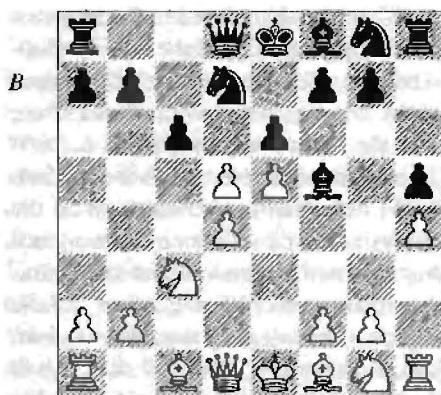
moment to look at alternatives. 6...♙e7 is one way, inviting the exchange on d5, when ...♗c6 is still available. However, I have always been of the view that approaches with ...dxc4 should be right in principle here since Black will receive not only a blocking square on d5, but may sometimes come to attack the d-pawn too. There are two ways of trying to do this:

a) 6...♗e7!? works quite well in the event of 7 ♙g5, when 7...dxc4 is fine but there is also a case for 7...♗b6!? 8 ♗d2 ♗d7 9 ♗f3 ♖f6! 10 exf6 gxf6 11 ♙e3 ♖g8 12 g3 ♗a5 and Black seems appealingly active, Gelashvili-Asrian, European Ch, Batumi 2002. However, the less frequently played 7 ♗ge2 should give pause for thought since 7...dxc4?! 8 ♗g3 ♙g6 9 ♙g5! prevents 9...♗d7? since 10 ♗ge4! causes a serious accident. However, here too there is a reasonable alternative in 7...♗d7 since 8 cxd5 ♗xd5! does not seem to create the same problems which Black faces in the main game, while 8 ♗g3 ♙g6 9 ♙g5 again permits 9...♖f6! 10 exf6 gxf6 11 ♙e3 ♗b6! and Black has no particular weaknesses.

b) 6...dxc4 may nonetheless be a simpler route to the important position after 7 ♙xc4 ♗d7 8 ♗ge2 ♗b6 9 ♙b3 ♗e7 10 ♙g5 ♗d7. Still, White can hope for some initiative here since it is not easy to develop the king's bishop without weakening the d6-square. Where ...♗c8 is needed as a prelude to ...♙e7 Black does look rather passive. Here too, there may be a case instead for 9...♙e7 followed by ...♗h6.

7 cxd5! (D)

7...cxd5



Certainly this way. 7...exd5?! would be dubious for both defensive and offensive reasons. The natural 8 ♙d3 would be a powerful first step towards frustrating Black's attempts to maintain control of f5 and prevent the powerful advance of White's f-pawn. With both ♙g5 and c6 in the air, encouraged by the weakening of the g6-square which 4...h5 represents, Black has little realistic hope of keeping the kingside blockaded. Meanwhile, there is precious little counterplay since any ...e5 advance will always come at a high cost.

8 ♙d3!?

The most striking thing about this impressive miniature is the supreme simplicity with which Nigel Short causes immense problems for his opponent. This is the first sign of this strategy. The most common move here has been 8 ♙g5, but it is not at all clear that 8...♖f6!? represents a weakening rather than a freeing of the black position.

8...exd3 9 ♗xd3 ♗e7 10 ♗f3

Another sign of White's patient approach. Previously 10 ♙g5 had been played but again 10...♖f6! 11 exf6 gxf6 12 ♙d2 ♗f7! 13 ♗ge2 ♗g6 14 g3 ♙d6 saw Black covering all the key squares in Ivanchuk-Karpov, Tilburg (rapid) 1993. If White waits, Black will proceed with the transfer of his knight to c6, which will weaken the g6-square and thus strengthen White's idea.

10...♗c6 11 0-0 ♙e7 12 ♙g5!

Only now, when ...♖f6 ideas are no longer on the table. This is clearly one variation in which the case for interpolating h4 and ...h5 speaks for

itself. The g5-square is the very lynchpin of the white strategy.

12...a6 13 ♖ac1 ♜b6 14 ♜e2!

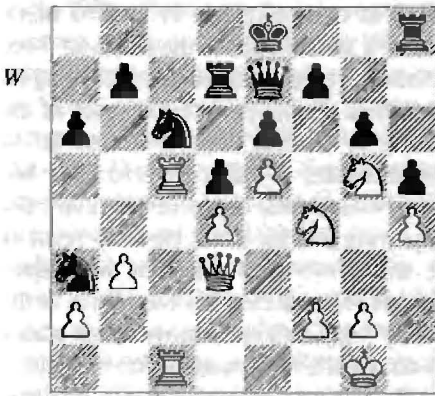
A reminder that the move ...h5 weakens not only the g5-square but also the h-pawn itself. The knight will be perfectly placed on f4, not only hindering castling but also raising the prospect of plausible sacrifices on either e6 or g6. In the next few moves Black may be able to improve the detail of his defence, but there is no escaping his lack of counterplay or the absence of a secure haven for his king.

14...♚d7 15 ♜f4 ♜c4 16 b3 ♜a3 17 ♖fd1 ♖c8 18 ♜xe7 ♚xe7

In general, recapturing on e7 with the knight would appear to offer better chances of bolstering the endangered g6-square. However, it is very risky to offer exchanges on the c-file when bringing the other rook into play will be so problematic.

19 ♖c5! ♖c7 20 ♖dc1 g6 21 ♜g5 ♖d7? (D)

A poor move which offers White a winning sacrificial sequence. Still, it is notoriously difficult to maintain a defence in the absence of any activity at all.



22 ♖xc6!

It has been clear for some moves that White's superiority lies with his piece deployment and that in the absence of obvious scope for pawn-breaks the final breach of the defences was likely to be sacrificial in nature. Looking at the brittle black edifice in the diagram, this solution is

hardly surprising, but it is elegantly economical for all that.

22...bxc6 23 ♜xg6! fxg6 24 ♚xg6+ ♜d8 25 ♖xc6! 1-0

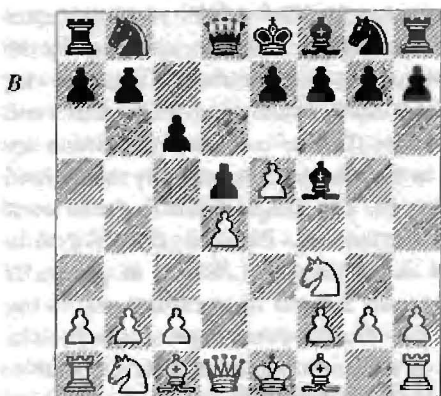
A bit one-sided? Well yes, but nonetheless a very instructive exhibition of the problems associated with a spatial deficit disguised in a superficially innocuous structure. Black should definitely look to the notes at move 6 (or perhaps even move 4!) for a more promising solution.

Conclusion

This chapter shows the Advance Variation and indeed the Caro-Kann in general in its sharpest and most entertaining guise. The overall picture is quite encouraging for Black. Game 10 tends to suggest that Black has a viable alternative in 3...c5, by which he can shift the play onto his chosen territory. If there is a problem here, it seems right now more likely to come from the recent explorations of plans with an immediate ♜f3 and c4, rather than from the main line 4 dxc5, where some quite entrenched theoretical assumptions may be profoundly challenged by 10...a5!. Black's cause also seems viable enough in the sharpest lines with 3...♜f5 4 ♜c3. These are undoubtedly lines which require greater specific knowledge than is customary in the Caro-Kann, but in particular the apparent viability of 6...f6!? (Game 12) both surprises and pleases me. If there is a note of warning for Black in this chapter it is probably to be found in Game 13. The danger is not in the strictest sense 'theoretical'. Black is not obliged to play 4...h5 anyway (4...♚b6!? in particular may become a focus of attention) and to my mind even if he does then the lines in which he meets c4 with ...dxc4 remain quite acceptable. It is rather that Nigel Short's impressive handling of his space advantage reminds us that some of these 'quiet' positions in Black possesses the 'good bishop' are not evaluated as favourably for him as was once the case. Much of White's strategy in Chapter 5 will be built around this insight.

5 Advance Variation: Short System and Other Modern Treatments

If Chapter 4 gave the impression that the Advance Variation tends to result in a huge tactical scrap, then Game 14 will do little to contradict this notion. This fascinating and hugely creative game is evidence that the seemingly quite unpretentious 4 Qf3 too can suddenly explode into life when Black elects to react with an early ...c5. Since this thematic freeing move slightly weakens the pawn on d5, White can treat it as an invitation to a general opening of the centre. This is usually achieved by means of the move c4 – although in Game 14 it is, unusually, the pieces alone which create all of the mayhem. There is now undoubtedly a group of 4 Qf3 devotees who thrive precisely on these sharp positions. However, the original motivation for 4 Qf3 (D) was altogether more sedate.



It was the insight that White's space advantage may have positive consequences even though the c8-bishop is able to develop outside the pawn-chain which took this, from a move whose existence was grudgingly noted, to main-line status. Indeed, in some of Nigel Short's games when he was developing and

interpreting this line in a very positional way, simply bolstering his centre with c3 as a response to ...c5, the claim was that *this bishop is actually missed on the queenside*. In a sense it is also one more black minor piece competing for a limited set of secure squares on the kingside.

Game 15, and to a degree the remaining games in this chapter, clearly reflect this more positional character. The key skill here is intelligent manoeuvring behind the lines and White's pressing need is to find an effective plan once his opponent has fulfilled the basic task of finding acceptable squares for his minor pieces. A key role in the implicit story running through the chapter is played by the move ...c5 even where it is delayed as here, or where it is never played, as in Games 16 and 17. Whilst Black can dictate a slower pace to the play and force White into less tactical channels by avoiding an early recourse to this pawn-break, part of the motivation for an array of other 4th moves – 4 Qe3 in particular – which have recently become very fashionable is precisely White's desire to prevent it. This is not the only point of course. In the two final games of the chapter White plays f4, obviously a consequence of the decision to delay Qf3 and a move which adds a further dimension to the acquisition of space.

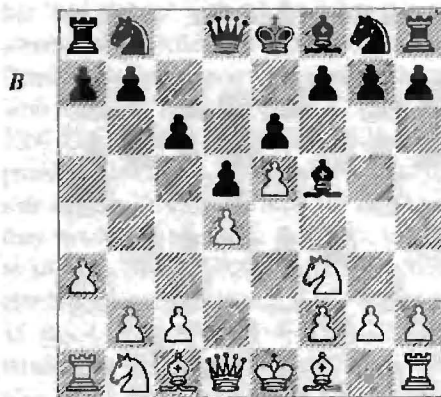
As a player who rather relishes a tactical tussle, it is not so easy fully to appreciate the desire to avoid ...c5. However, there is a sense in which White's play in Games 16 and 17 acquires a greater stylistic unity when he can guarantee a contest in a less open type of position. Then again, as Game 17 graphically illustrates, the inclusion of f4 itself brings into play a new pawn-break for Black too as 8...g5! offers a fresh opportunity to undermine White's impressive edifice.

Game 14

Alexander Motylev – Evgeny Bareev

Russian Ch, Moscow 2005

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 ♗f5 4 ♖f3 e6 (D)



5 ♗e2

This deceptively modest system of development was hardly seen prior to Nigel Short's highly successful deployment of it back in the early 1990s. It seems to have been one of those systems which came up against a fair degree of initial scepticism. Surely such a slow build-up by White could lead to little more than a space advantage comparable with that found in the Advance French, with the disadvantage of allowing a splendid bishop on f5 most decidedly not found there! I believe that much of what will be found in the remainder of this chapter arises from a profound reassessment of the potency of such a spatial plus. Even more modern systems have taken an undeniable inspiration from the 'Short System' and together these now form one of the main arenas of debate at the highest levels. Meanwhile, the current game should remind us that if Black reacts critically in the manner of the French Defence with a quick ...c5 then fireworks will often ensue. Then, not for the first time, we shall see that Black's pride and joy – that sweeping bishop on f5 – can be sorely missed from the queenside.

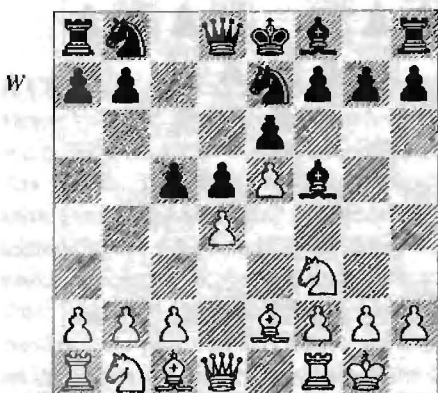
First a mention is owed to another of Short's babies: the paradoxical but ingenious 5 a3! (D).

There are two significant ideas. In some lines in which White will play an early c4 and Black will capture it, it is hoped that capturing directly with the bishop from f1 instead of e2 will win a tempo. Alternatively, there may be positions in which White can respond to the ...c5 break by capturing and then expanding on the queenside with b4 (and probably c4 too). Black has a choice of systems not dissimilar to those we shall examine in Game 15. However, their respective virtues might change. It seems logical for Black to avoid ...c5 and also to avoid lines in which White claims the bishop-pair with an early ♖h4, since here too he may benefit from being able subsequently to play his bishop to d3 in one go. Hence, 5...♗d7 6 ♖bd2 h6!? looks logical to me, perhaps followed just by ...♗e7-g6 and ...♗e7. For all its creativity, it is hard to believe that 5 a3 can pose a challenge so long as Black is mindful of its specific intentions.

5...c5

Options which keep the play closed will be considered in the next game, but here I would like to look at other attempts which seek to benefit from delaying ...c5 just slightly. The best way to introduce this seems to be with 5...♗e7. The problems encountered by the less appropriate 5...♗d7 6 0-0 c5?! 7 c4! serve to drive home

the lesson that bolstering the d5-square is a good prelude to opening the centre. Hence it is only 5...♖e7 6 0-0 (or 6 c3!? {Karpov}), when 6...c5?! 7 dxc5 is awkward, but 6...♗g6 7 0-0 ♟f5! 8 ♟bd2 c5 is a sensible way to organize Black's troops) 6...c5!? (D) which can be regarded as a viable alternative.

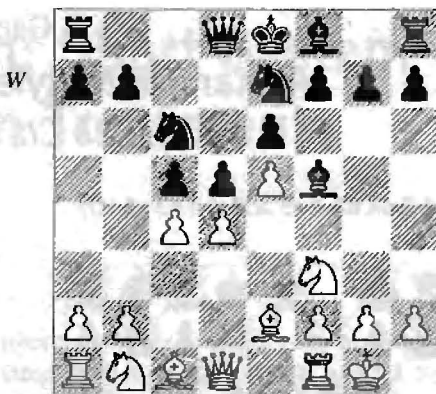


It is worth noting that c3-based systems should normally await the move ...♟bc6, since here, for example, 7 c3 ♟ec6! 8 ♗e3 ♟d7 allows relatively easy development. So, White has two main choices (given that 7 ♗e3 ♟ec6 8 dxc5 transposes to 'a'):

a) 7 dxc5 does not net a pawn for very long in view of 7...♟ec6 8 ♗e3 ♟d7. However, by 9 c4! dxc4 10 ♟a3 White can try to blast the centre open at a moment when Black's control of d5 is not at its greatest. However, after the sensible 10...♗xc5! (avoiding the risky complications which follow 10...c3?! 11 ♖b3!) 11 ♗xc5 ♟xc5 12 ♟xc4 0-0, the black king reaches safety and although d6 is something for White to play with, Black's minor pieces are well placed too. In particular, 13 ♖c1!? ♟d3!? 14 ♖e3 ♖d5! looks comfortable enough.

b) 7 c4!? is the sharpest as usual, when 7...♟bc6 (D) is the main line.

It says much for the abnormal complexities which the extreme tension in the centre generates, in conjunction with the question marks that continue to hang over the development of Black's kingside, that the curious-looking 8 ♟a3!? is strongly favoured by recent practice here. Naturally enough, such a move has been

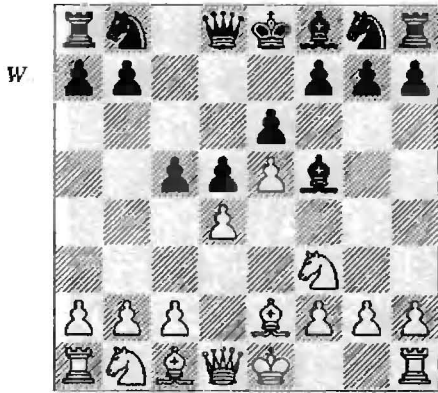


an important weapon in reply to ...dxc4, with the knight heading for d6 via the recapture of the c-pawn (rather as in 'a' above). However, it is interesting indeed that neither 8 dxc5 d4! nor the natural 8 ♟c3 dxc4 9 dxc5 ♟d5! is reckoned to be very special for White. The notable feature of 8 ♟a3 is that Black has no entirely convenient way to release the tension since now 8...cxd4 9 ♟b5! ♟g6 10 ♟bxd4 will enable White to recapture on d4 with a knight, which almost guarantees some initiative. Neither is 8...♟g6 9 cxd5 ♖xd5 10 ♟b5! ♟c8 11 dxc5!? a promising solution. Perhaps there is a reason that practice has almost exclusively seen the rather strange 8...dxc4 and Karpov endorses this too. However, at the very least this strongly vindicates White's 8th move. I am inclined to prefer White a little after 9 ♟xc4 ♟d5 10 ♗g5! ♖d7 (Black is too poorly developed to venture 10...f6 11 exf6 gxf6 12 ♗e3!) since following 11 ♟c1 h6 White should generally be happy to return the bishop to e3, as the d5-knight is pretty fundamental to keeping Black's game together in the centre.

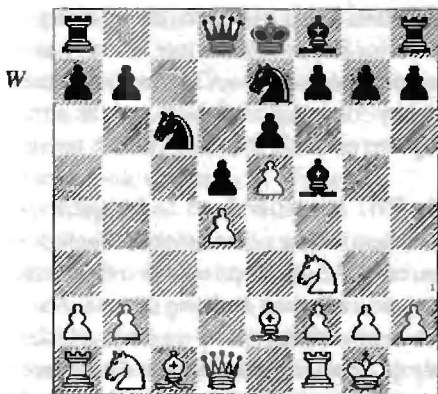
We now return to 5...c5 (D):

6 ♗e3!?

The fundamental choice White has to make in this line is between keeping the centre blocked, which presages a slow manoeuvring game, and forcibly opening it up, which promises fiery tactics and early piece clashes. Increasingly, the text-move is recognized as the right way to initiate the latter choice – White is looking to force the issue in the centre and blast it open while Black's development lags.



Not surprisingly, 6 0-0 is still a very respectable but generally quieter alternative. Then 6...Qc7 transposes to the extensive note to Black's 5th move, but the main line is 6...Qc6. Then White can still try 7 Qe3 with spiritual resemblance to the main game, but here I would like to consider the much more solid 7 c3!?, which has once again dipped a little in popularity, but was fundamental to Nigel Short's aforementioned prowess in the variation. The main line runs 7...cxd4 (it is probably wise to cut out the possibility of dxc5, which is, for example, a good reply to 7...Wb6?!) 8 cxd4 Qge7 (D), and now:



a) With 9 a3!?, White has in mind a possible expansion on the queenside with the 'extended fianchetto' and meanwhile keeps his b1-knight flexible – it may be better placed on d2 rather than c3, for example, in response to a ...Qg4 by Black since recapturing with the knight is a

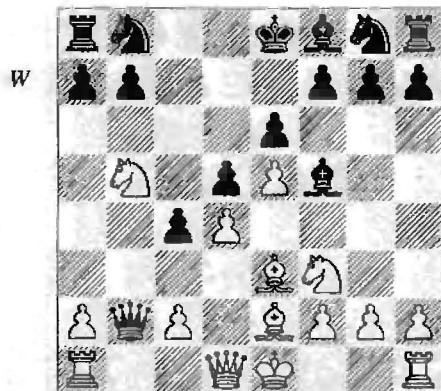
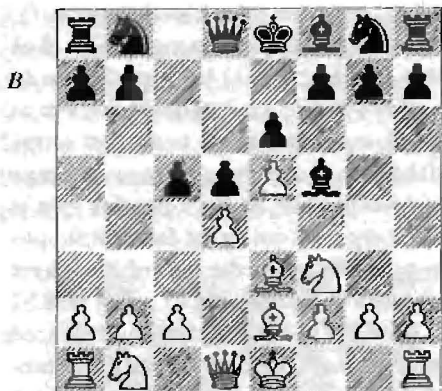
harmonious response to any exchange on f3. 9...Qc8!? (this looks better to me than 9...Qe4 since after 10 Qbd2 Qf5 11 b4! capturing on d4 always allows White a substantial initiative as he too will exchange on e4 and open centre files) 10 b4 (White can also choose to exchange his 'bad bishop' with 10 Qg5, but this gain is somewhat cancelled out by the fact that simplification generally eases the task of the player with less room to manoeuvre) 10...Qe7 11 Qb2 Qb6 12 Qbd2 0-0 13 Qc1 Qc8 with a balanced position. Both sides have squares on the queenside (c5 for White and c4/a4 for Black) which they would like to access. However, in response to 14 Qb3, Michael Adams once played the interesting pawn sacrifice 14...Qc4!? and after 15 Qxc4 dxc4 16 Qxc4 Qd5 17 Qc3 a5! obtained very decent active play. Hence Shirov's plan of 14 Qc3 followed by Qb3 and a4 is probably more prudent. My only slight reservation about Black's position is that this may be one of those cases where the fine bishop on f5 is slightly missed on the queenside. However, with care this should not be a major problem.

b) 9 Qe3 (9 Qc3 is also possible although in this case 9...Qg4 followed by ...Qf5 comes into strong consideration) is still perhaps best met by 9...Qc8!? (9...Qg4 10 Qbd2 Qf5 11 h3 Qxf3 12 Qxf3 followed by Qd3 looks a bit more comfortable for White) 10 Qc3!? Qb6 (if 10...Qe7, 11 Qa4 Qb6 12 Qc5 is interesting because 12...Qxc5?! 13 dxc5 Qd7 14 Qd4! is embarrassing for the f5-bishop in view of 14...Qdx5?! 15 g4!, Short-A.Ledger, British League (4NCL) 2001/2) 11 Qc1 Qe7 12 Qa4 Qxa4 13 Wxa4 0-0 and White's extra space is not worthless, but since 14 Qb5 is met with 14...Qb4! he does not have too much to bite on.

We shall return to 6 Qe3! (D):

6...cxd4

It is worth mentioning right away that the otherwise natural 6...Qc6?! runs into 7 dxc5! and Black has no easy way to recoup this pawn. Nonetheless, it still looks a little strange to oblige so readily in this opening of the centre, especially as the knight recapturing on d4 will hit f5. But the defender has in mind the quickest possible development by ...Qe7 and ...Qbc6 and if he can accomplish this without



real hiccups, he has chances both to consolidate and to exert light pressure on d4 and e5. Since the jury is still out on this way of proceeding, it is worth taking a look at the best of the other choices:

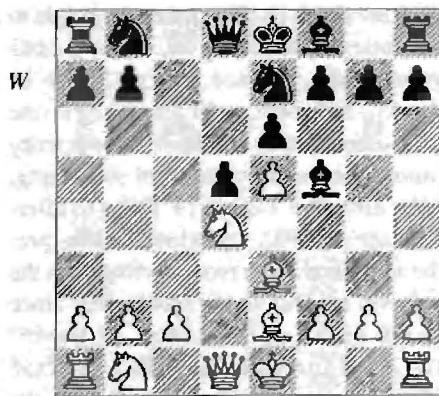
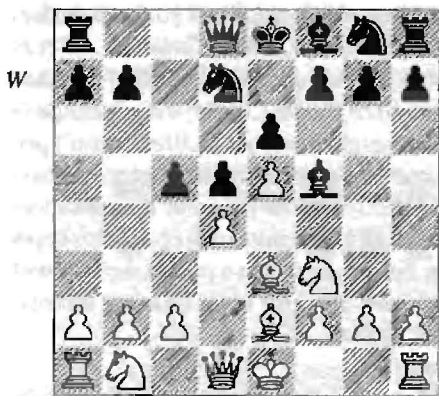
a) 6... Bxb2 looks risky – and it is. On entertainment value alone it would be worth covering, but in fact quite a lot of players take the plunge. White should avoid spineless defences of the b-pawn, but has an interesting choice of ways to sacrifice it. Karpov recommends 7 c4! and this has merit as the pawn sacrifice which Black can hardly consider declining. Moreover, 7... Bxb2 8 Qbd2 9 e7 9 0-0 Qbc6 10 Qb3 ! appears to yield quite decent compensation. However, Macieja has been willing to defend the complexities of 10...0-0-0!? 11 Qxc5 dxc4 12 Qxc4 Qd5 13 Qd3 Qa3 14 Nc1 twice, both times against Volokitin(!) and the position remains full of life. It is difficult to choose between this and the older 7 Qc3 . Then after 7... Bxb2 , 8 Qb5 looks scary enough and 8... Qa6 ? 9 dxc5 is indeed dire enough, but in fact it is Black who gets to invest material here through the extraordinary 8...c4! (D).

Now 9 Qc7+ Qd7 10 Qxa8 Qxc2 is very complicated, but apparently an attraction for the many players trying to play this way with Black. It may not be so easy to capture the stray knight on a8 so quickly, but it cannot come out either. Black has to be patient, and should have good compensation for the exchange (provided that this is all it is!). White has an interesting way to avoid this sacrifice, with 8 Bb1 . However, while 8... Qxc3+?? 9

Qd2 Qxc2 10 Qxb7 is certainly ruled out, a final verdict on 8... Qxb1+ 9 Qxb1 b6 has yet to be made. 10 Qb5 Qa6 looks tempting, but the attack/pin on the c-pawn is annoying and Black may survive this. Neither is 10 dxc5 bxc5 11 Bb7 so clear since Black has 11...a6 12 Qa4 Qd7 !, when 13 Bxd7 Qxd7 14 Qb6+ Qc6 15 Qxa8 Qe7 results in another unclear position with another trapped knight on a8. If none of this appeals, Black can also decline the pawn, meeting 7 Qc3 with 7... Qc6 8 0-0 c4, which Karpov appears to endorse. However, I prefer White. Even though the execution of the natural pawn-break b3 requires sorting out a response to possible attacks on the knight on c3, at least White has a plausible break likely to make a major impact. Moreover, Black has to be wary of ideas such as Qh4 or even Qxc4 followed by d5. Indeed 9 Qh4 ? may be an interesting alternative to the more routine move 9 Bb1 .

b) 6... Qd7 (D) defends c5 and in principle leaves c6 free for the other knight, although in practice, once White has prised open the centre, d5 often proves a more enticing destination.

White can 'rush in' with 7 c4 here, which is certainly quite playable, but I am not convinced that the positions arising from 7...cxd4 8 Qxd4 Qxb1 9 Bxb1 Qb4+ 10 Qf1 ! Qe7 are either easy to handle or theoretically that exciting for White. Black can develop and claim reasonable square coverage in the centre. Alternatively White can opt for 7 0-0 Qe7 , when after 8 c4 dxc4 9 Qa3 Qd5 10 Qxc4 Qe7 ? (since 10...b5 11 Qg5 ! is awkward for Black, while



10...Qxc3 11 Qxe3 Qe4 12 d5 is also risky given Black's enduring development deficit), the straightforward 11 Qd6+ Qxd6 12 exd6 0-0 13 dxc5 Qxc3 14 fxg3 Qxc5 15 Wd4 of Smirin-Vyzhmanavin, Novosibirsk 1995 has not really been improved upon. It is not a huge advantage, but Black has nothing to match the threat posed by the strong pawn on d6. Note that 8 dxc5 would have transposed to the note above about 5...Qe7 and 6...c5. There are wider similarities between these lines which are worth being aware of.

7 Qxd4 Qe7! (D)

In principle the f5-bishop is a good piece, well worth hanging on to. However, there is no time for 7...Qg6!! since 8 0-0 Qc6 9 c4! forces the issue in the centre with Black's development sorely lacking. Moreover, the text-move effectively covers the threat to capture on f5 since 8 Qxf5 Qxf5 would leave White's 6th move looking quite out of place.

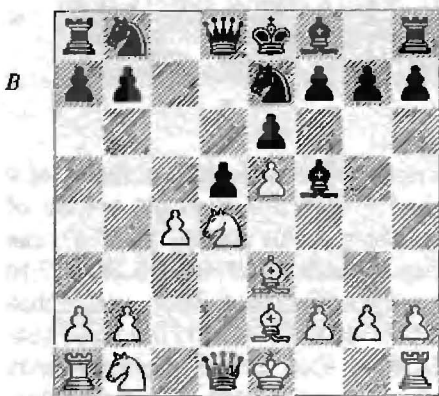
8 Qg5!?

This is another move which looks curious at first sight. The counsel against moving pieces twice in the opening is usually much strengthened in a sharp open position where the significance of tempi is heightened. Nonetheless, pinning the e7-knight does introduce a double threat – the positional 9 Qxf5 and the much more tactically immediate 9 Qb5, which would, after 8...Qg6? for example, be a rather devastating response.

Whether the unusual measures which this move demands from the defender will represent sufficient inconvenience to outweigh this loss

of tempo will be the basis for judging White's 8th move.

One point of principle is worth mentioning here. I hope I am not guilty of reading the crazy events to come backwards, but it seems reasonable to suppose that if White persists in trying to cause trouble using *just his pieces* and eschews the obvious pawn-break to exert pressure on Black's centre then there is likely to come a point where some measure of sacrifice will be essential to affect a breakthrough. As usual, the attempt to use pawns to blast open the centre to exploit a short-term advantage in development is a valid strategy too, so at least in principle I have sympathy with 8 c4! (D).

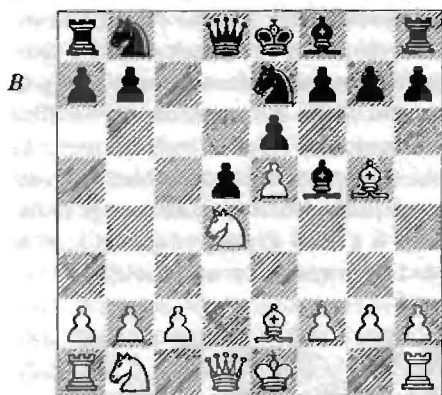


The first point is that after 8...Qxc4, 9 Qa3! is once again an efficient way to recapture on c4.

The second is that after 8...Qbc6 White intensifies the pressure with 9 Qa4! since the obvious retort 9...Wd7 is met by 10 Qb5!, when

preventing the check on d6 requires the knight to desert its duties of defending d5, when 11 cxd5 will favour White. 9...dxc4 10 ♖a3 ♗a5+ 11 ♗xa5 ♖xa5 12 ♖xc4 ♖xc4 13 ♖xc4 a6 is one reasonable defensive try but the relative activity of the minor pieces must count for something, especially after the clever 14 f3!? (Svidler-Anand, Madrid 1998), by which White prevents the f5-bishop from reconnecting with the queenside via e4. But 9...a6!? looks best since 10 ♖c3 (10 cxd5?! b5!) 10...dxc4 11 0-0-0!? ♖d3! 12 ♖xd3 cxd3 13 ♖xd3 ♗a5 14 ♗xa5 ♖xa5 was a reasonable simplification of the position for Black in Inarkiev-Ivanchuk, European Ch, Kusadasi 2006 although after 15 f4 ♖d8 16 ♖hd1 h5, White should search for something punchier than 17 h4!.

We now return to the position after 8 ♖g5!? (D):



8...♗a5+!

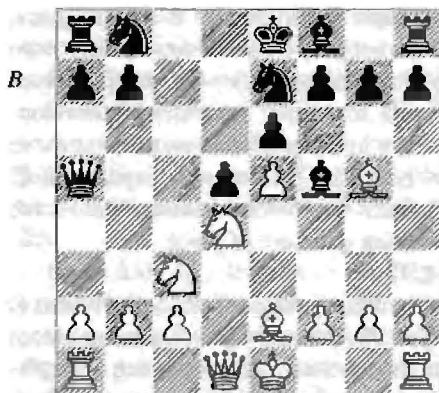
The right way to meet the dual threats of 9 ♖xf5 and 9 ♖b5. Black should beware of pawn-grabbing in this climate. 8...♗b6?! can be calmly met with 9 ♖c3, when 9...♗xb2? 10 ♖cb5! spells immediate disaster and 9...♖bc6 10 ♖cb5! ♖xd4 11 ♖xd4 a6 12 0-0 ♖g6 13 c4! dxc4 14 ♗a4+ ♖c6 15 ♖f3 resulted in fairly comprehensive misery too in Sutovsky-Gyimesi, Gibraltar 2006.

The claim that the doubling of Black's pawns is in principle a positional threat without the added advantage of the bishop-pair was also tested in Nijboer-Erenburg, Dieren 2006 by 8...♗d7 and the answer seems to be a qualified

'yes' in view of 9 ♖xe7 ♖xe7 10 ♖xf5 exf5 11 ♖d2 ♖c6 12 ♖f3 0-0 13 0-0 ♖ad8 (13...f6!?) 14 ♖e1 ♖fe8 15 ♗d2 ♖c5 16 ♖b5! ♗c7 17 c3 a6 18 ♖xc6 bxc6 19 ♖e2. I like the exchange of bishop for knight even though Black wasn't perhaps required to provoke it. White seems to have a more effective minor piece for his aspirations of later opening the centre with e6 than his opponent for his aim to secure a passed d-pawn with ...c5 and ...d4. Still, this is not clear-cut and may be tested further.

9 ♖c3 (D)

I am not sure whether it is a tribute to the soundness of White's position that he almost manages to generate a real initiative without queens after 9 ♗d2 ♗xd2+ 10 ♖xd2 ♖g6 11 ♖b5 or whether the fact that he just falls short is a cause for concern. In any case after 11...♖d7 12 c4 ♖bc6 13 ♖f3 ♖e4!, as in Morozevich-Galkin, Moscow 1998, Black holds his centre and White must pay attention to the e5-pawn. Keeping the queens on is of course much more in the spirit of the thing. Nonetheless, Black's idea is also clear. With the c-file blocked, White lacks his principal pawn-break and the pieces must perform some magic on their own.

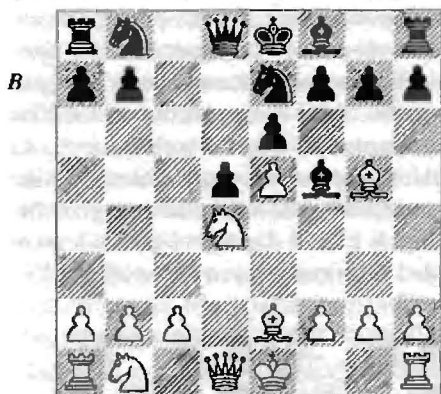


9...♖bc6!?

Catching up with development must be the right priority. Nonetheless, there have been attempts to secure the bishop first with 9...♖g6 and in the absence of any imminent c4 break now, White is obliged to pursue his initiative with some ingenuity. The present evidence is that 10 0-0 a6! 11 h4 h5! is solid for Black, but

preventing the check on d6 requires the knight to desert its duties of defending d5, when 11 cxd5 will favour White. 9...dxc4 10 ♖a3 ♗a5+ 11 ♗xa5 ♘a5 12 ♘xc4 ♘xc4 13 ♙xc4 a6 is one reasonable defensive try but the relative activity of the minor pieces must count for something, especially after the clever 14 f3!? (Svidler-Anand, Madrid 1998), by which White prevents the f5-bishop from reconnecting with the queenside via e4. But 9...a6!? looks best since 10 ♘c3 (10 cxd5?! b5!) 10...dxc4 11 0-0-0! ♙d3! 12 ♙xd3 cxd3 13 ♙xd3 ♗a5 14 ♗xa5 ♘xa5 was a reasonable simplification of the position for Black in Inarkiev-Ivanchuk, European Ch, Kusadasi 2006 although after 15 f4 ♙d8 16 ♙hd1 h5, White should search for something punchier than 17 h4?!

We now return to the position after 8 ♙g5!? (D):



8...♗a5+!

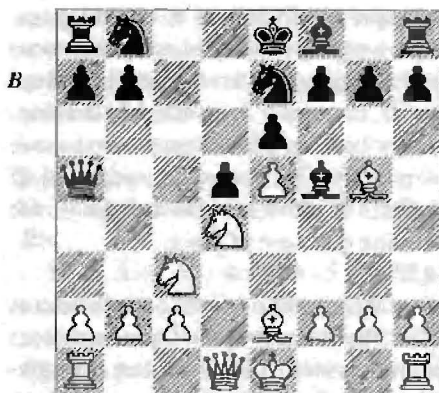
The right way to meet the dual threats of 9 ♘xf5 and 9 ♘b5. Black should beware of pawn-grabbing in this climate. 8...♗b6?! can be calmly met with 9 ♘c3, when 9...♗xb2? 10 ♘cb5! spells immediate disaster and 9...♘bc6 10 ♘cb5! ♘xd4 11 ♘xd4 a6 12 0-0 ♙g6 13 c4! dxc4 14 ♗a4+ ♘c6 15 ♙f3 resulted in fairly comprehensive misery too in Sutovsky-Gyimesi, Gibraltar 2006.

The claim that the doubling of Black's pawns is in principle a positional threat without the added advantage of the bishop-pair was also tested in Nijboer-Erenburg, Dieren 2006 by 8...♗d7 and the answer seems to be a qualified

'yes' in view of 9 ♙xe7 ♙xe7 10 ♘xf5 exf5 11 ♘d2 ♘c6 12 ♘f3 0-0 13 0-0 ♙ad8 (13...f6!?) 14 ♙e1 ♙fe8 15 ♗d2 ♙c5 16 ♙b5! ♗c7 17 c3 a6 18 ♙xc6 bxc6 19 ♙e2. I like the exchange of bishop for knight even though Black wasn't perhaps required to provoke it. White seems to have a more effective minor piece for his aspirations of later opening the centre with e6 than his opponent for his aim to secure a passed d-pawn with ...c5 and ...d4. Still, this is not clear-cut and may be tested further.

9 ♘c3 (D)

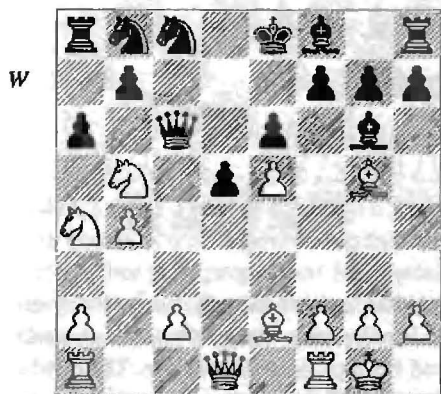
I am not sure whether it is a tribute to the soundness of White's position that he almost manages to generate a real initiative without queens after 9 ♗d2 ♗xd2+ 10 ♘xd2 ♙g6 11 ♘b5 or whether the fact that he just falls short is a cause for concern. In any case after 11...♙d7 12 c4 ♘bc6 13 ♘f3 ♙e4!, as in Morozevich-Galkin, Moscow 1998, Black holds his centre and White must pay attention to the e5-pawn. Keeping the queens on is of course much more in the spirit of the thing. Nonetheless, Black's idea is also clear. With the c-file blocked, White lacks his principal pawn-break and the pieces must perform some magic on their own.



9...♘bc6!?

Catching up with development must be the right priority. Nonetheless, there have been attempts to secure the bishop first with 9...♙g6 and in the absence of any imminent c4 break now, White is obliged to pursue his initiative with some ingenuity. The present evidence is that 10 0-0 a6! 11 h4 h5! is solid for Black, but

that 10 b4! is rather dangerous after 10...♖b6 (not 10...♖xb4 11 ♘db5 ♗a5 12 ♕d2 with a crushing attack) 11 ♘db5 ♘c8 12 0-0 a6 13 ♘a4 (13 ♕e3 ♖c6) 13...♗c6 (D).



14 c4! is a foretaste of what is to come in this variation, both the ingenuity which White needs to show to keep a genuine initiative alive and the very real dangers which Black faces if he succeeds. White succeeds in opening the c-file and using it to generate a powerful attack even at the expense of material. 14...axb5 15 cxd5 and after 15...exd5 16 ♖c1 bxa4 17 ♕b5! the three pieces will not fully match the queen and pawn since White keeps the initiative, Zhang Zhong-Liang Chong, Chinese Ch, Wuxi 2006. Neither is 15...♖xd5 to be recommended. After 16 ♖c1 ♘d7 17 ♘c3 ♖c6 (17...♖xe5 18 ♕f4 ♖f5 19 ♘xb5 does not look a very enticing alternative for Black) 18 ♕xb5 ♖c7 19 ♖d1 ♘cb6 20 ♘a4! Black's position fell apart in Gong Qingyun-Xu Yuanyuan, Xiapu 2005.

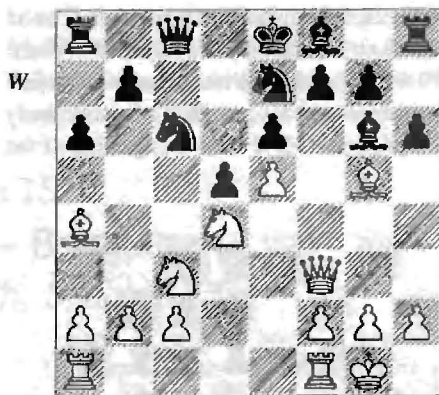
10 ♕b5 ♖c7 11 0-0!

Capturing on f5 would again leave Black well coordinated, while after 11 ♕xe7?! ♕xe7 12 ♘xf5 Black has the important resource 12...♖xe5+ 13 ♘c3 d4!, when it is White who faces some embarrassment.

11...♕g6 12 ♖g4 a6 13 ♕a4 ♖c8! 14 ♖f3 h6 (D)

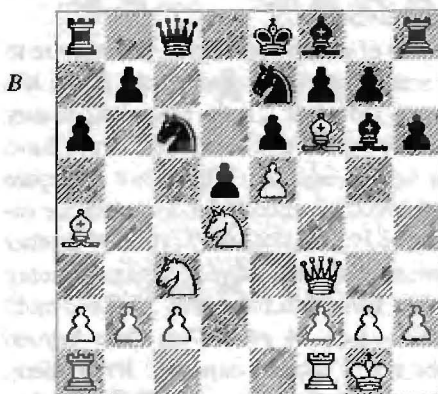
15 ♕f6!?

