

how to play against 1 e4

NEIL MCDONALD



EVERYMAN CHESS

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Introduction

When I was asked to write a repertoire book against $1\ e4$, I guess it was natural that I would seize the opportunity to discuss the French Defence, $1\ e4\ e6$ (**Diagram 1**), which has been my staple defence for more than a quarter of a century.

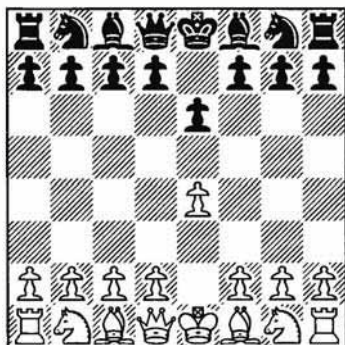


Diagram 1 (W)
The French Defence

Why Play the French?

The French has a very long history, which implies that it can be understood more easily than openings such as the Sicilian or Caro-Kann. It must have an intrinsic logic, amenable to common sense, or else it wouldn't have been popular before sophisticated openings were devised. In any case, it is hoped that a perusal of the first three chapters will quickly get you up and running in your new opening.

The Fort Knox is the most solid and untheoretical of all the main line French variations, and has the virtue that it can be played against both $1\ e4\ e6\ 2\ d4\ d5\ 3\ Nc3$

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and 3 Nd2, thereby greatly cutting down the amount of book work you need to do. The lines recommended against the Advance Variation and French Exchange also shouldn't tangle you up too much in theory. Finally, at the end of the book there is a brief discussion of early white divergences from the main lines.

After you have gained some experience, you might decide that you want to try out more counter-attacking variations. For this reason chapters 4-6 discuss lines in the Classical, the McCutcheon and the Tarrasch with 3...Be7 which are more dynamic but also require a lot more memory work than the Fort Knox.

It should be remembered that it took a great many experiments for chess players to discover what works and what doesn't work in a given opening. An ordinary player can't expect to discover for himself the best moves and plans in a complex position; he must rely on the work of his predecessors. Alekhine, for example, was a brilliant theorist, but in the 1920s he condemned as a strategic error the basic ...e5 plan for Black in the King's Indian Defence, which many years after his death was to become Fischer's main weapon and then a useful point scorer for Kasparov. The reason, of course, was that the King's Indian was little played during Alekhine's lifetime, and so he had few examples on which to base his judgement.

The French Defence in the 21st Century

Three things especially struck me while writing this book:

i. The number of women players who have made an important contribution to the modern theory of the French Defence. It could quite reasonably be renamed the 'Fairer Defence' in their honour (but not the crude 'Female Defence'). As usual when talking about chess, I mean 'he' to stand for both 'he' and 'she', and especially so in this book.

ii. How often the black king should (and does) stay in the centre in the French Defence. Many years ago the great World Champion Emanuel Lasker suggested that the right to castle should be abandoned in order to allow more attacking chess to be played. Capablanca (or perhaps Réti) replied that without the castling rule, White's right to move first would give him too much advantage. Well, looking at the games in this book, it strikes me that Black can get on pretty well in the French without castling. Often he (or she!) leaves the king in the centre for the whole game, or only condescends to castle at move 20 or so. Just one example: 31...0-0! forces Kasparov to instantly resign in the first game of Chapter One!

iii. Black can no longer count on having a good game just because he has dismantled his opponent's centre. The French Defence is handled in a very dynamic way these days. Black doesn't have to fear the white centre – he has to be afraid of what happens *when it vanishes*. He wants to destroy it, certainly; but he has to be careful that he isn't destroyed himself in the process by a burst of energy from the

white pieces, who suddenly find a whole host of open lines, diagonals or attacking squares handed to them. There is a special art in making sure that the white centre vanishes *on Black's terms*.

The question of open and closed positions is vital when playing the French. Black can get away with strategically desirable but time wasting manoeuvres if the position remains closed. However, the same manoeuvre might be suicidal in an open position.

It's time to wish you good luck with your new opening. I hope you enjoy this book and learn some useful ideas. Have fun with the French!

Neil McDonald,
Gravesend,
September 2008

Chapter One

The Advance Variation

- Introduction
- Black Plays 3...b6
- The ...Qb6 & ...Bb5 Variation
- White's 4th-move Alternatives

Introduction

The Advance Variation (never trust a man who calls this the *Advanced* Variation!) begins **1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5** (Diagram 1).

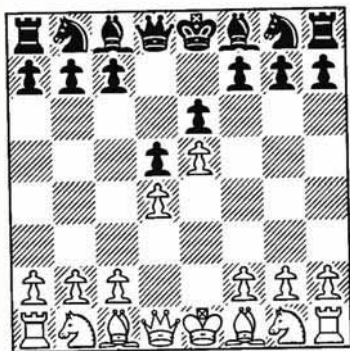


Diagram 1 (B)

The Advance Variation

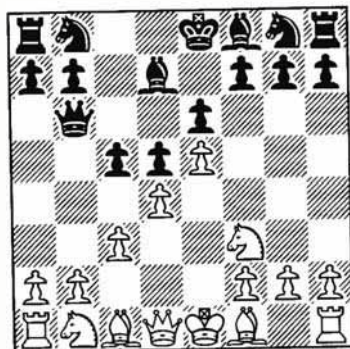


Diagram 2 (W)

Black prepares ...Bb5

Let's begin by considering what both sides are up to in this not-so-simple variation.