A moment which sums up the entire spirit of 8 ♕g5. The only course of action which White does not want to consider is one which loses the initiative. It is not that his position is so bad in



that case, just that he has made no structural inroads at all into Black's game – the only way to fight for an advantage is by preventing his opponent from developing and getting his king away from the centre. Objectively, it is very hard to assess White's idea. It would require a far greater analysis than there is space for here and even then it would be necessary to make a judgement about a great many highly irrational positions. For practical purposes, White's sacrifice offered good chances and guarantees maximum entertainment for the crowd.

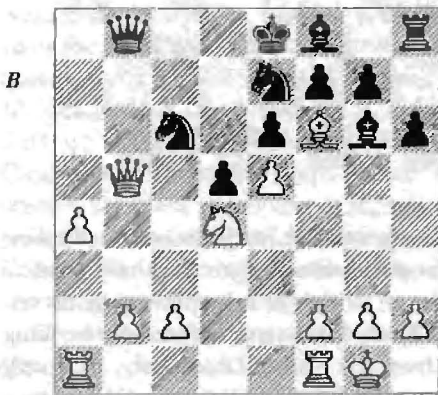
We return to 15 ♕f6!? (D):



15...♖b8!?

A restrained reaction, and a reasonable one, but it postpones rather than avoids decisions about which white piece to take. It is impossible to give more than a flavour of the myriad possibilities available to both sides around here. One of the most extraordinary lines to emerge from

Motylev's analysis must be 15...b5! 16 ♖cxb5 axb5 17 ♙xb5 ♖a5 18 ♗b3 ♙xb5 19 ♗xb5 ♗b8 20 a4! (D), when White's material deficit remains considerable, but Black is singularly poorly equipped to deal with the opening of the a-file.



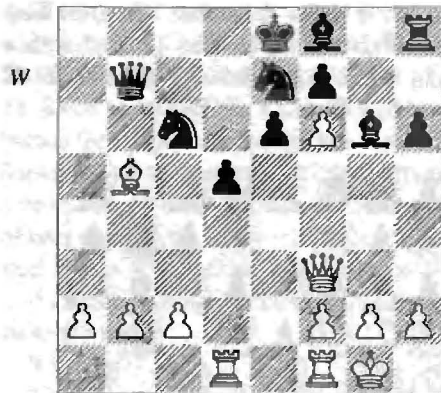
After 20...♗xb5 21 axb5 ♖xd4 22 ♖a8+ ♖d7 23 ♙xe7 ♗xe7 24 ♖fal ♖xb5 25 ♖b8 (Motylev) it remains anyone's guess whether Black can defend. Again, at least in practice, I suspect coordinating Black's forces would be the more difficult task.

16 ♖ad1! gxf6 17 exf6 b5 18 ♖cxb5 axb5 19 ♖xb5 ♖xb5?

In terms of general principles, the impulse to return some material to dampen the attack is a sound one. However, it is the infuriating beauty of such positions that such guidelines have strictly limited salience. What is not in dispute is that the analysis required to ascertain the superiority of 19...♖f5! 20 ♖a7 (20 c4 is another vast, messy, but ultimately not quite convincing story) 20...♗a6 21 ♙xc6+ ♖d8 22 ♙xd5 exd5 23 ♗xd5+ ♙d6 24 g4 ♗c7 is quite beyond over-the-board human capacity. Even there, White probably has a draw. After the understandable text-move, however, the attacker gets to open some more lines and play settles down into something which more closely resembles everyday chess.

20 ♙xb5 ♗b7 (D)

21 c4! ♙e4 22 ♗e2 ♖g8 23 f3 dxc4 24 fxe7! ♗xe7 25 ♗xc4 ♙d5 26 ♖xd5! exd5 27 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 28 ♙xc6 ♙d6 29 ♙b7

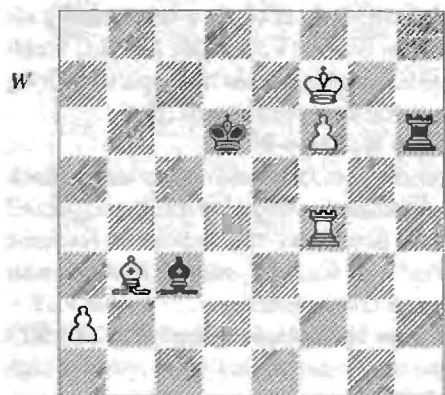


White has cashed in very successfully and the rest is reasonably straightforward, opposite-coloured bishops notwithstanding. Those who, at about move 15, bet upon a rook and opposite-bishop ending with an extra couple of pawns for White, go to collect considerable winnings!

29...♙g7 30 ♖d1 ♙xb2 31 ♙xd5 ♗e7 32 ♖b1 ♙d4+ 33 ♗f1 ♖c8 34 ♖b7+ ♖d6 35 ♙b3!

Keeping the black rook out and preventing any serious counterplay.

35...♖c1+ 36 ♗e2 f6 37 ♖h7 ♖g1 38 g3 ♖g2+ 39 ♖d3 ♙g1 40 ♖xh6 ♗e5 41 f4+ ♗f5 42 ♙a4 ♗e6 43 ♗e4 ♙xh2 44 ♙b3+ ♗e7 45 ♗f5 ♙xg3 46 ♖xf6 ♖f2 47 ♖e6+ ♖d7 48 ♖e4 ♙h4 49 ♙g6 ♙c7 50 ♖f7 ♙a3 51 ♙e6+ ♖d6 52 ♖d4+ ♗c5 53 ♖a4 ♙b2 54 f5 ♖h2 55 f6 ♖h6 56 ♖f4 ♖d6 57 ♙b3 ♙c3 (D)



58 ♖f1

But certainly not 58 ♗g7?? ♖xf6! 59 ♖xf6+ ♗e7 with a draw.

58...♗d4 59 ♖f5 ♗e5 60 ♖f3 ♗d4 61 a4 ♗b2 62 ♗c4 ♗c5 63 ♗d3 ♗b4 64 ♗b5 ♖h1 65 ♗e6 ♖e1+ 66 ♗d7 ♖d1+ 67 ♗c8 ♖c1+ 68 ♗b7 1-0

A game of extraordinary complexity which shows the practical difficulties involved in defending when the normal guidelines for assessment of a position are just not available.

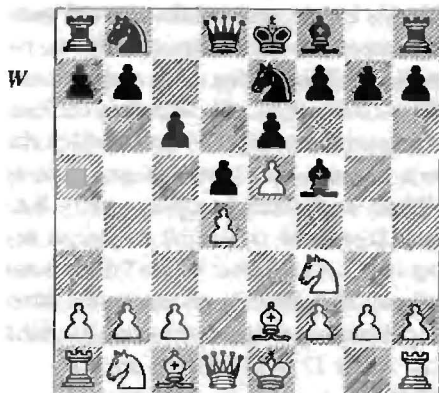
Game 15

Khairullin – Bologan

Russian Team Ch, Sochi 2006

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 ♗f5 4 ♗f3 e6 5 ♗e2 ♗d7

In Game 14 we discovered that the text-move was a rather poor preparation for a quick ...c5, whereas 5...♗e7 (D), as a result of bolstering the d5-pawn, was much more appropriate.



Here, however, our concern is with Black's attempts to find a viable treatment which keeps the position closed for some time and in this context either knight move (or perhaps both!) should be acceptable. Black's greatest problem in this variation is his lack of space, more specifically the developmental log-jam which can result from excessive demand for the e7-square – often the obvious square of preference for both of his kingside minor pieces. He also faces very early on a fundamental decision between three distinct approaches:

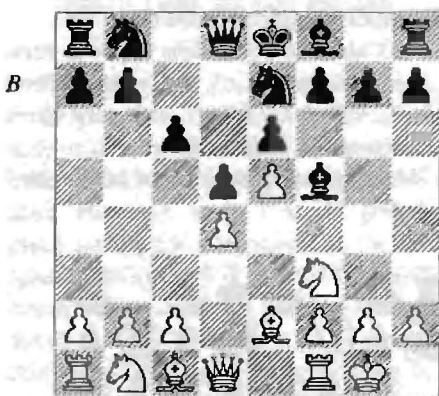
1) Permit the exchange of his bishop on f5 and hope that the time which his opponent consumes in organizing its capture provides compensation.

2) Somehow avoid the move ...♗c7 altogether so that ♗h4 is unlikely to be an issue.

3) Take a time-out to create a safe retreat-square – usually by playing ...h6.

The most obvious alternative to the text-move is 5...♗c7 and it is important to note that this move alone does not yet indicate a choice between these three.

White can of course then try 6 ♗h4?! but it is a fair rule of thumb that this strategy should wait upon Black committing his queen's knight to d7. Since it can still come to c6 here (by 6...c5 7 c3 ♗bc6) the exchange on f5 will simply leave an awkward amount of firepower bearing down on d4. So 6 0-0 (D) is preferable.



Then:

a) 6...♗d7 returns to the notes to move 6 in the main game below.

b) 6...h6!?! is also likely to lead to play similar to that found there. However, this does have some independent significance, as usual on the basis that 5...♗e7 is the better of the two knight moves as a preparation for ...c5. This is relevant here in the case of 7 b3!?. This is arguably White's most direct plan in the position, to play

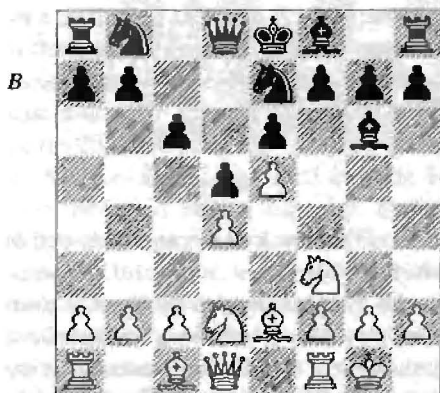
c4 supported by the b-pawn, a necessary prelude incidentally (since 7 c4 dxc4 8 ♖xc4 ♗d7 followed by ...♗b6 and ...♗e5 is a much more comfortable version for Black of the structure considered in Game 13). However, in this case 7...c5!? is a very interesting though complicated response. Then 8 ♖a3!? is interesting although Karpov's 8...♗ec6 9 ♖b2 ♖e4!? neatly exploits the absence of the knight from the centre. 8 dxc5 is also well met by 8...♗ec6 9 ♖e3 ♗d7, while 8 c4!? dxc4 9 ♖xc4 cxd4 10 ♗xd4 ♗bc6! is another illustration of how such ...c5 ideas harmonize much better with the knights on e7 and b8, although White's 11 ♖b5!? ♗c8 12 ♖a3! in Parligras-Vilela, Barbera del Valles 2005 did look more of a challenge than previous treatments. In general terms, White's plan of b3 and c4 still seems to me one of the most promising and hence this move-order is well worth considering for the defence.

c) There are some further notable nuances relating to 6...♖g6!?, preparing a quick ...♗f5.

c1) The first is that 7 ♗h4 probably remains inaccurate so long as the black knight sits on b8 for the customary reason that ...c5 and ...♗bc6 provides quick pressure against d4.

c2) 7 b3 also feels a bit less apposite here. Black can again try 7...c5, but even Becerra Rivero's 7...♗f5 8 c4 ♖h5!? with very quick pressure against d4 makes sense.

c3) White probably does better here with 7 ♗bd2!? (D).

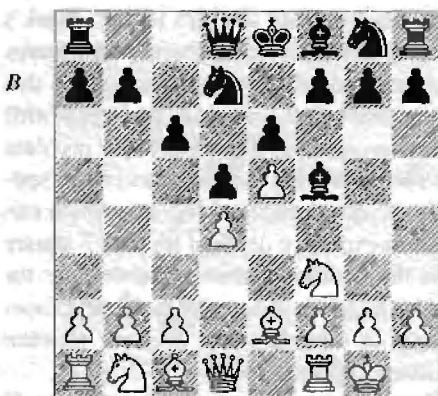


c31) This invites 7...c5 and it is interesting that after 8 dxc5 ♗ec6 9 ♗b3 ♗d7 10 c4 dxc4

11 ♖xc4 a6 12 ♖e3 ♗dxe5 13 ♗xe5 ♗xe5 14 ♖e2 ♖e7 15 ♖xd8+ ♖xd8 16 ♗fd1 (Rublevsky-Jobava, FIDE World Cup, Khanty-Mansisk 2005), a rather standard structure from the 3 ♗c3 Caro-Kann is reached in which White has his 3 vs 2 majority on the queenside. However, here he generally benefits from the advanced c-pawn. It might have been possible to keep queens on too.

c32) For these reasons, 7...♗f5!? might be a better bet, a conclusion which Jobava himself seems to have arrived at. It is instructive that after 8 g4, 8...♗h4?! 9 ♗xh4 ♖xh4 10 f4 just assists White with his kingside aspirations since the positionally desirable sequence 10...h5 11 g5! comes with a lot of tactical baggage which the black queen is unlikely to welcome. However, Black's idea is more subtle – he will meet this aggressive 8th-move thrust with the restrained 8...♗e7! intending ...h5, and crucially meeting 9 ♗h4 with 9...c5!, when it is difficult to find a continuation for White in which the g-pawn's advance does not look quite out of place. White should therefore play quietly; 8 c3 ♗d7! and then 9 b4 or 9 ♗b3 might get my vote, but in either case after 9...♖e7 there is not much wrong with Black's set-up. In the latter case 10 g4!? remains a live option, but 10...♗h4 11 ♗xh4 ♖xh4 12 f4 f5! is quite unclear.

6 0-0 (D)

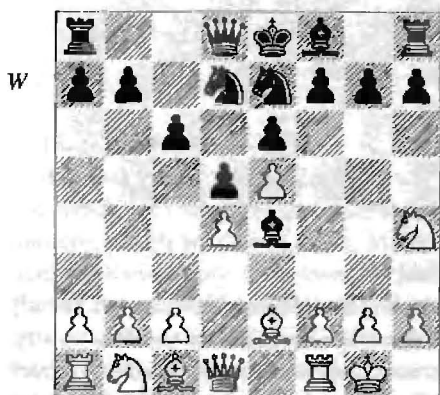


6...b6!?

Here too, at least in general terms, there are strong arguments for this taking priority. As we shall see, although these types of positions can

suddenly blow up, they are more often characterized by slow manoeuvring in which the role of tempi is less acute than in the sharper lines of the Advance Variation. Partly for this reason, the expenditure of a move to preserve the bishop seems to be quite a good deal. Moreover, extravagant though it may sound, the move is also used on occasion as preparation for an extended kingside fianchetto with ...g5. However, 6...d7 remains a popular alternative here and merits consideration. The main question relates to 7 d4!? and Black's attempts to improve on the 'traditional' 7...g6 8 d2 c5 9 c3 d6 (or 9...f5) 10 xg6 hxg6 11 f3. There are many games from such positions – some with an early ...cxd4, some holding this back and retaining the option of expanding on the queenside, but in all cases I am deeply sceptical that Black has enough ideas to compensate for the two bishops and a spatial deficit. Leaving the bishop on f5 is not the way either. 7...xb6?! 8 xf5 xf5 9 c3 c5 appears to represent serious pressure against d4, but the neat resource 10 d3! keeps things together since Black cannot allow xf5 and after 10...d7 11 dxc5! White stands well.

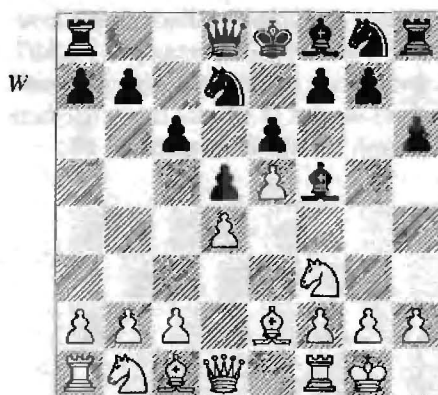
However, the recent trend for 7...e4 (D) looks much more promising territory.



Although the coming exchange on e4 would seem to promise quite a severe weakening of Black's structure, the added pressure against d4 is also significant and after 8 d2 c5 9 c3 d6 10 xe4 dxe4 11 g3 the latest idea 11...xb6! might well be the right way to reveal this. In

Kariakin-Motylev, Wijk aan Zee 2007 at least White felt obliged to accept a fairly ugly structural concession of his own after 12 e3 d8! (threatening to capture on e5) 13 a4 e7! (13...xb2?! 14 b5! would unnecessarily court danger) 14 ab1 xh4 15 gxh4 cxd4 16 cxd4 b4, when play ended abruptly after 17 b5 xa4 18 xa4 b6 19 c2 xd4 20 xe4 c4 21 bd1 1/2-1/2 with many unanswered questions but a sense that though highly complex, the play was fairly well balanced.

We now return to 6...h6!? (D):



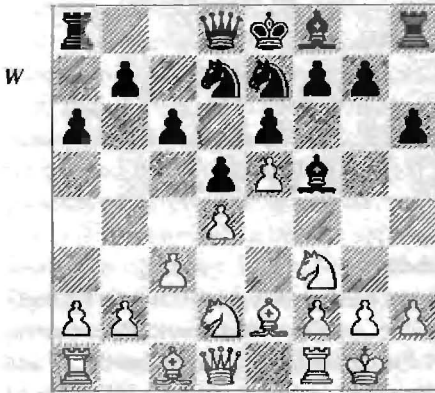
7 dbd2

This modest development is increasingly fashionable, not least as a result of the move-order 4 d2 e6 5 b3 and only later f3 and e2. However, again I would give pride of place among the alternatives to the direct and space-gaining 7 b3 d7 8 c4 g6, when one interesting sequence is 9 a3 f4!? 10 xf4 xa3 11 d3. White has a little more space but this should be containable so long as Black pays attention to the security of his king. To this end 11...g4!? followed by a willingness to exchange light-squared bishops on g6 with the extra pawn-cover which this can imply is probably best. He also needs to be vigilant with regard to the fate of his bishop on a3. It is likely that returning this piece to e7 will be prudent sooner rather than later. Another recent try is 9 e3, a further reminder that b3 is all about preparing play in the centre rather than the fianchetto. I suspect that no automatic plan presents itself if Black just sensibly develops here, but Zhang

Zhong-Stohl, Turin Olympiad 2006 provides a stark warning against opening the centre prematurely. For sure the e-pawn is weak after 9...dxc4 10 bxc4 c5 but the price of picking it off is very high: 11 ♖c3 ♙e7 12 h3 cxd4 13 ♗xd4 ♜gxe5 14 ♗xf5 exf5 15 ♖d5 ♜c8 16 ♚ad1 ♙c5 17 ♙f4! ♜g6 18 ♙d6 ♜c6 19 ♗b5 left Black in terrible trouble.

7...♗e7 8 e3 a6 (D)

This is certainly a sensible preface to the intended pawn-break since the immediate 8...c5 9 dxc5 ♗xc5 10 ♙b5+ ♗d7 11 ♗d4! merely serves to activate White's pieces for him. However, it is again legitimate for Black simply to reorganize his pieces with, for example, 8...♙h7, ...♗g6 and ...♙e7, etc. White's plan is eventually likely to involve f4-f5 once more, but there is also no rush for Black to organize ...c5.



9 ♗e1?!

It is true that the closed nature of the position, with its emphasis on manoeuvring, means that the importance of finding the optimal squares for the pieces might outweigh that of ensuring that they reach their destinations at great speed. However, there are limits to this logic and White's plan of taking four moves to shift his knights to f3 and e3 seems a bit profligate.

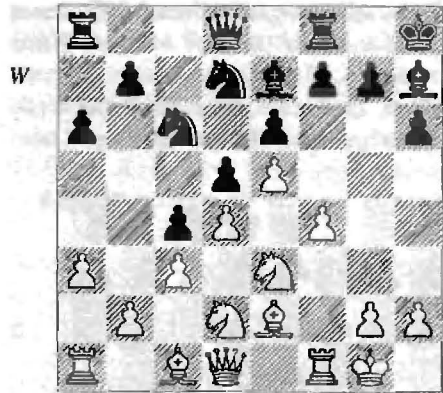
The evidence of Morozevich-Anand, FIDE World Ch, San Luis 2005 also speaks in favour of a more direct approach. After 9 ♗b3 ♚c8 10 ♗b4 ♙h7 11 f4 c5 12 ♙h5! ♗f5 13 ♗xf5 ♙xf5 14 ♙e3 g6 15 ♙e2 h5 16 dxc5! ♗xc5 17 ♗d4

complex position. Black will have a great bishop on e4 (the elimination of which his opponent later assessed to merit an exchange sacrifice) but White still enjoys a useful spatial plus.

9...c5 10 ♗df3 ♗c6 11 a3?!

This looks a bit contrived. White wants to provoke the move ...c4 to take pressure off the centre and thereby justify his, to say the least, methodical build-up. However, it is not clear that his manoeuvrings will result in a sufficiently punchy plan on the kingside, while from Black's point of view the move ...c4 at least serves to emphasize the power of his light-squared bishop. For this reason there would seem to be grounds for 11 ♙d3!? ♙xd3 12 ♗xd3 ♙e7 13 ♗f4 (Bologan), attempting to generate kingside play with his pieces. Nonetheless, aside from the definite weakness that ...h6 represents, the sense that Black has got a 'good French' is inescapable.

11...c4 12 ♗c2 ♙e7 13 ♗e3 ♙h7 14 ♗d2 0-0 15 f4 ♙h8 (D)



16 ♖c1?!

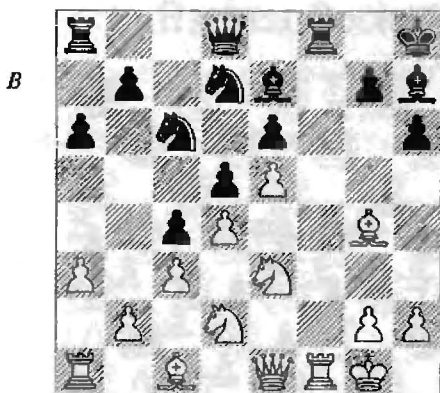
My feeling that White's build-up has already been rather slow remains, but as I have suggested, such considerations may take a back seat if the play remains closed. The text-move does look particularly suspect though, especially as 16 ♙g4! would have both promoted White's aspirations to gain further space with the advance of his f-pawn and prevented Black from challenging the white centre in the highly effective manner we are about to witness. Black could ensure quite active play by means of a

pawn sacrifice: 16...b5 17 ♖e1 (17 f5 can be met by 17...♟dx5!) 17...f5!? 18 exf6 ♟xf6 19 ♙xe6 ♟d6 looks the best version since 20 f5?! can be safely met with 20...♞ae8 and ...♟d8. However, the position would remain quite unclear in this case.

16...f6!

This would be useful even if only to disrupt White's plans for a slow organization of king-side play with f5. However, Black has much grander designs. If we observe how ponderous White's forces might appear in the absence of the massive covering pawn-centre, then perhaps quite audacious ideas to clear it off the board might come to mind. How much can such a pawn-centre be worth when it is the lynchpin of an entire deployment?

17 ♙g4 fxe5 18 fxe5 (D)



18...♟dx5!!

Bologan offers a magnificent answer to my last question, by which he immediately seizes an initiative which will never abate. Materially he initially obtains only two pawns for the piece. But what pawns! We soon realize that the e6-pawn is immune from capture and thereafter, albeit gradually, Black's centre pawns are themselves able to become very powerful players. In addition, from having one beautiful sweeping minor piece but two rather passive restricted ones, all three are liberated and their aiming at weaknesses such as d3 and b3 contrasts nicely with a sense that White's lack targets and hence purpose.

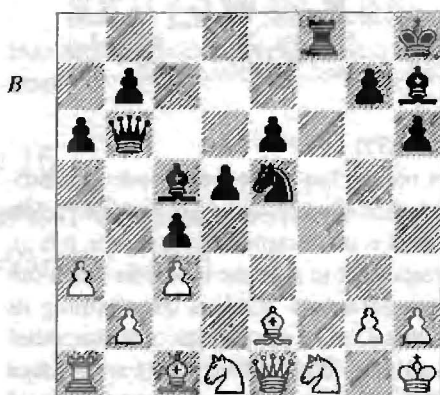
19 dx5 ♟xe5 20 ♞xf8+

As I hinted above, the tactical justification of Black's sacrifice is that 20 ♙xe6?! is well met by 20...♟d3 21 ♖e2 ♙c5! 22 b4 ♙a7, when combined threats of ...♖b6, ...♞e8 and ...♟f4 ensure that White's material gains will be very short-lived.

20...♙xf8 21 ♙e2! ♙c5 22 ♟df1

Perhaps 22 ♖g3!? is a better defence. At least the aspiration of landing a knight on the blocking square e5 is worth keeping in play, in spite of the evident obstacles.

22...♖b6 23 ♟h1 ♞f8 24 ♟d1 (D)



24...♟c6!?

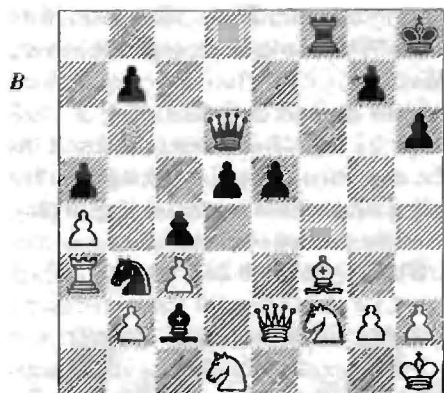
Bologan gives 24...♟d3!? 25 ♙xd3 ♙xd3 26 ♟g3 ♖b3 27 ♙e3 ♙d6!, when for sure White's coordination problems are severe enough that Black has fully adequate compensation. Nonetheless, I like this redeployment of the knight to b3. The embarrassment this causes White's rook becomes another component of the long-term return which Bologan enjoys on his investment.

25 ♙e3 ♙xe3 26 ♟fx3 ♟a5 27 a4 ♟b3 28 ♞a3 ♙e4 29 ♟g4 a5 30 ♟gf2

Once again it seems strange to withdraw a knight which is keeping an eye on the e5-square. However, the immediate 30 ♟e5 would be rather counterproductive since the simple 30...♞f5 31 ♖g3 ♟c1! forces 32 ♙f3 ♙xf3 33 ♟xf3 e5!.

However, 30 ♖g1!? might be a somewhat better defence since 30...♟d6 31 ♖e3 followed by ♟df2 offers more hope of coordinating at least some of the white forces.

30...♗c2 31 ♖f3 ♘c5 32 ♖e3 ♗d6 33 ♖a1
 ♘b3 34 ♖a3 e5 35 ♖e2 (D)



35...♗h7?!

This bishop has made a tremendous contribution to Black's cause and his desire to retain its services is understandable. However, it is always important to spot the moments when utilizing an advantage involves transforming its nature and I sense this is one of those. After 35...♗xd1! 36 ♖xd1 (if 36 ♘xd1 e4 37 ♗g4 then 37...♗c1! is embarrassing) 36...♖b6! 37 ♘h3 (since 37 ♗g4 e4 38 ♗e2 h5 traps the knight) 37...e4 38 ♗e2 (38 ♗g4? ♗d2!) 38...♖e3 White's pieces have been forced to awkward squares and are ill-equipped to prevent further infiltration.

36 ♗g1

36 ♗e3 looks tempting, but Bologan's next couple of moves suggest that he would have avoided fixing his centre and opted for the patient and prudent 36...♗g8!.

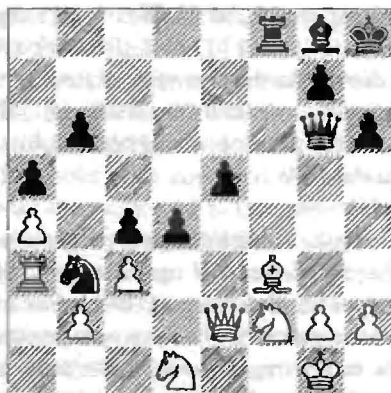
36...b6 37 ♗g4 ♗g8 38 ♗e3 ♖g6! 39 ♗ed1
 d4 40 ♗f3 (D)

Black has achieved the ...d4 advance, but White has managed to organize decent control of the 'new' blockading square e4. However, one factor always guarantees Black full value for his material – the tragic position of the rook on a3.

40...♖g5 41 ♗e4 ♗e1 42 ♖e1 d3!

At this stage, the tempo of the play moves up a gear as Black decides that his knight can play a direct attacking role rather than just keeping White's rook tied down. The correctness of the

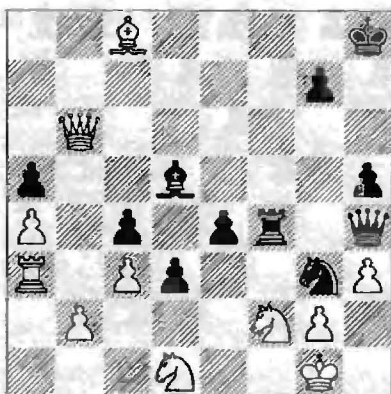
B



decision is shown by the shocking fact that the play runs for another 25 moves but the rook never gets to move again!

43 ♖e3 ♗e2+ 44 ♗f1 ♖h4 45 h3 ♗g3+ 46
 ♗g1 ♖f4 47 ♗f3 e4 48 ♗g4 h5 49 ♗c8 ♗d5 50
 ♖xb6?! (D)

B



50...e3!

The appropriate punishment for leaving the blockading square. This is in part a classic clearance sacrifice – opening a key diagonal for the d5-bishop. However, the rewards for offering such a key pawn need to be greater than that.

51 ♖xe3

Of course 51 ♗xe3? ♗e2+ is hopeless for White.

51...♖g5!

This is the real point. Not only did Black's pawn sacrifice transform his bishop into a strong attacking piece, but it also forced White's queen to occupy a square desperately needed by the

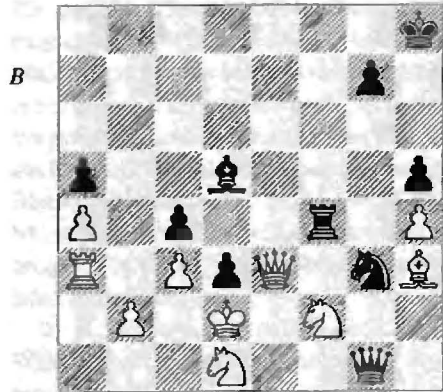
knight. Consequently there is no way to organize a defence of g2.

52 h4 ♖e2+ 53 ♜f1 ♜xg2+ 54 ♚e1 ♜g3 55 ♙h3 ♜g1+ 56 ♜d2 (D)
56...♙e4!

Yet another elegant tactical idea and another stage on the road to a final breakthrough. This forced removal of the f2-knight is enabled by the check on e4 and justified by the monstrous power of the knight there.

57 ♜xe4 ♜xe4+ 58 ♚c1 ♜h2! 59 ♜f2 d2+ 60 ♜c2 ♜xf2 61 ♜e8+ ♙g8 62 ♜xd2 ♜xh3+ 63 ♚c1 ♜f4 64 ♜b1 ♜h1+ 65 ♜c2 ♜g2+ 66 ♜b1 ♜f1+ 67 ♜a2 ♜d1! 0-1

There is no defence to mate beginning with ...♜c1+. A very crisp conduct of the initiative

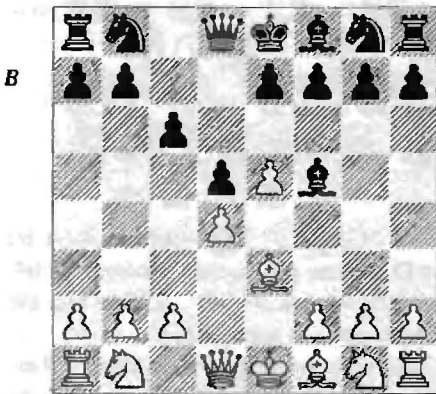


from Bologan which overflows with instructive ideas.

Game 16

Bartosz Socko – Valerian Gaprindashvili European Ch, Warsaw 2005

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 ♙f5 4 ♙e3!?! (D)

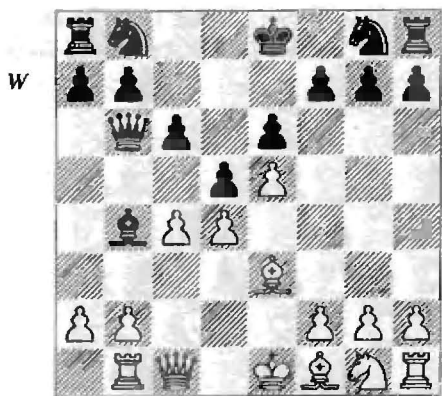


Related to and it seems inspired by the Short system, this apparently modest developing move has enjoyed tremendous popularity in the last few years, not least among the elite. For those who, like me, tend to find the lines of Game 14 in which Black plays an early ...c5 more enticing for White than those in which he restrains this advance, the priority which White places here precisely upon preventing (or more realistically delaying) this advance is rather curious.

However, the attempt to gain flexibility by leaving open the possibility of playing f4 before developing the king's knight is much more readily comprehensible. It should be noted that there can be a close resemblance to Game 15 once White does commit his knight to f3, although the bishop's development to e3 is not always the most natural then, which keeps direct transpositions to a minimum.

4...c6

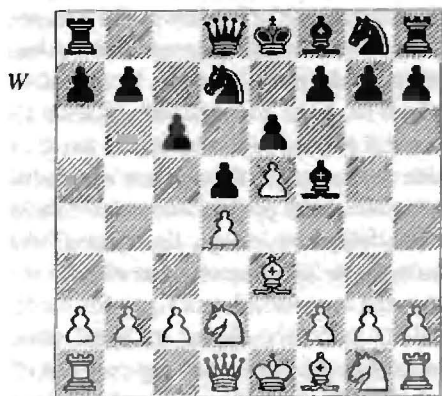
There is certainly no precautionary reason to avoid this natural developing move. The only serious alternative is 4...♜b6, based upon the belief that the defence of b2 will be inconvenient for White. It has to be admitted that in Game 17 this move will play a major role, but the move c3 both adds and subtracts from White's options. Here ever since a very positive side of 5 ♜c1 was revealed in Kasparov-Jobava, European Clubs Cup, Rethymon 2003, namely that after 5...e6, White has the very useful space-gaining 6 c4!, it is difficult to see the appeal for Black. One problem is that the advance of the pawn to c5 would come with gain of tempo and a serious gain in space. So Jobava responded critically with 6...♙xb1 7 ♙xb1 ♙b4+ (D).



However, it turns out that the displacement of the king is not such a great price for White to pay for the bishop-pair and the difficulties Black faces coordinating his forces. After 8 $\text{c}1\text{d}1!$ $\text{dxc}4$ 9 $\text{f}3!$? (Kasparov was not convinced by 9 $\text{ex}c4$ $\text{c}5!$) 9... $\text{d}7$ 10 $\text{a}3$ $\text{e}7$ (10... $\text{f}8$, leaving $\text{e}7$ for the knight, might be an improvement) 11 $\text{ex}c4$ $\text{c}7$ 12 $\text{e}2$ $\text{b}6$ 13 $\text{d}3$ $\text{d}5$, 14 $\text{e}1!$? (Kasparov) might have made more sense than preserving the bishop. In any case, White has a healthy initiative. Again the fact that Black has two minor pieces needing access to the $\text{e}7$ -square gives his 'cramp' a very concrete form.

5 $\text{d}2$ $\text{d}7$ (D)

Now 5... $\text{b}6$ can be met with 6 $\text{b}3$. As we shall see, there is a valid version of this strategy against an early $\text{f}4$, but it makes limited sense with White still so flexible.



6 $\text{b}3!$?

There is no denying the consistency of White's attempt to hold back ... $\text{c}5$. However, he has interesting options available here (aside from 6 $\text{c}3$, which will be covered in Game 17) and they each throw useful light on the range of set-ups which Black in turn can choose from:

a) 6 $\text{f}4$ aims at gaining space but my sense is that Black has a choice of ways to create plausible counter-chances here. Although a general claim that $\text{f}4$ increases the strength of a ... $\text{c}5$ break by Black might not be entirely reliable – after all, it may be useful to have $\text{e}5$ well covered in conjunction with a strategy of capturing on $\text{c}5$ followed by controlling the $\text{d}4$ -square – in this case the vulnerability of $\text{b}2$ adds to the feeling that 6... $\text{c}5$ 7 $\text{g}f3$ $\text{b}6!$ (D) might be viable.

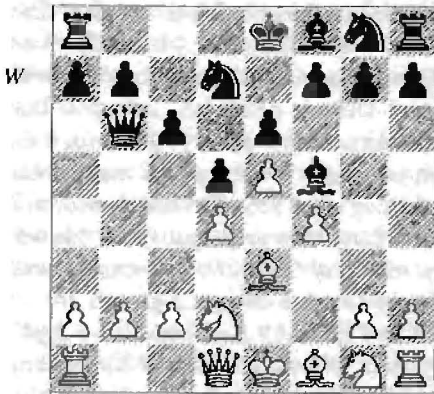


a1) For example, 8 $\text{b}1$ $\text{h}6!$ looks a bit slow as Black can put further pressure on $\text{d}4$, by, for example, ... $\text{g}6$ and ... $\text{f}5$, while the pin on the c -pawn is annoying.

a2) Therefore in Morozevich-Bareev, Russian Team Ch, Sochi 2004 White tried the more ambitious 8 $\text{e}2!$? $\text{h}6!$ 9 $\text{h}3$ (9 0-0 $\text{g}4!$) 9... $\text{xb}2$, when 10 $\text{c}4!$ is indeed much better than 10 $\text{b}1!$? $\text{xa}2$ 11 $\text{xb}7$ $\text{c}4!$, but still if Black had found the precise 10... $\text{c}3!$ 11 $\text{f}2$ $\text{e}2!$ 12 $\text{c}1$ $\text{xd}1$ 13 $\text{xc}3$ $\text{xe}2$ 14 $\text{xe}2$ $\text{cxd}4$ 15 $\text{xd}4$ $\text{b}4$ I am inclined to think that Morozevich's assessment of 'unclear' is if anything a bit optimistic for White. A pretty strong claim has to be made about the knight on $\text{h}6$ as a 'problem piece' to justify the pawn deficit.

a3) For these reasons 8 ♖c1(!) looks a more plausible try to me, but strangely has not developed much of a following since an outing in Kasimdzhanov-Anand, FIDE World Cup, Hyderabad 2002. The point is that after 8... ♖h6, at least White can now provide his centre with decent solidity by means of 9 c3, while if 8... ♖e7, Black should as usual bear in mind the possibility of capture on c5 with the customary plan to strongpoint the d4-square. 9 dxc5!? ♖xc5 10 ♖d4 looks logical, when interestingly Kasimdzhanov believes that not only should Black challenge for d4 immediately with 10... ♖c6!?, but that White should resist the temptation to play 11 ♖xf5 exf5 12 ♖f3 ♖a5+ 13 c3 ♖e4, when Black has good pieces and ... ♖c5 to come, but should prefer 11 ♖b5!? ♖g6 12 0-0 a6 13 ♖xc6+ bxc6, when although the defender can be thankful that (any) ♖b3 can usually be met with ... ♖xb3!, there is still a feeling that White, with ideas of an f5 break up his sleeve too, might enjoy light pressure.

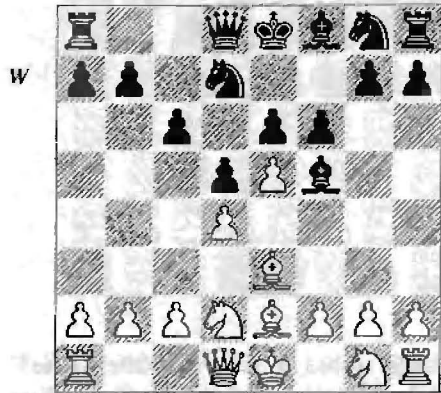
Not so much for the theoretical assessment of 6 f4, but rather for the light it might throw upon the main game, I would like to take a look at 6... ♖b6 (D) too.



This is because Black can seek a version of just the kind of blockade which will be found wanting in the game after 6 ♖b3 ♖c7 but featuring two slight but significant finesses. After 6... ♖b6 7 ♖b3 a5!? 8 a4 ♖b4+!? 9 c3 ♖e7 10 ♖f3 h5 11 ♖e2 ♖h6 12 h3 ♖c4 13 0-0 ♖f5 14 ♖f2 ♖xf3 15 ♖xf3 ♖h4! 16 ♖xh4 ♖xh4 17 ♖e2 ♖f5 18 ♖f3 h4 (Yagupov-Galkin, Russian

Ch qualifier, Tomsk 2004), the exchange of dark-squared bishops renders the black position safer and the hold on g3 that much more secure. Both the interpolation of ...a5 and a4, and the provocation of the move c3 serve to weaken the b3-knight while the former also ensures that Black will gain access to the useful 'hole' on b4, whenever White effects the thematic c4 break. It is worth bearing these ideas in mind later, as we shall see.

b) 6 ♖e2 aims at maximum flexibility – White may still choose f4, but is not, for example in the case of 6...c5, committed to it. Indeed, 6...c5 7 ♖g3 ♖c7 8 c4!? is a pattern familiar from Game 14 given a distinctive twist by the not unreasonable position of the knight on d2. As usual, this is aiming at c4 and ultimately d6. However, even 6 ♖e2 may have a downside and Black can strongly consider striking in the centre immediately with 6...f6!? (D).

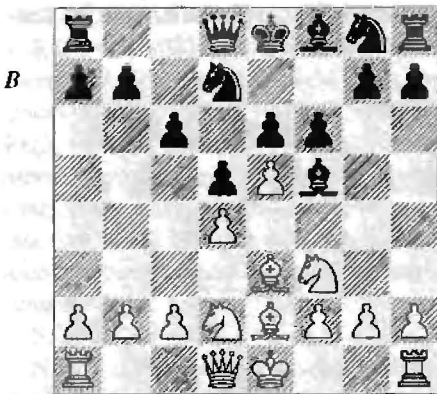


b1) The main point is that 7 f4?! ♖b6! appears to be quite awkward for White. Sacrificing the b-pawn with 8 ♖g3 is less convincing than usual as after 8... ♖xb2, the c2-pawn is en prise and e3 is also rather loose. 8 g4?! ♖g6 9 exf6 smacks of panic rather than preparation and 9... ♖gx f6 10 ♖d3 0-0-0 11 ♖b3 ♖xd3 12 cxd3 e5! was already a total disaster for White in Korneev-Burmakin, Dos Hermanas 2006.

b2) So White must look elsewhere at move 7. One way is to try 7 exf6 ♖gx f6, but simply competing for the critical e5-square thereafter does not look very promising as the straightforward ... ♖d6 could only be deterred by losing a

move with the white bishop on e3. So White has preferred to combine this with some aggressive gestures on the kingside: 8 g4!? ♗g6 9 h4, which at least makes a virtue out of 6 ♗e2. However, either 9...h6 or the more ambitious 9...h5!? looks viable, the latter particularly so if White is obliged to play 10 gxh5 (I suppose that White did not like 10 g5 ♖g4!? 11 ♗xg4 hxg4 12 ♗xg4 ♗f5! with a lot of light squares and potential counterplay with ...e5 for the pawn) 10...♗xh5 11 ♗g3 ♗d6 12 ♖g1 ♗f6 13 ♗g5 ♗f7 (Vachier Lagrave-Wojtaszek, Lausanne 2006), when he has weakened some very important squares on the f-file in return for activity of uncertain value.

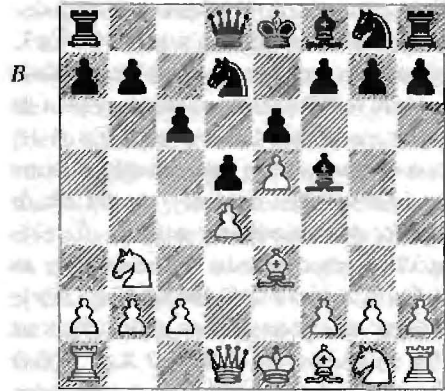
b3) Another try is simply to play 7 ♗g3!? (D).



If Black rushes in with 7...fxe5 8 ♗xe5! ♗xe5 9 dxe5 it is unclear how he will complete development. However, after 7...♗c7!?, whilst White enjoys reasonable resources in relation to the likely contest for the e5-square, the evidence of Rublevsky-Bologan, Russian Team Ch, Sochi 2005 is that Black may nonetheless remain very active. After 8 ♗f4 fxe5 9 ♗xe5 (9 dxe5 no longer looks right; after 9...♗e7 10 h4!? ♗g6 11 ♗h2 0-0-0 12 ♗g5 ♗dxe5 13 g4 h6 14 gxh5 hxg5 15 fxg6 ♖xh4, as in Shirov-Bologan, Foros 2006, there is a feeling that, extraordinarily complicated though this is, it was the need to hold a collapsing centre together that forced White into such a risky, materialistic course) 9...♗d6 10 ♗df3 ♗g6 11 0-0 0-0 12 ♗g3 ♖ae8 13 ♖e1 ♗e4 14 ♗xd7 ♗xd7 15

♗xd6 ♗xd6 it was difficult for White to use e5 due to the excellent knight on e4 and potential play on the half-open f-file.

We now return to 6 ♗b3!? (D):



6...♗e7?!

This creates the impression that Black is committing himself to a version of the blockading strategy – for neither ...f6 nor ...c5 ideas fit too well with it – without really wanting to admit it! Bearing in mind the insights into the most effective blockades gleaned above, some move-order such as Dautov's 6...♗e7 7 f4 a5!? 8 a4 ♗b6 9 ♗f3 ♗e4 (9...♗g4!) 10 ♗e2 ♗f5 11 ♗f2 ♗b4+!? 12 c3 ♗e7 13 0-0 ♗xf3 14 ♗xf3 closely resembles the note to White's 6th move, and looks a better bet. It is true that White has done well to avoid h3 and with it the problem of ...♗h4, but the points made about the weakening of b3 are still valid. However, it is also true that White may try to avoid this version by means of 7 ♗e2!?, delaying f4 until Black has resorted to either ...♗g6 or ...h6.

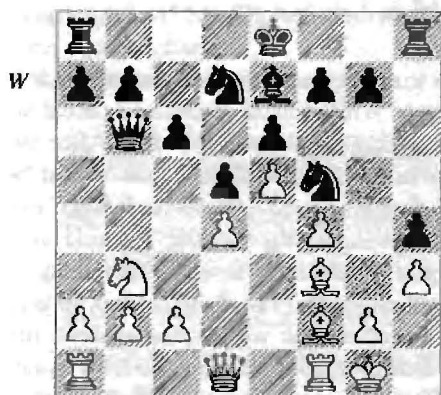
7 f4 ♗b6 8 ♗f3 h5 9 ♗e2 ♗h6 10 0-0 ♗g4

Consistent with the standard blockading plan. Black wishes to free the f5-square for his knight and is willing to exchange on f3 to render this square more stable for his knight in a rather closed position. 10...♗g4?! 11 ♗d2 gets Black nowhere fast.

11 h3 ♗f5 12 ♗f2 ♗xf3 13 ♗xf3 h4?! (D)

By analogy with Galkin's treatment (see the note 'a' to White's 6th move, about 6 f4) there would seem to be a general case for ...♗h4 in such positions as well as a very specific case for

13...♔h4! to avoid White's coming shot. For this reason I am also inclined to wonder whether 11 h3 was slightly rushed.



14 c4!

This is in general a key means to make an impact upon Black's solid structure. Usually it requires preparation and a willingness to cede the d5-square in exchange for enhanced piece activity. Here though, Black will not even have recourse to such a familiar structure. This timely breakthrough leaves him an unpleasant choice between a more severe shortage of space if he does nothing, or palpable damage to his pawns and a substantial enhancement to the prospects of the white bishop-pair if he captures.

14...dxc4

It is not entirely clear to me whether Black feared the c5 advance or the opening of the c-file. Either represents an achievement which White would usually have to fight for in such a line. However, the text-move is very committal and Black's king now comes under serious fire.

15 d5! ♖b5 16 dxe6 fxe6 17 ♔h5+ (D)

17...♔d8

Or 17...♔f8 18 ♖xd7 ♖xh5 19 ♖xe6!, when 19...cxb3 is powerfully met by 20 ♖g6. Black should prefer to reach an endgame instead with 19...♖d5 20 ♖g6! ♖f7 21 ♖xf7+ ♔xf7, but after 22 ♔a5! White nets a pawn for which the admittedly decent enough kingside blockade will not provide sufficient compensation.

18 ♔d2 ♔c5!? 19 ♔e2 ♔xf2+ 20 ♖xf2 ♖xb2!?

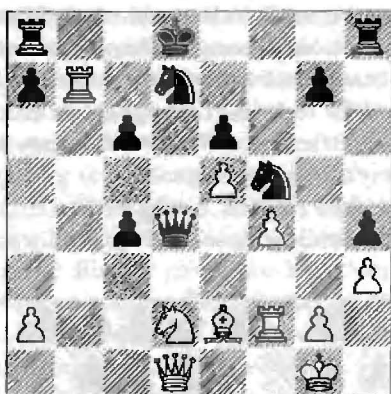
B



It looks strange to invite White's rook deep into his position in this way. However...

21 ♖b1 ♖d4 22 ♖xb7 (D)

B



22...♔e3?

A grave mistake and a curious one. The only way possibly to justify the risky pawn-grab was to secure the exchange of queens here. 22...c3 23 ♔e4 ♖xd1+ 24 ♔xd1 is still unpleasant since 24...♔e7 can be met with 25 ♔c5! followed by ♖f3 to round up the c-pawn. However, this must be a better fighting chance.

23 ♖c1! ♔c8 24 ♔b3!

Elegantly exploiting Black's loose pieces. The queen is nearly trapped in mid-board.

24...♖d5 25 ♔f3 ♖d3 26 ♔d2 1-0

Winning material and retaining a crushing attack. There was no need for Black's position to fall apart so quickly, but there is reason to believe that the blockading strategy witnessed here needs a good deal of finesse to be effective.

Game 17

Evgeny Alekseev – Alexei Dreev

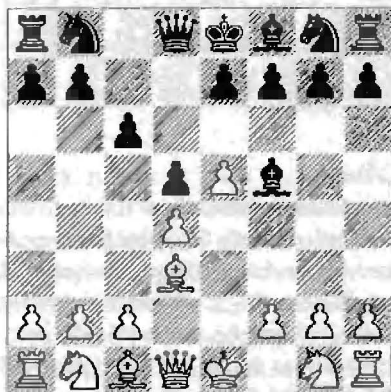
Moscow 2004

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 ♙f5 4 c3!?

This move introduces another modern system closely related to that of Game 16, although arguably a little less flexible in that here the advance of the f-pawn is perhaps even more integral to White's space-gaining designs. One point of the move is to be ready to answer an early ...♞b6 with ♞b3, hoping to make the claim that the kind of spatial plus sought here is not dependent for its force upon the presence of queens. However, for all this, such an exchange can enable the defender to consider undermining manoeuvres which would not be realistic with queens on the board and hence, personally, I find Black's task here to be less testing.

First, this feels like the appropriate moment to round up the last of White's almost bewildering array of 4th-move options:

a) 4 ♙d3 (*D*) has a long history, but has largely fallen into disuse and for good reason.



B

factors to offset such worries. Nonetheless, it is a tribute to White's extra space that as usual his position remains playable enough. After the logical 4...♙xd3 5 ♞xd3 e6 Black should be aware of the resource ...♞a5+ (or ...♞b6) and ...♞a6 – aiming for the endgame as sound territory upon which to try to make something of the superior bishop – but not too reliant upon it. It is fine where the white queen cannot run away. However, following 6 ♘e2!?, for example, White can easily meet 6...♞a5+ with 7 ♘bc3 and after 7...♞a6 8 ♞h3! we have exactly transposed to a position covered in Game 12 (at the end of the note 'c' to Black's 4th move) and thought to offer reasonable attacking chances. In such a case, the immediate 6...c5! seems a much sounder choice since 7 ♞b5+ ♞d7 helps only Black and 7 dxc5 ♘c6 is also fine.

b) 4 ♘e2 is at least something different. 4...e6 (*D*) and now:



W

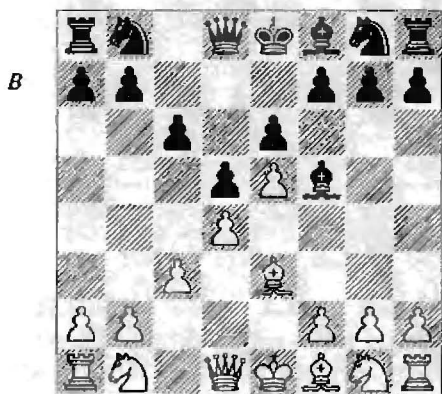
It is interesting and slightly ironic that as the issues surrounding 'good' and 'bad' bishops are these days handled with greater subtlety and less dogmatism than ever, the reputation of this particular exchange is perhaps lower than ever. It is true that the exchange of White's 'good' bishop should set off positional alarm bells as it is rather early in proceedings for any concrete

b1) Following 5 ♘g3 ♙g6 6 h4, it is worth noting that White cannot claim too much initiative even after the most frequently played line 6...h6 7 h5 ♙h7 8 ♙d3, although he has marked out a bit of space on the kingside. However, the braver 6...h5! looks better and certainly more fun. After 7 ♙e2 c5 8 c3 ♘c6 9 ♙e3 ♞b6 Black

looks very active although 7 $\text{\textcircled{e}}\text{d}3!$? is perhaps worth considering.

b2) There is another route for the e2-knight, namely 5 $\text{\textcircled{d}}\text{f}4!$? but now 5...c5!? looks right since 6 g4 $\text{\textcircled{e}}\text{e}4!$ 7 f3 $\text{\textcircled{w}}\text{h}4+$ 8 $\text{\textcircled{c}}\text{e}2$ $\text{\textcircled{d}}\text{c}6!$ offers good counter-chances.

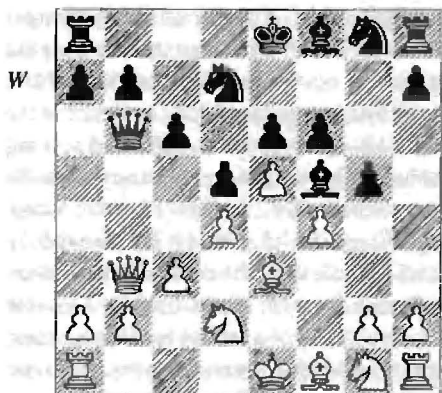
4...e6 5 $\text{\textcircled{e}}\text{e}3$ (D)



5... $\text{\textcircled{w}}\text{b}6$

This is not the only possible approach here – 5... $\text{\textcircled{d}}\text{d}7$ 6 $\text{\textcircled{d}}\text{d}2$ c5 is, for example, probably sufficient to encourage 7 $\text{\textcircled{d}}\text{g}f3$, when at least White is forced to abandon his f4 ambitions. However, the exchange of queens which the text-move provokes does enable Black to pursue a plausible and instructive undermining process upon which I would like to focus here. Moreover, there seems no reason to delay since 5... $\text{\textcircled{d}}\text{d}7$ 6 $\text{\textcircled{d}}\text{d}2$ $\text{\textcircled{w}}\text{b}6$ affords White the useful alternative 7 b4!?

6 $\text{\textcircled{w}}\text{b}3$ $\text{\textcircled{d}}\text{d}7$ 7 $\text{\textcircled{d}}\text{d}2$ f6! 8 f4 g5!?! (D)

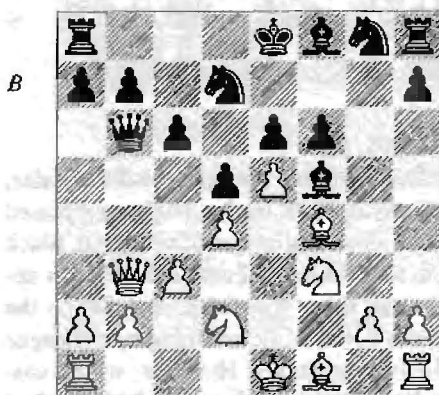


It is attractive in principle to undermine White's imposing pawn-centre from the base and certainly less extravagant now that queens are likely to be exchanged. The dangers here are positional rather than tactical. In particular, Black should try to avoid the danger that in exchanging off the key pawn on e5, he might merely leave an equally pivotal square which it is easier for his opponent's pieces to access. Current evidence is that he will just about claim enough squares of his own in return, but careful handling is required.

9 $\text{\textcircled{d}}\text{g}f3!$

It seems to be important to play this while it is still possible. Disguised behind Black's previous move was the neat point that 9 exf6 can be well met with the *zwischenzug* 9...g4! (in fact 9... $\text{\textcircled{d}}\text{g}xf6$ 10 fxg5 $\text{\textcircled{d}}\text{g}4$ 11 $\text{\textcircled{e}}\text{f}4$ e5! also gives decent compensation). Strangely, with f3 off-limits to a white knight, it suddenly looks as if Black is the one with something akin to a spatial grip on the game. Access to e4 becomes more straightforward than access to e5, while attempting to challenge this bind with, for example, 10 f7+ $\text{\textcircled{c}}\text{x}f7$ 11 h3 is simply met with 11... $\text{\textcircled{d}}\text{g}f6$, when there is an additional risk of activating Black's pieces for him. Moreover, Black need not fear $\text{\textcircled{d}}\text{e}2$ -g3 either since capture of the bishop on f5 will merely further strengthen his hold on the c4-square.

9... $\text{\textcircled{g}}\text{x}f4$ 10 $\text{\textcircled{e}}\text{x}f4$ (D)

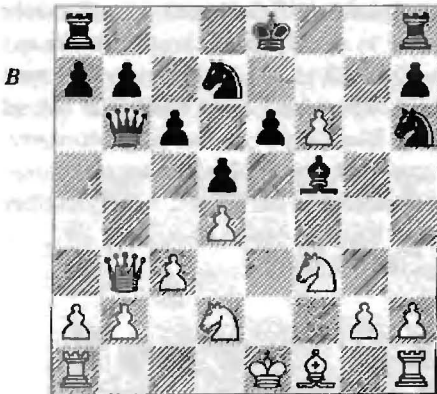


10... $\text{\textcircled{e}}\text{h}6$

When I first saw this position, I remember being a bit surprised that Black was happy to trade

dark-squared bishops in this way. Normally this could be expected to make it harder for Black to contest the key e5-square. However, in this case he does gain in terms of development and is quick to the g-file. 10...♘g7 is a playable option though. After 11 exf6, Black can choose 11...♗gx6 12 ♖e2 (12 ♖h4!? is also interesting now since an exchange on f5 will not just enhance Black's control of e4 but crucially also leave him with a vulnerable f-pawn) 12...0-0, but then I like Lukacs's suggestion of 13 ♖d6!?, driving the rook from the f-file before Black has time to secure the f7-square for it by playing ...h6. After 13...♗fd8 14 0-0 there is not too much counterplay to offer against White's useful square coverage. However, Morozevich's suggestion to play 11...♘xf6!? has some appeal. The idea is to follow up with ...♗e7-g6, which at least affords the contest for e5 the priority it deserves.

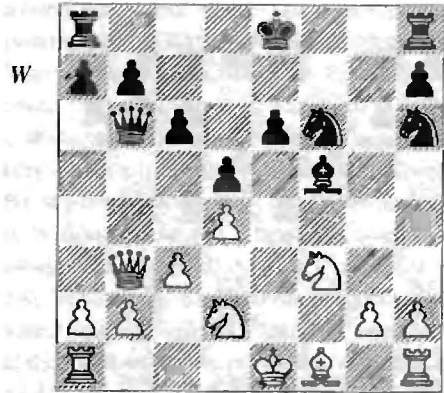
11 ♘xf6 ♗hx6 12 exf6 (D)



12...♗xf6 (D)

12...♗g4!? was tried in Gongora-Y.Gonzalez, Ciego de Avila 2003, but has not been repeated since. The idea has some intuitive appeal. Black wants to recapture on f6 with a knight that appears to risk being somewhat stranded on the side of the board while retaining its colleague for e5-covering duties. However, whilst castling is by no means high on Black's agenda, I nonetheless suspect that 13 f7+!? ♗x17 14 h3 is annoying for Black since 14...♗g6 15 g4 ♖g6 16 ♖g2 reminds us that the backward e6-pawn as well as the square in front of it can be a

tangible weakness, while 14...♗e3 is well met by 15 ♖f2!. Now 15...♗c2 16 ♖c1 gets Black in a terrible tangle, while exchanging on f1 leaves White with more knights confronting a bishop of the wrong colour to defend Black's weaknesses.

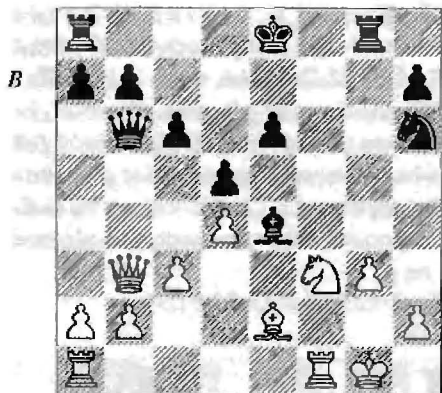


13 ♖e2

There is certainly nothing wrong with this logical developing move. Nonetheless, if White is to be able to hinder the return of the h6-knight to the action, then 13 h3!? – which threatens to win a piece with g4-g5 – is worth investigating. This plan is also viable in conjunction with exchanging queens. After 13 ♗xb6 axb6 14 h3 ♗e4 15 ♗xe4 ♖xe4 16 ♗g5 ♖f5 17 g4 ♖g8 18 gxf5 ♖xg5 19 fxe6 ♗e7 20 a3 ♗f5 21 ♖d3 White could claim a slight edge in Jenni-Fridman, Bundesliga 2005/6, although I think that the simple 21...♗xe6 would have been safe enough for Black.

On the other hand 13 ♗e5?! is much less impressive. Just a case of the threat being stronger than its execution? Maybe, but there is also the feeling that by occupying the weak square too quickly, White is assisting Black to combine the tasks of challenging for the square and solving the problem of his knight on h6. In any case, the position reached after 13...♖g8 14 ♗df3 ♗hg4 15 ♗xg4 ♗xg4 16 h3 ♗f6 17 ♗xb6 axb6 18 ♗e5?! h5! 19 a3 ♗e7 20 0-0-0 ♖g3 (Smirin-Dreev, Russia-Rest of World (rapid), Moscow 2002) is something of a model for Black to aim for. He exerts tangible pressure on the g-file and has turned g3 into a useful outpost.

13...♖e4 14 ♖xe4 ♗xe4 15 0-0 ♜g8 16 g3 (D)



16...♗f7!

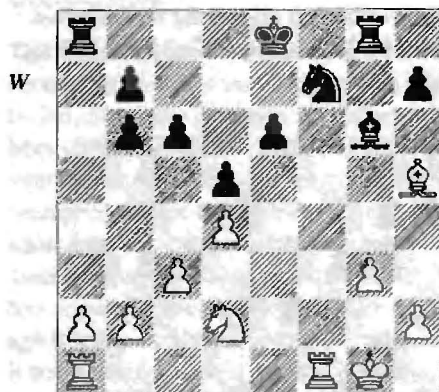
Defending e5 continues to be a high priority. The perils of neglecting this were graphically brought home in Yudasin-Furdzik, New York 2003. After 16...♗f5? 17 ♖e5 0-0-0 18 ♖xb6 axb6 19 ♗g4! ♖c7 20 ♜f4 ♜g7 21 ♗xf5 exf5 22 ♖f2 ♖d6 23 ♞h4 ♞e8 24 ♖e3 c5 25 ♞f1 White enjoys the luxury of a crystal-clear plan – improving his rooks via the uncontested f4-, h6- and h4-squares – while his opponent has no real counterplay whatsoever. Note the contrast in the two minor pieces. The knight on e5 radiates good health *and* covers key squares for the implementation of the plan. Black's bishop also occupies an apparently desirable outpost, but it has no targets and there is a danger that the pawns supporting it in fact serve chiefly to cut it off from a return to the defence. In general in this variation, Black should be very wary of allowing his bishop to battle it out against a white knight with access to e5.

17 ♖d2 ♗f5 18 ♖xb6

At last, the long-running tension created by the confrontation of queens is resolved. Such situations quite often endure for a time because while both players are content to see queens exchanged, neither player is keen to make the exchange themselves. Generally speaking, the half-open a-file is likely to be at least as great an asset as the doubled b-pawns would be a liability – hence the waiting game. Now though, the real possibility that Black might profitably try

...♖c7 with attacking aspirations on the kingside forces White's hand.

18...axb6 19 ♗h5 ♗g6! (D)

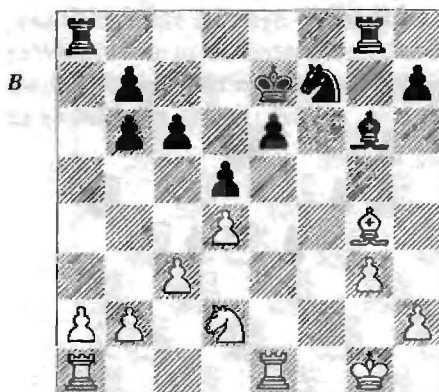


Consistent with Black's desire to prevent positions in which his bishop must face an entrenched knight on e5.

20 ♗g4 ♖e7!?

Preparing an interesting pawn sacrifice and much more combative than the natural 20...♗d3 21 ♜f3 ♜xg4 22 ♜xd3 ♖e7 23 ♞e3!, when the position is fairly balanced, but the weaknesses on the e-file look more likely to count than anything Black will concoct on the kingside.

21 ♞fe1 (D)

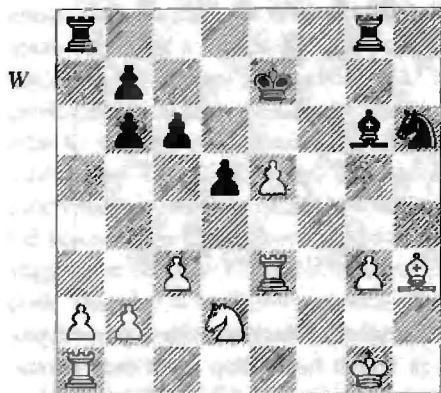


21...e5!

A radical solution to the dual weaknesses (e6 and e5) which have featured so heavily in the discussion hitherto. For his pawn Black gains time not just to create a genuine target on the

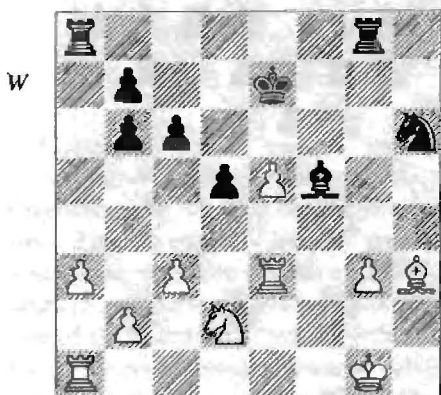
kingside but also to rearrange his pieces to start attacking it. Moreover, although White's passed e-pawn might prove far from innocuous in the longer term, for the moment it nicely shields the black king, critical to his seizing the initiative.

22 dxe5 h5 23 ♖h3 h4 24 ♙e3 hxg3 25 hxg3 ♜h6! (D)



A nice manoeuvre. Superficially, g5 might look a more natural square for this piece, but the text-move supports ...♙f5, which combines much more purposefully with a direct attack on g3. Note too that White is still required at some point to take a time-out to play a3 – a direct consequence of having been the party to implement the exchange of queens all those moves ago.

26 a3 ♙f5 (D)



27 ♙g2

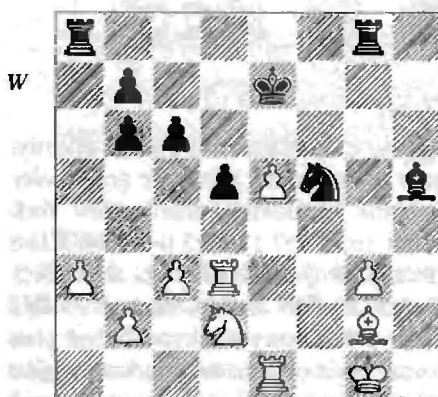
There was no respite in 27 ♙g2?! ♙xb3+ 28 ♜xh3 ♚h8, when if White attempts to retain the

e-pawn with 29 ♙e2 then 29...♙ag8 30 ♜f1 ♙g5, for example, subjects him to enormous pressure through very natural moves.

27...♙g4

Dreev could have pretty much forced a draw with 27...♜g4 28 ♙e2 ♜h6, when only 29 ♙e3 again defends the vital g3-pawn. However, he rightly senses that his initiative is already full value, which at least in practical play gives him the better chances. 27...♙e6!? looks a valid alternative though, still more direct in its planned assault on g3.

28 ♙ae1 ♜f5 29 ♙d3 ♙h5 (D)



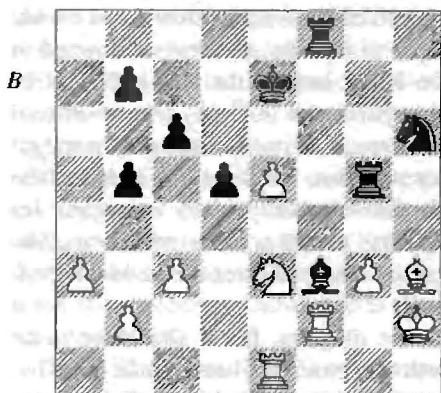
30 ♜f1!?

This feels like White's last chance to gain active play by attacking Black's solid central pawn edifice with 30 c4!?. Of course the talented young Russian would understand very well that returning material in order to seize back the initiative is a vital tool of defence. Thus it would be surprising if, after 30...♜xg3 31 cxd5, he had not relished the prospect of 31...♜c2+ 32 ♙xc2 ♙xe2 33 ♙e3, when his powerful centre pawns seem to spell excellent chances to hold the game. Perhaps he had doubts about the simple 31...cxd5!?. Instead. Of course it is much easier to assess the consequences of 32 ♙xd5! ♜e2+ 33 ♜f2 ♜f4 (33...♙af8+ 34 ♙f3 ♜f4 35 ♙d4 also seems just playable for White) 34 ♙d4 ♜xd5 35 ♙xd5 ♙af8+ 36 ♜e3 ♙g3+ 37 ♜d4 ♙g6 38 ♜e4! with the help of an analysis engine! This is clearly not an exhaustive analysis either, but it does feel like one of those moments when White maybe had to take the bull

by the horns rather than just carry on suffering slowly.

30...♠af8 31 ♔h2 ♜h8 32 ♔g1 ♜hg8 33 ♔h2 b5! 34 ♙h3 ♘h6 35 ♜d2?! ♜g5 36 ♘e3 ♙f3 37 ♜f2? (D)

This loses rather straightforwardly, but there is no simple advice to give any more. 37 ♙g2 ♙xg2 38 ♔xg2 ♜fg8 is very unpleasant. The white king's discomfort is unlikely to be eased when g3 drops. 37 ♜d4? ♙e4! 38 ♙g2 ♜h8! is even more unpleasant.



37...♜h5!

Winning material. White is no position to provide his passed e-pawn with any meaningful support and further simplification follows, which leaves an undemanding technical phase.

38 ♜xf3 ♜xf3 39 ♔g2 ♜f8 40 ♘c2 ♘f7 41 e6 ♘e5 42 ♘d4 ♘d3 43 ♜e3 ♘f2 44 g4 ♜xh3 45 ♜xh3 ♘xh3 46 ♔xh3 c5 47 ♘xb5 ♔xe6 48

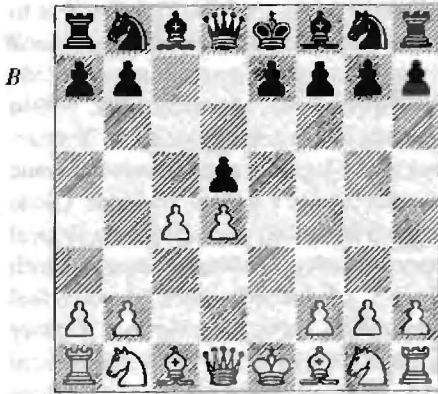
b4 b6 49 ♔g3 ♔e5 50 bxc5 bxc5 51 g5 d4 52 cxd4+ cxd4 0-1

Conclusion

The Short System and the various related offshoots which it has inspired form an approach to handling the Advance Variation which is here to stay. The idea that White's space advantage cannot be its own justification, that to 'compensate' for the c8-bishop finding a good square on f5 it is somehow necessary to 'do something special', has been put to rest. Within this approach, the decision whether to discourage Black's ...c5 break or to positively welcome it will remain largely a stylistic question. Game 14 confirmed that those who welcome a tactical tussle have a healthy set of resources with which to confront 5...c5. Indeed, as Black I would feel some trepidation about entering this territory and a greater security in the quiet reactions of Game 15. However, there are also attractions for White to keeping the f-pawn flexible. The notes to Game 16 suggest to me that an early f4 may actually enhance the role for the ...c5 break, although subtlety is needed in the contest for the d4-square which often then emerges. Another approach presents itself where White opts for an early c3 as well. Dreev's handling in Game 17 is an excellent illustration of Black's possibilities here although a glance at the note to White's 13th move should reveal that this is a fascinating fresh battleground rather than a battle already won.

6 Panov-Botvinnik Attack and 2 c4

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 c4 (D)



The Panov-Botvinnik Attack has long been a favourite among players who thrive on open positions and are not afraid of accepting some compromise to their pawn-structure in the quest for the initiative. In particular, White must be ready to accept an isolated queen's pawn (IQP). As the position becomes simplified, this has the potential to prove a serious weakness indeed. Thus it is incumbent upon the player with the IQP to make something of the open lines which are present by definition in such positions, in conjunction with the active pieces which should accompany these in any positions of theoretical worth. This might involve chances of a mating attack, but equally, in the more balanced examples it is just as likely to be about compensating structural gains or maybe even piece activity which defies its customary classification as a 'temporary advantage' by enduring right into the endgame. In either case, an ability to maintain the initiative is important in this variation and there is no surprise to see players celebrated for just this – the great World Champion Mikhail Botvinnik himself and Michael Adams, to name two notable examples – looking comfortable with the white pieces.

The importance of the IQP to this variation is difficult to overstate. Games 18 and 19 both feature them, while in each of Games 21 and 22 White 'enjoys' a couple of them!

Any discussion of IQPs is likely to touch on concepts which have an application to a wide range of positions by no means restricted to the Caro-Kann. Indeed, the play in Games 18 and 19 in particular is highly transpositional and can be reached from a variety of openings: the Nimzo-Indian, the Semi-Tarrasch and the Queen's Gambit Accepted by no means exhausts the list, but gives some indication of the importance of these positions for modern opening theory.

From the diagram, Black should be in no great rush to capture on c4 as restraint holds out the possibility of encouraging the f1-bishop to develop first, when the capture will result in a gain of tempo. Hence 4...♘f6 is best. Likewise, White should increase the pressure with 5 ♖c3 (D) and all the games here proceed in this way.



On move five, however, Black faces a fundamental choice. 5...e6 (Games 18 and 19) justifiably enjoys the most solid reputation. It ensures the smooth development of the kingside and decent prospects of firmly blocking the IQP.

This battle for control of the d5-square is critical to success here, as are Black's (not unrelated) efforts to find a promising future for his queen's bishop. However, since Black's strategy often involves soaking up a degree of pressure in order to exploit his positional pluses in the longer term, it is not surprising that 5...e6 does not have universal appeal, even within the often positionally-orientated group which Caro-Kann players comprise. Of the alternatives, 5...g6 is well motivated positionally but 6 ♖b3 requires Black to sacrifice a pawn. This can be recovered quite harmoniously if White is inattentive, but a knowledge of the theory will usually ensure that some kind of price may be exacted. 5...♘c6 may be sounder, but its apparently active motivation comes, especially after 6 ♘f3, with an extensive theoretical baggage. I do not take the view that the endgame which arises in Game 20 is necessarily 'drawish' at all levels, but at the very least some quite accurate knowledge is demanded even to reach it.

Game 22 features 2 c4, a move often relegated to some 'odds and ends' chapter, but to

my mind it is a serious sister variation to the Panov which obviously belongs alongside it in comparative perspective. I am not convinced that any of White's 5th-move options promise an advantage if Black is well-prepared. However, 5 ♘c3 in particular demands care as subtly different responses are often required here from those demanded in the Panov. A mastery of these differences will repay a little study.

I come across players at all levels who are reluctant to take on an isolated queen's pawn, but there is no doubt that the ability to handle these positions from either side is a hugely important practical skill and for this reason there is much of instructive value to be found in this chapter. In terms of results, Black takes a bit of a hammering in the main games of this chapter. I would appeal to the reader not to read too much into this. Finding attractive, instructive, recent games featuring strong players is not as easy as it might appear and leaves little room for worrying about the pattern of results. In each of these games Black has tangible scope to improve and in some of them was quite reasonably placed until late in the day.

Game 18

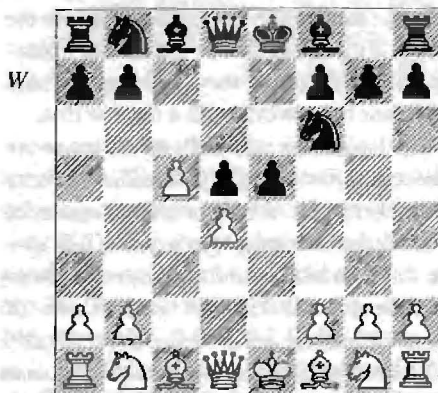
Branko Damljanović – Eugenio Torre

Elista Olympiad 1998

1 c4 c6 2 e4 d5 3 exd5 exd5 4 d4 ♘f6 5 ♘c3

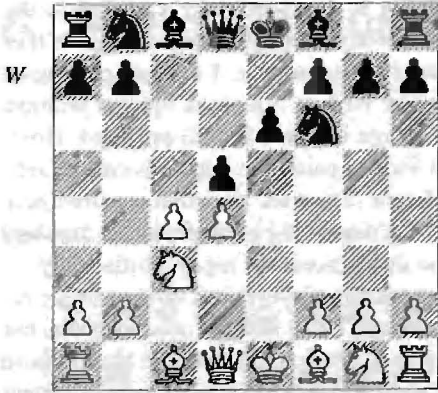
I remember as a young Caro-Kann player in the late 1970s benefiting greatly from the rash recommendation of 5 c5?! by one of the popular 'complete repertoire books' of the time. This releases the pressure on the centre too early, allowing the freeing 5...e5! (D).

The book rightly accepted that 6 dxe5 ♘e4! was none too promising for White, but strangely believed that 6 ♘c3 exd4 7 ♖xd4 ♘c6 8 ♙b5 was pleasant for White. True perhaps against the lazy 8...♙d7?!, but d7 is the key square for a black knight in lines such as 8...♙e7! 9 ♘f3 0-0 10 ♙xc6 hxc6 11 0-0 (11 b4 might minimize the damage) 11...♘d7! 12 b4 a5!, which is distinctly embarrassing for White. Of course, believe everything you read here, but in general



check lines yourself and don't take all that opening books tell you on trust!

5...e6 (D)



This move has a well-deserved reputation as Black's most solid choice. Priority is given to developing the kingside and bolstering d5. Examination of Game 20 is advisable to get a feeling for whether these goals are in fact compatible with first developing the c8-bishop, but at the very least White can force the play along quite different lines in that case. Here a major test of Black's play will be how he solves the problem of that piece, but in principle at least its development to b7 fits nicely with the goal of blockading the IQP.

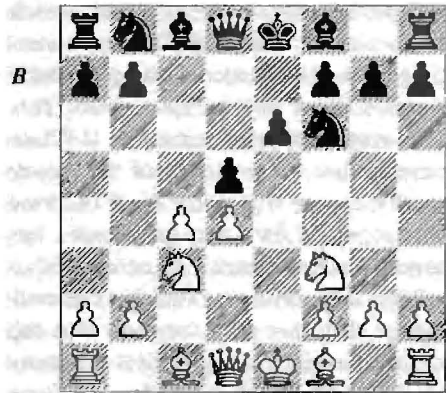
6 ♘f3

The most flexible way to develop and rightly the most popular. However, of special significance for the large group of players intending to meet 6 ♘f3 with 6...♗b4 is the possibility of the immediate 6 c5! here. This is probably best met with 6...♗e7, when 7 ♘f3 transposes to the note about 7 c5 below. However, 6...♗b4 players too should note that they will need to supplement their homework with a look at that.

6 ♗g5 also occurs relatively often, but as we shall discuss in the notes to Game 20, this is by no means always the most appropriate square for this piece in the isolated queen's pawn positions, due to a likely confrontation of bishops when a subsequent cxd5 is met with ...♗xd5. Of course, after 6...♗e7 7 ♘f3 0-0, White can still try 8 c5. However, this plan, as we shall see, is at its most effective when Black has played ...♗c6. Although it might appear that the exchange of dark-squared bishops after 8...b6! 9 b4 a5 10 a3 ♗e4! 11 ♗xe7 ♗xe7 12 ♗xc4 dxe4 13 ♗e5 (Hort-Cirić, Amsterdam 1970) might enhance

White's prospects of a bind on the dark squares, Black could have freed himself quite efficiently by 13...♗d7! 14 ♗c4, when 14...♗a6!? is interesting, but 14...axb4 15 axb4 ♗xa1 16 ♗xa1 e5! is a simpler and more thematic way to leave White looking rather overextended.

We return to 6 ♘f3 (D):

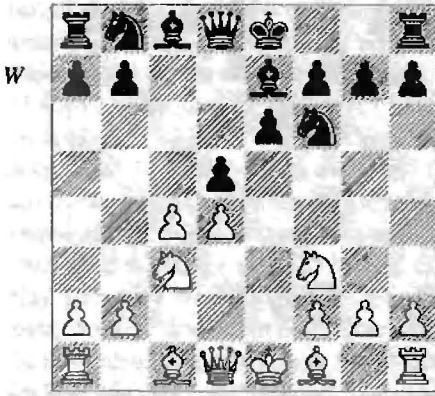


6...♗e7

This solid developing move has had to face tough competition from 6...♗b4 (Game 19) for main-line status over the years. However, it retains a strong following and the positions to which it gives rise are in any case of fundamental importance both for understanding the IQP as a whole and due to a wealth of transpositions from a range of openings.

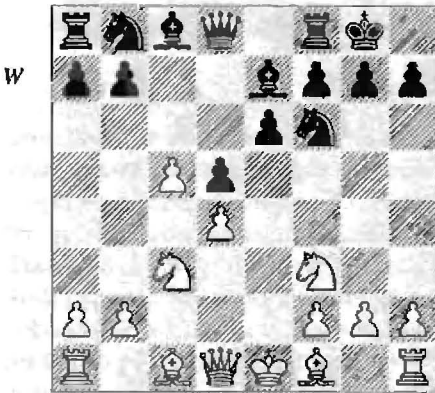
Both bishop moves are probably preferable to 6...♗c6. This has little independent significance in any case should White opt for the IQP, but it is an encouragement to play 7 c5! since, in spite of controlling b4, the knight on c6 somewhat hinders the task of creating counterplay against White's advanced pawn. After 7...♗e7 (or 7...♗e4 8 ♗c2!) 8 ♗b5! ♗d7, it is true that 9 ♗xc6 ♗xc6 10 ♗e5 ♗d7! is probably a rather too direct assault on the e5-square, so White should prefer 9 0-0 0-0 and now maybe 10 ♗e1, which hinders counterplay based on ...♗e4 on the one hand, while always keeping an exchange on c6 in reserve (in conjunction with ♗e5 and b4) as a response to any ...b6 break. White's chances of retaining his bind in this version of the c5 structure thus seem more promising than usual.

Back to the more reliable 6...♗e7 (D).



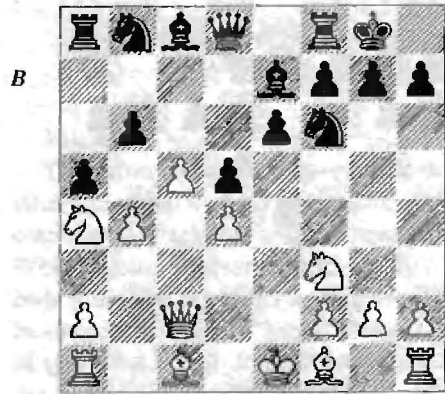
7 cxd5

The most logical route to the IQP positions as 7 ♗d3 cedes a tempo to 7...dxc4. However, as mentioned above, there is a major alternative here in 7 c5, by which White avoids the whole IQP structure, while seeking to capture space and prevent a freeing break on the dark squares. The problem with this strategy is that Black has more than one source of potential play. In structural terms, he should consider the head-on challenge to the c5-pawn by means of ...b6, but for back-up he can also try to prepare the undermining move ...e5. Moreover, there are chances for active piece-play too with ...♗e4 since White cannot reliably exchange this off without risking possession of a potentially vulnerable backward d-pawn. In concrete terms 7...0-0! (D) is a flexible preparation for all of these ideas.