White has more space and an intact centre

With the Advance White immediately locks the centre and so deprives Black of the chance to break up his pawns with ...dxe4. It is also significant that he has prevented the black knight being developed to f6, which has been its square of choice in more than 10 million games.

What do we mean by the abstract expression 'White has more space'? Simply that his centre pawns are fixed further up the board than the black pawns, so that his pieces will have more freedom of action when deployed behind them. If left unchallenged, this extra mobility will allow White to build up an initiative – most likely in the form of an attack on the kingside, as the pawn on e5 grants him a space advantage there and, as stated, has kept the black knight from the important square f6. You will notice that the h7-square will be especially vulnerable to attack once Black castles kingside as it is lacking the defence of a knight on f6.

White's thematic pawn advance

If we think schematically in terms of the pawn structure, White should be trying to engineer the advance f4-f5, bringing up his f-pawn next to his furthest advanced pawn on e5. This would increase his ascendancy on the kingside, and, speaking in more concrete terms, might lay the groundwork for an assault by the white rooks along the f-file, or expose the black pawn on e6 to attack.

Black's thematic pawn advance

By the same logic, Black should play ...c5, putting a pawn alongside the spearhead of his own structure on d5. This would create tension between the black pawn on c5 and the white pawn on d4; and if Black followed up with a sequence of moves such as ...Nc6, ...Qb6, and ...Ne7-f5, he would be attacking the d4-pawn so many times that White would have to be careful not to lose it. Of course, ...c5 can be met by d4xc5, but on the whole this is a positional victory for Black, as it loosens White's bind on the centre.

As we can see from this strategic outline, the black knight may have been denied the f6-square, but it still has a route into the game via e7 and f5, where it performs a useful function in attacking d4. Alternatively it might emerge on g6, also via e7, from where it can take part in a well-prepared attack on the e5-pawn with ...f6.



NOTE: The pawn advance ...c5 is almost universal for Black in the d4/e5 versus d5/e6 pawn structure: it may be delayed, but is hardly ever avoided altogether. The other pawn advance ...f6 is fairly common, and indispensable in some situations where Black has to activate his kingside pieces, such as when he needs to win back the f6-square for his knight or open the f-file for a rook on f8 to create counterplay.

Indeed, it is almost unthinkable for there to be a game in this pawn structure in which Black plays neither ...c5 nor ...f6.

The biggest loser in the French Advance

As we have seen, the knight on g8 still functions pretty well in the Advance Variation, as it can support an attack on d4 or on e5. Therefore we might say that the biggest loser after 3 e5 is the black bishop on c8. It can't find a similar role in Black's strategy. It is a forlorn-looking piece, shut in behind its pawns. In other words, it is the archetypal *bad* bishop.

And the biggest winner in the French Advance

In contrast, what a splendid future awaits the white bishop on f1! It has an excellent post available on d3, where it controls diagonals on both sides of the board. In particular, it would aim at f5, in support of the key advance f4-f5, and beyond that at the h7-square: a weak point in Black king's defences after he has castled kingside as ...Nf6 has been prevented. White's blessed light squared bishop is a so-called *good* bishop, whereas his bishop on c1 is regarded as a *bad* bishop, even though it has a fair amount of scope, as White's central pawns are obstructing it by being fixed on dark squares.

The theme of this chapter

The white piece that benefits the most through the fixing of the centre is the bishop on f1; the black piece that suffers the most is the bishop on c8. Surely it would be worth Black going to some trouble to exchange off these bishops? That is, indeed, the theme of this chapter.

Black has several ways to meet the Advance Variation, but here I wish to show you two systems that have the express purpose of getting rid of White's best and Black's worst minor piece. These are 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 b6, aiming for an immediate, no-nonsense ...Ba6; and 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3 Qb6 5 Nf3 Bd7 (**Diagram 2**) and then 6...Bb5, once again bringing Black's light-squared bishop in contact with its enemy counterpart. That's a lot of effort just to exchange these bishops, one might think. That's true, but it should be remembered that the centre is blocked, which puts the emphasis on slow-moving operations to achieve long-lasting strategic goals.



TIP: Black doesn't need to rush his pieces out to defend key squares and avoid coming under an immediate attack. Instead he trusts in the blocked centre to keep the white pieces at bay.

Black Plays 3...b6

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 b6 (Diagram 3)



NOTE There are three ways for Black to introduce this early ...b6 idea: the first is 3...b6, which is the move order I've chosen here; another is 3...Qd7, intending 4 Nf3 b6; and the third is 3...Ne7 4 Nf3 b6.

The immediate 3...b6 is an unusual and radical move, but positionally well motivated. Not only does it prepare ...Ba6, facilitating the desired exchange of bishops,

but also the pawn on b6 gives Black the chance to recapture ...bxc5 should White answer ...c5 with d4xc5.

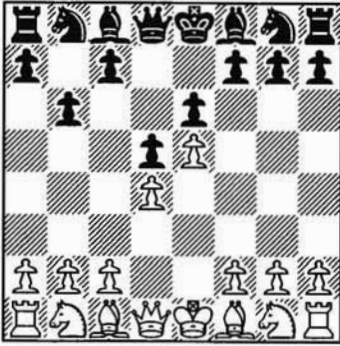


Diagram 3 (W)

...Ba6 will follow



Diagram 4 (W)

Black invests two tempi!

Case study 1: how ...b6 defeats a chess genius

Let's begin our discussion on a high note by seeing Garry Kasparov lose with White against Ivanchuk. We'll have to cheat, though, *by giving White two extra moves!*

Game 1

□ G.Kasparov ■ V.Ivanchuk

Horgen 1995

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4

According to the repertoire in this book, we are playing 3...dxe4 or 3...Nf6 versus 3 Nc3, but you'll soon see why we are looking at this game.

4 e5 b6 5 a3 Bf8 (Diagram 4)

So there we have it: our 3...b6 line, but with the extra moves a3 and Nc3 thrown in for White. Admittedly a3 doesn't help him much, and jumping ahead we'll see that Ivanchuk will be able to ram the pawn with ...b5-b4 to open lines, but it might be a surprise to hear that Nc3, which seems a sound developing move, is also not necessarily in White's interest. That's chiefly because it blocks his c-pawn, whose advance can be useful as we'll see further below, but let's enjoy this game first.

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6 Nf3 Ne7

Black wants to exchange bishops with ...Ba6, but he prefers to wait until White has developed his bishop: for example, if 7 Bd3 Ba6 8 Bxa6 Nxa6 and he has gained a move over 6...Ba6 7 Bxa6 Nxa6, as White has needed to move his bishop twice to carry out the exchange. If instead White plays 7 Bd3 Ba6 8 0-0, leaving it for Black to inaugurate the exchange with 8...Bxd3 9 Qxd3, then this is still a gain for Black as he has avoided having his knight misplaced on a6. In that scenario he wouldn't have to worry about returning the knight to the centre via b8 and c6, or in some cases after ...c5 and then ...Nc7.

7 h4

Kasparov knows a thing or two about positional play and so also continues to delay the development of his bishop. Instead he gains space on the kingside.

7...h6

Both sides play useful waiting moves.

8 h5 a5 9 Bb5+!? (Diagram 5)

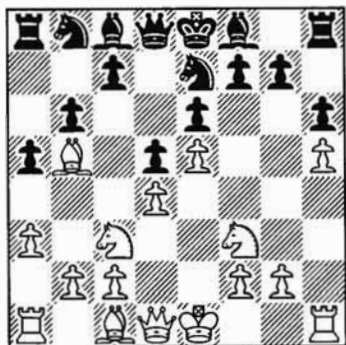


Diagram 5 (B)

White plays against ...Ba6



Diagram 6 (W)

Both sides manoeuvre

The World Champion loses patience and decides to cut across the plan of ...Ba6. This check should be compared with 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 b6 4 Bb5+, which we will examine below.

9...c6 10 Ba4

Here we find a use of 5 a3: if the pawn was still on a2, White would lose the bishop after ...b6-b5 and ...a5-a4.

10...Nd7

At first glance, 10...Ba6 seems an obvious move, but in fact after 11 Ne2 White will be able to castle, and the bishop wouldn't do much on a6. So Ivanchuk changes plan: using White's bishop on a4 as a target, he will gain tempi with ...b5 and ...c5-c4 to carry out a queenside pawn-storm.

11 Ne2 b5 12 Bb3 c5 13 c3 Nc6 14 0-0 Qc7 15 Re1

The pawn structure requires the preparation of f4-f5 by White, and this might have been prepared immediately with 15 Nh2 and then 16 f4. Such an advance would also have more bite with the white rook supporting it on f1, rather than 'centralized' on e1.

15...c4 16 Bc2 Nb6 (Diagram 6) 17 Bf4?!

Another natural move, but it clutters the f-file. Kasparov might still have tried 17 Nh2, intending f2-f4 at some point.

17...Be7 18 Bg3 Rb8 19 Nh2 Qd8!? 20 Ng4

Again 20 f4 was beckoning, but perhaps Kasparov didn't like the reply 20...Bh4.

20...b4 21 axb4 axb4 22 cxb4?!

White's plan is to sweep the deck clear of pawns on the queenside and only then to carry out his kingside attack. However, the World Champion had underestimated the danger that results from the black pawns being replaced by black knights.

22...Nxb4 23 Bb1 Bd7 24 b3 Ra8 25 Rxa8 Qxa8 26 bxc4 Nxc4 27 Nc1?

A careless move that loses a pawn, but the position was already quite pleasant for Black.

27...Ba4 28 Qe2 Qa7! (Diagram 7)

Suddenly there's no way to defend d4.

29 Ne3 Qxd4 30 Nxc4 dxc4 31 Qf1 0-0! 0-1

There's nothing to be done against the advance of the c-pawn to c2, winning a piece.



NOTE: One of the themes of this book is the value of late castling by Black – see in particular the King's Indian Attack chapter. Well, Ivanchuk couldn't have left it any later than this. We might add another golden rule in the French: only castle when it makes your opponent resign!

Kasparov has carried out many brutal attacks playing White, but Ivanchuk's unusual antics in the opening, including delaying castling, appeared to have confused his normally ultra-reliable positional sense. Moreover, this was the great man's only defeat versus the French, unless you include a simul game he lost in the Exchange Variation against Sheransky in 1996, after which he allegedly told his opponent: 'you are the weakest player I've ever lost to!'