Now, 8 b4?! is understandable since an extra tempo 'on the queenside' would enable White to support his c5-pawn without the help of the rather offside ♗a4 move we shall see in a moment – he can meet 8...b6?! with 9 ♖b1. However, it positively invites 8...♗e4!, when 9 ♗c2 ♗c6 10 b5 ♗xd4! 11 ♗xd4 ♗xc5 12 ♗xe4 ♗xd4 13 ♗c3 ♗d7 has been known to give Black excellent structural and dynamic compensation for the piece since Estrin-Bergraser, Telechess Olympiad 1978. So White should rather support the e4-square, but against 8 ♗d3, theory's long-established undermining technique of 8...b6 9 b4 a5 10 ♗a4 ♗fd7!? 11 a3 axb4 12 axb4 e5! seems as valid now as when first played by Kasparian in 1931(!), although admittedly contemporary theory views 10...♗bd7 as playable as well.

Hence maybe 8 ♗c2!? b6 9 b4 is the sternest test. One important point arises after 9...a5 10 ♗a4 (D).

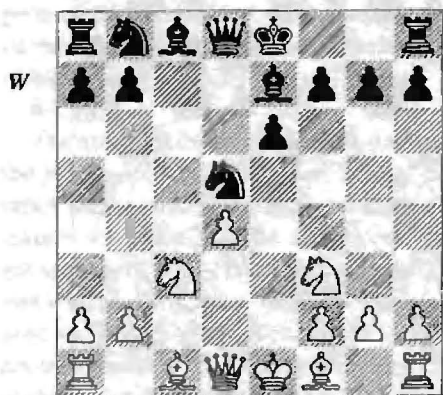


Now 10...♗bd7?! can be met with 11 b5! bxc5 12 dxc5 e5 13 ♗e2 d4 14 0-0 (Colović-Fontaine, Pančevo 2002), when on this occasion the more scary appearance of the wing pawns does not seem to be illusory. Not unusually when the honour of the Caro-Kann is at stake, it was Karpov to the rescue. It looks a bit unnatural to allow the knight so lightly to b6 with the calm improvement 10...axb4!, but it appears that once the c5-pawn is blockaded, attention can be redirected to White's slight weakness on d4. Certainly after 11 ♗xb6 ♗a7 12 ♗e5 ♗fd7 13 ♗bxd7 ♗xd7 14 ♗d3 h6 15 ♗d2

♙f6! 16 f4 (16 ♙xb4 ♙xe5 17 dxe5 ♜c6) 16... ♜c6 17 ♜xc6 ♙xc6 18 ♞h2 ♞a5 it is clear that Black enjoyed a handy initiative in Emelin-Karpov, Tallinn (rapid) 2006. This probably renders the alternative of limited theoretical urgency, but 9... ♜c6 10 a3 bxc5 11 bxc5 e5 12 dxe5 ♜g4 13 ♙e2 ♜gxe5 14 ♜xe5 ♜xe5 (Nataf-Palo, European Ch, Istanbul 2003) also illustrates a valid plan for Black which might have wider application. He successfully frees his pieces and can claim in the battle of potentially weak passed pawns that White's on c5 is no better off than his own on d5.

7... ♜xd5 (D)

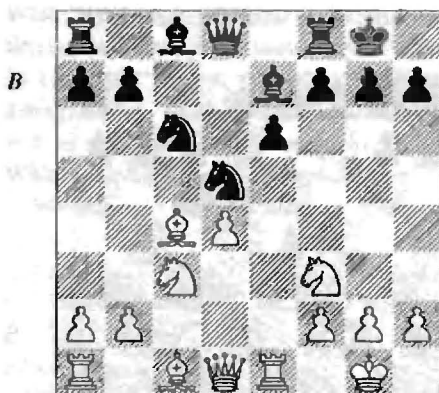
This is probably not the time to seek solace in symmetry. After 7... exd5 8 ♙b5+ , White prepares to meet 8... ♜c6 with the annoying 9 ♜e5 and 8... ♙d7 with 9 ♙xd7+ ♜bxd7 10 ♞b3! , all but forcing the black knight to b6, where it is likely to be vulnerable to an advance of White's a-pawn and unlikely to reroute successfully via c4.



8 ♙d3

This is the most effective square for the purpose of attacking the kingside and is rightly the most popular move. 8 ♙c4 deserves attention too, although it might be fair to say that the position after the main-line sequence 8... ♜c6 9 0-0 0-0 10 ♙e1 (D) arises more commonly by transposition than by White's choice at this juncture.

One downside of the move ♙c4 comes to the fore every time the bishop is later re-deployed to d3 with obvious inefficiency in terms of tempi.

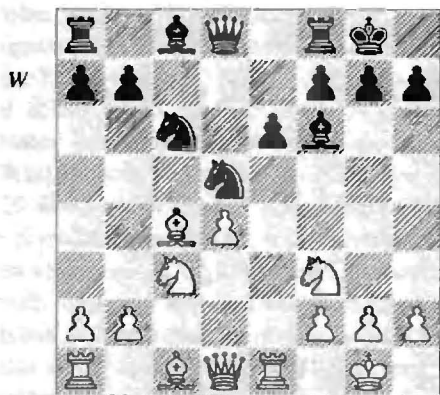


However, both the possibility of capturing the knight on d5 and indeed of advancing the d-pawn if the knight voluntarily retreats can be points in the move's favour.

a) 10... b6?! does not have the grave tactical flaws which we shall see in the analogous position with 8 ♙d3 , but 11 ♜xd5 exd5 12 ♙b5 still retains a pleasant positional edge since 12... ♙d7 13 ♞a4! , forcing 13... ♜b8 , certainly does not help matters for Black.

b) Neither is 10... ♜f6 really recommendable, not least since the positions arising from 11 a3 b6 12 $\text{d5!?$ rarely seem to be quite equal. After 12... exd5 13 ♜xd5 ♜xd5 14 ♞xd5 ♙b7 15 ♞h5! White has the more active pieces without the headache of having to nurse his long-term structural weakness. However, Black does have better options.

c) Given that 10... $\text{♙f6!?$ (D) does not actually threaten the d-pawn, it is perhaps surprising that it works rather well.

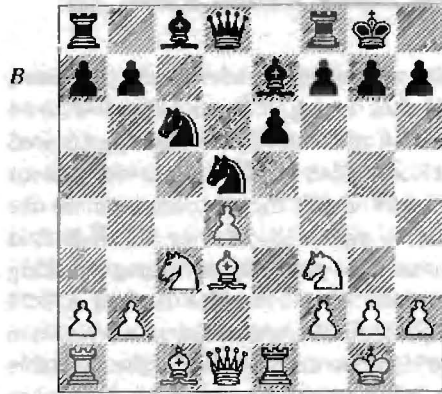


The instructive lesson here is that so long as the d5 blockade is watertight, Black can often permit the exchange of his dark-squared bishop, usually in return for one of the white knights which could otherwise have challenged for d5. 11 ♖e4 b6 and now 12 a3 ♗b7 13 ♜d3 ♕ce7 14 ♗d2 ♜g6 15 ♞ad1 ♞c8 16 ♜eg5 ♗xg5 17 ♗xg5 ♝c7 18 ♞c1 ♜df4 19 ♝e3 ♝b8 (Gavrikov-Johannessen, Gothenburg 2004) is an example of successful defence where Black can even use his control of f4 to initiate counterplay. Of course White could have gone for symmetry with 12 ♗xd5, but so long as Black opts for the realistic 12...exd5! he is fine. Perhaps 12 ♜xf6+!? ♜xf6 13 ♗g5 is more interesting, but once he has secured his hold on d5, Black can probably even play ...♕e7 permitting doubled f-pawns but preparing to cover them with ...♜g6 and again reaching a solid position.

d) However, there is another important dimension to the ♗c4 positions. Black can consider a major change in the pawn-structure – shifting attention from one weakness to another by means of 10...♜xc3!? 11 bxc3 (D).

♗b7 the sharp pawn sacrifice 13 h4! still yields promising attacking chances. After 13...♗xh4 14 ♜xh4 ♝xh4 15 ♞e3! the rook swings into the fray and forces problematic weaknesses in front of Black’s king. 13...♗f6 reveals the other dimension of the h-pawn’s advance as 14 ♜g5! g6 15 ♝g4! h5 16 ♝g3 ♕e7 17 ♗a3!?! also offers White a powerful attack and various sacrificial opportunities. 17...♞e8?, for example, already loses to 18 ♜xe6!.

8...♜c6 9 0-0 0-0 10 ♞e1! (D)

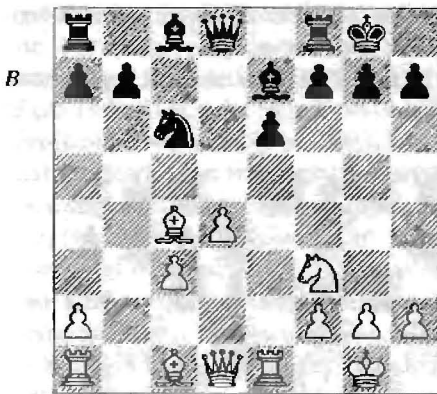


10...♗f6

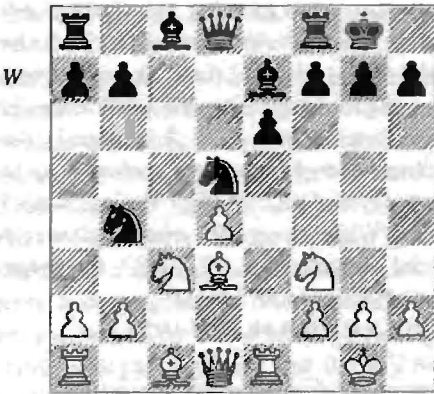
This move can claim to promote both of the strategies which we have outlined for Black. Not only does it attack d4 – and incidentally contest White’s claims to control the e5-square – but the bishop also makes way for a strengthening of the blockade with ...♕ce7. I thus have a good deal of sympathy with it. It might appear rather that the central issue of how to organize the development of the queen’s bishop is being shelved, but in a sense anything which has in mind the strengthening of the d5-square is contributing to this noble cause. For the moment the instability of d5 is pivotal to the failure of 10...b6 since after 11 ♜xd5! there is a miserable choice between 11...exd5 12 ♗xh7+, or 11...♝xd5 12 ♗e4 followed by ♕c5, winning material. Thus the fianchetto requires preparation.

However, there may be other ways to accomplish this. 10...♜cb4 (D) retains a certain following.

On the plus side, White’s bishop is driven back to b1 at a possibly inconvenient moment



There is no IQP any more, but c3 can become weak on the half-open c-file and a light-square-based blockade (using, for example, a knight on a5 and a bishop on d5) is not out of the question as a means to fix this weakness. The justification for the move now is that here White’s hopes will really rest on a direct king-side assault and thus he is likely to have to lose the tempo putting his bishop back on d3. However, my feeling is that after 11...b6 12 ♗d3!

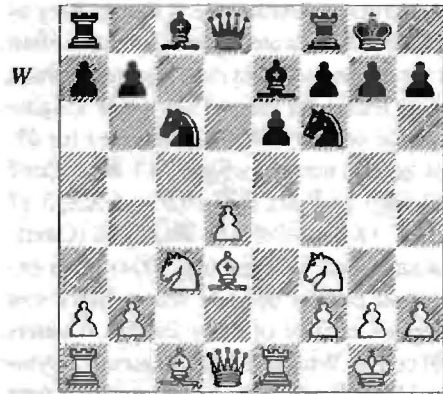


with the a1-rook still undeveloped. However, after 11 ♖b1 b6 12 a3 ♖xc3 13 bxc3 ♖d5 14 ♗d3, 14...♗f6 is met by 15 ♔g5 g6 16 ♖e5 ♖b7 17 ♖h6 ♖e8 18 ♗h3. Then the ruinous threat of 19 ♖xf7, though countered for the moment by either 18...♗c8 or 18...♗d6!?, is symptomatic of generally promising attacking prospects for White. 18...♗c8 19 ♖a2 ♖f8 20 ♖e3 ♔g7 21 ♖ae1 (Adams-Seirawan, Wijk aan Zee 1991) does not look especially palatable for the defence since the task of generating any counterplay on the c-file against the 'hanging pawn couple' has scarcely begun. Neither is it very convincing immediately to grant White 14...g6 and try to make a virtue of the knight's position on d5. In fact, 15 ♖c2 ♗c7! 16 c4 ♖a6 followed by ...♖f6 and eventually ...♖e7 looks like a decent reorganization of the black troops, but the direct 15 ♖h6! ♖e8 16 ♖e5 appears better. The d5-knight is likely to be kicked back before it has anywhere great to go.

There is, however, a further serious alternative in 10...♗f6 (D).

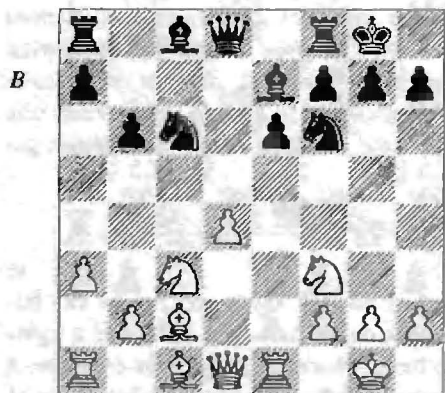
As I mentioned in the chapter introduction, this does make me rather uneasy since the 'tempo comparison' with other theoretical variations is not great for Black. In any case, White generally prepares the lining-up of forces on the b1-h7 diagonal by 11 a3, cutting out ...♖b4 ideas for good. Then after 11...b6 he has an interesting choice:

a) 12 ♖e5 ♖b7 (if 12...♖xd4 then 13 ♖e3 ♖f5 14 ♗f3 is dangerous) 13 ♖a6!? has now been rendered harmless, but it is still a noteworthy tactical idea which it is well worth being



familiar with. The antidote is 13...♗c8! 14 ♖xb7 ♗xb7 15 ♖xc6 ♗xc6 16 d5 ♗c4 17 ♗e2 ♗xe2 18 ♖xe2 ♖c5! 19 dxe6 fxe6 20 ♖e3 ♖xe3 21 ♖xe3 ♖d5! 22 ♖xe6 ♖xc3 23 bxc3 ♖ac8 24 ♖e3 ♖f4, when Black has successfully sacrificed his weak pawn to leave his opponent with two isolated pawns. Defending these puts sufficient burden on the white rooks that the task of conversion into victory is basically a hopeless one. In Ribli-Kavalek, Tilburg 1980, White accepted this fact after just a couple more moves and later examples have all confirmed this impression.

b) 12 ♖c2 (D) is now the most popular continuation.



White hopes, by lining his forces up against h7, to compel his opponent to play ...g6 and thus enable the powerful development ♖h6 in one go. However, it does offer Black an interesting choice since the extended fianchetto also

serves to cross White's immediate intentions. Both options merit a look:

b1) 12...♖b7 13 ♖d3 sets a nasty trap. The reason is that after either 13...♗e8? or 13...♗c8? (or indeed both moves, which Karpov once arrived at by a different move-order, also in vain!) the thematic central break 14 d5! is at its most powerful. White meets 14...exd5 with 15 ♔g5, when 15...g6 suffers to 16 ♗xe7! and 15...♗e4 16 ♗xe4 dx4 17 ♖xe4 g6 18 ♖h4! secures a tremendous initiative on the open board. Hence 13...g6 is forced, but there is a danger after 14 ♔h6 ♗e8 15 ♗ad1 ♗d5 that White can utilize the tempo he enjoys compared with line 'c' below: 16 h4! could be a good start in this regard.

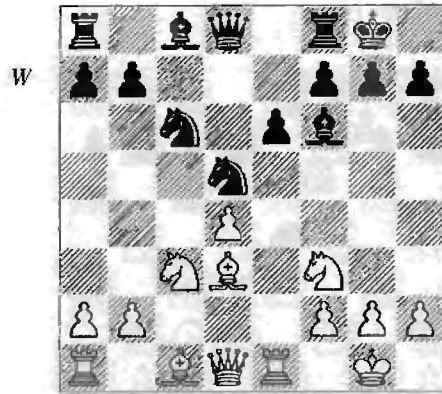
b2) 12...♗a6! attempts to punish White's move-order by preventing ♖d3. Now 13 b4! contains a fiendish trap since the positionally desirable response 13...♗c8 14 ♔b2 (14 b5 ♗a5!) 14...♗d5?? is caught by 15 b5! ♗xc3 16 ♖d3! since the threat of mate nets a piece. However, 14...♗c4! also fits well with Black's need to control the central light squares. White can try to attack starting with b5 and ♗e5, but either the knight or bishop coming to d5 will give a rock-solid version of the crucial blockade. Hence carrying on with 13 ♔g5 looks better but 13...♗c8 14 ♖d2 ♗d5 15 ♗xd5 ♖xd5 16 ♗ad1 ♔xg5 17 ♗xg5 h6 18 ♗f3 ♗e7 (Fressinet-Malakhov, Selfoss 2003) looks a fair deal for Black, who is reducing material without losing sight of his blockading priority.

c) 12 ♔g5! rules out ...♗a6 ideas, and claims that the possible loss of tempo which a later ♔h6 in response to ...g6 implies is not a major issue. After the typical sequence 12...♖b7 13 ♔c2 ♗c8 14 ♖d3 g6 the key is not to rush in with ♔h6 but rather to wait for his opponent to return the knight to the blockading d5-square once more. To this end 15 ♗ad1 ♗d5 16 ♔h6 keeps some initiative.

Now back to 10...♔f6 (D).

11 ♔c4!

Lining up the forces this way round on the b1-h7 diagonal presages a more positional approach rather than playing for an all-out attack. White still has an eye on the kingside for sure, but he is concerned first and foremost with challenging the blockader on d5. This raises the



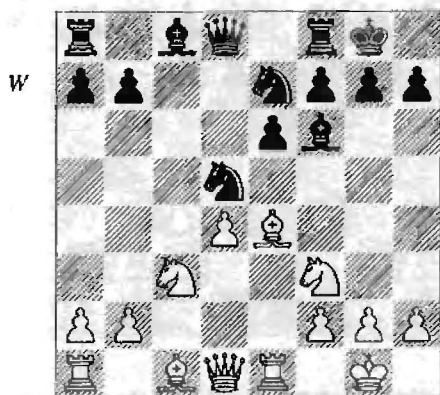
possibility that White might not be averse to some minor-piece exchanges, so long as they are the right ones. He will often be interested in trading dark-squared bishops, after which he can perhaps aim to leave Black with an inferior bishop – especially if the blockade is not strong enough always to ensure that a piece rather than a black pawn ends up on d5 after exchanges.

This is much more than making a virtue out of a necessity, but the threat to White's d-pawn is itself disruptive. 11 ♔c2 is no longer appropriate because 11...♗db4! attacks c2 and d4 again and should therefore net the bishop-pair.

Moreover, whilst 11 a3 does not oblige Black to capture on d4, current theory suggests that there is little wrong with his position after 11...♗xd4 12 ♗xd4 ♔xd4 13 ♔xh7+ ♗xh7 14 ♖xd4 ♗xc3 15 ♖xc3 f6! 16 ♔e3 (Kosten-Kuczynski, 2nd Bundesliga 1999/00), when 16...b6! continues the process of trying to take useful squares away from White's bishop, when the slight displacement of Black's king should not be too critical.

Lastly, there is an interesting alternative in 11 ♗e4!?, claiming that Black's tenth move is as much a reorganization as a real threat against d4. However, after 11...♔xd4 12 ♗xd4 ♗xd4 13 ♖h5 (13 ♗g5 ♗f5! 14 g4?! h6 looks looser for White's own king than for his opponent's) 13...f5 14 ♔g5 ♖e8 15 ♖xc8 ♗xe8 16 ♗d6 ♗f8 17 ♗ac1?! (17 ♗ad1 is more effective) 17...h6 18 ♔e3 ♗xe3 19 fx3 ♗c6 20 ♔b5 ♗e5 21 ♗c5 White can claim that his compensation is enduring but it did not look very fierce in Sulskis-H.Olafsson, European Ch, Istanbul 2003.

11...♗ce7 (D)



12 ♖d3

The text-move and 12 ♖c2 are played primarily with the intention of persuading Black to play ...g6. This is a worthy goal in itself, but since the queen often ends up wanting to be on a different square, it is worth checking out whether it is possible to induce ...g6 some other way. This has been one reason behind the popularity of 12 ♗e5!?, a highly thematic move in any case since the drawback of Black's ...♗ce7 is that some influence over this key square is relinquished. If Black still feels obliged to continue with 12...g6, then 13 ♖h6 ♗g7 14 ♖xg7 ♗xg7 15 ♖f3 does indeed look like a more purposeful square for the white queen. Having said all that, Frolianov-Sakaev, Russian Team Ch, Sochi 2006 was quickly agreed drawn after the highly thematic sequence 15...h6 16 ♖xd5 ♗xd5 17 ♗xd5 ♖xd5 18 ♖xd5 exd5 19 ♖ac1 ♖e6 20 ♖c7 ♖fc8 21 ♖ec1 ♖xc7 22 ♖xc7 ♖c8. This is White's plan in its purest, most logical form – exchange dark-squared bishops, place pressure on d5, which ultimately translates into an isolation of Black's d-pawn too and emerge with a slightly superior minor piece in the ending. If this does not threaten Black, it is certainly worthy of note!

In addition, Black has other interesting tries versus 12 ♗e5. 12...♗d7!? looks OK against 13 ♗g4 ♖c6 – once again the exchange of the f6-bishop can probably be allowed so long as the blockade of d5 is watertight, but 13 ♖d3! looks better, when neither 13...g6 14 ♖h6 nor 13...h6

14 ♖g3! is an entirely convenient response. 12...♗g6!? and even the paradoxical 12...♗c6!? are also possible.

We now return to 12 ♖d3 (D):



12...g6

This was once the virtually automatic response here, but the exchange of dark-squared bishops fits well from White's standpoint with his more patient positional handling and hence there is a case for trying to avoid the text-move.

12...h6 13 ♗e5 ♗xc3 14 ♖xc3 ♗f5 is an alternative approach which has enjoyed Karpov's stamp of approval. Nonetheless, after 15 ♖e3, for all that this piece can be liquidated, there is a sense that completing Black's queenside development will be no trivial matter.

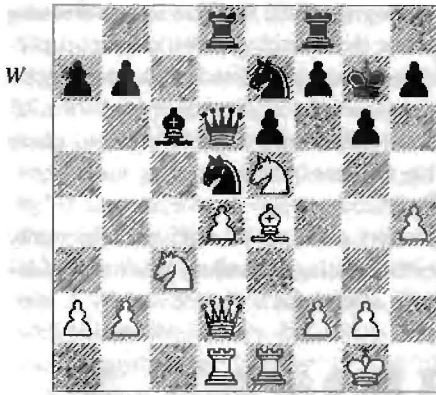
13 ♖h6 ♗g7 14 ♖xg7 ♗xg7 15 ♖d2

There are several alternatives here: 15 ♖ac1, 15 ♗e5 and even 15 h4 are all plausible. My feeling is that a purely positional strategy which makes no effort to utilize the weaknesses around Black's king is unlikely to make enormous headway. Play on both wings, keeping in mind the thought that pitting a knight against Black's light-squared bishop might be one way to seek progress on the weakened dark squares, feels like the most testing approach.

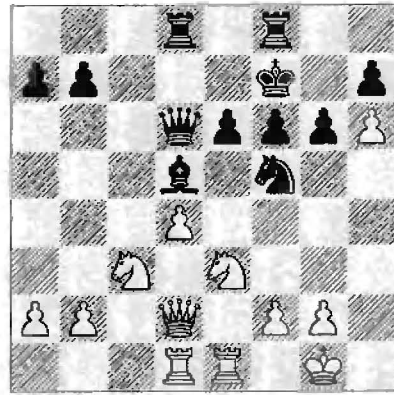
15...♖d6 16 ♗e5 ♖d7 17 h4! ♖c6 18 ♖ad1 ♖ad8 (D)

19 ♖xd5! ♖xd5!

As I hinted in the last note, knights which can compete for the f6- and h6-squares may be worth every bit as much as the bishops here, and both sides' approaches to this exchange



B



confirm that. In fact, 19... $\text{Qxd5?!$ is clearly weaker due to 20 h5! , when Black is reminded that attempts to kick the c5-knight away may come at a high positional price after 20... $\text{f6?!$ 21 Qe4! Wf7 22 Qxc6 bxc6 23 Qc5 , when e6 is desperately weak.

20 Qg4 Qf5 21 h5 f6!

A quite different story from the last note – under the right circumstances this eviction is a key resource for the defender.

22 h6+ Qf7 23 Qe3 (D)

23... $\text{Qc6!?$

Quite principled – Black believes that his king will survive the exchange on f5 and that the g-file might even work to his favour. In fact though, the simple 23... Qxe3 24 fxe3 f5! , preparing to meet a future e4 with further exchanges, looks solid enough too.

24 Qxf5 gxf5 25 Wc2 Qg8 26 Wh5+ Qf8 27 d5 Qg5!

Just as White finally effects his thematic pawn-break, this nice riposte holds Black's

position together well. 27... exd5 28 Wxf5 would look altogether looser.

28 We2 exd5 29 Qb5 Wb4??

A decisive blunder. Of course, whatever idle hopes may have remained that the black bishop might still play a role supporting the play on the g-file, this is a knight that had to be removed. I can only assume that Torre was facing serious clock pressure in this phase. The punishment is swift and merciless.

30 Qc7!

This should win the exchange without to any degree ceding the initiative and hence be decisive. Black's attempt to avoid material loss leaves him desperately tangled and at the mercy of White's invading forces.

30... Qd6 31 We7+ Qg8 32 g3!

Avoiding the final trick. The immediate 32 Qe6? would have allowed 32... Qxg2+ 33 Qxg2 Wg4+ with perpetual check.

32... Wf4 33 Qd3 Qd7 34 Wd8+ Qf7 35 Qe7+ Qg6 36 Wg8+ Qh5 37 Wf7+ 1-0

Game 19

Michael Adams – Karen Asrian

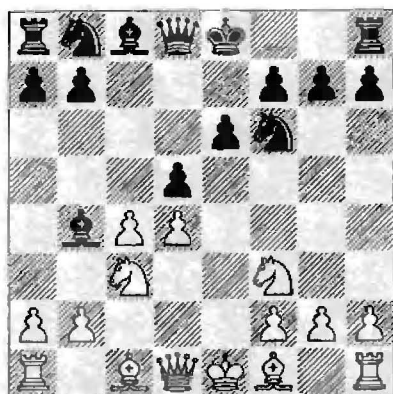
FIDE Knockout, Tripoli 2004

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 c4 Qf6 5 Qc3 e6 6 Qf3 Qb4 (D)

This is usually played with the aim of reaching an improved version of the IQP positions now familiar from Game 18. The idea is that any recapture with ... Qxd5 will now involve

pressure on c3, interrupting the free flow of White's development. If White declines to capture on d5, then the similarities which the position bears to the classical treatments of the Nimzo-Indian can move rather into the realm of direct transposition.

W

**7 cxd5**

Undeterred, White continues with his plan, believing that the pressure on c3 will extract but a minimal concession, while ultimately Black will have to make a decision about his b4-bishop which will involve some loss of tempo in turn. However, it is not surprising that alternatives to inviting this strengthening of the pin have been sought. In particular, 7 ♖d3!? dxc4 8 ♗xc4 (D) leads to a position of huge theoretical importance, but one more commonly approached via the Nimzo-Indian than the Caro-Kann.

B



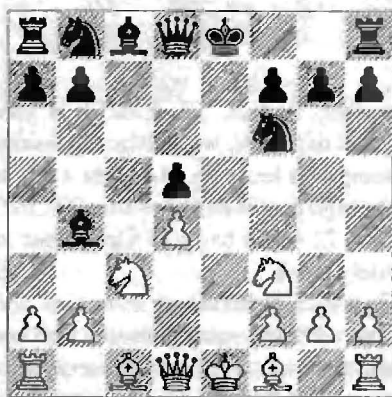
I shall just say that after 8...0-0 9 0-0 Black can choose between the modest 9...b6 and the more ambitious 9...a6 with ...b5 to come. Retreat of the b4-bishop is not out of the question, but in contrast with Game 18, Black has available the additional strategy, rather in 'Nimzo spirit', of placing his queen's knight on d7 to lessen the impact of any future pin by ♗g5, and

then exchanging on c3 with a view to creating play against the 'hanging pawn couple'. In return for the bishop-pair, Black hopes to obtain a flexible position in which either ...e5 or ...b5 breaks will come into consideration to carve out stable squares for his knights.

7...Qxd5

Consistent, although 7...exd5 (D) is certainly much more enticing in conjunction with ...♗b4 than it was after ...♗e7.

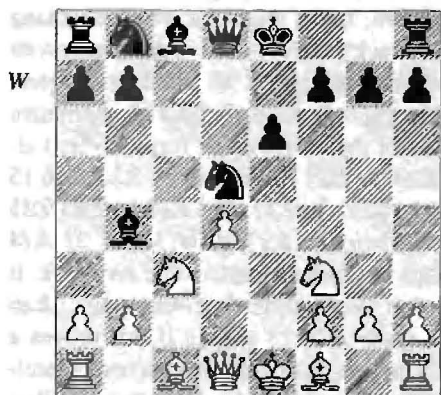
W



For a start, 8 ♗b5+?! loses most of its force since the principal strategy for the defence is to exchange on c3 and then put pressure on the c3-pawn while maintaining a hold on c4, and in relation to all of this an exchange of light-squared bishops just plays into Black's hands. The main problem is probably the far from obvious 8 ♗e5!?, which prevents any annoying ...♗g4 pins and indeed leaves the c8-bishop with few of the enticing fruits promised by the opening of its diagonal. There may on occasions also be a case for a new modification of the pawn-structure later following ...♗c6. After 8...0-0 9 ♗d3 ♗c6 10 0-0!, lines such as 10...♗c8 11 ♗f4 ♗xd4 12 ♗xh7+ ♗xh7 13 ♗xd4 are not especially enticing for Black. He will need to exchange on c3 to relieve the pressure against d5 and will have a dreary task nursing a weakness with limited counterplay. I also remember finding it (unpleasantly) instructive that the alternative 11 ♗xc6 bxc6 12 ♗g5 also left Black with no easy task after 12...♗xc3 13 bxc3 ♗d6 14 f3! h6 15 ♗d2 c5 16 ♗e1 ♗xe1+ 17 ♗xe1 cxd4 18 cxd4 ♗a6 19 ♗b4! ♗b6 20

♙c5 ♖c6 21 ♙f5! in Hebden-Wells, British Ch, Southport 1983. I think I had assumed that organizing 18...♙a6 should spell the end of Black's real problems, but having retained the bishop-pair Mark showed that they can keep an unpleasant grip on the play and that the 'activity' of this piece on a6 was something of an illusion. My continued espousal of the line was based on the idea that the untested 10...♖a5!? was a bit inconvenient for White. This could well still be the best try, but I have no plans to touch it again soon!

We now return to the position after 7...♘xd5 (D):

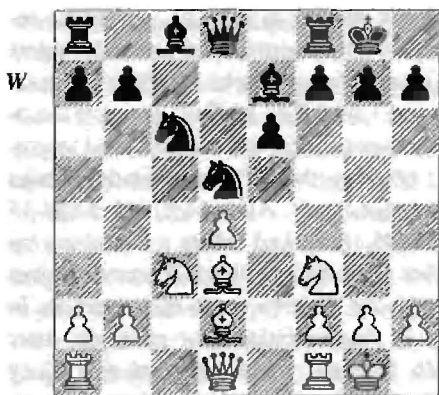


8 ♖c2

This might not look much like the 'concession' Black has been anticipating, although as we shall see there is a further fundamental issue to be faced on the next move.

The popular alternative is 8 ♙d2, not perhaps the most active developing move in itself, but not at first sight too problematic as an 'extra' move if Black is likely to need to make a voluntary ...♙e7 retreat in the forthcoming moves. However, this hides an awkward fact. After the natural sequence 8...♘c6 9 ♙d3 0-0 10 0-0 ♙e7! (D) (rather than 10...♘f6 11 ♙g5) it suddenly becomes apparent that the move ♙d2 is indeed the only difference between this position and the main line of Game 18, and moreover that it may cause White's isolated d-pawn a degree of discomfort.

There are various ways to try to deal with this, and theory is by no means disheartening for



White, but at the very least the recommended treatments of the position differ profoundly from the analogous case we have seen:

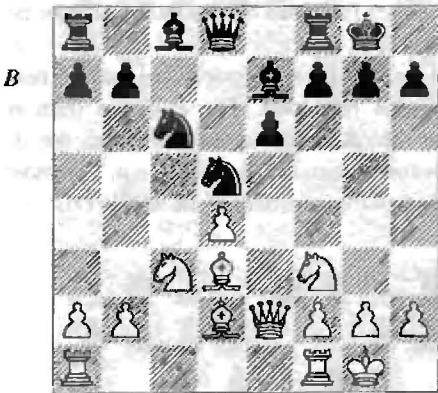
a) 11 ♙e1 finds itself here well down the list of preferences since the scale of the compensation after 11...♘db4!? 12 ♙c4 ♘xd4 13 ♘xd4 ♖xd4 does not generally convince. In fact Sulskis-Macieja, FIDE Knockout, Tripoli 2004 provided some food for thought since by 14 ♖e2 f5 15 ♙c3! ♖e5 16 f4 ♖a5 17 ♙f3 White managed to generate some enduring pressure which misplacing the knight by 17...♖a6 18 ♖xa6 ♘xa6 19 ♙ed1! did little to relieve. However, although the c8-bishop is a problem, simply 17...♘c6 followed by ...♙f6 should not be too bad.

b) 11 a3 is the straightforward way to rule out ...♘db4 for good. The question then is whether 11...♙f6 can again embarrass the d-pawn before White is fully functional. The most testing response is probably 12 ♖c2! (D).



Then my feeling is that 12...g6, while recently quite prominent in the games of some strong players, is nonetheless slightly cooperative since 13 ♖h6 ♗e8 14 ♖ad1 protects the d-pawn without concession. I would tend to prefer 12...h6 since then 13 ♖ad1 ♘xd4!? looks quite safe for Black. After 14 ♘xd4 ♗xd4 15 ♘xd5 ♖xd5 16 ♗e3 e5 White will recover his pawn, but no more than that. Of course, moves such as 13 ♗e3!? keep much more tension. In general in this variation (for example, after 11...♗f6 12 ♗e3) I am surprised that Black does not simply exchange this bishop more often than he chooses to. Neither White's pawn-centre nor the f-file looks particularly scary and if he can follow up with ...g6 and ...♗g7 his position looks quite harmonious. However, 13 ♗e3 is certainly an exception for precisely the reason that with ...h6 already on the board there is a danger of a piece sacrifice hanging over the attempt to follow up with ...g6, which really should put Black off. However, alternatives such as 13...♘xc3!? 14 bxc3 e5 and simply 13...♘ce7 14 ♘e4 b6! give a clue to the variety of strategies at Black's disposal.

c) 11 ♖e2!? (D) has claims to be the most testing.



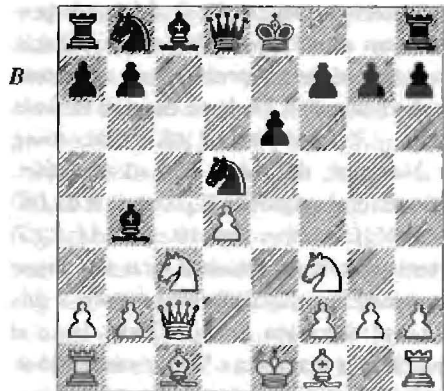
c1) 11...♗f6 is less convincing now, since ♗xh7+ motifs render the d-pawn basically immune after the simple 12 ♖ad1.

c2) Hence 11...♘f6 has tended to be the main line. However, whilst Karpov's play against Kamsky in their FIDE World Championship match won this treatment with an early

...♖b6 a lot of respect. White can gain a good deal of space which makes me a shade sceptical. Sturua-Dautov, Bad Wiessee 2001 was a good example of White's patient build-up with 12 ♘e4 ♖b6 13 a3! ♗d7 (13...♖xb2 14 ♖fb1) 14 ♖fd1! (14 ♖ad1 allows 14...♖xb2) 14...♖fd8!? 15 ♗e3 ♘d5 but now my preference might have been for 16 ♖ac1 ♖ac8 17 b4 and though Dautov claims that 17...♗e8 is equal, it seems that Black's position might be a bit cramped for many tastes. There is no doubt that this is playable, but I would be inclined to look at other approaches too.

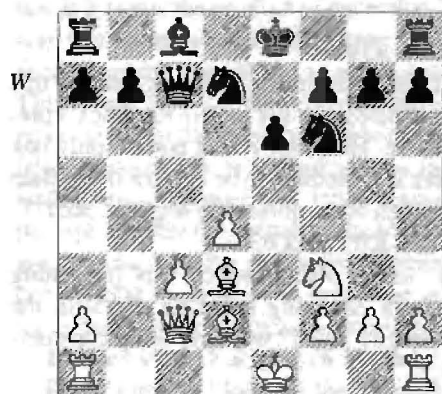
c3) 11...♘db4!? has a rather risky reputation when played in conjunction with snaffling the d4-pawn, but it might be worth checking whether Black's deployment makes sense with less materialistic goals. In J.Polgar-Magem, FIDE Knockout, Las Vegas 1999 an alternative rationale for the knight on b4 was delivered after 12 ♗e4 ♗f6!? 13 ♖ad1 b6! 14 ♗b1 ♗a6 15 ♖e4 g6 16 ♖fe1 ♘e7 17 ♗h6 ♗e8 18 ♘e5 ♘f5 19 ♗c1, when 19...♗g7 20 ♖f3 ♖c7 21 ♗f4 ♗b7 does not look so implausible for Black. It is true that White might pre-empt the ...♗a6 idea by flicking in 13 a3, but if this proves a problem there is no obvious reason not to accelerate Black's idea with 12...b6!? instead. Perhaps this will receive some more tests. Its focus on the only real drawback of 11 ♖e2 is appealing.

We now return to the position after 8 ♖c2 (D):



8...♘c6

This familiar developing move has an additional point here – a double attack against b4 and d4, which is revealed in the note about 9 ♙d3 $\text{♙a5!?$ below. However, as we shall see, this does involve both very complicated theoretical knowledge and a willingness to soak up a lot of pressure in exchange for a pawn and is of course not to everyone’s taste. Hence there has been some consideration for alternatives. In particular 8... $\text{♜c7!?$ 9 ♙d2 ♞d7 10 ♙d3 ♙xc3 11 bxc3 ♞f6 (D) is motivated in part by a far from obvious ‘problem’ with 8 ♜c2 – the fact that the queen no longer defends the f3-knight, which may leave it vulnerable to capture by a fianchettoed bishop on b7.

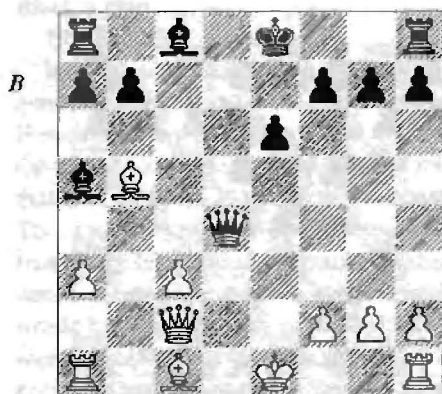


Several games have continued 12 0-0 b6 13 ♞ac1 ♙b7 14 ♞e5 although White’s attacking chances after 14... ♞xe5 15 ♞xe5 0-0 do not look too fearsome given that 16 $\text{♙g5!?$ can be met with 16... ♞g4! , while otherwise Black has chances of a light-square blockade if White restrains from c4, or pressure on the centre if he elects to play it. Another interesting set-up involves 12 c4 b6 13 $\text{♙b4!?$ ♙b7 14 ♜c2 , intending to meet 14... ♜f4 with 15 ♜e3! (Holst-Rasmussen, Århus 2002) or 14...a5! with 15 ♙d2! (but not 15 $\text{♙a3!?$ b5!). Nonetheless, as an attempt to reach a position that resembles a quite playable Nimzo-Indian and avoid a lot of complex theory, I think there is still some mileage in this approach.

9 $\text{♙e2!?$

This apparently modest development of the king’s bishop is in no small part designed to

avoid the immense complications arising from 9 ♙d3 $\text{♙a5!?$. The problem is that while 10 0-0 ♞db4 11 ♜d1 ♞xd3 12 ♜xd3 is not disastrous for White – the transaction after all has cost Black some time – the exchange of the light-squared bishops does allow the useful 12...f6!, which would otherwise be quite weakening, but as it plays a useful role in keeping White’s knight out of both e5 and g5. This should be comfortable enough for Black. Hence 10 a3 is the critical test, but this involves an unclear pawn sacrifice due to the tactical sequence 10... ♞xc3! 11 bxc3 ♞xd4 12 ♞xd4 ♜xd4 . Now after 13 ♙b5+ (D) Black has an interesting choice:

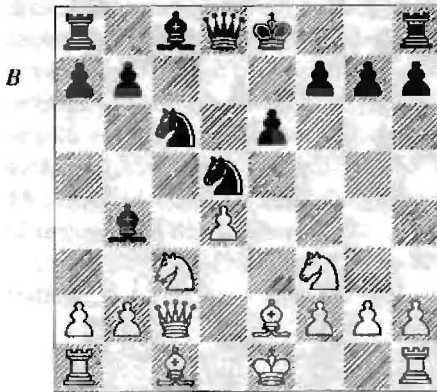


a) 13... ♙d7 is by far the most popular try, but the pressure after 14 0-0 ♜d5! (14... ♜xc3 15 ♙xd7+ ♞xd7 16 ♜a4+ ♞e7 17 ♙g5+ f6 18 ♞ac1 is far too perilous for Black) 15 c4 ♜f5 16 ♙xd7+ ♞xd7 looks like quite a test of Black’s defences. 17 ♜b3 b6 18 ♞d1+ ♞e7 19 a4 ♞hd8 20 ♙a3+ ♞f6 21 ♙d6 may just be OK for Black due to the excellent resource 21...g5!, followed by tucking the king behind the g-pawn, as in Aleksandrov-Dautov, 2nd Bundesliga 1998/9. However, there are other enticing options – perhaps 17 $\text{♜b2!?$ is best, eyeing both b7 and g7. Again, it feels uncomfortable that Black is always obliged to play 17...b6 with his a5-bishop stuck out of play. 18 a4! is one interesting try, with enduring pressure.

b) 13... $\text{♞e7!?$ has much to recommend it. It may cede castling rights with less of a fight, but to my mind the fact that after 14 0-0 ♜e5! 15

a4. Black can, in contrast with line 'a', attempt to reroute his awkwardly-placed bishop with 15...♗b6! speaks in favour of this approach. Of course, the downside is that the c8-bishop will not only have trouble developing, but will therefore also impede the coordination of Black's rooks struggling to cover the back rank. However, this seems hard to exploit. 16 ♔a3+ ♕c5 17 ♜f1 (or 17 ♜e2 ♜c7!) 17...♜c7 18 ♜f5 ♔xa3 19 ♜g5+ ♔f8 20 ♜xa3 ♜e7! 21 ♜d2 a6 22 ♜d1 g5 (Rogulj-Zelčić, Pula 2000) is typical of how Black can slowly but surely unravel if his opponent cannot show something of exceptional force. This seems well worth further investigation.