How to Play Against 1 e4

It's now time to get down to the business of opening theory by examining White's various ways of meeting 3...b6.

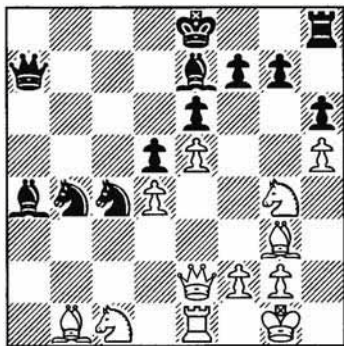


Diagram 7 (W)

Picking off the d4-pawn

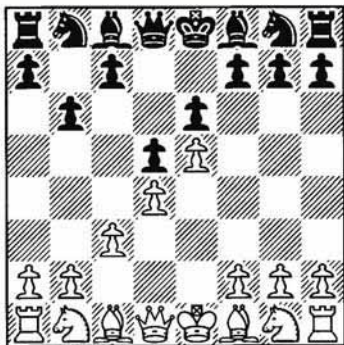


Diagram 8 (B)

Preventing 4...Ba6

Case study 2: White plays 4 c3

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 b6 4 c3!? (Diagram 8)

White guards his d4-pawn in typical French Advance style and sets a little trap.



WARNING: Whatever else you do, please don't fall for the trap 4...Ba6?? 5 Bxa6 Nxa6 6 Qa4+ when the knight is lost.

4...Qd7!

A very common move for Black in this variation. He rules out Qa4+ and so is ready for ...Ba6.

5 Nf3

A solid and sensible decision. Instead 5 Qg4 is pretty pointless as g7 is defended. After 5...Ne7 6 Nf3 Nf5 7 Bd3 Ba6 (sticking to our rule – as soon as the white bishop moves from f1, offer the exchange!) 8 Bxa6 Nxa6 9 0-0 Be7 10 Bg5 h5! 11 Qh3 0-0-0 12 Bxe7 Qxe7 13 Nbd2 g5! Black had well and truly taken over the initiative in A.Lebedev-D.Skliarov, Dubna 2007.

Another alternative is 5 f4, which we'll examine in our next illustrative game.

5...Ne7 6 h4 c5

Shades of the Ivanchuk-Kasparov game: neither player wants to develop their light-squared bishop. We'll now follow a former World Championship challenger

defending the black side:

7 h5 h6 (Diagram 9)

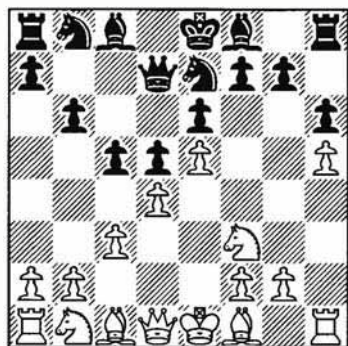


Diagram 9 (W)

Correctly preventing h5-h6

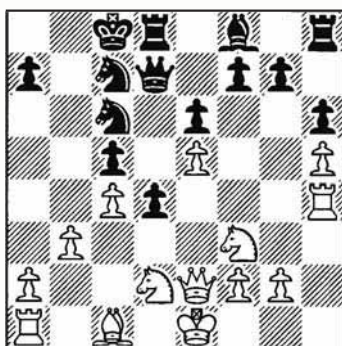


Diagram 10 (W)

Black may break with ...g6

Black mustn't allow 8 h6 when 8...g6 leaves him with a dark-square hole on f6.

8 b3 Ba6

At last Black offers the bishop exchange. Now that he has played ...c5, he can put the knight on c7, and so doesn't have to spend two moves recentralizing it with ...Nb8 and ...Nbc6. Besides, White's last move indicated that a central struggle was about to begin with c3-c4, so Black couldn't dally with his development forever.

9 Bxa6 Nxa6 10 Qe2 Nc7 11 dxc5 bxc5 12 c4 Nc6 13 Rh4 d4 14 Nbd2 0-0-0 (Diagram 10)

Black has held his centre together, brought his king to the relative safety of the queenside, and now begins to search for counterplay on the kingside.

15 Kf1 Be7 16 Rg4 Rdg8 17 a3 g6

From here Black went on to outplay his opponent in A.Schmitt-N.Short, French League 2004.

Game 2

□ **M.Larrea** ■ **B.Roselli Mailhe**

Montevideo 2007

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 b6 4 c3 Qd7 5 f4 (Diagram 11) 5...Ba6?!

A paradoxical moment. Black might have delayed this in 'Tvanchuk style' with

How to Play Against 1 e4

5...Ne7, intending 6 Nf3 c5 7 Bd3 Ba6 and compared to the game Black has gained time because White has moved his bishop twice after 8 Bxa6 Nxa6. However, in that case White's wild attacking move 10 g4 would most likely never have occurred, as he would have 'automatically' played the sensible 6 Nf3. So 5...Ba6 may not be the most precise move, but it does give White the chance to beat himself!

6 Bxa6 Nxa6 7 Qd3

White gains time for his plans along the f-file by bringing his queen in touch with the f5-square whilst attacking the black knight.



NOTE: It is no great hardship for the knight to be forced to retreat to b8, as it was poorly placed on a6 and needed to be rerouted via b8 to c6 in any case.