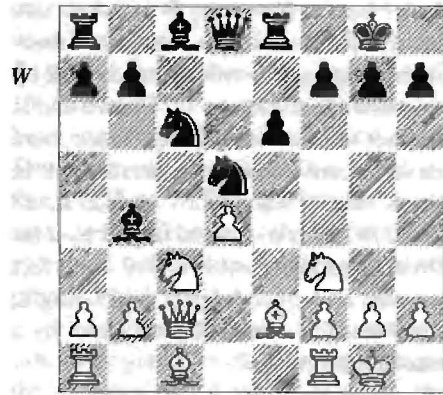
We now return to 9 ♕e2!? (D):



9...0-0 10 0-0 ♜e8!? (D)

An interesting refinement of Black's strategy. His claim is that f8 may prove to be a more positive square for the bishop's retreat than e7. This might in principle be true whether Black ultimately has to defend his kingside with ...h6 or ...g6, although since the plan of ♜e4 and ♕d3 features heavily in White's arsenal, it is quite likely to be the latter. In addition, by occupying the e-file Black will be much more prepared to countenance an exchange of knights on d5, which entails ...exd5. This in turn increases the viability of ...♕d7, both easier to execute than ...b6 and enabling a speedy development of his other rook to the c-file. All this sounds rather positive and I believe on balance it is. On the other hand, Black will need to weigh up his loss of control over the g5-square

compared with 10...♕e7, since either a bishop or a knight landing there can cause trouble.



11 ♜d1 ♕f8

As I discussed in the last note, making this retreat possible was one motive for Black's previous move. However, it was not the only one and there is something to be said for immediate mobilization of the queenside with 11...♕d7!?

12 ♜e4 ♕d7 13 ♕d3

The 'loose' bishop on e2 was preventing White from capturing twice on d5. Still, the older move 13 ♕g5!? was still worth considering.

13...f5

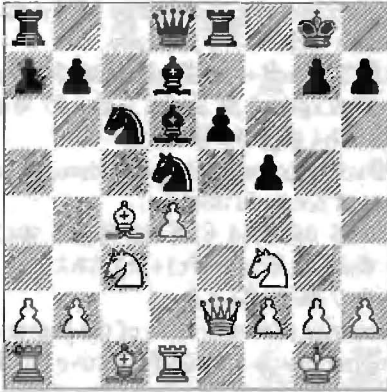
Not a disastrous weakening in itself, but at the same time a vindication of White's idea. But while 13...♔f6 would be strongly answered by 14 ♜h4 with a powerful attack in prospect, the interesting question is whether 13...g6!? is possible. This is not the first time we have seen that Black's relatively healthy development in this line brings with it the possibility to sacrifice a pawn. 14 ♕g5!? is perhaps, once again, the best option here, but Adams instead gives 14 ♔xd5 exd5 15 ♜xd5 ♔b4 16 ♜b3 ♕e6 17 ♕c4 ♕xc4 18 ♜xc4 ♜c8 19 ♜b3 ♜d5 with compensation for the pawn. Black has good development of his rooks with chances to penetrate to the 7th rank as well as a probable perfect blockade of the passed, but isolated, d-pawn.

14 ♜e2 ♕d6 15 ♕c4 (D)

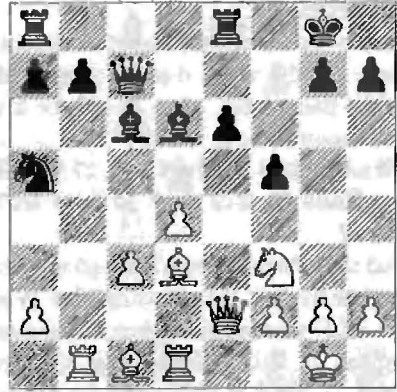
15...♔xc3

The conversion of the isolated pawn on d4 into an isolated pawn-couple on c3 and d4 is

B



W



quite a common technique for the defence in such positions, although here there is a feeling that it is rather the product of necessity. In general this strategy nicely illustrates the difference between a formal and an actual weakness. Theory will tend to frown more on the isolated pawn and treat the question of whether the isolated pawn-couple is a weakness as far more ambiguous. However, the latter formation is perhaps simpler for defining Black's plan – he aims to blockade the pawns by controlling the central light squares, c4 in particular, and thus leave the c3-pawn backward on a half-open file.

16 bxc3 ♖a5 17 ♔d3 ♕c6 18 ♖b1

Black's aim to blockade the isolated pawn-couple is clear from his last two moves. However, with the e5-square a definite weakness, his chances of success do not look too great. Tactically his intentions seem to work for the moment as the immediate 18 c4 is met with 18...♕xf3! 19 ♖xf3 ♖h4! winning the d4-pawn, a nice switch to the dark squares in response to a crossing of his intentions on the light squares. Moreover, while 18 ♖e5!? ♖c7 should guarantee a slight edge – even in conjunction with just exchanging on c6 – the more ambitious 19 ♕f4 can be met with 19...♕a4!? followed by 20...♖c6 and again Black is successfully limiting the damage.

18...♖c7 (D)

19 c4!

At just the right moment. On the positive side, as we shall see, the mobility of the doubled pawns justifies the pawn offer. However, White's hand was really forced by the positional

threat of ...♕d5, which would have stopped the c-pawn in its tracks and entirely vindicated Black's plan.

19...♕xf3?!

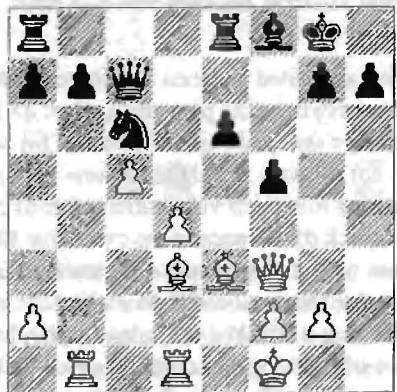
It might seem that declining the offer would permit White his positional gain at no real cost. However, delaying this with 19...b6!? retains the threat to cash in, while Adams mentions that 20 ♖e5 ♕xc5 21 dxe5 ♖b7! is not so clear. This kind of splitting of the hanging pawns frequently leaves useful squares for the opponent's pieces in its wake, and the knight on c5 would be as good as any of the bishops. Therefore 20 ♕e3!? looks a more ambitious way to keep the tension, but restraining the c5 advance improves the defender's chances in any case.

20 ♖xf3 ♖c6?! 21 ♕e3 ♕xh2+ 22 ♔f1

Perhaps 22 ♖h1 was more accurate, not least as in a few moves' time Black could have put up stiffer resistance by playing 26...♖h2!.

22...♕d6 23 c5! ♕f8 (D)

W



24 d5! exd5

Black could keep his structure intact by 24...e5, but the white d-pawn supported by the bishop-pair would, after 25 d6!, be a very potent weapon indeed.

25 ♖xd5+ ♗h8 26 ♗xf5 g6?! 27 ♗h3 ♖f7 28 ♖g1 ♗ad8 29 ♖c2 ♖g7 30 ♖b3 ♗c7 31 ♖d5 ♗e5?

A bad slip which leaves b7 and g6 vulnerable simultaneously and greatly simplifies White's task. 31...♗d7 was much tougher, although after the logical 32 ♗d2! (threatening 33 ♖xc6!) 32...♗ed8 33 ♗bd1 Black's task of coping with the bishop-pair in such an open position with a

less than secure king is still quite unenviable, as 33...♖c3 is well met by 34 ♖g5!

32 ♖f7! ♗xd1+ 33 ♗xd1 ♗d8 34 ♗xd8+ ♖xd8 35 ♖xg6 h6 36 ♖xh6 ♖xh6 37 ♗xh6+ ♖g8 38 ♗h4 ♖g7 39 ♗h7+?!

39 ♗xd8 was much cleaner although the result should not be in doubt.

39...♖f8 40 ♗h4 ♖e6 41 ♗h6+ ♖e7 42 ♗h7+ ♖d8 43 ♗xb7 ♗e1+ 44 ♖h2 ♗xf2 45 ♗b8+ ♖e7 46 ♗e8+ 1-0

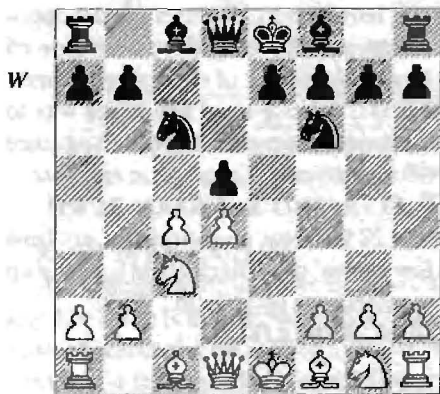
A powerful demonstration of the potential of the hanging pawns when no effective blockade can be put into place. However, the theoretical status of this line seems very much up for grabs.

Game 20

Roman Hernandez – Lenier Dominguez

Cuban Ch, Varadero/Matanzas 2003

1 c4 e6 2 e4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 d4 ♖f6 5 ♖c3 ♖c6 (D)



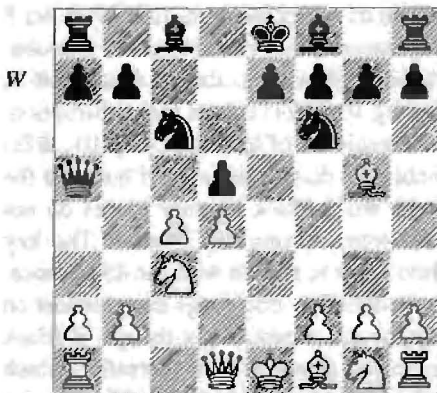
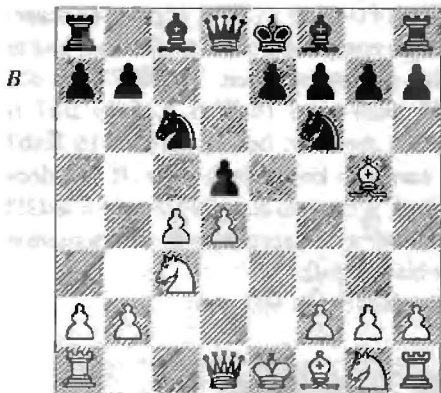
Quite a spirited defence which reminds us that one answer to the pressure against d5 is to keep an eye on the d4-pawn in turn. This strategy is not without risks. On the one hand, the knight may find itself vulnerable either to cxd5 or to a quick d5 advance in the event that Black captures on c4. Furthermore, desirable though it is to solve the question of the c8-bishop rather than leaving it blocked in, delaying the development of the kingside clearly carries its own dangers, while b7 may also become a target

once the bishop has left home. Still, this is a popular system and in some variations – including the main game here – the theory, and the degree of risk Black is running, is by now pretty well worked out.

6 ♖f3

Giving cover to the d4-pawn and challenging Black to show that ...♖c6 really forms part of a consistent and distinctive pattern of development. As we have seen in the notes to Game 18, 6...e6 does not mix perfectly with ...♖c6 in view of 7 c5! and there are also question marks over the mix of ...♖c6 with 6...g6, since both 7 cxd5 ♖xd5 8 ♗b3 ♖xc3 9 ♖c4!, with an awkward threat to f7, and 7 ♖g5!?, when the thematic 7...♖e4 is met with 8 cxd5 hitting the knight on c6, can claim to be quite challenging answers. Hence the text-move has the undeniable practical virtue of squeezing Black's range of viable options. However, for all this iron logic, there has always been understandable interest in the aggressive 6 ♖g5! (D).

Interestingly, despite his virtuoso handling of IQP positions already noted, this bishop sortie was the main theoretical contribution of Botvinnik to this chapter and the reason his name came to be attached to what at the time was the Panov Attack. White reacts calmly to



his opponent's attempts to counterattack against the d4-pawn and himself increases his pressure against d5, hoping that if d5 becomes the focus of discussion then the c6-knight might prove to be misplaced. In particular, the position of the knight on c6 means that ♙xf6 and cxd5 is a concrete threat – there will be no mileage in a pawn sacrifice for Black with his knight immediately forced to move. In spite of this threat, Black has a very wide choice of reasonable responses which result in a very wide range of interesting positions:

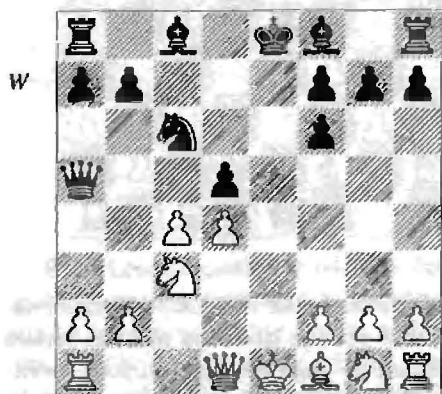
a) 7... ♖b6?! seeks complications but should not succeed in finding them. 7 cxd5 ♞xd4 (7... ♞xb2 8 ♜c1 does not help) can get very murky after 8 ♙e3 e5 9 dxe6 ♙c5, but this seems wholly unnecessary when the simple 8 ♙f3! leaves White with much the better development after 8... ♞xf3+ 9 ♞xf3, or excellent compensation should Black instead care to test 8... ♞xb2 9 ♜c1 ♞xf3+ 10 ♞xf3 a6 11 ♙d3. With a d6 lever in the air, the mobilization of Black's kingside will be no straightforward matter.

b) 6... ♞a5! (D) is a more important tactical line of defence.

h1) The first thing to mention here is that there are a couple of possibilities for the peacefully inclined which may arise from this. The first is that the objectively best response to 7 ♙d2 is probably the retreat 7... ♞d8, but since the bishop does not accomplish too much on d2, the return to g5 is a not unreasonable if quite uninspired choice. In Kurajica-Dizdarević, Skopje 2002 the players were generous

enough to illustrate both drawing possibilities in one wide-ranging peace conference, indicating an awareness of the first by 7 ♙d2 ♞d8 8 ♙g5 ♞a5 before reverting to the more complex but nonetheless theoretically well-worked-out second option: 9 ♙xf6 exf6 10 cxd5 ♙b4! (this is the 'tactical justification' of 6... ♞a5) 11 dxc6 ♙xc3+ 12 bxc3 ♞xc3+ 13 ♙e2 0-0 14 f3! ♜e8+ 15 ♙f2 ♞e3+ 16 ♙g3 ♞g5+ 17 ♙f2 ♞e3+ 18 ♙g3 ♜e4! (a nice addition to the armoury; Black threatens mate commencing with 19... ♜g4+) 19 h3! ♞f4+ 20 ♙f2 ♞e3+ 1/2-1/2.

b2) Let us eliminate the repetition, return to standard move-numbers and revisit 7 ♙xf6 exf6 (D).



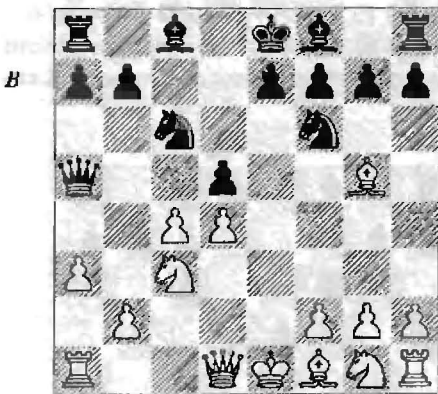
Armed with the above knowledge, there are two ways in which White may try to improve. The first is to defend c3 after 8 cxd5 ♙b4! with 9 ♞d2!?. The other, perhaps more interesting, is to prevent ... ♙b4 altogether and thus retain

pressure on d5 rather than 'cashing in'. After 8 a3!?, for example, the critical question is probably whether, following 8...dxc4 9 ♟xc4 ♟d6!?, the irritating 10 ♖e2+! causes major disruption. The inconvenience of having to play 10...♟f8! is probably not disastrous in itself but after the simple 11 ♖d2! Black's minor pieces do not enjoy obviously promising squares. The key for White is not to rush in with the d5 advance, which can definitely encourage his opponent on the dark squares. Interestingly though, if Black chooses to play an early ...♟e6 thereafter (which I wouldn't recommend) then after the exchange of bishops on e6, the d5 advance is very much back on the agenda and the black king may feel the pinch when the position opens up.

Of course White also has 7th-move alternatives.

b3) 7 ♟f3 ♟g4! 8 ♟xf6 exf6 9 cxd5 ♟b4! 10 ♖b3 ♟xf3 11 dxc6 ♟xc6 does not look especially promising as it is Black who can boast the more active pieces here.

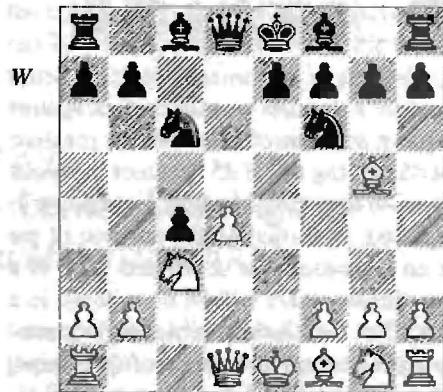
b4) However, 7 a3!? (D) merits consideration.



This eliminates all the ...♟b4-based counterplay and perhaps has b4 in mind in certain circumstances – such as against 7...♟e6, for example. This time it is the threat to exchange on f6 which White would like to prove stronger than its execution. His case is enhanced by the fact that the thematic 7...♟e4 (7...dxc4 8 d5!) 8 cxd5 ♟xc3 9 bxc3 ♖xd5 10 ♟f3 ♟g4 can probably be met calmly with the extraordinary 11 ♟e2! since 11...♟xf3 12 ♟xf3 ♖xg5 13

♖a4 ♜c8 14 0-0! c6 15 ♟fb1 appears to generate enough compensation. Timofeev has had to face this onslaught twice. 15...♖e7?! 16 d5! ♖c7 17 dxc6 bxc6 18 ♖a6 ♟c5 19 ♟b7 is clearly not the way, but 15...♖d2!? 16 ♟xb7 ♖xc3 seems to keep Black alive. If this does not appeal, White can also play simply 8 ♟d2!? ♟xd2 9 b4!, with decent spatial compensation for the bishop-pair.

c) 6...dxc4!? (D) and now:

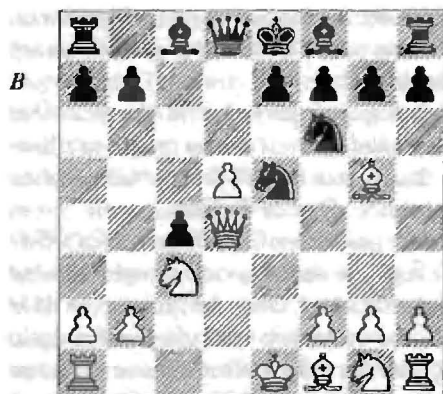
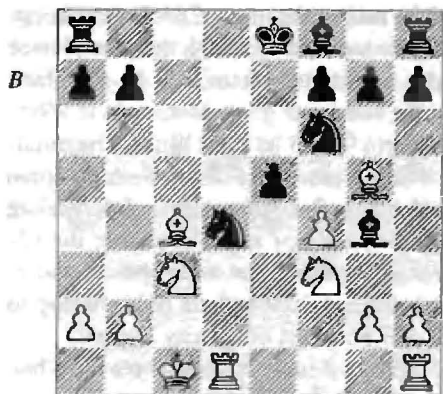


c1) After 7 ♟xc4 Black can play this line with two hugely contrasting treatments in mind:

c11) Alexei Dreev in particular has been content to play 7...e6 8 ♟f3 ♟e7 9 0-0 0-0, rather in the spirit of Games 18 and 19. He has done quite well with this, tending to continue with ...a6 and ...b5 to grab some space on the queenside while trying to confirm the impression we gained there that an early ♟g5 is not always entirely apposite. However, there remains a suspicion that playing ...dxc4 when White is able to recapture 'in one go' from f1 cannot be theoretically critical.

c12) The surprisingly fashionable pawn-grab 7...♖xd4!? is both more fun and considerably more risky. It seems fair to suppose that this is a product of new attitudes to what is 'defensible' brought on by the era of computer-assisted analysis. Certainly 8 ♖xd4 ♟xd4 9 0-0-0 e5 10 f4! ♟g4 11 ♟f3 (D) looks horrendously risky for Black.

c121) However, after 11...♟xf3 12 gxf3 ♜c8 13 fxe5 ♟xc4 14 exf6, had Black in P.H.Nielsen-L.Dominguez, Esbjerg 2003 followed up



his sensible 14...Qc6! 15 Nhe1 with 15...g6! 16 Qb1 Nc6, he would just about seem to be holding the position.

c2) Nonetheless, recent practice has focused upon the equally nerve-racking 11...Qxf3 12 gxf3 Qxf3 13 fxe5 Qxh1 14 cxf6 Nc8 (or perhaps 14...h6!?). Now White all but forces a draw with 15 Nc1+ Qd7 16 Nd1+ Qe8 (since 16...Qd6? 17 Qc2 gxf6 18 Qxf6 Qg2 19 Qe5 was no good for Black in Grishchuk-Bareev, Russian Ch, Moscow 2004). When White tried for more in Yakovenko-L'Ami, Wijk aan Zee 2007, Black wriggled away and eventually even exploited some of his assets after 17 Nc1+ Qd7 18 Nd1+ Qe8 19 Qe2(!) h6 20 Qh4 g5 21 Qg3 Qe4! 22 Qg4 Nxc3+ 23 bxc3 Qa3+ 24 Qd2 h5. It is not clear to me why White needs to allow the bishop to escape via e4. Hence 17 Qd3! looks a more testing try.

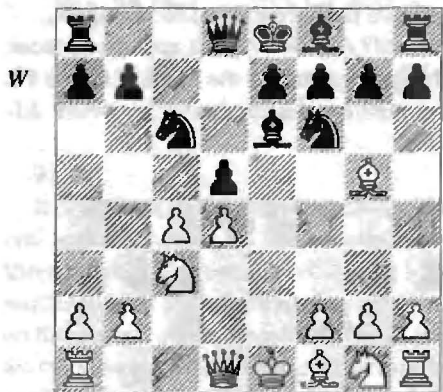
Black might just be surviving in this line at the time of writing, but he is clearly running the risk of one of those Duke of Brunswick moments.

c2) Moreover, if so inclined, White can even avoid all this by 7 d5 Qe5 8 Wd4 (D), which aims reasonably enough at amassing a good deal of space.

Then 8...h6! is a useful *zwischenzug*, but players defending this with Black still need to know a couple of handy tricks. 9 Qh4 Qg6 10 Qg3 e6! 11 d6 Qe7!, bringing this knight back to either d5 or f5, is one important resource courtesy of Yasser Seirawan, while the simple 9 Wxe5 hxg5 10 Qxc4 would be problematic were it not that after 10...Qd7 11 Wxg5 Black

has the fork 11...Wc7!, when after the bishop moves, it is quite safe to capture on h2, when the bishop-pair can become a real asset, Kindermann-T.Balogh, Mitropa Cup, Baden 1999. The conclusion is that White has no 'cost-free' way to preserve his spatial plus here although it is imperative upon Black to be well-prepared.

d) 6...Qc6!? (D) also enjoyed its period of popularity at the highest levels.



Peter Leko in particular wielded this interesting weapon several times, a reminder that for all his legendary solidity, he has worked over the years with such highly original players as Adorjan and Miles and has absorbed many of their ideas. Black wants to contest d5 with pieces and avoid blocking in his light-squared bishop. At the same time, a fianchetto may solve the apparent problems created for the other bishop. Although this piece may be liberated as a result of an exchange on f6, Black in

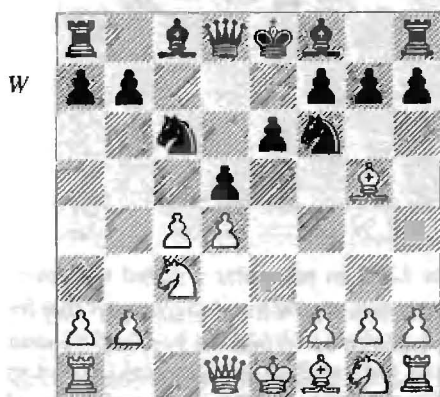
fact, given the choice more often recaptures on f6 with the g-pawn. Handling this tension is not straightforward.

d1) 7 $\text{d}2\text{ge}2$ – played with the plausible enough plan of $\text{d}2\text{f}4$ – is almost unique in allowing 7... $\text{d}2\text{c}4!$ since 8 $\text{d}2\text{xf}6?! \text{exf}6$ 9 d5 can then be met with 9... $\text{d}2\text{b}4$ or 9... $\text{d}2\text{e}5$.

d2) The immediate 7 $\text{d}2\text{xf}6 \text{gxf}6$ 8 $\text{d}2\text{f}3$ $\text{d}2\text{d}7$ 9 c5?! $\text{d}2\text{g}4!$ is also a good example of what White should avoid. Once the pressure on d5 is relaxed, the e6-bishop will often move again and $\text{d}2\text{f}3$ invites ... $\text{d}2\text{g}4$, since after an exchange on f3 the d4-pawn will likely become weak (...e6, ... $\text{d}2\text{g}7$ and ...f5 being a simple plan to attack it).

d3) However, a refined version of this with 7 a3!? $\text{d}2\text{d}7$ 8 $\text{d}2\text{xf}6 \text{gxf}6$ 9 c5 is one of White's most interesting ideas. In Lanka-Leko, European Clubs Cup, Budapest 1996 Black tried the familiar 9... $\text{d}2\text{g}4!$? 10 f3 $\text{d}2\text{f}5$ 11 $\text{d}2\text{b}5$ e5 12 $\text{d}2\text{ge}2$ 0-0-0 13 0-0. He is quite active and 13... $\text{d}2\text{h}6!$ would be the consistent way to follow up, but he will nonetheless face some attack on the queenside and the prospect that a timely $\text{d}2\text{xc}6$ is likely to weaken him there.

e) 6...e6!? (D) by contrast appears to mark something of a return to the spirit of Game 18. However, there are a number of important differences.



e1) Firstly White can by the immediate 7 $\text{cxd}5$ force the recapture 7... $\text{exd}5$ and reach the very symmetrical pawn-structure against which Black was counselled in that analogous case. However, while White can still try 8 $\text{d}2\text{b}5$, after

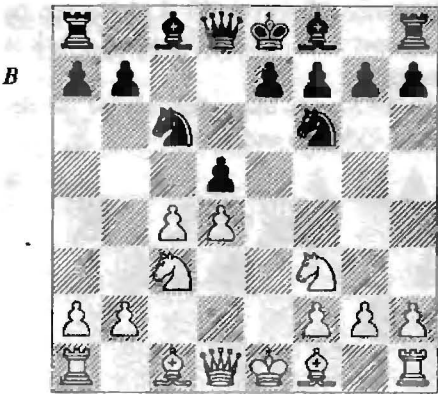
8... $\text{d}2\text{e}7$ he misses the move $\text{d}2\text{f}3$ – with the opportunity to hop into e5 which this would have offered – and it also remains to be seen how helpful the bishop on g5 is. Moreover, if White now ventures 9 $\text{d}2\text{f}3$ he must himself be mindful of a future pin with ... $\text{d}2\text{g}4$. Perhaps some kind of strategy of capturing on c6, trading dark-squared bishops and blockading the c5-square suggests itself, but with open b- and e-files and perhaps development of his bishop to a6, Black is not short of activity himself.

e2) Hence it is more common here for White to opt for 7 $\text{d}2\text{f}3$ $\text{d}2\text{e}7$ 8 c5!? (D).



However, again looking back to Game 18, it was suggested that in this structure neither the move 6 $\text{d}2\text{g}5$ on the one hand, nor the answering of 6 $\text{d}2\text{f}3$ with 6... $\text{d}2\text{c}6$ on the other was entirely recommendable. In a sense, what we are faced with here is a trade-off of suboptimal developments which to some degree cancel each other out and result in a fresh and balanced position. In fact after 8...0-0 9 $\text{d}2\text{b}5$ $\text{d}2\text{c}4!$? (9...h6 10 $\text{d}2\text{f}4!$? does not necessarily help Black's struggle for the e5-square, even if he thereby keeps dark-squared bishops on the board) 10 $\text{d}2\text{xe}7$ $\text{d}2\text{xe}7!$? only the ambitious 11 $\text{d}2\text{c}1$ b6 12 c6!?! seems capable of unbalancing the position. White's advanced c-pawn looks vulnerable at first sight, but it does restrain Black's further development and this makes it surprisingly hard to get at. 12... $\text{d}2\text{c}7!$? (12... $\text{d}2\text{d}6$ 13 0-0!) 13 $\text{d}2\text{d}3$ $\text{d}2\text{d}6$ 14 $\text{d}2\text{c}2$ h6 15 $\text{d}2\text{b}5$ $\text{d}2\text{xb}5$ 16 $\text{d}2\text{xb}5$ a6 was nonetheless about equal in Zeller-Dautov, Swiss Team Ch 2006.

After this long but very important excursion, we return to the more modest but still critical 6 Qf3 (D).



6...g4

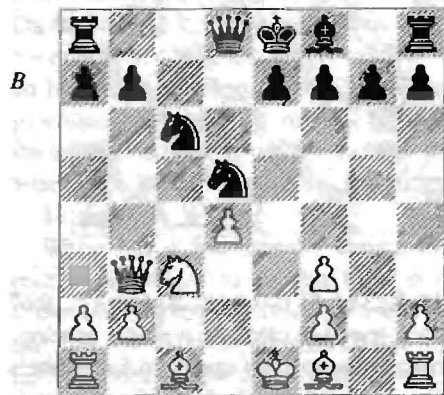
My initial comments on 6 Qf3 touched on the reasons why Black's choices are somewhat limited here. The text-move is consistent, overwhelmingly the most popular and almost certainly theoretically sound, although I am in a sense sympathetic with Joe Gallagher's comment that there is something a bit artificial about the extent to which Black neglects the mobilization of his kingside. There is a temptation to check alternatives here. 6... Re6 !?, similar in spirit to line 'd' after 6 Bg5 above, is possible and Jonathan Speelman has occasionally tested 6...a6 with some similar ideas. However, in Korneev-Speelman, Gibraltar 2003 it appeared that Black was achieving something on the light squares after 7 cxd5 Qxd5 8 Wb3 Qxc3 9 bxc3 (but definitely not 9 Rc4? e6 !, when Black wins significant material and reveals an important point to ...a6) 9...b5 10 Re2 Re6 11 Wb2 Qa5 12 0-0 Qc4 13 Wb1 Qb6 , but the difficulties in developing the black kingside nonetheless gave White time to undermine this by 14 Qe5 g6 15 a4! Qxa4 , when a nice sequence of moves left Black with virtually no compensation for a pawn: 16 Rxb5+ axb5 17 Wxb5+ Rd7 18 Wd5 e6 19 Wf3 f6 20 Qxd7 Qxd7 21 Wb7+ Qe8 22 Wc6+ Qf7 23 Rxa4 .

7 cxd5 Qxd5 8 Wb3

It is this move which gives the variation its distinctive character. There is nothing unusual

about reacting to an early development of the queen's bishop by attacking the b-pawn it leaves unguarded. The early lessons which players tend to absorb warning them against grabbing such 'poisoned pawns' are quickly put into context and with the black king stuck in the centre the prospect of White's queen landing on b7 could appear quite alarming for the defence. However, as we shall see, Black does have surprising resources and of course the coming damage to White's pawn-structure is itself pretty serious and can have an enduring impact.

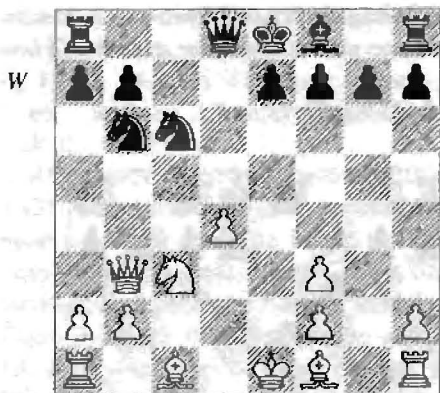
8...Qxf3 9 gxf3 (D)



9...e6

It is difficult to discuss these choices in general terms any more, so well worked out is the theory of this variation. In principle it looks desirable to hold the knight in the centre and rely on the counterattack against d4, but in reality it all rests on specifics. With only White in possession of a light-squared bishop, relinquishing the b-pawn could easily end in tears and it is essential to have a thorough grasp of the basic theory here. The text-move in fact provokes a rather forcing sequence resulting in an endgame generally felt to be quite tenable for Black. Re-examining this ending, I am in fact inclined to think that while most of the top players now regard this line as rather too drawish, for lesser mortals there is sufficient potential for play for both sides in the coming ending. After all, there is no shortage of structural imbalance in the position!

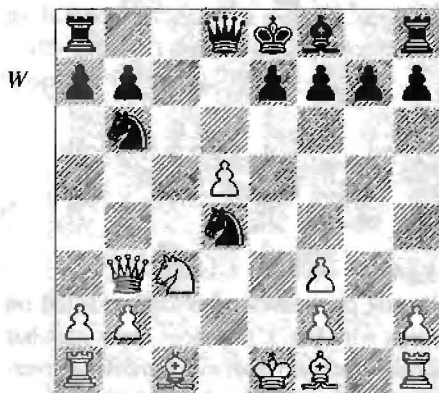
Nonetheless, there have been many takers for avoiding simplification and trying to exploit White's structural deficiencies in a middle-game context. 9...♖b6 (D) is certainly complex and demands a degree of accuracy from White, but objectively, while more fun than our main line, it does not seem quite so secure. White has two decent ways to cover the threat to his d-pawn:



a) 10 ♙e3 e6 11 0-0-0 (11 ♖g1!?) 11...♙e7 sees Black trying to catch up with his development before the position opens up for White's bishop-pair. The thematic 12 d5! still needs careful handling from the defence, not least because 12...♗xd5? 13 ♖xb7 should constitute a major accident. Nonetheless, I think Black should be able to consolidate after 12...exd5 13 ♗xd5 (13 ♙xb6 ♖xb6 14 ♖xb6 axb6 15 ♗xd5 ♖xa2 16 ♖b1 ♖a5 17 ♙b5! ♖f8! is no problem for Black) 13...♗xd5 14 ♖xd5 ♖c7! 15 ♖b1 0-0 16 f4! and now 16...♗b4! is the way to generate counterplay. After 17 ♖d4 (if 17 ♖d1, then 17...♖c6! 18 ♖g1 ♖e4+ should equalize without trouble), 17...♗c6?! 18 ♖d1 ♖fd8 19 ♙g2 ♖xd1+ 20 ♖xd1 ♖d8 21 ♖c1 is better for White, whose bishop-pair and pressure against Black's queenside pawns should guarantee a healthy initiative with or without queens. However, the retreat 17...♗c6 is a bit compliant. Black should exploit the tactical opportunity which permits the more active 17...♖fd8!, when back-rank weakness prevents 18 ♖xb4?? and 18 ♖c4?! needlessly cedes Black the d-file. White's best would seem to be 18 ♖xd8+ ♖xd8,

when the unpretentious 19 ♙e2 ♖d7 20 ♖c1 a6 (20...a5!?) 21 a3 a4) 21 a3 ♗d5 22 ♖a2 ♗xe3 ½-½ of Lanka-Gyimesi, Austrian Team Ch 2005 was not designed to ask serious questions of the defence. However, 19 ♙c4 too can be modestly met with 19...♙f8!?, when Black is safe enough.

b) 10 d5! looks more difficult for the defence. 10...♗d4 (D) and now:



b1) 11 ♖d1 e5 12 dxe6 fxe6 13 ♙e3 ♙c5 is very complicated, but 14 b4?! ♖f6! is now believed to be too risky for White, while the more solid 14 ♙g2 can apparently be met by 14...♗c4!?, with reasonable counterplay for Black.

b2) 11 ♙b5+! offers to give up the bishop-pair in order to try to keep a space advantage. Following 11...♗d7 (after 11...♗xb5, 12 ♖xb5+ ♖d7 should not be too scary, but 12 ♗xb5! makes much more sense, since the fork on c7 renders d5 immune) 12 ♖a4 ♗xb5 (12...e5? seeks to support the knight but unsurprisingly the open centre rebounds drastically after 13 dxe6 ♗xe6 14 ♙g5!+, neatly ensuring immediate and decisive access to the d-file) 13 ♖xb5 g6 14 0-0 ♙g7 15 ♙g5 0-0 16 ♖fe1 ♙f6 17 ♙x16 ex16, 18 ♖xb7 may be possible, but there is much to recommend 18 ♖e3! (Marin-Fressinet, Sitges 1999) nullifying much of Black's counterplay and retaining all White's trumps.

10 ♖xb7 ♗xd4 11 ♙b5+

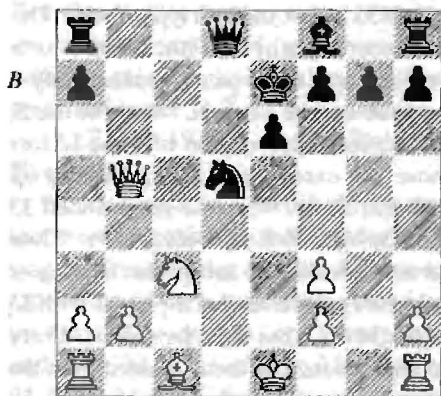
On the face of it, this is a good sign for Black. White will succeed in deflecting Black's knight and embarrassing his king a little in

return for this bishop, but at least the piece itself will not be causing havoc!

11...♖xb5 12 ♖c6+!

An important *zwischenzug* which misplaces the black king.

12...♙e7 13 ♗xb5 (D)



13...♗d7!

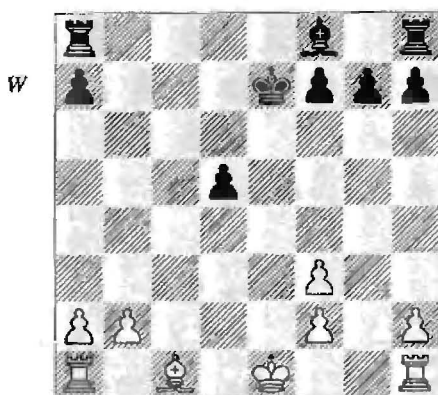
Heading for the ending and at the same time showing commendable realism in appreciating the balance between the structural and the dynamic. The same cannot be said of 13...♗xc3?! 14 bxc3 ♗d7 15 ♖b1!, when Fischer's instructive comment in *My 60 Memorable Games* has always stuck in my mind: "horrible as White's pawn-structure may be, Black can't exploit it because he'll be unable to develop his kingside normally. It's the little quirks like this that could make life difficult for a chess machine." The last part has proven to be rather optimistic, but the speed with which White's rooks enter the position while Black is still mobilizing is spot-on.

14 ♗xd5+ ♗xd5 15 ♗xd5

There is a major alternative here in 15 ♙g5+ f6 16 ♗xd5 exd5 17 ♙e3, but logical exposition will be greatly aided by dealing with this via the move-order 15 ♗xd5 exd5 16 ♙g5+ f6 in the note to White's 16th move below.

15...exd5 (D)

It is perhaps a sign of the times, i.e. of the depth of some contemporary opening research, that this interesting ending now has a rather drawish reputation. Not much more could be asked for in terms of structural imbalance, with



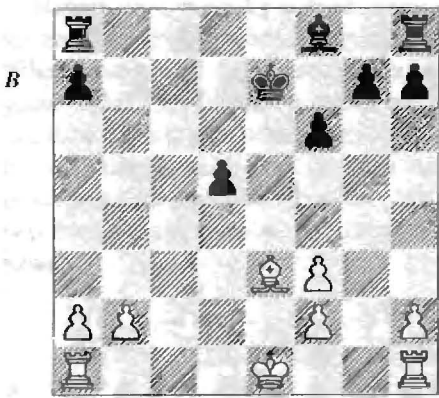
both sides nursing serious pawn weaknesses. On the face of it, White's are even uglier than his opponent's two isolated pawns, but there is an important additional factor that Black's d-pawn may well need the support of his king in the short term and this can itself render the king a target for White's operations thereafter.

16 ♙e3

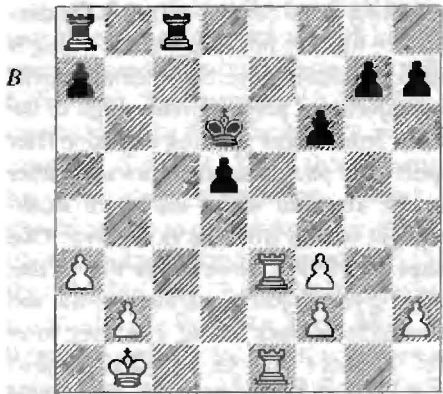
White has a fundamental choice to make concerning where to put his king. It clearly doesn't belong in the centre – he needs the central files free to try to prove that Black's king is far from comfortable there. So he should castle, and the majority of players prefer to go to the queenside, from where the king can hope later to shepherd the pawn-majority forward, rather than to the kingside where the pawn weaknesses might benefit from the extra cover. One advantage of 16 0-0, however, is that White does get to give a useful check on the e-file and hope to misplace Black's king. However, after 16...♙e6 17 ♖e1+ ♙f5 18 ♖d1 ♖d8 19 ♙e3 ♖d7 20 ♖ac1 ♙e7 21 ♖d4 Black is well advised to prevent any more harassment of his king by 21...g5! 22 ♖a4 ♙f6 23 b4 d4 24 ♖a5+ ♙g6 25 ♙d2 ♖e8 26 ♙f1 d3 with reasonable play, Adams-Dreev, Wijk aan Zee 2002.

However, perhaps the most durable threat comes from 16 ♙g5+! f6 17 ♙e3 (D).

What is White trying to achieve by forcing upon his opponent the 'extra move' ...f6? His claim is that access to the e6-square will give added punch to his efforts to harass Black's king. Of particular interest is the sequence 17...♙e6 18 0-0-0 ♙b4!. Then after 19 a3



Nc8+ 20 Qb1 Sc5 21 Nhe1 Qxe3 22 Nxe3+ Qd6 23 Nde1 (D) (since 23 Ned3 Sc5 24 b4 Nb5 with ...a5 to follow leads to little more than an equilibrium in which the rook is stable on b5 but confined there by White's threats, while he has no real way to increase the pressure) it appears that White is making progress since Black will be unable to contest his invasion of the seventh rank.

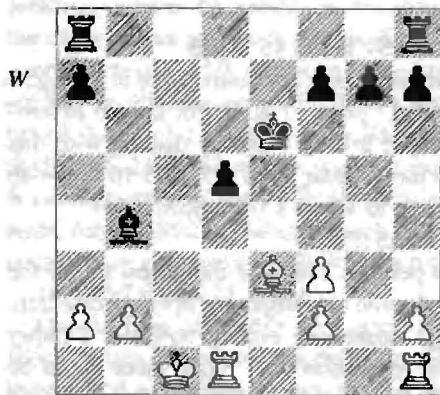


However, it is precisely here that we are reminded of the very genuine nature of White's own pawn weaknesses, and by means of the counter-invasion 23...Nc4! Black can hold the balance. We should stick with Belikov-Dreev, Moscow 1992 a bit longer, since after 24 Ne7 Nh4 25 Nle6+ (25 b4 contains a particularly lethal threat but 25...d4! meets it and leaves Black's king comfortably heading for d5) 25...Qc5 26 Nxe7 Nhx2 27 Nxf6 Nxf2 28 Nhx7 Nb8! 29 Nc7+ Qd4 30 Nc2 Nxc2 31 Qxc2

Black showed an exemplary understanding with a wide application. This is but one of many endings I have seen in this line where Black winds up a pawn down but with a super-active king and a potentially dangerous d-pawn. The important thing is to remain consistent in not obsessing about material. Here 31...Qe3?! 32 Nc6+ Qxf3 33 b4! would be a typical error. Despite the material parity, the black king is suddenly cut off and the d-pawn consequently a weakness rather than an asset. Dreev, as usual, showed an acute appreciation of these factors and chose the excellent 31...a5!, meeting 32 Na6 with 32...Nc8+, when the game ended 33 Qd2 Nb8 34 Qc2 Nc8+ 35 Qd2 1/2-1/2. White seemed rather willing to accept this sharing of the spoils. He could have tried to play on with 33 Qb3 Nb8 34 Qa2 , but the d-pawn would very much come into its own then – indeed even the sacrifice of a second pawn with 34...Qe3 35 Nxa5 d4 would be by no means out of the question.

This all raises the question of whether White can improve his position prior to chasing the bishop from b4. There are useful moves such as Qb1 and Nd3 , but the evidence is that Black has sufficient moves which make a contribution too. J.Polgar-Leko, FIDE World Ch. San Luis 2005, for example, looked very comfortable for Black after 19 Nd3 Nhd8 20 a3 (20 $\text{Qb1!?$) 20...Nac8+ 21 Qb1 Sc5 22 Nle1 Qf7 23 Ned1 Qe6 24 Nle1 Qf7 25 Ned1 1/2-1/2. On this occasion the availability of f7 unusually proved useful to Black!

16...Qe6 17 0-0 Qb4! (D)



An important move. 18 ♖h1 would otherwise be quite awkward to meet, whereas now Black gains time to mobilize his rooks.

18 a3

As in the analogous position from the note about 16 ♔g5+, there is no need to rush this. However, after 18 ♖d3 ♖hd8 19 ♖b1!? ♖d7 20 ♖c1 Black does best to bring his a-pawn to greater safety and hold up White's queenside with 20...a5! since the black king is safe enough on f5 and hence 21 ♖c6+ no big issue.

18...♖hc8+ 19 ♖b1 ♔c5 20 ♖h1 ♔xe3 21 ♖xe3+ ♔d6

We have reached a position very similar to that reached in the note about 16 ♔g5+ with the single difference that Black's f-pawn is on f7 rather than f6. Deprived of the plan of invasion on the e-file – double-edged though that is – and with 22 ♖ed3 still comfortably met by 22...♖c5 23 b4 ♖b5, White now attempts to probe some weaknesses on Black's kingside. A worthy enough intention, but it scarcely impacts upon the defender's long-term aspirations of counterplay on that wing.

22 ♖d4 a5! 23 ♖g4 g6 24 ♖h4 h5 25 ♖f4 f5 26 ♖d4 ♖ab8 27 f4

A new route to try to embarrass the black king, via the e5-square, but it is easily parried.

27...♖e8 28 ♖a4 (D)

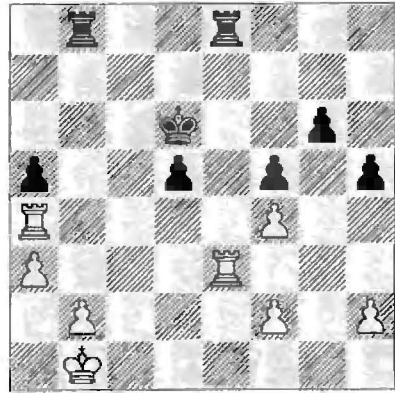
28...♖e4! 29 ♖xa5

White should certainly avoid 'repairing' his opponent's pawn-structure: 29 ♖xe4 fxe4 30 ♖xa5 ♖f8 is unnecessarily risky for White.

29...♖xf4 30 ♖a6+ ♔c5 31 ♖c3+ ♖c4 32 ♖xc4+ ♔xc4 33 ♔c2

Hernandez afterwards preferred 33 ♖xg6 ♖e8! 34 ♖g5 ♖e1+ 35 ♔a2. I see considerable

B



risks in these endings where Black can run his d-pawn and White's king is cut off. After 35...d4 36 ♖xh5 d3 I sense that things could go quite wrong for White too.

33...g5?! 34 ♖f6 ♖c8 35 ♖xf5 ♖e2+ 36 ♔d1 ♖xb2 37 ♖xg5 d4

Once again Black's active pieces and useful passed d-pawn are quite sufficient compensation to hold.

38 ♖xh5 ♔c3 39 ♖c5+ ♔d3 40 ♔c1 ♖a2 41 h4 ♖xa3 42 h5 ♖a1+ 43 ♔b2 ♖f1 44 ♖f5 ♖h1 45 ♖g5 ♖h2 46 ♖f5 ♔e4 47 ♖f8 ♔d3 48 ♖f3+?!

I am not sure I quite trust the game score here. The text-move, though far from losing, seems to be courting some trouble had Black continued instead with 49...d3, whereas 48 ♖f5! would indeed head for an immediate draw.

48...♔e2 49 ♖f5 ♔d3 1/2-1/2

For all the mass of theory, an interesting end-game in which, at least for mere mortals, there seem to be decent chances for either side to have a go.

Game 21

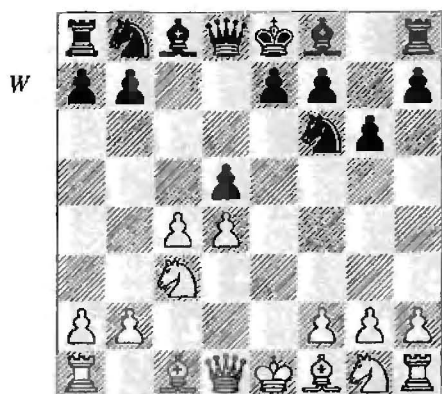
Michael Adams – Julio Granda Zuñiga

Madrid 1998

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 c4 ♔f6 5 ♔c3 g6!? (D)

In some ways this is rather an ambitious try. In common with 5...♔c6, Black places counter-attack against the d4-pawn higher up the agenda

than attending to his own pawn on d5. In comparative terms, the idea seems rather promising – a Grünfeld Defence in which Black has already exchanged his c-pawn for White's c-pawn has a lot of attraction *once the defender can*



consolidate. Likewise, if we compare the Tarrasch Defence to the Queen's Gambit (1 d4 d5 2 c4 e6 3 Qc3 c5 4 cxd5 exd5 5 Qf3 Qc6, which is in reality a Panov-Botvinnik Attack in reverse) it is 6 g3! which has the best reputation. The fianchetto exerts pressure on the IQP which is likely to result in its advance. However, this need not be feared – it can be effectively blocked even after it has progressed to the 5th rank and its advance will tend to leave a splendid diagonal open to the bishop in any case.

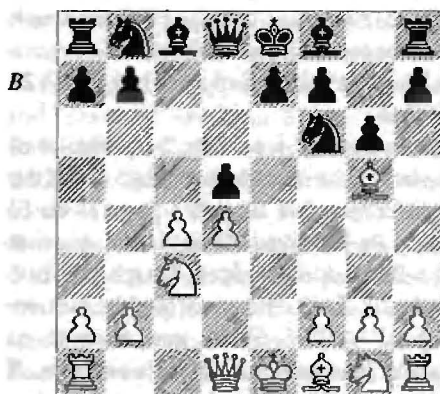
So much for the meta-theory. There was a wider significance to the phrase "once the defender can consolidate" that was thrown in above. For White can cause immediate trouble in the main line and effectively turn 5...g6 into a pawn sacrifice, whether permanent or not, and it is doubts about its absolute soundness which have always impacted upon the popularity of 5...g6 at the highest levels.

6 ♖b3

As indicated, this is the stiffest test. Given that the combination of ...g6 and ...e6 will generally be undesirable, Black's ...g6 move effectively rules out ...dxc4 until such time as he is ready to answer ♗xc4 with ...0-0. Hence this pressure on d5 all but forces Black to sacrifice his d-pawn. However, it is worth mentioning that netting a pawn in this way does involve an implicit commitment. Certainly, the hope that Black will need to make some concessions in order to win it back is a valid one, but it would be naïve to suggest that the developing moves required to cling on to it are entirely natural either. If White makes these moves and subsequently

just loses the pawn back, without being able to dictate the circumstances (such as by a well-timed advance of the pawn to d6) then he will generally stand worse than if he had not embarked on this entire project in the first place. For this reason, if for no other, there are still some valid alternatives:

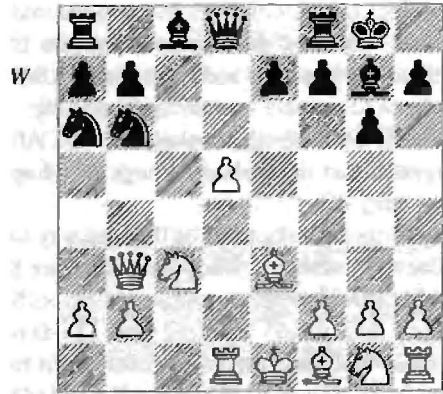
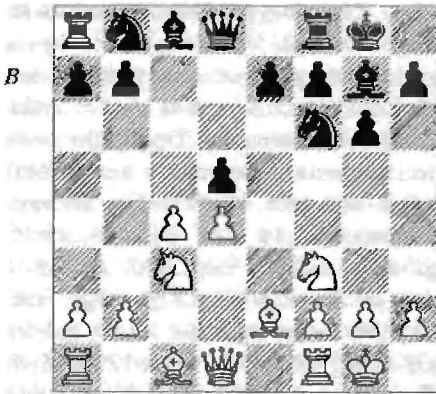
a) 6 ♖g5 (D) does not look too threatening.



6...♗e4 7 ♗xe4 dxe4 is probably OK for Black here since he can pile pressure on d4 very quickly. However, it is also worth being aware of a further solution, the calm 6...♗g7!. The point is that 7 ♗xf6 ♗xf6 8 ♗xd5?! (8 cxd5!? 0-0 might appear to make little sense either – White arrives at the structure of the main line but is missing a valuable dark-squared bishop; however, Black's pressure on d5 is also reduced and this may therefore be White's best try) 8...♗g7 leaves Black perfectly poised to attack d4 with ...♗c6, ...♗g4 (after White defends with ♗f3) and ...e6 where necessary. The chances are that if Black wins back the pawn, his bishop-pair will count. Note that ♗g5 tends for this reason to be much more effective when there is a knight on c6, since in that case a subsequent cxd5 wins valuable time.

b) 6 ♗f3 ♗g7 7 ♗e2 0-0 8 0-0 (D) is the 'pure' route to a reversed Tarrasch.

This should be a decent enough way for White to play since his extra tempo is real enough – against 8...♗c6, for example, 9 ♗e1!? is a useful move to have in just about all cases. Perhaps there is a case for delaying ...♗c6 here though. Black can consider 8...dxc4 9 ♗xc4



Qg4 first. Again, White has an extra tempo over a familiar 'defence' after 10 h3 Qxf3 11 Wxf3 Qc6 12 d5, but when playing with Black and trying to equalize, 12...Qe5! is a perfectly reasonable move. As so often with 'reversed openings', Black gets into trouble if he keeps hankering after the initiative in a manner analogous with the main line of the white opening, but if he lowers his horizons there tend to be side-lines which are a safer path to genuine equality.

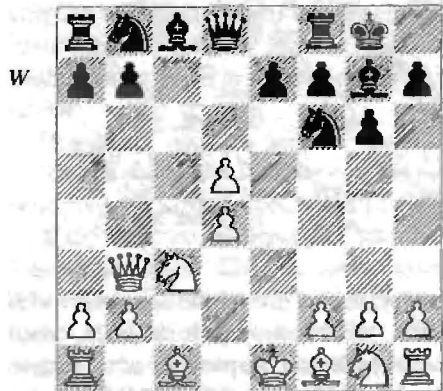
c) 6 cxd5! is theoretically the most threatening of these side-lines. The point is that after 6...Qxd5! (if 6...Qg7 then both 7 Qb5+ and 7 Qc4 are quite sensible) 7 Wb3, Black tends to regard 7...Qxc3 8 Qc4! as a rather unpalatable *zwischenzug*, virtually forcing as it does the move ...e6, when White can look to cause irritation with a quick Qa3. However, whilst the retreat 7...Qb6! looks rather like a concession, the Grünfeld-type position which can be generated after 8 d5 Qg7 9 Qe3 0-0 10 Qd1 Qa6! (D) is surprisingly full of counter-attacking promise.

This knight is headed for a4 and if White develops in any way routinely it will support the g7-bishop to excellent effect. 11 Qe2 Wd6 12 Qf3 Qd7 13 0-0 Qc5 14 Wa3 Qca4! is a good illustration of Black's plan. In Ibragimov-Kamsky, New York (rapid) 2006 White did a reasonable job of damage limitation, but nevertheless after 15 Wxd6 exd6 16 Qxa4 Qxa4 17 Qd4 a6 18 Qd2 Bc8 he was still under tangible pressure. Perhaps there is something to be said for the more radical 11 Qxa6!?. After

11...bxa6 12 Qge2, Black can try to locate his light-squared bishop on its best square with the immediate 12...a5. However, while 13 Wb5 Wd7! does not convince for White, there might be a case for asking quite how much the bishop can achieve on a6 once the dark-squared bishops have been traded with 13 Qd4!.

Of course, it is also possible that 8 d5 is the culprit. Perhaps it is just not worth increasing the scope of the g7-bishop to this degree for a relatively minor gain of space. This is a plausible argument but it does not imply that White has alternative methods of prosecuting his initiative. For example, after 8 Qf3 Qg7 9 Qb5+ Qd7 10 Qe5 0-0 11 Qxd7 Q6xd7! (keeping the c6-square as the active choice of its colleague) 12 0-0 Qc6 13 Qe3 Qxd4 14 Qxd4 Qxd4 15 Qad1 e5 16 Qe4 Qf6 Black again has ample counterplay, Osinovsky-Evseev, St Petersburg 2002.

6...Qg7 7 cxd5 0-0 (D)



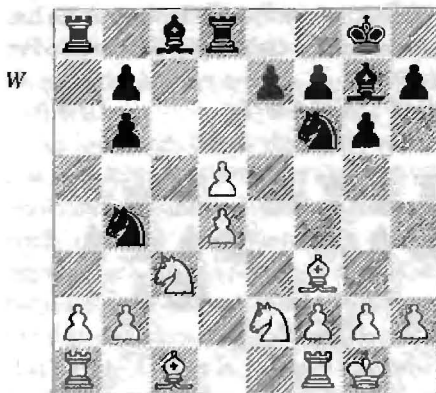
8 $\text{c}2$

White's choice of development patterns is determined by the need either to support his d5-pawn, or to prepare to return it profitably – most often via a well-timed advance to d6. All this suggests that the bishop belongs on g2 or f3, supporting d5.

The text-move is regarded as the best way to introduce the fianchetto, since the immediate 8 g3 affords Black the extra option of 8...e6!?. Whether 9 $\text{e}2$! $\text{c}5$ 10 $\text{c}2$ $\text{c}6$ 11 0-0 is in fact absolutely innocuous is in fact open to question as 11... $\text{c}4$ 12 $\text{c}4$ $\text{c}4$ 13 $\text{c}5$ $\text{e}5$ 14 $\text{h}6$ still looks like light pressure for White and 14... $\text{e}8$? 15 $\text{a}1$ $\text{f}6$? 16 $\text{a}4$ 1-0 Timofeev-Petzold, European Clubs Cup, Rethymnon 2003 is altogether heavier.

Nonetheless, the main alternative to the text-move is 8 $\text{e}2$!?, trying to defend d5 by playing this piece to f3. Black then has an important choice of ways to develop:

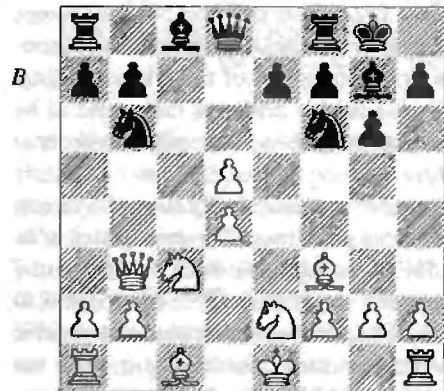
a) 8... $\text{a}6$ 9 $\text{f}3$ $\text{b}6$!? involves an apparently paradoxical offer to weaken Black's pawn-structure. The point is not so much the exchange of a defender of d5 for one of its attackers – no great gain there – but rather enabling Black to use the b4-square for his knight. Indeed, after 10 $\text{b}6$ $\text{a}6$ 11 $\text{c}2$ $\text{b}4$ 12 0-0 $\text{d}8$ (D) the process of recouping d5 is well under way.



However, this is one of the moments, with which we will become quite familiar, when White can best return the pawn by advancing it. Here, by 13 d6! $\text{c}6$ 14 $\text{f}4$ $\text{d}7$ White gains

useful time. The most popular line then is 15 $\text{f}d1$ $\text{f}d5$ 16 $\text{g}3$. However, this invites a modification to the pawn-structure by 16... $\text{c}3$ 17 $\text{b}c3$ $\text{c}6$!, which seems at least to make Black's task more interesting. Despite the weak b-pawns, he gains a potentially very useful pawn-break with ...e5. However, by the very precise manoeuvre 18 $\text{f}4$! $\text{a}5$ (18...e5 19 $\text{c}d5$! is awkward) 19 $\text{c}d3$! $\text{a}3$ 20 $\text{f}d1$! White may be able to retain a slight edge. Still, there may also be an argument for the quieter 16 $\text{c}d5$ $\text{c}d5$ 17 $\text{e}5$!?, when 17... $\text{d}8$ 18 $\text{c}d5$ $\text{f}d5$ 19 $\text{c}3$ $\text{d}8$ 20 $\text{c}g7$ $\text{c}g7$ should only be a slight edge for White, but looks a bit joyless for the defence. Perhaps 17... $\text{e}5$!? is a better try.

b) 8... $\text{b}d7$ 9 $\text{f}3$ $\text{b}6$ 10 $\text{c}2$ (D) brings us to another important parting of the ways.

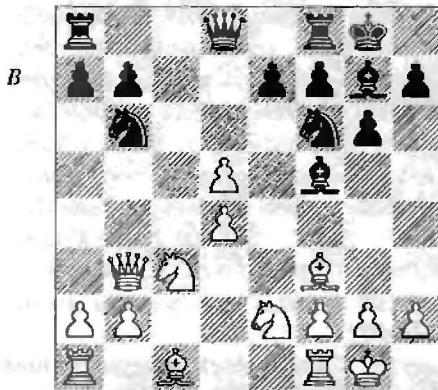


Black has a choice of methods by which to use his queen's bishop to increase pressure against d5, but neither promises straightforward equality:

b1) 10... $\text{g}4$ 11 $\text{c}g4$ $\text{c}g4$ not only exchanges a defender of d5 but also a piece which potentially comes into its own precisely when d5 is captured. This not only means that the knight's return to f6 will leave d5 difficult to defend, but that if Black is able to recapture it, his remaining minor pieces will be rather ideally placed. However, since the knight has been dragged to g4, White has a tempo to try to disrupt this plan. 12 $\text{f}4$ $\text{f}6$ 13 d6! $\text{e}6$ 14 $\text{a}4$ is one way, but this does not strike me as the most convincing route to this symmetrical

structure. 12 a4!?, targeting the potentially misplaced knight on b6, looks more punchy to me. Black must either allow it to be driven away, which somewhat complicates the task of rounding up d5, or preserve its position with ...a5, which at the same time weakens it. One example: 12...♟f6 13 ♟f4 a5 14 0-0 ♟d6 (Siebrecht's 14...g5?! weakens the f5-square and looks well met by 15 ♟fe2 h6 16 ♟g3!) 15 ♟c1!? ♟fd8 16 ♟b5 ♟d7 17 d6! exd6 18 ♟c3 all but forces 18...♟a6 and left White with slightly the more comfortably placed pieces in C.Bauer-Kühn, Biel 2006.

b2) 10...♟f5 aims to exploit the fact that the unusual position of the bishop on f3 weakens the d3-square. Here too, Black will be well placed if the d5-pawn stays put, but in almost all lines a well-timed d6 advance raises some questions. White replies 11 0-0 (D).

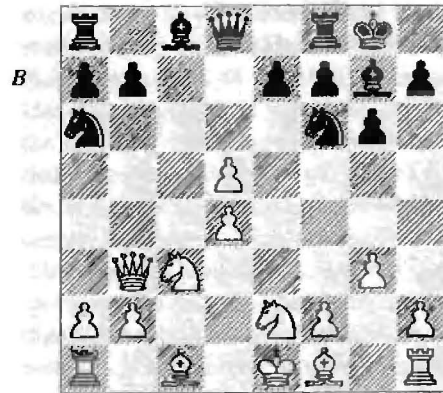


11...♟d7 (Black defends b7 because after 11...♟d3 12 d6! exd6 13 ♟xb7 ♟b8 14 ♟f3 ♟bd5 15 ♟d1 I suspect that Black's compensation is not quite enough) 12 ♟f4! (or 12 a4 ♟d3 13 d6!, when Black should probably try 13...♟c4 14 ♟b4 ♟xd6!? 15 ♟xd6 exd6 16 ♟xb7 ♟ab8 17 ♟f3 ♟bd5 with familiar compensation, but perhaps a rather better version in the absence of queens; the a4 move has weakened b3 and ensured that White's further development is far from straightforward) 12...♟fd8 (the problem is that 12...♟d3 may now be met with 13 d6 exd6 14 ♟a4!, an unusual but rather effective trick, made possible by avoiding the a4 advance, which gains the bishop-pair at no

cost at all) 13 d6 exd6 14 d5 ♟d3 15 ♟fd1 ♟a6 16 a4 (Tyomkin) gives White rather more space and slightly the better minor pieces.

8...♟a6 9 g3 (D)

Consistent, especially as 9 ♟f4 ♟b6!? looks quite OK for Black.



9...b5!?

Black has the option to react to 8 ♟ge2 pretty much as he would to 8 ♟e2 with either 8...♟bd7 last move or indeed 9...♟b6 here. However, my impression of Granda's choice is fairly favourable and confirms my feeling that 8 ♟e2 is the more secure way for White.

10 ♟xb5

The only way to take the pawn because 10 ♟xb5? ♟b8 followed by ...♟b4 is very dangerous for the white king. 10 a3!? comes into consideration, although Shulman-Abdulla, Dhaka 1999 broadly confirmed the view that 10...♟b8 11 ♟f4 ♟b6 12 ♟g2 b4 13 ♟a4 ♟b7 14 0-0! (14 d6?! exd6! 15 ♟xb7 ♟xb7 offers the white king an uncertain future) 14...bxa3 15 ♟xa3 ♟xd5 is satisfactory for Black. His pieces look slightly loose but he has a fair hold on d5 in particular.

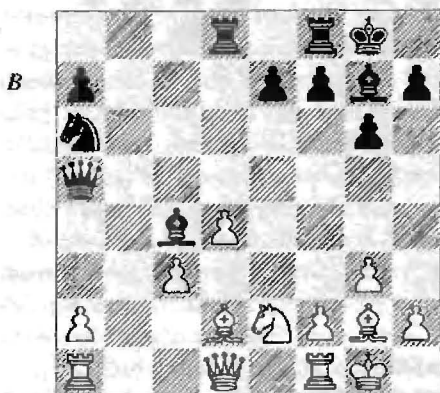
10...♟xd5

Natural enough, but not the only way to generate play. 10...♟b8 11 ♟ec3 ♟c7 12 ♟f4 ♟xb5 13 ♟xb5! does not convince, but 10...♟b7!? 11 ♟ec3 (11 ♟bc3? ♟b8! is embarrassing for White) 11...♟xd5 12 ♟g2 ♟xc3! 13 ♟xb7 ♟xb5 14 ♟xb5 ♟c7, followed by ...♟b8 and perhaps even ...♟c6 to prepare the optimal capture of d4, looks quite tempting.

11 ♖g2 ♗e6! 12 ♖d1 ♗a5+ 13 ♜bc3 ♜xc3
14 bxc3 ♜ad8

This brings the possibility of ...♜c5 into the play which is attractive since the knight on a6 remains the drawback of an otherwise harmonious piece deployment. However, in view of the next note, there may have been a case for the immediate 14...♜ab8!?

15 0-0 ♗c4 16 ♗d2 (D)



16...e5?

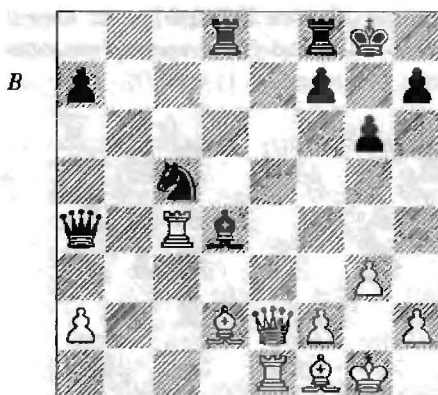
A mistake, as Adams points out in his instructive notes for *Informator 72*, but a quite understandable one. What could be more natural than to supplement the pressure exerted by the black pieces with the only pawn-break which can hope to trouble White's centre pawns? The problem is that it is the very act of cashing in on this initiative and winning back the pawn which brings the white pieces back to life. Suddenly, as White recaptures with cxd4, the d2-bishop gains a better view, the bishop-pair looks like a major asset and the hitherto blurred factor of the knight stuck on the edge of the board is brought back into sharp focus. Moreover, Black's activity was

sufficient that with 16...♜b8! 17 ♜e1 ♜b2 he would be close to holding the balance. One nice point is that the tempting 'tidying' move 18 ♜c1 fails to 18...♗xd4! (Adams) 19 ♜b3 ♗xf2+! 20 ♜xf2 ♗b6+ 21 ♜d4 e5! 22 ♜xe5 ♗f6+ 23 ♜f3 ♜d8, when White is looking very overstretched. 18 ♗f1 is better, but after 18...♜fb8, even if White has few points to attack, it is difficult for him to unravel.

17 ♜e1 ♗xe2

The natural follow-up, but 'improving the worst-placed piece' with 17...♜c7! was, as so often, worth considering.

18 ♗xe2 exd4 19 cxd4 ♗a4 20 ♜ac1! ♗xd4
21 ♗f1! ♜c5 22 ♜c4 (D)



22...♜fe8??

An awful blunder which jettisons serious material. Black is already losing the exchange as a result of trying to force matters and Adams's super-accurate reaction. However, by playing 22...♗xa2 23 ♗h6 ♗xe2 24 ♜xe2 ♜e6! he could still have placed some reasonable technical obstacles in White's path.

23 ♗xe8+! ♜xc8 24 ♜xa4 1-0

Game 22

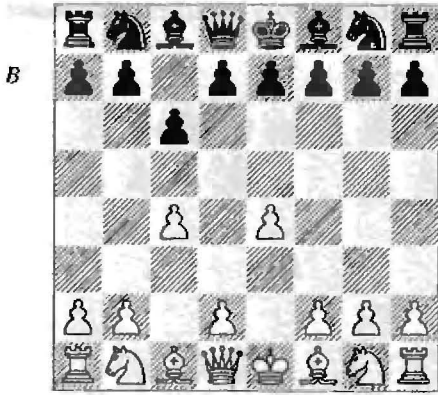
Teimour Radjabov – Zurab Azmaiparashvili

Dos Hermanas 2005

1 e4 c6 2 c4!?! (D)

While it is sometimes simply a route to the rest of the chapter, this move offers a wealth of

positions which are closely related to, but nonetheless subtly different from, those found in the Panov-Botvinnik Attack. As such, it justifies

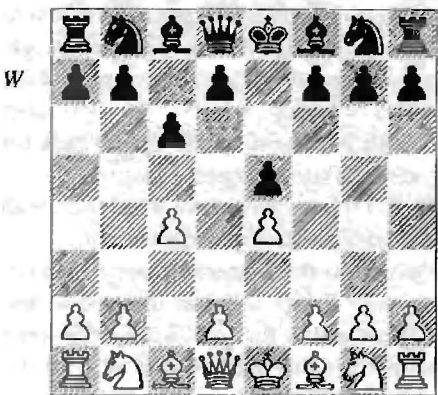


its practical popularity and is, for the reader, useful territory for testing how well the ideas of the previous games have been absorbed.

2...d5

The natural 'Caro' move, but the possibility of his opponent capturing twice might give Black pause for thought. The strange-looking and rather unambitious 2...e6 does not look very enticing after, say, 3 ♘f3 d5 4 exd5 exd5 5 cxd5 cxd5 6 ♙b5+! ♚c6 7 ♖e2+! ♜e7 8 ♚e5 ♙d7 9 ♙xc6! (Gulko-Shabalov, Berne 1992), when either recapture is pleasant for White, who can simply castle in readiness to meet ...f6 with ♜h5+.

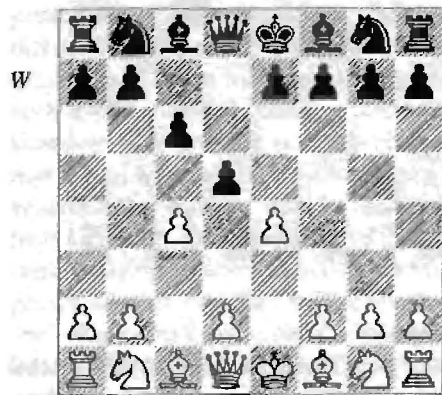
However, 2...e5 (D) is a serious option which utterly transforms the nature of the play.



One interesting question after 3 ♘f3 is whether Black is in effect obliged to steer the play into either an Old Indian or a King's Indian with 3...d6 4 d4 ♚d7, or whether he has viable

independent options. Various have been tried: 3...♜c7 is one way, looking to keep alive hopes of developing the f8-bishop more actively before playing ...d6. However, by cleverly delaying the advance of the d-pawn, Black may find himself having to commit his bishop unfavourably. Specifically, 4 ♚c3! ♙b4 5 a3!? ♙xc3 6 dxc3 results in a structure where Black may really have cause to regret his first move! Neither does 3...d6 4 d4 ♙g4 fully convince. The idea of exchanging on f3 to enhance control of the potential 'hole' on d4 is laudable, but the detail after 5 dxe5! ♙xf3 6 gxf3! dxe5 7 ♜xd8+ ♙xd8 8 f4! is problematic since White is quite content to meet 8...♙b4+ with 9 ♚e2. So I think that best play after 2...e5 3 ♘f3 probably spells an Old Indian (or possibly a King's Indian, although Black may find that his commitment to ...c6 is not what he would choose in that case). Coverage of this is really outside the scope of this book. An e4 player keen to venture 2 c4 may feel some doubt that this is his natural territory. Perhaps true, but it can be entered into with the confidence that many Caro-Kann players will feel very much the same way!

We now return to 2...d5 (D):



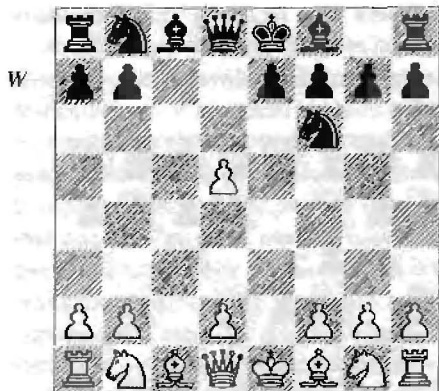
3 cxd5

It is often interesting to speculate on players' move-order preferences, which can sometimes be a puzzling business. Personally, the text-move makes the most sense to me, not least because 3 exd5 can be met with 3...♚f6!?, a pawn sacrifice known from the Scandinavian Defence

(1 e4 d5 2 exd5 ♟f6 3 c4 c6!?) and almost always declined since 4 dxc6 ♟xc6 gives Black notoriously harmonious development for an extra d-pawn which is itself damagingly backward. However, 3 exd5 remains overall much the more popular move and a far from insignificant role is played in this by those more than happy to transpose back into the main Panov Attack by meeting 3...cxd5 with 4 d4. Fair enough if the game in fact began 1 c4 c6, when White might prefer a Panov Attack to playing some kind of Slav Defence, but in the usual case of the game commencing 1 e4 c6 2 c4, it seems that using this move-order in order to reach the Panov merely allows the opponent a major extra option (2...e5) in return for no tangible gain.

3...cxd5 4 exd5 ♟f6 (D)

The alternative is of course the immediate capture with 4...♞xd5, but even those with a soft spot for the Scandinavian Defence might be a bit sceptical about the loss of time involved here.

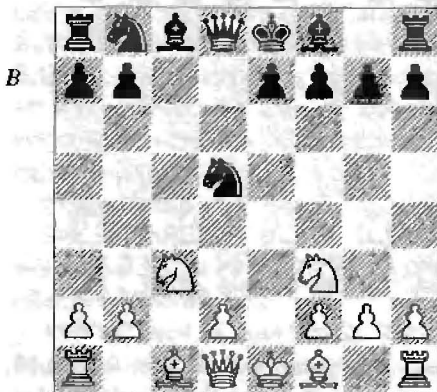


5 ♞a4+

One of three important attempts to show that 2 c4 has some independent punch – two of them designed to make the recovery of the pawn on d5 no automatic matter, the third to show that White may derive some mileage from delaying the advance of his d-pawn. The text-move has recently enjoyed a real resurgence of interest, but the others certainly retain their vitality too:

a) 5 ♟c3 ♟xd5 6 ♟f3 (D) bears obvious similarities to the main-line Panov of Games

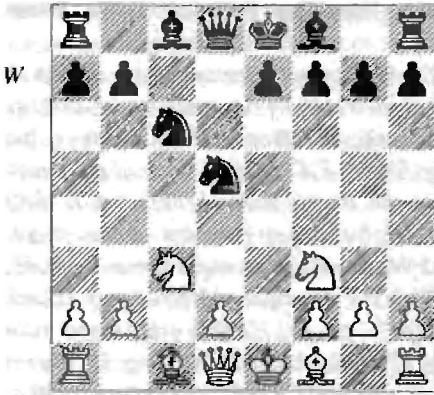
18-21 and Black enjoys a similarly wide choice of set-ups.



It is, however, quite instructive to see White attempting to put his extra developing move ♟f3 to work in these cases and to benefit from the added flexibility which keeping the d-pawn at home might have produced. Whatever its theoretical merits, it adds an original twist to several lines. Only 6...e6 leaves White no really independent choices although even here, if he is willing to put his bishop on c4, he can delay d4 and hence avoid the ...♞b4 lines of Game 19. 6...g6?! is inadvisable because 7 ♞b3 ♟b6 (7...♟xc3?! is well met by 8 ♞c4 or the simple 8 ♞xc3) 8 ♞b5+ ♞d7 9 ♟e5 e6 10 ♟e4 gives White a strong initiative. The prudent way to introduce such a Grünfeld-type set-up is first to play 6...♟xc3!? 7 bxc3 and only then 7...g6. However, either 8 d4 followed by simply ♞d3, 0-0 and ♞e1 or perhaps 8 ♞b5+!? ready to meet 8...♞d7 with 9 a4, holding the d-pawn back for a time, gives White reasonable play.

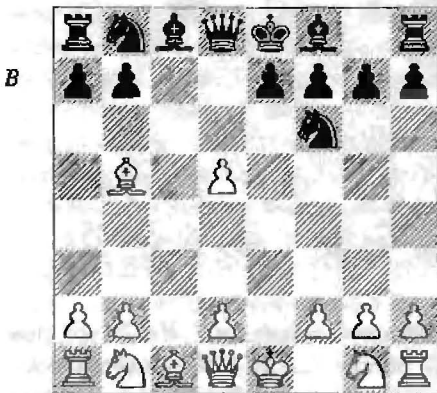
6...♟c6 (D) is another move which may lead back into known territory, but need not.

For White has the interesting move 7 ♞b5!?, which avoids ...♞g4 and has distinctive features if Black settles for ...e6. After developing in a manner familiar from Game 18 with d4, 0-0 and ♞e1, White can seriously consider exchanging on c6 under some circumstances and hoping to show that c6 is weaker than d4. My feeling is that Black's best after 7 ♞b5 is 7...♟xc3!? 8 bxc3 ♞d5!, which introduces yet another fresh system. 9 ♞e2 does not appeal



since after 9...g4! 10 c4 even 10...f5!? does not seem unduly risky and the structural gains will be quite substantial. 9 b3!? seems a better shot, although here too, even if 9...e6 10 0-0! promises some initiative, the simple 9...e4+ 10 e2 e6 11 d3 f5 12 0-0 e6 13 a3 xa3 14 xa3 a5!, as in Tkachev-Khenkin, Santo Domingo 2002, promises White a slight edge at best. The hanging pawns are not a huge problem, but there is potential counterplay there for Black if no initiative can be drummed up.

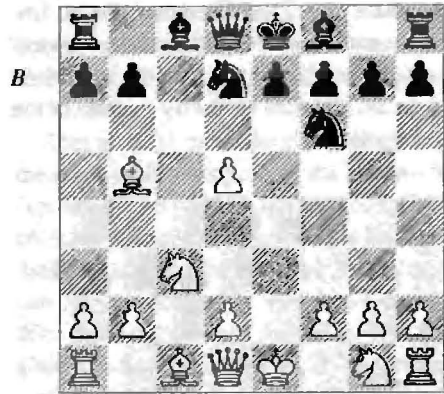
b) 5 e5+ (D) is another logical way to force a piece to d7 and thereby complicate the recovery of the d5-pawn.



b1) There is a sense in which 5...e5d7 6 c4! is a clear gain for White unless some concrete counterplay can be generated against the white bishop. The usual attempt 6...b5 (or 6...c7 7 d3!, preventing Black's intended ...xd5 and

...e5+ trick) 7 e3 a5 8 a3 a6 looks quite fun but not fully convincing after 9 d4. Black is as likely to leave himself with weaknesses on the queenside as he is to generate any durable activity; for example, the thematic 9...a4 10 e2 b4 is met by 11 c4!

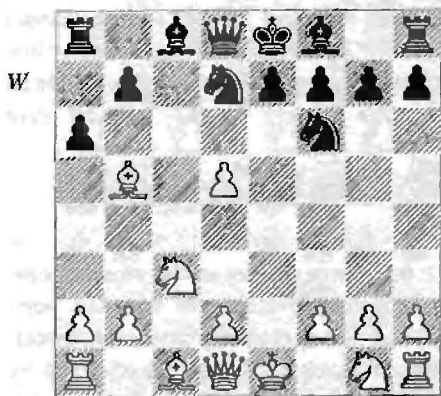
b2) In any case, there is a compelling logic to 5...bd7 in such positions. Black only needs to drive away the invader on b5 and his rounding-up of the d-pawn can proceed in the most harmonious manner with ...b6. After 6 c3 (D) he has an important choice:



b21) 6...g6 is a patient move, simply completing kingside development with the hope that castling will necessarily involve a 'threat' of ...b6. If Black wins back the d5-pawn by such a plan, he will have no worries at all. However, the drawback is that White can disrupt his opponent's plans with a timely advance of the d-pawn, already familiar to us from Game 21. The assessment of the line will rest largely upon how much discomfort can be generated after 7 d4 g7 8 d6! cxd6 (8...0-0 9 dxe7 xe7+ 10 gc2 is clearly inadequate for Black) 9 e2+! e7 10 f4. The first thing to say about this position is that if Black is to solve his problems, it is likely to be by using the light squares in the centre. Partly for this reason, he should avoid playing the move ...d5 in general (over and above the fact that the immediate 10...d5? is embarrassingly met by 11 e6!). Hence he is all but obliged to play 10...xc2+, when the following moves serve to emphasize the extent to which the battle is

around the d5-square. For this reason, White's bishop is headed to f3, so 11 ♙xe2! is best, when 11... ♜e7 12 ♙f3 ♜b6 13 ♜ge2 looks favourable for White. The defender's dilemma is that he must either waste time preparing to develop the c8-bishop, or sacrifice the b7-pawn by 13... ♙g4 . The latter is quite promising if White gets greedy, but if White returns the material by 14 ♙xb7 ♞ab8 15 ♙c6! ♞hc8 16 d5, Black has more problems to solve. After 16... ♙xe2 17 ♜xe2 ♜c4 18 ♞ab1 ♜xb2 19 ♞hc1 White consolidated his powerful minor pieces in Pavasović-Ferčec, Zadar 2005, but the immediate 16... ♜c4!? seems to be an improvement and might merit further exploration.

b22) 6...a6 (D) tries to clarify matters at the expense of a tempo.