7...Nb8 8 Ne2

Here rather than f3, as White intends to blast his way through the f-file and doesn't want the knight blocking his path.

8...c5 (Diagram 12)

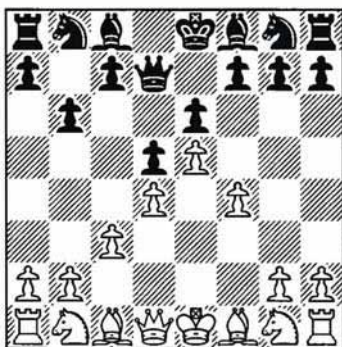


Diagram 11 (B)

Black might delay ...Ba6

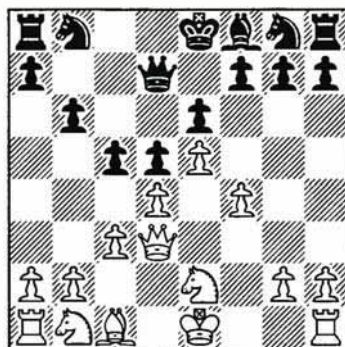


Diagram 12 (W)

Provocative play

Safer was 8...Ne7 first.

9 0-0

White might have speculated with the sharp 9 f5!?, intending 9...exf5 10 0-0 Ne7 11 Bg5.

9...Ne7 10 g4?

As Kasparov discovered, it is very hard to engineer the f4-f5 advance in the cor-

rect manner. Larrea is rated 2317, making him a very competent international player, but here his judgement goes completely awry. Instead with 10 Ng3, preparing f4-f5 at an appropriate moment, White might have justified his opening play. Black's position isn't stable enough in the centre to hold a blockade with 10...g6: 11 dxc5 bxc5 12 c4! and 12...d4? 13 Ne4 is bad for Black, but otherwise White keeps the latent threat of cxd5 when if ...exd5 in reply, f4-f5 carries out the desired advance. Of course, Black could have avoided all this back on the fifth move by delaying ...Ba6 with 5...Ne7.

10...h5! (Diagram 13)

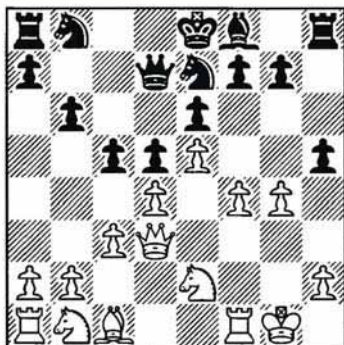


Diagram 13 (W)

A key counterthrust

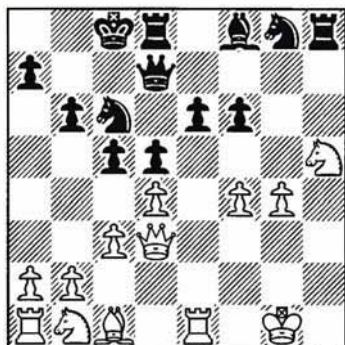


Diagram 14 (W)

Which king is safer?

Exactly. This counterthrust turns the tables on the kingside.

11 h3

Very grim for White would be 11 g5, when the f5-square becomes a strong point for the black knights after 11...Nbc6 intending ...Nf5, etc. However, now Black gains attacking chances against the white king.

11...hxg4 12 hxg4 f5! 13 exf6

If 13 Ng3 Black can play sharply with 13...fxg4 or else just hold the line with 13...g6, when White's initiative on the kingside is over, and Black can develop with ...Nbc6 and ...0-0-0 with fine chances.

After the game move the situation on the kingside stays fluid, but the opening of the g-file means greater peril for the white king.

13...gxf6 14 Ng3 Nbc6 15 Nh5 Ng8 16 Re1

The best chance was to get the queens off with 16 Qg6+ Qf7 17 f5, although Black

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has the better of it after 17...cxd4.

16...0-0-0 (Diagram 14)

Black's king will be absolutely safe on the queenside.

17 Qe2 Re8 18 Be3 cxd4 19 cxd4 Kb7 20 Nc3 Qh7

Threatening to undermine the knight with 21...f5.

21 Ng3 Qh3 22 Nh5

White suffers a disaster on g4 after either 22 Qg2 Qxg4 or 22 Bf2 Nh6 intending 23...Nxg4.

22...Re7 23 f5

White finally achieves his aim of f4-f5 but...

23...Rxh5! (Diagram 15) 0-1

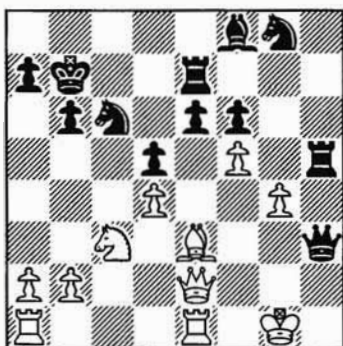


Diagram 15 (W)

The attack is overwhelming

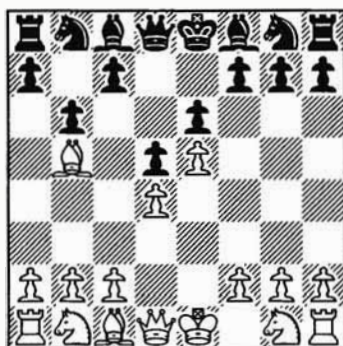


Diagram 16 (B)

Another anti-...Ba6 idea

...and he was forced to give up in view of 24 gxh5 Rg7+ 25 Kf2 Qg2 mate.