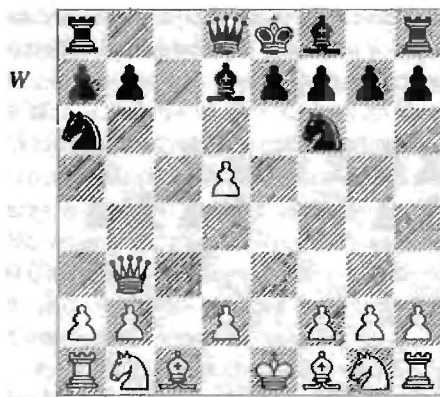
b221) Black's game has always quite appealed to me after the theoretical line 7 ♞a4 ♞b8 8 ♙xd7+ $\text{♞xd7!?$ 9 ♞xd7+ (there must be a case for keeping queens on, especially as 9 $\text{♞f4!?$ wins a tempo; however, after 9... ♞a8 10 ♜f3 ♜xd5 11 ♜xd5 ♞xd5 12 0-0 e6 13 d4 ♙e7 White misses his light-squared bishop and is hard-pressed to make his lead in development count; for example, 14 ♞g3 0-0 15 ♙h6 ♙f6 16 ♞fe1 ♞h5! 17 ♙d2 ♙d7 was fine for Black in Kengis-A.Filipenko, Togliatti 1985) 9... ♙xd7 10 ♜ge2 (10 d3!? ♙f5 11 ♙g5 is another route to adequate play for the IQP, but no more) 10... ♞d8 11 d4 ♙f5 12 ♜f4 g5! 13 ♜fe2 ♞g8 14 ♙e3 ♜xd5 15 ♜xd5 ♞xd5 16 ♞c1 e6 17 0-0 ♙d3 with no troubles at all in Lautier-Illescas,

European Clubs Cup, Barcelona 1993. White has no time to make use of the c-file.

b222) However, recently White has been getting somewhere by retaining the b5-bishop. 7 $\text{♙e2!?$ makes no effort to retain the pawn, but after 7... ♜b6 8 ♜f3 ♜bxd5 9 d4, if play continues 9...e6 10 0-0 ♙e7 11 ♜e5 0-0 12 ♙f3 we see that the bishop is useful on this diagonal and White can place more pressure on d5, with ♞b3 for example. Alternatively, Black can prefer 9...g6, but 10 ♜e5 prepares to meet 10... $\text{♙g7!?$ with the embarrassing 11 ♞a4+! and hence requires Black to adapt with either 10... ♙e6 or 10... ♜xc3 . None of this looks like a clear plus for White, but the whole idea of re-deploying the bishop on f3 is refreshingly different and has a definite logic. Black's grip on d5 may be quite tight, but White enjoys a hold on e5 and there is an absence of direct pressure on the IQP.

5... ♜bd7

This move has a more solid reputation than 5... $\text{♙d7!?$ although Black's active piece-play after 6 ♞b3 ♜a6! (D) is not to be dismissed lightly.

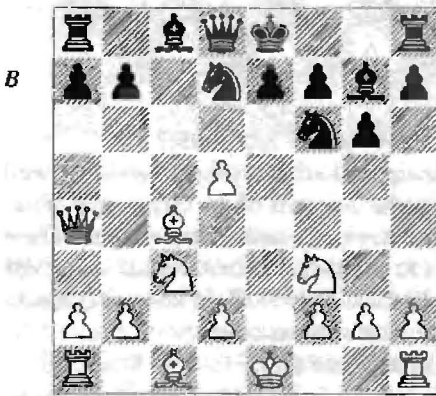


The dangers underlying 7 ♞xb7? are clear enough. Simply 7... ♜c5 8 ♞b4 leaves Black a pleasant choice between 8...e6!? or possibly just 8... ♜xd5 (9 ♞xc5 ♞c8!) with terrific piece-play. Perhaps the neatest resources are to be found against the natural 7 d4, when 7... ♞b6! yields excellent counterplay since 8 ♞xb6 axb6 leaves White vulnerable to an impending ... ♜b4 , while 8 ♙c4 is met by 8... ♞c8! , when neither 9 ♜f3

♖b4+! nor 9 ♖c3 ♖b4! threatening 10...♗xc4 looks very appetizing for White.

However, White does have one much more challenging response in 7 ♖c3! ♖c5 8 ♗d1, when after 8...g6 he should refrain from 9 d4 ♖ce4!, which in a subtle sense weakens the d5-pawn, preferring instead 9 ♖c4, reserving the d-pawn for the more important if seemingly modest role of supporting this bishop in due course. Seirawan then suggests 9...b5 10 ♖xb5 ♖xd5 but again after simply 11 ♖f3, Black's decent piece activity rather lacks targets.

6 ♖c3 g6 7 ♖f3 ♖g7 8 ♖c4 (D)



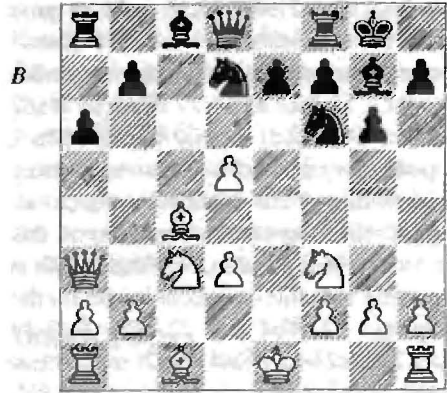
8...a6

The slightly more flexible choice is 8...0-0, when the older main line 9 ♗b3 permits Black additional plausible sources of counterplay such as 9...♖c5!? 10 ♗a3 ♖ce4 or the analogous 9...a6!?, which then all but forces 10 a4. However, in view of this 9 d3! appears to be the best there too. Then Black can also consider 9...♖b6 10 ♗b3 in conjunction with either 10...♖g4 or 10...♖f5. However, this is very similar to the note to Black's 10th move below. The difference is whether it is better to have the a-pawn on a7 or a6. An extra tempo or a weakening of the b6-knight?

9 d3 0-0 10 ♗a3!? (D)

This is the modern way. White had to meet the threat of 10...b5 11 ♖xb5 ♖b6!.

The queen is well-placed to exert pressure on e7 and since 10...♗b8 is well met by 11 ♖f4! it is not easy for Black to 're-threaten' ...b5 in the immediate future. However, the queen can also

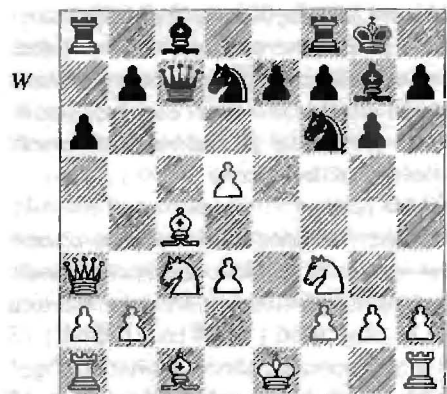


become rather cut off from the action and clearly threats of ...b5-b4 are a medium-term worry.

10...b6

This appears to be about shelving the goal of the more ambitious push of the b-pawn but is in fact keeping it very much in mind. Taking the b6-square from the knight all but requires that a further ...b5 must be the goal. As before, Black can also consider 10...♖b6 since here too 11 ♗b3 is the only way to defend the d-pawn. Then after 11...♖g4! 12 ♖c5 ♗c7!? the inclusion of ...a6 cuts both ways. After 13 ♖xg4 ♖xg4 14 h3 ♖e5 White misses the fact that he has no ♖b5 move but the extra option 13 0-0!? gives relevance to the weakness to the knight on b6.

However, there is a further option, which more clearly plays to the strengths of ...a6, in 10...♗c7!? (D).



If White cannot improve on 11 0-0 ♖e5 12 ♖xe5 ♗xe5 (threatening ...♖g4) 13 h3, then

the new idea 13...b5! will make this line quite appealing for the defender. 14 ♖xb5 ♙xh3! looks somewhat perilous for White, while after 14 ♖b3 ♙f5! 15 ♙e3 a5 16 d4 ♜b8! 17 ♜xe7 ♜e8 18 ♜c5 a4 19 ♙d1 ♜c8 20 ♜e7 a3! Black developed a very powerful initiative by using the vulnerability of his opponent's queen, always a potential source of counterplay in this line, in Siebrecht-Burmakin, Seville 2007. It is worth staying with this a moment longer for the fine sequence 21 ♜b4 ♙f8 22 ♜b3 ♙d3 23 ♜e1 ♙c4 24 ♜c2 b4 25 ♙a4 ♙xa2! with a clear advantage.

11 0-0 ♙b7 12 ♜e1 ♜e8 13 ♙g5 (D)

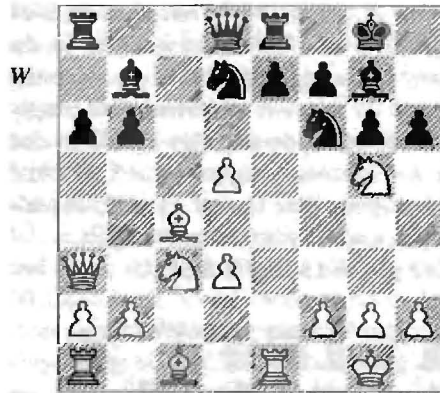


This move has been integral to the whole revival of this set-up for White. Having coaxed the black rook to e8, White uses the weakened f7-square to reintroduce the d6 idea, with the added bonus that ♙ge4 may make the recovery of the pawn there no simple matter either. Whether an enduring challenge or not, there is little doubt that this move has enriched a position where previously d5 had been written off as impossible to defend.

13...h6!? (D)

Black sees in White's last move the chance for play on the central dark squares and hence switches plans. Continuing with the planned 13...b5 14 ♖b3 ♙b6 (14...♜b6 15 ♜b4!) 15 d6! e6 is also possible, although after 16 ♙ge4 ♙xc4 17 ♙xc4, 17...♙xe4 18 dxe4 ♙e5 19 ♜d1 ♜h4 20 f4!? enables White to keep his d-pawn in quite a dangerous incarnation, while Megaranto's sneaky 17...a5!?, meeting 18 ♙g5

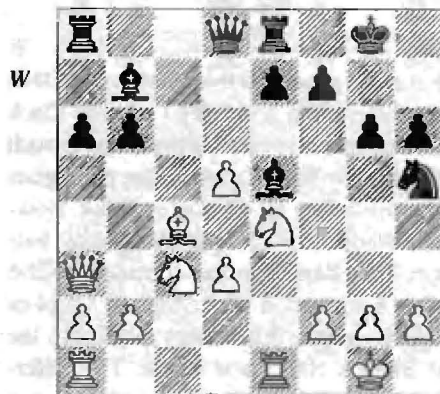
with the calm 18...b4 19 ♙xd8 ♜exd8, is less convincing after 18 ♜c5! with ♙g5 still in the offing.



14 ♙ge4 ♙e5 15 ♙f4 ♙h5!?

Azmaiparashvili's dynamic style is well suited to the demands of the variation. It is important to avoid any materialistic impulses here since 15...♙xd5?! 16 ♙xd5 ♙xd5 17 ♙xd5 ♜xd5 18 ♙c3! ♜d6 19 ♜a4! leaves Black subject to a most unpleasant pin.

16 ♙xe5 ♙xe5 (D)

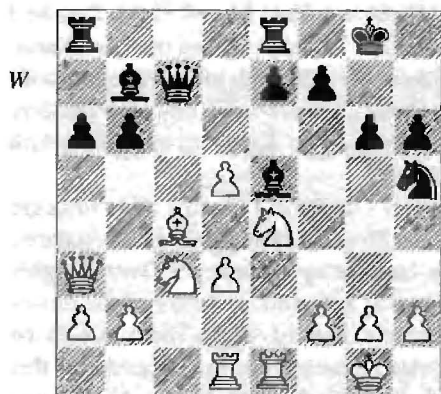


17 ♜ad1

White has an interesting alternative here in yet another d6-based idea. Indeed with 17 d6 ♙xd6 (17...exd6 18 ♜b3! ♜e7 19 ♙d5 initiates positionally attractive exchanges and promises a firm grip on d5) 18 ♙xd6 ♜xd6 19 ♜xd6 exd6 20 ♙d5! ♙xd5 21 ♙xd5 White seeks more than mere positional gain, although after

21...♟g7 22 ♘xb6 ♜xe1+ 23 ♜xe1 ♜b8 24 ♗a4 ♜f4 25 ♜d1 ♜d5 26 g3 ♜c8 the pawn won is far from trivial to convert into victory. G.Jones-Woodward, British Ch, Douglas 2005.

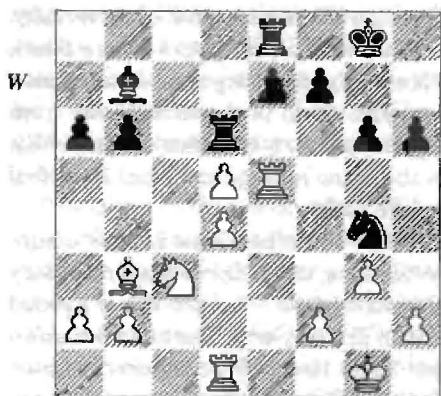
17...♞c7 (D)



18 g3

There is still something to be said for 18 d6!?. Once Black brings his rook to d8, the sting is taken out of this idea and the defence of d5 becomes much more problematic.

18...♜ad8 19 ♖b3 ♜f6 20 d4 ♗d6 21 ♗xd6 ♞xd6 22 ♞xd6 ♜xd6 23 ♜e5 ♗g4! (D)



24 ♜e4

Fritz likes 24 h3!? here, and the idea is attractive. However, he does have a tendency to be slightly lavish with other people's pieces these days!

24...♜f6 25 ♜e5

Recognizing that if d5 falls without compensatory gain, it can be White who is thrown on the defensive. Hence the peaceful conclusion.

25...♗g4 1/2-1/2

Conclusion

My feeling is that the Panov-Botvinnik Attack deserves rather better than the elite's relative neglect of it in recent times. At the same time though, I also sense that Black has available a choice of reasonably viable systems to suit varying styles.

5...e6 is unlikely itself to become a victim of fashion since the ideas on combating an isolated queen's pawn which it embodies have such a broad applicability and respectability across opening theory. The most that can plausibly be claimed is that 6...♖b4!? (Game 19) perhaps offers greater strategic variety than 6...♗e7 and that Black tends to enjoy slightly more active play. At the same time I well understand the urge to look elsewhere.

5...♗c6 (Game 20) has the drawback that the main line is highly theoretical, but at the same time Black is not clearly worse in the endgame, while deviations such as 6 ♗g5 offer opportunities for interesting and creative responses.

It is 5...g6 (Game 21) which I would dearly love to make work. However, where White both seizes a pawn with 6 ♞b3 and then returns it judiciously, Black can end up with a drier defence than in some ostensibly less ambitious lines.

Lastly, 2 c4 has plenty to offer for both sides. Here the best advice would seem to be to foster a keen awareness of comparisons with the rest of the chapter, while avoiding the naïve assumption that comparable solutions will always be best.

7 Miscellaneous Systems for White

It is quite standard for an opening book to close with an 'odds and ends' chapter in which those systems that somehow do not quite fit in receive (more or less) their share of attention. In this case though, it seems worth pointing out that given both the variety of plausible systems available for White against the Caro-Kann and the desire to keep this book within manageable limits, some of the systems which find themselves here are a bit more worthy than usual. In other words, though these variations, with periodic exceptions, do not find much favour at the top level, they each have a bit of sting, and their considerably greater following at lower levels is not entirely without merit.

It would be surprising if it were otherwise. Take the Exchange Variation of Game 23 for example. Whilst I must admit to having few doubts that the most challenging 4th move after the exchange of pawns is really 4 c4! (see Chapter 6) it can hardly be disputed that the structure itself has pedigree. For in terms of pawn-formation, this is simply the Exchange Queen's Gambit in reverse, one of the soundest of black defences which has reliably attracted top-level adherents across the generations. True, it could be argued that the goals of Black and White respectively are just too different and that experience suggests that the 'extra tempo' in many reversed openings often results in little more than an 'easier equality' for White. This is part of the story which explains why it has not caught on with the elite. Still, White kicks off with 4 ♕d3, preventing one easy development of his opponent's queen's bishop and sets about rendering its alternatives problematic too. Moreover, the kingside play which can be a central goal for Black in the Exchange Queen's Gambit is certainly easier to organize here, while the minority attack features less automatically when the player must organize it with a tempo less. I do not wish to overstate

this. White can do better against the Caro-Kann, but the defender still needs to treat this line with respect. After all, there was a time when Bobby Fischer himself was happy to take the white pieces here.

Similarly Game 24. I like the clear strategic plan which Black can pursue on the dark squares, but my last outing against the Two Knights Variation was a reminder of some of the move-order complexities of which Black would be well advised to be cognisant. Embedded in this game is also a discussion of a few further systems and move-order issues arising from the Two Knights. Among White's other second-move alternatives are a few eccentric lines which can largely be handled with common sense. However, lurking here too is 2 d3. I would point to very real similarities between the various 'King's Indian Attack' variations which suggest a value to studying them as an entity apart. However, even here, 1...c6 does have distinctive features which I have tried to draw attention to. This is another system where Black should not be afraid so long as he comes armed with a minimal level of preparation, but from White's perspective, it is further evidence that there is still some mileage to be had from less well trodden paths.

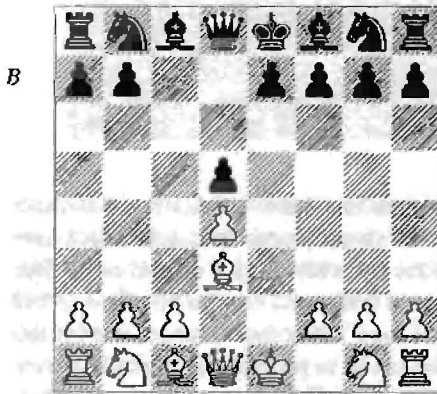
The Fantasy Variation (Game 25) is of course of quite different stock. It has one profoundly admirable motivation – to keep White's proud centre intact in a way which no other 3rd move can aspire to do. However, its drawbacks, as we shall see in the notes to the game, are not too difficult to tease out either. Still, its appeal among those looking for a complex struggle and for ways to deviate from well-trodden paths can also be heartily applauded – hence Morozevich's interest. Certainly this is another variation where Black can hardly afford to be ignorant of some important basic ideas, since White's system must be treated with respect.

Game 23

Alexander Semeniuk – Denis Evseev

Russian Team Ch, Ekaterinburg 2002

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 cxd5 4 ♖d3 (D)

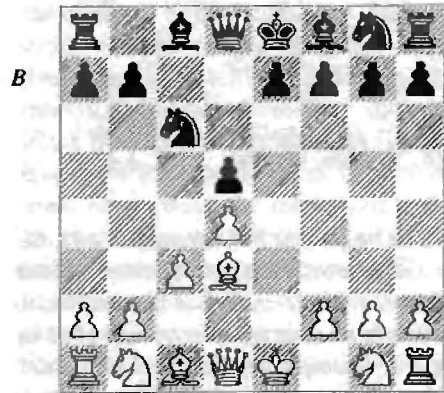


Aside from 4 c4(!), this is clearly the most precise way for White to handle the Exchange Variation. In general terms, d3 is the most aggressive square for the bishop. But specifically, the move fits well with the priority of causing Black a headache over the deployment of his light-squared bishop. Desirable in itself, this also has useful spin-offs. Since Black will be well advised to avoid playing ...e6, blocking this piece in, he needs to find a solution to the 'c8-bishop question' before he can attend to the f8-bishop.

This is part of the reason why 4 ♖f3, allowing 4...♗g4!, seems to be a rather imprecise treatment. Surprisingly, there are an enormous number of games on my database either with 4 ♖f3 or at least an early ♖f3 by White in the Exchange Variation, so the point that this cannot be critical is worth making. Of course there is nothing wrong with White's position in that case – an early ...♗g4 leads effectively to a genuine reversed Exchange Queen's Gambit rather than anything worse. But whereas the move ...♗f5 for Black in that case often represents easy equality and early exchanges, the equivalent move ♗f4 for White here is in danger of meaning just the same. Black will indeed play

...♗d6, but for White seeking the initiative, such exchanges are much less enticing.

4...♙e6 5 e3 (D)

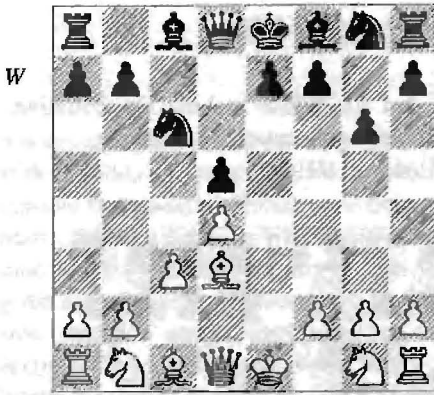


5...♙f6

The battle for the e5-square is an important feature of this opening and there may very well be circumstances in which Black is not averse to freeing his position with ...e5 even at the expense of an isolated queen's pawn. However, he does not want simplification to accompany such a break and here 5...e5?! 6 dxe5 ♖xe5 7 ♗e2!? ♗e7 8 ♗b5+ is one route by which White can reach an easy structural edge whilst allowing scant counterplay.

If Black is indeed content to reach such a structure, then 5...♗c7!? is a much more promising way of going about it. He prevents ♗f4 for the moment, retains the option to meet ♖f3 with ...♗g4 and can counter the thematic 6 ♖e2 with the interesting manoeuvre 6...♗g4!? 7 f3 ♗d7. This looks a bit curious, but the hope is that when the ...e5 break comes, the e3-square will prove to be somewhat weakened. After the plausible sequence 8 ♗f4 e5 9 dxe5 ♖xe5 10 0-0 ♗d6 11 ♖d4 ♖e7 I quite like Black's active play. At least I am sure that White should be less than delighted to be committed to the f3 advance.

Yet another idea, which may have an ultimate ...e5 break in mind, is 5...g6 (D).



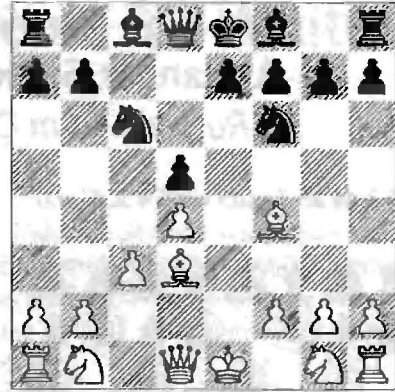
This can be played in conjunction with the simple ...d6, most likely transposing to a later note. However, after, say, 6 ♘f4 Black can also focus much more directly upon control of e5 by playing, for example, 6...♙g7 7 ♘f3 ♖h6! (note that ...♙g4 loses its force in conjunction with ...g6; the dark-squared bishop tends to be 'good' only in a very technical sense and its colleague should not be traded off lightly) 8 0-0 f6!? 9 ♖e1 ♘f7. This plan tends to work very well if White reacts too passively. His minor pieces are rather unfortunately placed if Black can painlessly effect the ...e5 break. However, I feel that by getting his blow in first in the centre with 10 c4!, White should have a pleasant game. Whether Black captures on c4 or supports his d-pawn with 10...e6, it is at any rate clear that ...e5 is not coming so fast now. It is also worth mentioning that it will be desirable to add to the pressure against d5 by developing the b1-knight to c3. In the specific case of the ...f6 and ...d6 plan, this seems to speak strongly for this move-order, particularly for White avoiding an early ♘d2.

6 ♘f4 (D)

Once again, White is right in this line to ignore Lasker's famous maxim 'knights before bishops'. His king's knight must head for e5, but should continue to avoid the ...♙g4 pin. His queen's knight belongs on d2, so the bishop first escapes to avoid being blocked in behind it.

6...♙g4!?

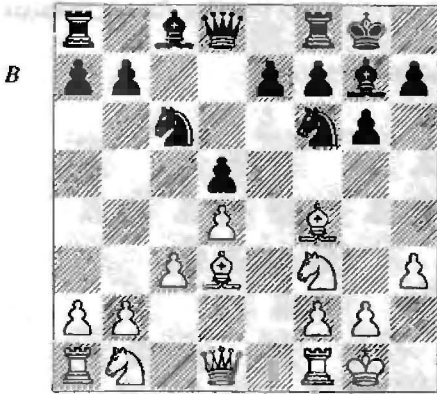
B



The main-line status of this move is proof that such a development does not always have to wait for the white knight to land on f3 first. Once again there is no need to be afraid of 7 f3 since the most likely route mapped out for this bishop is via h5 to g6 in any case, aiming to exchange off the d3-bishop, a piece pivotal to White's kingside ambitions. There is a slight weakening of b7 to consider too – reminiscent of so many 1 d4 d5 openings where Black should always develop his queen's bishop with one eye on this potential problem. However, practice suggests that this is quite manageable in the current case, an impression which the course of the game confirms.

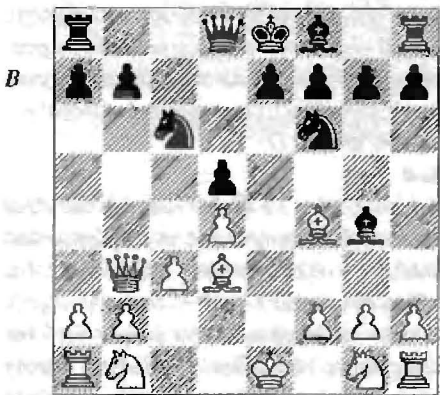
The fianchetto 6...g6 is a viable option here too. My principal memory of a good deal of experience playing this line is that everybody tended to assume that Black's position was worse, whereas objectively things were reasonably under control. After 7 ♘f3 ♙g7 8 0-0 0-0 White must decide whether he is afraid of the idea ...d5. For example, 9 ♖bd2 ♖h5! 10 ♙e3 ♗d6 looks reasonably active for Black, who may get to play ...d4, although the once-recommended 10...f5?! looks terribly loose against the simple side-step 11 ♖b3. If White is not happy about ...d5 then he will play 9 h3 (D), creating the h2-square for the bishop to remain on its proud diagonal.

Then the second and rather surprising dimension of Black's plan is revealed. He should play 9...♙f5! (which incidentally is playable against 9 ♖bd2 as well) with the idea that after 10 ♙xf5 gxf5, the open g-file and even more



importantly the possibility to embed a knight on e4 should guarantee a decent share of the play. After 11 ♖e5! I became quite fond of the idea 11...♖c8!?, always intending to recapture on c6 with the rook and preparing ...♗e4 next move. It might appear that e4 is not the most durable outpost ever since White has the option of evicting it by f3. However, in that case the knight often simply retreats and ...♗h5 in turn becomes a source of play. In short, the line is a good deal more dynamic than it appears at first sight. Of course, White can decline to capture on f5. This is not so bad, since the g7-bishop can become a bit stymied by the stable pawns on c3 and d4 if the structure remains unmodified. However, Black has solved the perennial problem of the c8-bishop and it is hard to believe he has real problems there.

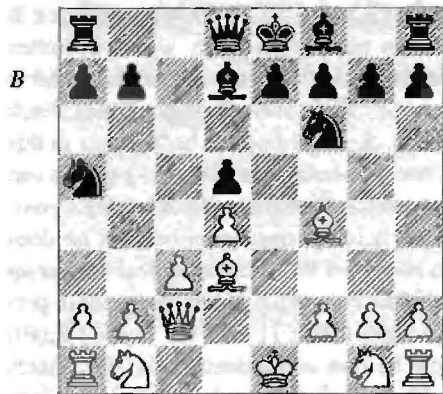
7 ♗b3 (D)



7...♗d7

This is one of three reasonable ways of defending b7. The text-move is not only about playing to a more natural-looking square than the alternative queen move (7...♗c8). Black may also be keen to support the move ...♗d6 in due course. At the same time though, he is playing his queen to a square where she is likely to be vulnerable to attack. The strongpoint (e5) is fundamental to White's plans in any case and the prospect of hitting d7 reinforces this. So the choice is by no means easy. The necessary insight is that the two queen moves are respectively integral to two quite plausible but fundamentally different plans. With the text-move Black is willing to exchange his light-squared bishop off for a knight. With 7...♗c8, he more often has in mind the manoeuvre ...♗g4-h5-g6, exchanging off White's valuable attacking bishop, a device to which I have already alluded. In addition there is 7...♗a5, which can be associated with developing play on the queenside, but is clearly vulnerable to claims that it abandons the coming battle for e5. Concretely we should consider:

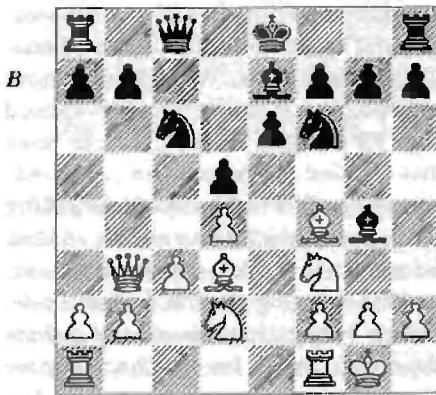
a) 7...♗a5 8 ♗a4+ ♗d7 9 ♗c2 (D) leaves the black pieces looking a bit dishevelled.



It was Fischer's insight that any early ...♗b6 after this, seeking a desirable trade of the light-squared bishops, can usually be well met with a4, the weakness of b3 notwithstanding. More recent attempts to treat the position with 9...g6 do not really change the assessment either. After 10 ♗f3 ♗g7 11 0-0 0-0 I would be tempted to make room for the bishop to stay on its fine

diagonal with the simple 12 h3!?. Black can try to make something of the e4-square as a base for some hopes on the queenside, but White's enhanced control of e5 looks the more significant.

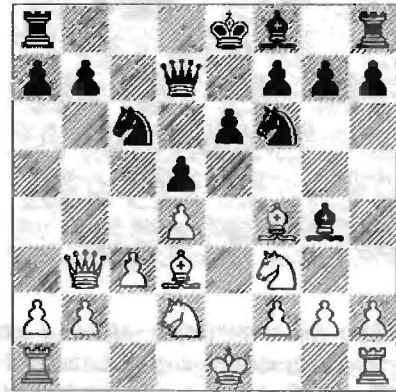
b) 7...♖c8!?, by contrast, has retained a very respectable reputation. After 8 ♘d2 e6 9 ♙gf3 ♙e7 10 0-0 (D) Black faces an interesting question of move-order and can probably ease his task considerably by treading with care:



B

text-move reinforces the case for his 'bishops before knights' strategy.

8...e6 9 ♘gf3 (D)



9...♙xf3!

As discussed above, it is here that the distinction between the approaches associated with 7...♗d7 and 7...♗c8 becomes finally clear. Black is happy to cede the 'minor exchange' (a bishop for a knight) in order to develop freely and to challenge his opponent's f4-bishop, which may be technically 'bad' in terms of the overall pawn-formation, but given its raking diagonal is clearly in concrete terms anything but.

10 ♘xf3 ♙d6!

An important element in Black's plan. He is content to play with a very respectable knight against a bishop, but the bishop-pair is a much less welcome adversary and he wisely moves to exchange part of it off. There is another very important dimension to consider too though. As we shall see, Black's play constitutes a genuine pawn sacrifice and its acceptance is a possibility which needs to be regarded seriously.

11 ♙xd6 ♗xd6 (D)

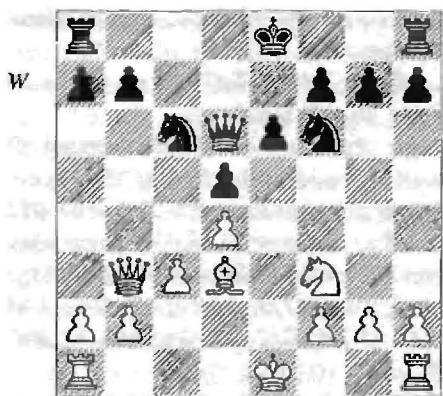
12 0-0

It turns out after 12 ♗xb7 ♖b8 13 ♗a6 that the pawn sacrifice is genuine in the sense that 13...♖xb2? 14 ♙b5! is very unpleasant for Black. However, after 13...0-0!, the respectability of Black's compensation for a pawn also becomes apparent. 14 b4 ♖b6 15 ♗a4 e5! hardly bears consideration with the white king still in the centre, while Black's activity is also very appealing after 14 ♙b5 ♖b6 15 ♗a4 ♘e7!

The natural 10...0-0 is quite playable, but the immediate 11 ♘e5! is slightly awkward, since 11...♙xe5 12 dx5 ♘d7 13 ♗c2! forces Black to move either his g- or h-pawn, which frustrates his intended ...♙h5-g6 manoeuvre. 11...♙h5 is better, but 12 ♗c2! still virtually obliges Black to play 12...♙g6. Ceding the bishop-pair in this way is not disastrous – the doubled g-pawns can even somewhat strengthen Black's king's position – but it is not optimal either and he does need to beware of White's major pieces lining up on the h-file. Hence 10...♙h5! seems more precise. The idea is that 11 ♘e5 (or 11 ♗c2 ♙g6!) can now be met conveniently with 11...♙xe5, when 12 dx5 ♘d7 just looks a shade anti-positional in the absence of a serious threat to h7. After 12 ♙xe5 0-0 White needs to decide upon a plan. My sympathy would probably be with one involving ♖ae1 and f4, meeting ...♙g6 with ♗c2 and trying to advance the f-pawn further rather than exchanging on g6.

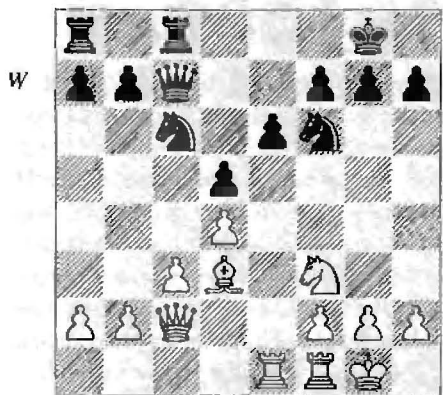
8 ♘d2

Of course White needs to support the f3-square before he can play a knight there. The



(threatening 16...♖fb8) 16 b3 ♘e4 17 ♖c1 ♜c8 18 ♙d3 ♚g6!, Morozevich-Oll, FIDE Knock-out, Groningen 1997. So the only plausible way to keep the pawn is to head for the ugly 14 0-0 ♜b6 15 ♗a3 ♗xa3 16 bxa3 ♘a5 17 ♜ab1 ♚d7 18 ♜b5 ♜xb5 19 ♙xb5 ♚b6 20 ♚d2 ♜c8 21 ♖c1 ♖c7 22 ♜f1 ♚b7 23 ♜e2 ♚d6, when Black should have enough weaknesses to target to hold the balance comfortably, A.Filipenko-Zelčić, Pula 2000.

12...0-0 13 ♜ael ♗c7 14 ♗c2 ♜fc8 (D)



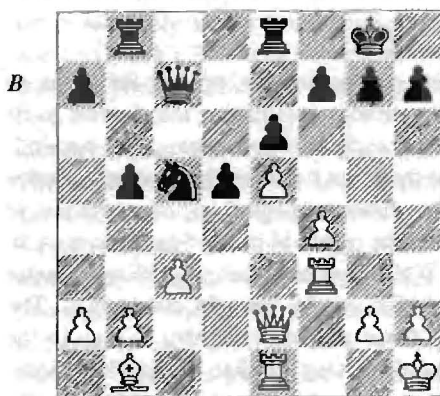
It is time to take stock of this rather well balanced position. Although White may claim that the single 'minor exchange' (bishop vs knight) constitutes some gain, the removal of the bishop-pair has significantly eased the defender's task. What will really count here are the respective sides' chances of drumming up some play on the wings where they are in the ascendancy. This pawn-structure tends to offer

Black queenside prospects since by playing ...b5 and ...b4 he can use his pawns to create weaknesses in the opponent's pawn-majority – the so-called 'minority attack' – which also explains the choice of rook he played to c8. White will still hope to use his control of e5 to spearhead some kind of kingside attack. If he can get in moves such as ♘e5, f4 and either ♜f3-h3 or the further advance of the f-pawn, he may generate real threats. For the moment though, Black's last move threatens 15...♚b4, so White side-steps the pin.

15 ♗e2 ♜ab8 16 ♜h1 ♜e8!?

Black would like to be ready to exchange immediately in reply to the coming ♘e5, before this piece can be supported by the f-pawn. This apparently curious rook move is then prophylaxis against the further advance of White's f-pawn once the structure is modified. If this looks a bit too defensive, it is worth noting how the changed structure does in turn accelerate Black's counter-chances.

17 ♘e5 ♚xe5 18 dxе5 ♚d7 19 f4 ♘c5 20 ♙b1 b5 21 ♜f3!?



21...g6!

That this move is a wise precaution is confirmed by the variation 21...a5?! 22 ♙xh7+! ♜xh7 23 ♜h3+ ♜g8 24 ♗h5 ♜f8 25 ♗g5!, when Black has nothing better than 25...♜g8, giving his opponent the choice between further plausible attacking play with 26 ♜g3!? or an immediate draw with 26 ♗h5. Since I like Black's position, this line seems to me well worth avoiding. The judgment that Black's

queenside initiative will survive the obligatory retreat of his knight to duties defending h7, seems a sound one too.

22 ♖d2 a5 23 ♜h3 ♘d7! 24 ♙c2 ♘f8 25 ♜d3 ♜ec8 26 f5

Frustration in the face of the impregnable wall which Black has constructed is understandable. However, after the coming simplification, the e-pawn, which this move weakens, becomes a clear target.

26...exf5 27 ♜xd5 b4! 28 ♙b3 bxc3 29 ♖xc3 ♖xc3 30 bxc3 ♜xc3 31 ♜xa5 ♜b7 32 ♘g1 ♘g7 33 ♜d1 ♜e7 34 ♘f2 g5!? 35 ♜d2 ♘g6 36 ♜dd5?

A passive response and the first stage of a process by which White is guilty of abandoning his king in order to protect his e-pawn. It would have been much better to pin-point the drawback to Black's 34...g5!? and attack the newly-

weakened f-pawn by 36 ♙c2!, with excellent drawing chances.

36...♘f4 37 ♜db5? ♜d7! 38 g3 ♘h3+ 39 ♘e2 ♘g1+ 40 ♘f1 ♜d2?

A tragic slip. Black could have rounded off his excellent build-up by finding the exceptionally beautiful sequence 40...♜c1+! 41 ♘f2 ♜d2+ 42 ♘e3 and now 42...♘f3!! threatening mate on c3. Even 43 ♜c5 does not stave off the white king's demise in view of 43...♜e1+! 44 ♘xf3 g4+ 45 ♘f4 ♜f2+ 46 ♘g5 h6+ 47 ♘h5 ♜xh2#.

By contrast, the text-move allows White to simplify the position, after which his opponent's initiative poses no further significant threat to his king.

41 ♜c5 ♜xc5 42 ♜xc5 ♘f3 43 h3 g4 44 hxp4 fxp4 45 e6 fxe6 46 ♙xe6 ♘h2+ 47 ♘e1 ♘f3+ 1/2-1/2

Game 24

Mark Paragua – Viktor Bologan

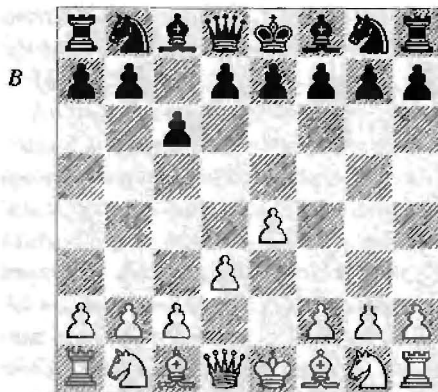
FIDE Knockout, Tripoli 2004

1 e4 c6 2 ♘c3

There can be various motives for trying to develop without committing the d-pawn to its customary early advance. It avoids the possibility that the pawn itself will be a target – similar thoughts have motivated experimentation in avoiding the move d4 in the Scandinavian too. Also, White may be hoping to utilize the extra piece which can be brought out instead. The first of these arguments is also at play in the version of the King's Indian Attack (KIA) initiated by the seemingly modest move 2 d3 (D). Black has various possible set-ups here, but it has never been clear to me which of these is the most appealing. I shall briefly outline some of the more promising:

After 2...d5 3 ♘d2 Black can try:

a) 3...g6 4 g3 ♙g7 5 ♙g2 e5 6 ♘gf3 ♘e7 7 0-0 0-0 looks solid enough. Indeed, in some positions with mutual fianchettoes on the kingside there can be greater flexibility and chances of advancing the f-pawn based upon having a knight on e7 rather than f6. However, in this

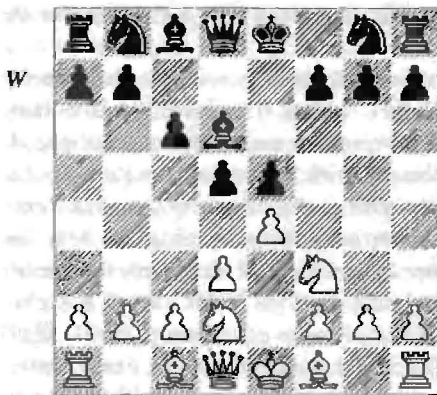


case, with the c6-square blocked, it has always seemed to me that e5 is a bit vulnerable to attack. In other words, Black's system does not seem to me to 'fit' ideally with the Caro-Kann's defining move! The continuation 8 ♜e1 ♘d7 9 b4! seems to pinpoint this problem and, for example, 9...a5 10 bxa5 ♖xa5 11 ♙b2 d4 12 a4 ♖c7 13 c3 e5 14 exd4 cxd4 15 ♙a3 ♜e8 16 ♘c4 (Bruzon-Y.Gonzalez, Cuban Ch, Santa

Clara 2000) seems to exemplify well the potential difficulties in this line. Perhaps for this reason those thinking of fianchettoing should avoid 2...d5, perhaps preferring 2...e5 or even 2...g6!?

b) 3...♘f6 or 3...♗c7 can be played with the intention of a quick ...♙g4, a development which has a respectable place in the KIA in general and blends well with 1...c6. Neither of these is especially popular, but 3...♘f6 in particular seems to me quite viable.

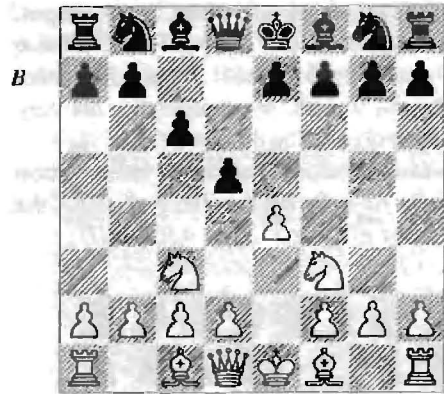
c) 3...e5 4 ♘g3 ♙d6 (D) is probably still the most straightforward and popular variation.