Case study 3: White plays 4 Bb5+

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 b6 4 Bb5+ (Diagram 16)

If you want to prevent this Bb5+ move, you can do it with the move order 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 Qd7. On the other hand, the variation 4 Nf3 b6 5 c4 might then have more bite for White, as compared to 3...b6 Black would be a tempo worse off if he has to recapture with his queen on d5 having already gone ...Qd7.

Instead 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 Ne7 4 Nf3 b6 should deter 5 Bb5+ because after 5...c6 6 Ba4 Ba6 White doesn't have the option of Ng1-e2 to secure castling, as he has already played his knight to f3. Of course he can continue Nc3 and Ne2, though, which was the way that Kasparov would have met ...Ba6 in his game with Ivanchuk, but don't forget that Kasparov had been presented with the move Nc3 'for free' by the move order 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 b6 5 a3 Bf8.

Confused? Well, just stick to 3...b6 and play it like the imaginative strategist Yasser Seirawan.

Game 3

□ **A. Shabalov** ■ **Y. Seirawan**

US Championship, Chandler 1997

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 b6 4 Bb5+!

As in the Kasparov-Ivanchuk game, White avoids the exchange of his light-squared bishop by deploying it to a4.

4...c6 5 Ba4 b5

Seirawan decides to continue harassing the white bishop in order to gain space. The alternative was 5...Ba6, when White might have continued 6 Ne2 intending 7 0-0.

6 Bb3 c5 (Diagram 17)

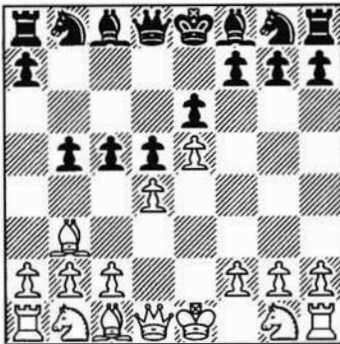


Diagram 17 (W)
Seizing space

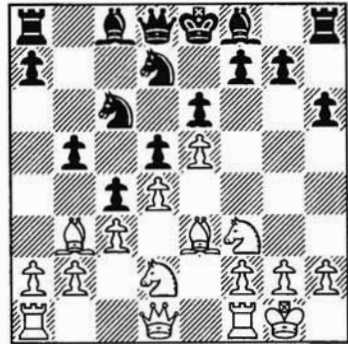


Diagram 18 (W)
Black continues to rush forward

White strengthens his centre and clears the c2-square for the bishop.

7...Ne7 8 Nf3 Nec6 9 0-0 h6!

I have beside me Emanuel Lasker's *Common Sense in Chess*, a compilation of lectures that the World Champion gave in 1895. He gives four rules for the development of the pieces 'according to my own experience over the board':

- i. Do not move any pawns in the opening of a game apart from the e-pawn and the d-pawn.
- ii. Do not move any piece twice in the opening, but put it at once upon the right square.
- iii. Bring your knights out before developing the bishops, especially the queen's bishop.
- iv. Do not pin the adverse king's knight (by Bg5 as White or ...Bg4 as Black) before your opponent has castled.

Lasker's only exception is that sometimes you are permitted to play c2-c4 as White in the Queen's Gambit.

Now let's examine Seirawan's play so far. His first six moves have been with pawns, including moving the c-pawn twice. He has only developed one piece, and that is the knight, which has moved twice to reach c6, where it takes away the natural square from the knight on b8. And to cap it all, his ninth move is 9...h6, the type of move that Lasker censures because 'it doesn't give additional force to any of (Black's) pieces'.

You might think that Seirawan has not merely broken Lasker's rules, but that he has ripped them into little pieces, scattered them on the floor and done a little dance on them. However, this would be to miss the point. Lasker's strict rules apply to the *open* games where the emphasis is on rapid development. As an experiment, trying making six consecutive pawn moves in the opening for Black, beginning 1 e4 e5, and see how long it takes before your position is in ruins.



TIP: With a blocked centre after 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 you not only can but at times *must* delay your development in order to secure a strategic objective.

Thus Seirawan moved his knight across the board and put it on c6, because he believed this was its best square; he wasn't concerned about depriving his other knight of its natural post, as that horse has a perfectly decent second-best square on d7.

All of Black's opening six pawn moves had a clear purpose, either to curtail the action of White's light-squared bishop or to gain space on the queenside – the part of the board where Black looks for counterplay. And 9...h6 may not add any power to the black pieces, but it is also far from being the kind of thoughtless move that beginners make when they can't find a plan. By playing 9...h6, Black

takes away the g5-square from the white knight, which thwarts Ng5 and then f2-f4 when White would have made progress towards his basic strategic plan of f4-f5. Note that if Black had waited for Ng5 to be played and only then attacked it with ...h6, the knight could fall back to h3, where it leaves open the way for f4-f5.

It should be remembered that it is very rare for a position to be completely open or completely blocked. Shabalov has broken Lasker's rules as well – twice as many pawn moves as allowed, and three moves with his bishop (incidentally, Seirawan follows the third rule impeccably, as he develops both knights before his bishops). If White had made a quick bid to open lines with 4 Nf3 and 5 c4, as in case study 4 below, then Seirawan wouldn't have been able to play in such lackadaisical fashion. You could say that both players 'made a pact' to spend the opening in slow positional jockeying.