Black's pieces develop reasonably harmoniously after 5 g3 ♘f6 6 ♙g2 0-0 7 0-0 ♞e8 8 ♞e1 ♙g4!? 9 c3 ♘bd7 10 ♗c2 ♗c7, for example. However, the position of the bishop on d6 does give White a couple of early possibilities to change the pace. Neither is especially scary, but Black should be aware of 5 d4!?, which is best met with 5...cxd4 6 exd5 cxd5! (it is worth keeping control of the c4- and e4-squares even at the expense of taking on an isolated queen's pawn) 7 ♘xd4 ♘c6 8 ♘2f3, when either 8...♘f6 or 8...♙ge7 leads to a decent IQP position. Perhaps 5 ♗e2!? is slightly trickier since the plausible 5...♘f6 actually runs into a degree of trouble after 6 d4! dxe4 7 ♘xe5 ♙f5 8 h3 h5 9 ♘dc4! ♙e7 10 ♙d2! with the plan of 0-0-0, ♘e3 and c4 and very pleasant piece coordination. However, rather than 5...♗e7, when 6 d4 will likely lead to an IQP *without* queens, the pawn sacrifice 5...♙e7!? looks tempting to me since 6 exd5 cxd5 7 ♘xe5 0-0 followed by

...♘c6 offers enticing piece-play for a pawn. This has rarely been tried, but Rustem Dautov has been one of the pioneers, an implicit endorsement to be taken seriously.

2...d5 3 ♘f3 (D)



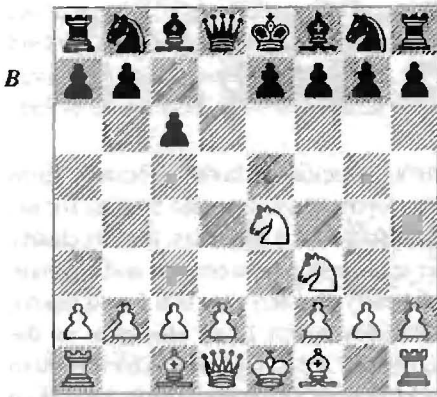
White's intention is both to benefit from rapid development and to retain options for his d-pawn. In spite of the latter aim, there is clearly a greater relationship between this and the main line of the early chapters than that found among other relatively minor lines. However, as the notes to Black's 3rd move show, if he is keen to steer the play back into such territory he should be well aware of some key points of difference too. What does White lose by this move-order? The significant additional idea which Black gains has been an evident feature of an early ♘f3 throughout the book. This piece can be pinned by ...♙g4, which with certain pawn-structures – notably those associated with an exchange on d5 and the move ♘c3 already blocking White's c-pawn – can sap a good deal of the dynamism from the white position. It is incumbent on White to ensure that any such exchange on f3 occurs in the context of an altogether more flexible pawn deployment.

3...♙g4!?

I have always found this both logical and appealing. Moreover, there is something to say against each of the alternatives. Any temptation to attempt space-gaining through 3...d4?! should be resisted. Black's first move fits poorly with this kind of thing and after 4 ♘e2 c5, either 5 c3 or maybe just 5 ♘g3 followed by ♙c4 gives

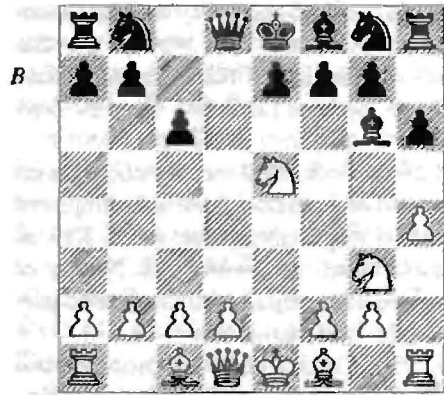
White nice light-square play. For fellow fans of comparative openings, it is worth noting that he is in fact something like two tempi up on the 'Knights' Tango! Neither does 3...♞f6?! inspire confidence. After 4 e5 ♞e4 (after 4...♞fd7 Black is likely to reach some kind of French in which the move ...c5 will come in two stages, with consequent loss of tempo) 5 ♞e2! ♖b6 6 d4 c5 7 dxc5! ♜xc5 8 ♞ed4! White will answer 8...♞c6 with 9 ♖b5, re-emphasizing his very useful control over the d4-square.

However, there is bound to be a temptation for some to return to the familiar pastures of the main line by playing 3...dxe4 4 ♞xe4 (D).



Is this advisable? For those who are happy to accept the doubled pawns which characterized the play in Chapter 3, the answer is a fairly unqualified yes. After 4...♞f6!? 5 ♞xf6+, there is a strong case for regarding the early ♞f3 as none too stern a test of 5...exf6!? and perhaps even as a slight inaccuracy against 5...gxf6 too. However, whether an improved version or not, these lines are still not to everybody's taste. An equally resounding answer can be given as to why 4...♖f5?! is particularly inappropriate here. The problem is that after 5 ♞g3 ♖g6 (5...♖g4!?) 6 h4 h6 7 ♞e5! (D) White very profitably dispenses with an early d-pawn advance immediately to lay siege to the poor bishop on g6.

Indeed, things are still worse than they look. 7...♖h7 8 ♜h5! g6 9 ♖c4! is acutely embarrassing. After 9...e6 10 ♜e2, Black still needs to attend to the threat of ♞xf7 while the bishop on h7 has been incarcerated with none of the



prospects for release which we witnessed in Game 4.

To pursue our analogy with the main line a little further, whilst it is certainly true that 4...♞d7 involves no such major catastrophe, I am inclined to think that some Caro-Kann books have been a bit negligent in implying that there are no importantly distinctive features here. In fact, after 5 ♖c4 ♞gf6 6 ♞eg5! e6, the seemingly tempting sacrifice 7 ♞xf7 ♞xf7 8 ♞g5+ ♖c7 9 ♞xe6 is not so convincing after 9...♜a5 10 0-0 ♞c5! (Minasian-Burmakin, Omsk 1996, but after the quiet but menacing 7 ♜e2!, Black must be very careful. White is again threatening to sacrifice and the natural 7...♞b6? (analogous with the main-line response in Chapter 2) is now powerfully met with 8 ♞e5!, when f7 is in real trouble. Black can instead limit the damage with 7...♞d5, but this does not form part of his plan, and will complicate his task of developing his remaining pieces fluently and of implementing his key ...c5 break.

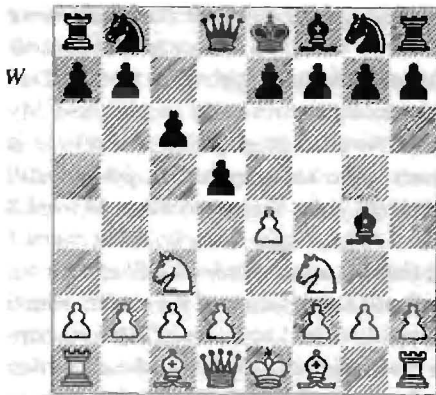
Back to the main line, and Black's soundest choice 3...♖g4 (D).

4 h3!

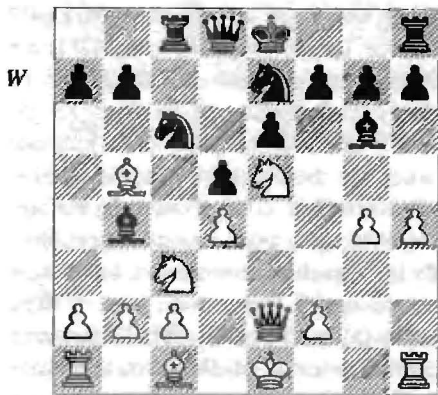
'Putting the question' to the bishop immediately is right. Black has a choice between ceding the bishop-pair or entering a highly forcing, complicated sequence.

4...♞xf3

The most common reply and in my opinion the most practical. The strategy of exchanging a bishop off and then deploying the centre pawns on squares which maximize the scope of the remaining bishop has a respectable pedigree.



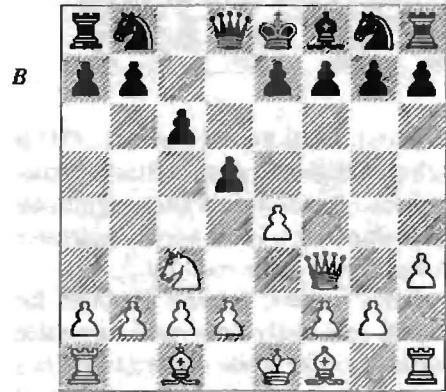
However, retaining the pin with 4...♙h5 might well have considerable appeal too, were it not for the risks associated with the sequence 5 exd5 cxd5 6 ♙b5+ ♚c6 7 g4 ♙g6 8 ♚c5 ♜c8 9 d4. At first it looks as though White's initiative is very dangerous. However, Black is not without resources and stands rather nicely positionally if he can soak up the pressure. After 9...e6, the most testing is 10 ♖e2! (since the immediate 10 h4 permits Black to play 10...f6 11 ♜xg6 hxg6, when it could be argued that White's pawn advances have weakened his kingside just as much as his opponent's, while as usual I have reservations about the conjunction of exd5 and d4 with a knight on c3) 10...♙b4! 11 h4 ♚e7! (D).



This move confirms that there is no longer any decent way to rescue the piece. However, practice shows that Black will get a bunch of pawns for it. The most critical line would seem

to be 12 h5 ♙e4 13 f3 0-0! 14 ♜xc6 ♜xc6 15 ♙e3! (15 ♙xc6 ♜xc6 16 fxex4 ♜xc3!) 15...♖f6 16 fxex4 ♜xd4 17 ♙xd4 ♖xd4 18 ♜d1 ♙xc3+ 19 bxc3 ♖xc3+ 20 ♚f1 dxe4 21 ♖xe4 and despite the somewhat exposed white king, Black has nothing better than to round up a third pawn for which he must accept the exchange of queens.

5 ♖xf3 (D)



5...♙f6

This looks perfectly natural and uncontroversial – at least, once it is appreciated that 6 e5?! would be rather out of keeping with White's strategy. He wants solid pawns on d3 and e4, not on d4 and e5 where the exchange of his f3-knight will merely have rendered the base of his centre – the d4-pawn – very vulnerable to attack. However, the decision between 5...♙f6 and 5...e6!?! is in fact a bit more complex. Traditionally the text-move has been preferred on the basis that 5...♙f6 6 d4?! dxe4 7 ♜xe4 ♖xd4! 8 ♙d3 ♚bd7! is an unsound pawn sacrifice, whereas 5...e6 6 d4?! dxe4 7 ♜xe4 ♖xd4 8 ♙d3 (D) is much more dangerous.

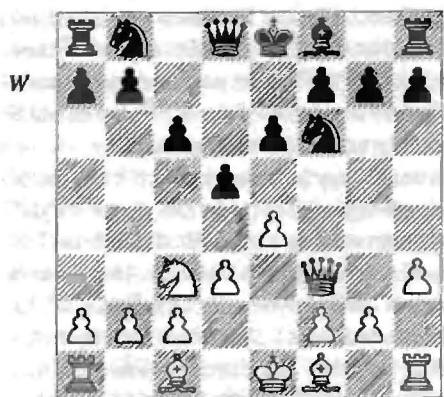
This much may be true, although a couple of recent games suggest that by playing 8...♜d7! anyway, introducing the defensive 'threat' of ...♚e5, Black has decent chances. He meets 9 ♙c3 with 9...♖d5!, when after 10 ♜d1 ♚e5 11 ♖f4 the immediate 11...♜xd3+?! merely helps White to marshal his forces. However, the alternative 11...♖a5+ 12 ♚e2 ♜g6!?! 13 ♜d6+ ♙xd6 14 ♖xd6 ♜d8 looked reasonably safe for Black in Azarov-Dreev, European Clubs Cup,



Panormo 2001, while the old move 11...f5!? is also far from refuted. In general Black's structure is so solid that despite White's significant lead in development it is not easy to guarantee something tangible at the end of it.

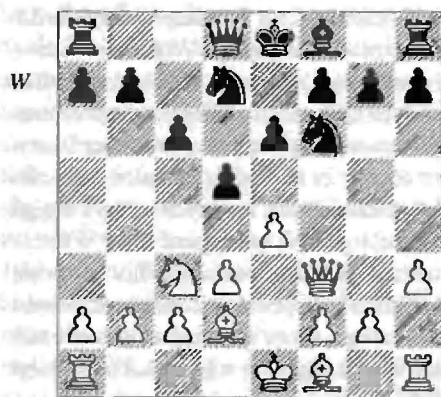
All of this matters, because although the knight on f6 only rarely finds itself vulnerable to an advance of the white e-pawn, there is a stronger case for concern at the advance of White's g-pawn, as we shall see in the note to White's 7th move. At least, if White is intending to proceed prosaically with 6 d3 in any case, then my preference for the more flexible 5...e6!? would be a strong one. In particular, the set-up 6 d3 Qd7 7 Qd2 g6!? followed by ...Qg7 and ...Qe7 strikes me as very flexible and takes much of the sting out of the advance of White's g-pawn.

6 d3 e6 (D)



7 g3!?

The marking may be harsh, but by allowing the pin which occurs in the game and passing up the chance for more aggressive g4-based approaches, the text-move looks second-best. My preference would I think be for 7 Qd2!. It is quite instructive to note that 7...Qb4 is still playable then, since the apparently awkward 8 e5 Qfd7 9 Qg4 is met with 9...Qf8!, when I suspect that the tempo-losses for Black are not as significant as the fixing of the centre, which is almost always bad news for White's bishop-pair in this variation. However, the exception may be 8 a3!? Qa5 9 Qg3!?, when it is easy to imagine that the bishop on a5 will be sorely missed from the kingside. Hence 7...Qbd7 (D) looks more flexible.



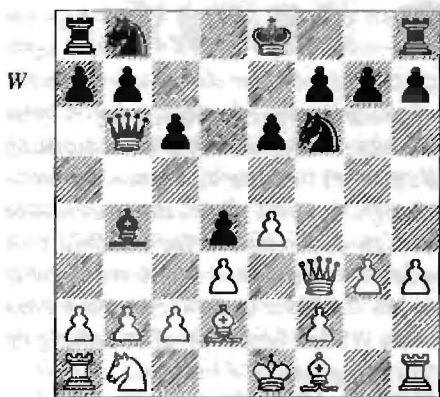
However, with the d7-square occupied, 8 g4!? gains in force. I discovered that 8...Qb4?! is not so suitable any more since after 9 a3 Qa5 10 0-0 d4 11 Qe2 Qxd2+ 12 Qxd2 c5 13 g5! Qg8 14 h4 White's spatial gains on the kingside count wherever the black king heads, Heinz-Wells, Pulvermühle 2005. However, the approach with 8...g6! again seems appropriate. Not only is a fianchetto introduced, but a plausible square on h5 is secured. After 9 Qg3 Qg7!?, 10 0-0 is met by 10...Qb6!?, threatening to capture twice on d4. However, there may be a case for 10 f4, perhaps even in conjunction with e5 given that Black has fianchettoed. White could also consider g2 or e2 for the queen instead. The position is rich and complex, but again, as I suggested in my earlier note, there remains a case for 5...e6!? since the

knight can be more comfortable on e7 than f6 in these positions.

7...♟b4 8 ♟d2 d4 9 ♞b1 ♚b6!? (D)

The merits of this move can be assessed by answering a simple question: can White soundly offer the b-pawn as he does in the game? If he cannot, then the text-move will all but force the move b3, which will assist Black's attempts to gain play on the dark squares following the coming desirable exchange of bishops. However, if he does not need to worry about b2, then this move looks curiously inappropriate. It would be strange indeed if so many games had featured 9...♚b6 10 b3, when White had available the b-pawn's profitable sacrifice.

Theoretically, Black need not worry here. The simple 9...♟xd2+ 10 ♞xd2 e5 11 ♟g2 c5 12 0-0 ♞c6, known from Fischer-Petrosian encounters back in the 1960s, should result in a decent enough 'King's Indian reversed' for Black, who benefits considerably from the exchange of dark-squared bishops.

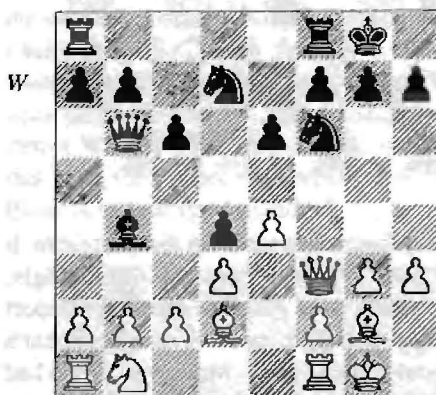


10 ♟g2! 0-0?!

This really seems to be a case of saying A but neglecting to follow up by saying B. To play 9...♚b6 and not to grab the pawn on b2 is frankly to be caught bluffing. Have the many players who have chosen the cautious 10 b3 done so out of inertia? It seems not for after 10 ♟g2 ♟xd2+! 11 ♞xd2 ♚xb2 12 0-0 0-0 13 ♞c4, Black is certainly well-advised to avoid 13...♚xc2? 14 a4! but 13...♚c3! seems to be OK. The point is that if White declines to play 14 a4 then he has to reckon with ...b5 (since an

advance of White's e-pawn can always be met with ...♞d5) whereas after 14 a4 ♞bd7 White does not have time to embarrass Black's queen further since ...♞b6! is an important resource for the defence.

11 0-0 ♞bd7 (D)



12 ♟c1!

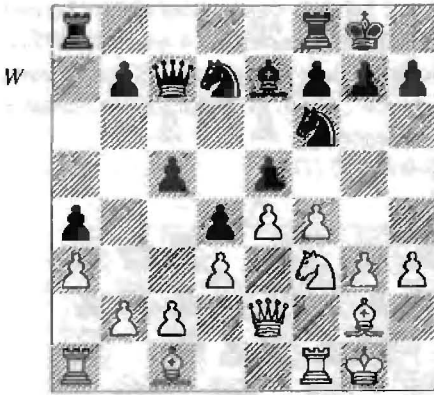
An excellent 'undeveloping move'. Black's fixing of the centre with 8...d4 made good sense in the context of an impending exchange of dark-squared bishops. However, battling against the bishop-pair may not be so straightforward. In the next few moves, we can see the blocked centre mapping out the respective advantages on the wings, White on the kingside, Black on the queenside. The play starts to resemble a reversed King's Indian, where, suffice it to say, the importance of the bishop which White wisely preserves for his kingside attack is well documented.

12...a5 13 ♚e2 a4 14 a3

Forestalling any further push of Black's a-pawn. For the moment at least, White can cover his b3- and c4-squares sufficiently, but even such an apparently small concession on the weaker side can have implications later on.

14...♟e7 15 f4 e5 16 ♞d2 ♚c7 17 ♞f3 c5 (D) 18 f5?

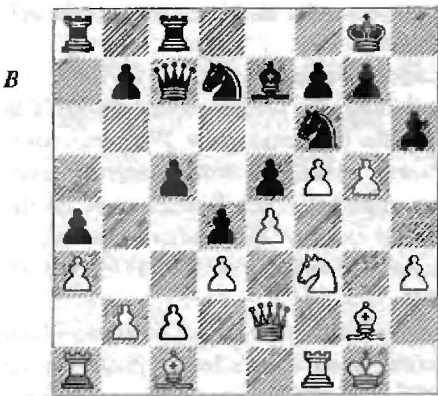
A very instructive moment and one which might make some King's Indian players sit up and take notice. This attack by means of a pawn-storm, advancing the f-pawn and then the g-pawn has of course a vital role to play in such positions. But somehow, Black's attack here is



relatively faster than usual on the queenside. It appears that White misses his other knight, which in analogous positions can often support the attack from g3, or keep the opponent's forces out from d2 or e1. Moreover, White had available the very decent alternative of first using his pieces to cause trouble on the kingside. 18 fxe5 19 Qxe5 19 Qxe5 20 f4 21 We6 was not especially dangerous either, but 18 Qh4!? with Qf5 in mind looks much more challenging for the defence.

18...fxc8! 19 g4 h6 20 g5 (D)

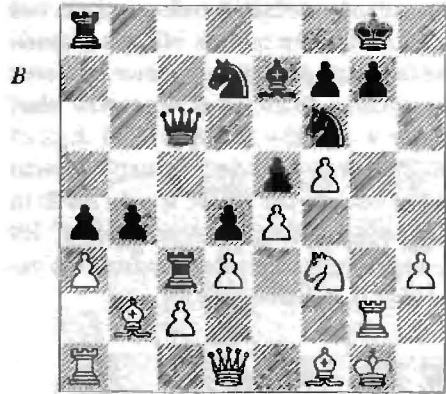
White could attempt to stabilize the entry points on the c-file first with a view to continuing the more thematic h4 and g5 breakthrough himself thereafter. However, after 20 Qe1 c4 21 h4 cxd3 22 cxd3 Qc5! the weakness of the b3-square plays a major role after all.



20...hxg5 21 Qxg5 c4 22 f2 Wb6 23 Qc1 c3! 24 bxc3 Bxc3

It is clear that Black's attack has landed with some alacrity, before his opponent can even get close to putting pressure on g7. The problem is that this rook cannot really be evicted (since dropping the a-pawn always affords Black counterplay through a plan which would require little explanation). However, for the moment White can hold c2 – even if he may need the awkward Ra2 move to do it.

25 Qf1 Qc6 26 Qd1 b5 27 Bg2 b4 28 Qb2? (D)



The impulse to send the rook away is quite understandable. After all it has been radiating good health on c3 for some moves now. Unfortunately though, this both allows Black a decisive breakthrough and removes the possibility of playing Qh6, which while it can be comfortably countered by ...Qf8 for the moment, nonetheless represented White's best hope of drumming up some distracting threats of his own.

28...b3! 29 cxb3

After this the rook remains extremely active and White will never come close to competing for the initiative again. However, 29 Qxc3 dxc3 30 cxb3 Wb6+! and ...axb3 can hardly be countenanced either. The passed pawns are simply unstoppable.

29...Bxb3 30 Bc2 Wb7 31 Qc1 Bc3 32 Qb2?!

32 Bg2 Wb3 33 We2 had to be tried. After this exchange of rooks White has no hope of covering the various entry-squares.

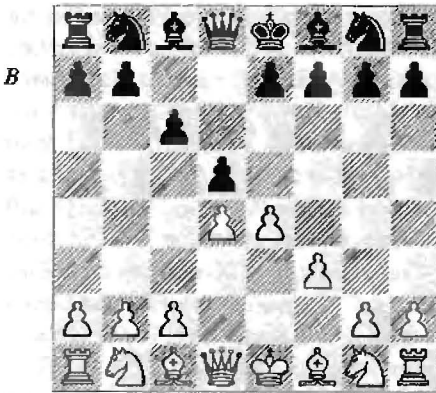
32...Bxc2 33 Wxc2 Bc8 34 Wf2 Wb3 35 Qe1 Bb8! 36 Qc1 Wc3 37 Wa2 0-1

Game 25

Alexander Morozevich – Viktor Bologan

Russian Team Ch, Sochi 2004

1 e4 c6 2 d4 d5 3 f3!? (D)

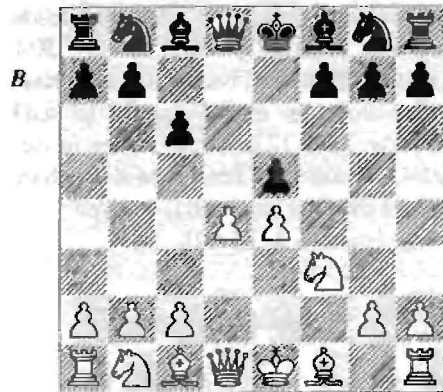


For White to take away such a good developing square as f3 from his pieces at such an early stage requires a serious justification. Moreover, whilst the line stands up rather well to crude attempts to highlight the resulting weaknesses on the dark squares, they are surely there and subject to more sophisticated probing. White's main idea is to keep the pawn-centre intact and with it to pose questions for Black's development. He is trying to make the strength of the Caro-Kann its weakness here, raising doubts about the ability of the c8-bishop to find a role.

3...e6

An apparently modest response, but logical in two ways. First, throughout most of the book, we have been concerned that this bishop should usually be developed before ...e6 risks shutting it in, but here, as mentioned in the last note, this is just not an option anyway. In other words, the ...e6 move has lost its customary drawback. Second, the slight weaknesses which White experiences on the dark squares after playing 3 f3 should be exploited so far as possible by a pawn-break, either ...c5 or ...e5. Perhaps to understand why ...c5 is the more prudent way, it would be best to take a look at some alternatives.

a) There is a temptation here to try to clarify the centre right away with 3...dxe4 4 fxe4 e5. Positionally this seems very well motivated, since it strikes directly at the weakened dark squares. Moreover, the threat of ...♖h4+ restricts White's options. However, it turns out that after the almost compulsory 5 ♖f3! (D) Black is well advised to rethink.



a1) The problem is that the positional damage he can inflict with 5...cxd4?! is more than compensated by White's dynamic chances after 6 ♗c4!, putting fierce pressure on f7. Black's lack of development really counts here. Trying to catch up with 6...♗b4+? leads to disaster after 7 c3! dxc3?! 8 ♗xf7+ ♖xf7 9 ♗xd8 cxb2+ 10 ♖e2 bxa1 ♗ 11 ♖g5+ ♖g6 12 ♗e8+ ♖h6 13 ♖e6+ mating (this full sequence may happen rarely, but cases where Black deviates at far too late a stage to help account for many miniatures). 6...♗e7 7 0-0 ♖f6 8 ♖g5 0-0 9 ♖xf7, winning material, is also clear enough, while the relatively best 6...♗e6 7 ♗xe6 fxe6 8 0-0 with ♖g5 to come also grants White a dangerous attack.

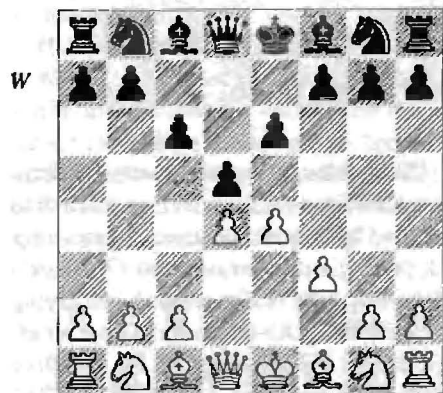
a2) Given that the white knight should not abandon its defence of h4, Black still has a decent choice in 5...♗e6!. Then White tends to stabilize his centre with 6 c3, when 6...♖d7 7

♙d3 ♜g6 8 0-0 ♙d6 9 ♜h1 (preparing ♙e3 by freeing the g1-square in response to 9...♜g4) 9...0-0 10 ♙c3 and now before White can keep a pleasant edge with ♜bd2, theory suggests that 10...c5!? is best. Still, I wonder whether 11 d5!? ♙xd5! 12 exd5 e4 13 ♜a3! is really full equality.

Of course, 3...dxe4 cannot be regarded as a mistake, so long as Black avoids 5...exd4?!. However, I am sure these lines are a major draw for people venturing the Fantasy Variation.

b) For those who do not like the French style of the main line, however, there is also 3...g6!?. After 4 ♜c3 ♙g7 5 ♙e3 it is not clear how best to develop the g8-knight, but there is scope to make a dent in White's queenside structure with 5...♞b6!? 6 ♞d2 ♞xb2 7 ♞b1 ♞a3 8 exd5 ♜f6! 9 dxc6 bxc6! (it is important to keep control over the d5-square) 10 ♙d3 ♜bd7 11 ♜ge2 0-0 12 0-0 ♙a6!, when in Adams-Leko, Tilburg 1996 Black had a fair share of influence over the key central squares.

We now return to 3...e6 (D):

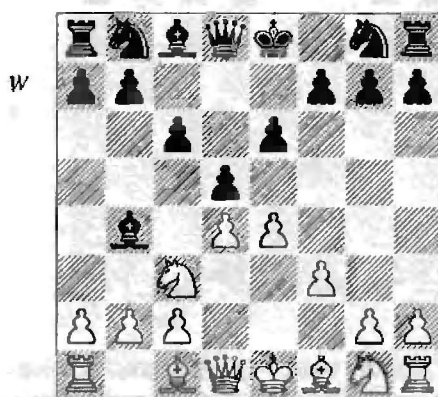


4 ♙c3

This natural developing move has the virtue of meeting Black's threat to win a pawn with 4...dxe4 and ...♞h4+. However, the game reveals that the ...♙b4 pin in response can be annoying, and White has sometimes sought to avoid this. However, after the most plausible alternative 4 ♙e3!? Black has a choice of ways to net a pawn and neither after 4...♞b6 5 ♜d2 (5 ♞c1?! c5!) 5...♞xb2 6 ♙d3 ♞a3! 7 ♜e2 b6! 8 0-0 ♙a6, when the exchange of light-squared

bishops damaged White's attacking prospects in Mitkov-Dreev, European Clubs Cup, Neum 2000, nor even 4...dxe4 5 ♜d2 exf3 6 ♜gxf3 ♜f6 7 ♜c4 ♙c7 does the compensation fully convince. Gallagher likes the latter case for White, but I find Black solid and lacking real weaknesses in both cases. The bishop on e3 does not really add much to White's attacking potential.

4...♙b4! (D)



Comparisons with the French Defence are inevitable here, but can also offer rather a good guide to handling the position. After the text-move we are left with a 'Winawer Variation' in which White has the extra move f3 and Black the extra move ...c6. Clearly neither is an optimal use of a tempo, but I have always been convinced that of the two, it is White's additional move that may actually come to prove detrimental. For a start, the fact that the f-pawn blocks the move ♞g4 prevents White from pursuing many of the most critical ideas from the Winawer proper. Moreover, whilst playing a subsequent ...c5 represents nothing worse than a 'pure' tempo-loss for Black, his opponent, if he advances his f-pawn, may find that the move f4 simply does not fit well at all in such positions. All of this does not imply that the diagram position is bad for White, but he certainly needs to handle it in ways which make a virtue of the move f3 and this involves a virtual prohibition upon the further advance of his e-pawn, at least until the circumstances are quite altered.

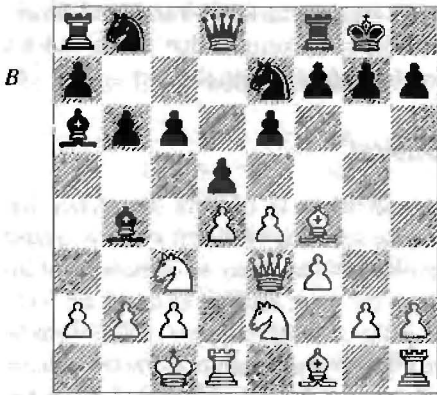
Hopefully this all explains why I believe 4...♗b4 deserves such a positive marking. By contrast, 4...♗f6 allows 5 e5 ♗fd7 6 f4 c5 and we have a genuine transposition to the Steinitz French – not bad in itself, but unlikely to be in most Caro-Kann players' ambit.

5 ♗f4 ♗e7!?

Given White's likely reluctance to advance his e-pawn, there is perhaps not too much to choose between this and 5...♗f6. The text-move would seem to make the knight less of a target, but it also means that the sometimes useful retreat ...♗e7 is no longer available as a response to a well-timed a3. I do have a general sense that 5...♗f6 requires greater care since a subsequent ...♗bd7 may bring the e-pawn's advance back onto the agenda if this piece on f6 lacks comfortable retreat-squares.

6 ♗d3 b6! 7 ♗e2 ♗a6 8 ♗e3 0-0 9 0-0 (D)

There is no real case for preferring 9 a3. Even 9...♗d6 would be OK, but 9...♗xc3+ 10 ♗xc3 (10 ♗xc3! ♗d7!) 10...♗xf1 11 ♗xf1 c5! offers Black fluid, active play.



9...c5!?

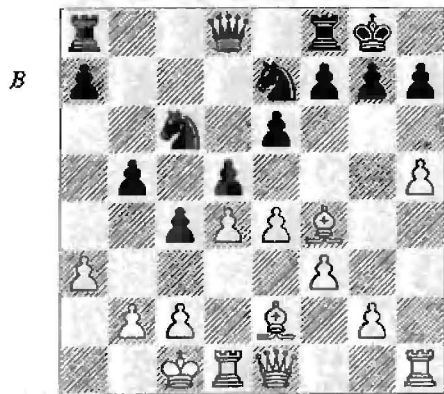
This is a very interesting decision which radically alters the flow of the play in a manner not apparent at first sight. The move makes sense to me only in conjunction with the next two, ceding both bishops in order to close the centre and ensure that the dominant contest will be between the respective sides' wing attacks. Black's claim is that the bishops are not such a major asset in this more closed structure and that a3 constitutes something of a ready-made

target for operations. I think I am basically a believer in Black's idea, but a firm assessment is tricky and it is hence worth pointing out that 9...♗g6 10 a3 ♗e7 11 ♗g3 ♗d7 looks like a valid alternative for bishop lovers.

10 a3 ♗xc3 11 ♗xc3!

Not 11 ♗xc3, when 11...♗xf1 12 ♗hxfl ♗bc6 13 dxc5 d4 14 ♗e2 ♗g6! 15 ♗g3 bxc5 puts Black somewhat in the ascendancy both in the centre and on the queenside.

11...♗xe2! 12 ♗xe2 c4! 13 h4 b5 14 ♗e1 ♗bc6 15 h5 (D)



15...♗d7!?

There was also a case for the very direct 15...a5 16 g4 b4. However, White can try 17 a4 then and although it is possible to attack this pawn with ...♗c8-b6, it should be noted that were Black able to make a similar ...b4 break without ...a5 as preparation, use of the a5-square would give more choice about how to follow up.

16 g4 f6! 17 ♗f1 ♗ad8?!

In general it feels wrong for Black to open the position up here. In particular he has done well to eschew ...dxe4 at several earlier points. However, there was a case for the tactical solution 17...♗xd4! here since after either 18 ♗xd4 e5 or 18 cxd5 e5! White will be required to give up the bishop-pair to keep material parity and the opening of the position may largely benefit Black's square coverage.

18 ♗h3 dxe4?!

In principle, such an opening of the game continues to look suspect. However, White has shuffled his bishops around quite well and for

Index of Variations

Chapter Guide

1 e4 c6
2 d4

2 c4 – Chapter 6

2 d3 – Chapter 7

2 c3 d5 3 f3 – Chapter 7

2 ... d5

3 c3

3 f3 – Chapter 7

3 exd5 – Chapters 6 and 7

3 e5 – Chapters 4 and 5

3 ... dxe4

4 xc4

Now:

4...f5 – Chapter 1

4...d7 – Chapter 2

4...f6 – Chapter 3

1: Main Line with 4...f5

1 e4 c6

2 d4 d5

3 c3 dxe4

4 xc4 9

4 ... f5 10

5 g3 10

5 c5!? 30

5 ... g6 30

6 h4 10

6 e2 32

6 h3 32

6 c4 32

6 ... h6

7 f3 11

7 h3 32 7...e6 8 f4 h7 9 c4 f6 10

fh5 (10 e2 33; 10 0-0 33) 10...bd7 33

7 ... d7 11

7...f6 25

7...e6 25 8 e5 h7 9 d3! xd3 10 xd3

23 10...d7 (10...f6 26) 11 f4! 26

8 h5 h7

9 d3 xd3

10 xd3 11

B



10 ... e6

10...c7 11 d2 e6 – 10...e6 11 f4 a5+

12 d2 c7

11 f4

11 d2 gf6 (11...c7 – 11 f4 a5+ 12

d2 c7) 12 0-0-0 e7 18

11 ... a5+ 12

11...b4+ 12 c3 e7 19

11...gf6 19 12 0-0-0 21 12...e7 (12...d5

13 d2 b4 21) 13 b1 21 (13 b1 21)

13...0-0 22

12 d2 c7

12...b4 19

13 0-0-0 gf6 12

14 e4

14 c4 12

14 e2 12

14 ... 0-0-0

15 g3 14

2: Main Line with 4...d7

1 e4 c6

2 d4 d5

3 c3 dxe4

- 4 ♖xe4 ♜d7 36
 5 ♜g5!? 37
 5 ♖e2?! 48
 5 ♜f3 48 5...♜gf6 6 ♜xf6+ (6 ♜g3 48)
 6...♜xf6 50
 5 ♜c4 48 5...♜gf6 51 6 ♜g5 (6 ♜xf6+ 51)
 6...e6 7 ♖e2 51
 5 ♜d3!? 43 5...♜gf6 (5...♜df6!? 43) 6 ♜g5 -
 5 ♜g5 ♜gf6 6 ♜d3
 5 ... ♜gf6
 5...h6? 37
 5...♜df6 37
 5...♜b6 38
 5...e6 38
 6 ♜d3
 6 ♜c4 - 5 ♜c4 ♜gf6 6 ♜g5
 6 ... e6
 7 ♜f3 38
 7 ... ♜d6 38
 7...♜e7?! 38
 7...h6?! 38
 8 ♖c2 h6
 9 ♜e4 ♜xe4
 10 ♖xe4 39
 10 ... ♖c7
 10...c5 39
 10...♜f6 39
 11 0-0!?
 11 ♖g4 43 11...♜f8 (11...g5?! 43) 12 0-0 c5!? 44
 11 ... b6
 11...c5 40
 12 ♖g4! ♜f8! 45
 12...g5?! 41
 13 b3! 45

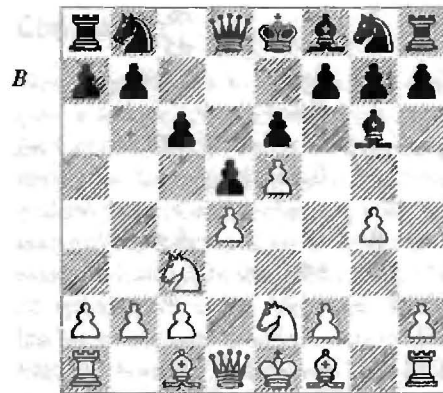
3: Main Line with 4...♜f6

- 1 e4 c6
 2 d4 d5
 3 ♜c3 dxe4
 4 ♜xe4 ♜f6 55
 5 ♜xf6+ gx6 61
 5...exf6 56:
 a) 6 ♜f3 57
 b) 6 c3 ♜d6 7 ♜d3 0-0 8 ♜e2 ♜e8 56
 c) 6 ♜c4 ♖e7+!? 7 ♖e2 ♜e6 58
 6 c3
 6 g3 61

- 6 ♜f3 61
 6 ♜e2 62
 6 ... ♜f5 62
 7 ♜f3
 7 ♜e2 62
 7 ... e6
 7...♖c7 63
 7...♜d7 63
 8 g3 63

4: Advance Variation: Sharp Lines and Black's Early Alternatives

- 1 e4 c6
 2 d4 d5
 3 e5 66
 3 ... ♜f5 74
 3...♜a6?! 67
 3...c5!? 67 4 dxc5 (4 c3 68; 4 c4!? 68; 4 ♜f3 68) 4...♜c6 (4...e6 69) 5 ♜b5 e6 71
 4 ♜c3!? 74
 4 ... e6 74
 4...a6 81
 4...h5 82
 4...♖b6 82
 5 g4 ♜g6
 6 ♜ge2 75



- 6 ... c5 75
 6...♜e7 83
 6...♜b4 83
 6...♜e7 83
 6...f6!? 83 7 ♜f4 (7 h4 84) 7...fxe5! 84
 7 h4
 7 ♜e3 75

7 ... h5
 7...h6 77
 8 ♖f4 ♗h7 77

5: Advance Variation: Short System and Other Modern Treatments

1 e4 c6
 2 d4 d5
 3 e5 ♗f5
 4 ♖f3 92
 4 ♗d3 112
 4 ♖e2 112
 4 h4!? 87 4...h5 (4...h6 87; 4...c5 88;
 4...♗b6!? 89) 5 c4 89
 4 ♗e3!? 107 4...e6 (4...♗b6 107) 5 ♖d2 108
 (5 c3 113)
 4 c3!? 112 4...e6 5 ♗e3 113
 4 ... e6 93
 5 ♗e2 93
 5 a3!? 93
 5 ... ♖d7 101
 5...♖e7 101 6 0-0 c5 94
 5...c5 6 ♗e3!? 94 (6 0-0 95)
 6 0-0 h6!?
 6...c5?! 93
 6...♖e7 103
 7 ♖bd2
 7 b3 103
 7 ... ♖e7
 8 c3 104

6: Panov-Botvinnik Attack and 2 c4

1 e4 c6
 2 d4
 2 c4!? 148 2...d5 (2...e6 149; 2...e5 149) 3
 cxd5 (3 exd5 149) 3...cxd5 4 exd5 ♖f6 150 5
 ♗a4+ (5 ♖c3 150; 5 ♗b5+ 151) 5...♖bd7
 (5...♗d7!? 152) 6 ♖c3 153
 2 ... d5
 3 exd5 cxd5
 4 e4 118
 4 ... ♖f6

5 ♖c3 118
 5 c5?! 119
 5 ... e6 120
 5...♖c6 134 6 ♖f3 (6 ♗g5 134) 6...♗g4
 (6...♗e6 139; 6...a6 139) 7 exd5 ♖xd5 139
 5...g6!? 143 6 ♗b3 (6 ♗g5 144; 6 ♖f3 144; 6
 cxd5!? 145) 6...♗g7 7 exd5 0-0 145
 6 ♖f3 120
 6 c5!? 120
 6 ♗g5 120
 6 ... ♗b4 127
 6...♖c6 120
 6...♗e7 120:
 a) 7 ♗d3 121
 b) 7 c5 121
 c) 7 exd5 121
 7 exd5
 7 ♗d3 128
 7 ... ♖xd5
 7...exd5 128
 8 ♗c2
 8 ♗d2 129
 8 ... ♖c6 130
 8...♗c7 131
 9 ♗e2!?
 9 ♗d3 131
 9 ... 0-0
 10 0-0 132

7: Miscellaneous Systems for White

1 e4 c6
 2 d4
 2 d3 162
 2 ♖c3 d5 3 ♖f3 163
 2 ... d5
 3 exd5
 3 f3!? 169
 3 ... cxd5
 4 ♗d3 157
 4 ♖f3 157
 4 ... ♖c6
 5 c3 157