We now return to the game and 9...h6:

10 Be3 Nd7 11 Nbd2 c4 (Diagram 18)

With this and his next move, Black shifts his attack on the queenside from d4 to c3.

12 Bc2 b4

A bold decision after which lines are opened, and the tension rises.

13 Ba4 Qc7 14 cxb4 Nxb4 15 a3 Nd3 16 Qc2 Ba6 17 b3

Shabalov is able to break open the queenside before the black pieces can be fully mobilized. So will Seirawan be punished after all for violating Lasker's rules?

17...Be7 18 bxc4 dxc4 19 Bxd7+ Kxd7 (Diagram 19)

If 19...Qxd7, then 20 Nxc4 when Black is not only a pawn down but has trouble with his trapped knight. Therefore he is obliged to recapture with the king.

20 d5

Shabalov offers a pawn to win the d4-square for his knight and clear the way for the advance of his kingside pawns, which soon leads to the creation of a passed pawn. On the other hand, Black will now have two connected passed pawns on the queenside.

Here we see the conflict in philosophy between an open game and a closed game. White hopes that the position is sufficiently dynamic (with enough open lines) to make the awkward position of the black king a significant factor; Black trusts that there will be enough barriers (closed lines) to hold the white attack at bay.

20...exd5 21 Nd4 Kc8 22 f4 Rb8 23 Rab1 Rb6!

Clearing the way for the black king to sidle over to the comparative safety of the a8-square. At the same time White is prevented from exploiting the open file with 24 Rxb8+ and 25 Rb1, as if now 24 Rxb6, then 24...axb6 blocks the line.

24 Kh1 Bc5 25 N2f3 Kb7 26 e6 Ka8 (Diagram 20)

Avoiding 26...fxe6 27 Nxe6, which would invigorate the white attack.

27 f5 Rhb8 28 Rxb6 Rxb6 29 Qa4 f6 30 h3 c3 31 Qa5?

White should evacuate the rook from f1, say, with 31 Rg1. Then Black has the better chances, but the protected passed pawn on e6 isn't to be underestimated.



Diagram 19 (W)

White will strive to open the position

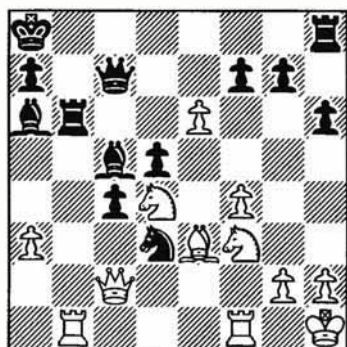


Diagram 20 (W)

Black's king reaches safety

31...Ne5?

Black missed 31...Nf2+! when he wins the exchange after 32 Bxf2 Bxf1, as 32 Rxf2 Rb1+ wins the white queen by discovered attack.

32 Re1?

Another mistake – no doubt time pressure was at work. After 32 Rc1! Nxf3 33 gxf3 the c3-pawn will be lost, so Black might do best to force a draw with 33...Qg3 34 Qxc5 Qh3+ 35 Kg1 Qg3+.

32...Nxf3 (Diagram 21) 33 Nxf3

If 33 gxf3 Qg3 the rook on e1 is hanging, so White has no time to capture the bishop on d5 – that's why he should have played 32 Rc1!

33...Bxe3 34 Qxd5+

Hopeless for White is 34 Rxe3 c2.

34...Rb7

Simpler was 34...Kb8.

35 Nd4 Qg3 36 Nf3 Qc7 37 Nd4 c2 38 Nxc2 Bc5

And not 38...Qxc2 39 e7.

39 Nb4 Bxb4 40 axb4 Qe7

The e6-pawn is stopped in its tracks, after which only a little care is needed by

Black to force the win.

41 Rd1 Bb5 42 Qf3 Kb8 43 Qf4+ Rc7 44 Rd6 Kc8 45 Qd2 Rc4 46 Qd5

Attacking the bishop and hoping to gain counterplay with 47 Qa8+, but now there is a surprisingly quick finish.

46...Rc1+ 47 Kh2 Kc7! 0-1

White's rook is trapped and he can't even try any tricks, as 48...Qxd6 will come with check.



Diagram 21 (W)

White is in huge trouble

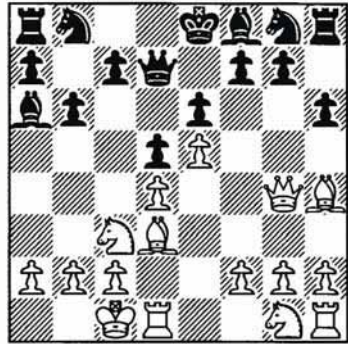


Diagram 22 (B)

Black must be accurate!

The Noah's Ark Trap



NOTE: If a player lets his bishop be gradually cornered by an advancing loop of enemy pawns, it is said he has fallen for the Noah's Ark Trap. Perhaps this is because the trap is so old it was known even before the Biblical flood!

A bishop can end up trapped by pawns in a multitude of manners when space is tight in the centre. In our French Exchange repertoire after 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 4 Nf3 Nc6 5 Bb5 Bd6 6 c4 we should play 6...dxc4! and avoid getting our bishop trapped after 6...Nge7?? 7 c5.

Something similar could happen to White in the McCutcheon: 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4 5 e5 h6 6 Bd2 Bxc3 7 bxc3 Ne4 8 Qg4 Kf8 9 Bd3 Nxd2 10 Kxd2 c5 11 h4 Nc6 and now 12 Ne2?? has a lot of positional merit as it leaves the f-file clear for the advance f4-f5, but it leaves the bishop in the mire after 12...c4.

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Here in the Advance Variation White has to be careful that he doesn't bunch his pieces together too tightly, or a bishop might fall off. A gruesome example follows.

Game 4

□ I.Dombai ■ I.Dudics

Budapest 2000

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 b6 5 Qg4 Bf8

Black plays in the style of our 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 b6 repertoire.

6 Bd3 Ba6 7 Bg5 Qd7 8 0-0-0 h6 9 Bh4?? (Diagram 22)

White, rated 2128 Elo, misses the danger to his bishop.

9...g5??

And Black, 2051 Elo, in his excitement gives his opponent the chance to escape. He should play 9...Bxd3 first and only after 10 Rxd3 trap the bishop with 10...g5.

10 Bg3??

An automatic move but White could have saved himself with the interpolation 10 Bxa6 Nxa6 11 Bg3 h5 12 Qe2, when the attack on the knight on a6 doesn't give Black time to trap the bishop with 12...h4.

10...h5 11 Qe2

The evil point is that 11 Qxg5 Bh6 pins the white queen. The queen is also lost to the black bishop after 11 Qh3 (trying to save the bishop by pinning the h-pawn) 11...g4 12 Qh4 Be7.

11...Bxd3 12 Rxd3 h4 and White played on until move 20 before resigning.

Case Study 4: White plays 4 Nf3

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 b6 4 Nf3 Ne7 (Diagram 23)

It makes sense to bolster the d5-point rather than play 4...Qd7 in view of White's next move.



WARNING! Plain poor for Black would be 4...Ba6?! 5 Bxa6 Nxa6 6 c4! when White breaks open the c-file with the threat of 7 Qa4+ winning the knight.

5 c4!

This is the critical test of Black's opening, as we will see in Game 5. After other moves Black can get on with the business of ...Ba6: for example, 5 Nc3 (Kasparov had Nc3 'for free' and it didn't do him much good, so it would be surprising if this

hurt Black here) 5...Ba6 6 Bxa6 Nxa6 7 0-0 Qd7 8 Ne2 Nb8 (the typical plan of re-routing the knight to c6) 9 Ng3 Nbc6 10 b3 0-0-0 11 Bb2 Kb7 12 c4 (not a well-supported advance as the white knights are absent on the kingside) 12...Nf5 13 Qe2 Be7 14 Rad1 g5! (having secured his king, Rustemov begins to activate his pawns on the kingside) 15 Ne1 Ng7 16 Nc2 h5 17 Qf3 h4 18 Ne2 Nf5 and Black had a pleasant position and eventually won (on move 102!) in M.Ulibin-A.Rustemov, Tomsk 2004.

Alternatively, 5 h4 Qd7 6 Nc3 Ba6 7 h5 Bxf1 8 Kxf1 h6 9 g3 c5 (meeting White's kingside play with counteraction in the centre) 10 Ne2 cxd4 11 Nexd4 Nec6 12 Kg2 Nxd4 13 Qxd4 was the course of S.Brunello-M.Stojanovic, Verona 2005, and here I think Black should have continued to strive for the initiative in the centre with 13...Nc6 14 Qg4 0-0-0 (**Diagram 24**) 15 c4 d4!.

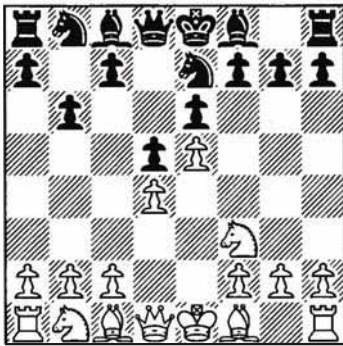


Diagram 23 (W)

Prudently delaying ...Ba6

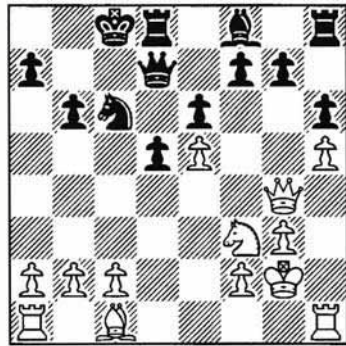


Diagram 24 (W)

An unbalanced situation

Game 5

□ K.Opl ■ J.Jurek

Austrian League 1991

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 b6 4 Nf3 Ne7 5 c4!

White puts immediate pressure on d5 and prepares to open the c-file for his rook. Note that in his game with Kasparov, Ivanchuk didn't have to face this approach as White had played 3 Nc3.

5...Bb7

A change of plan: the bishop has the potential to become a marvellous attacking

How to Play Against 1 e4

piece once a pawn exchange on c4 or d5 opens its diagonal, but for the moment Black is more concerned with holding together his centre.

6 Nc3 Qd7 7 Be3

White defends d4 and prepares to bring his rook to the centre.

7...Nbc6 (Diagram 25)

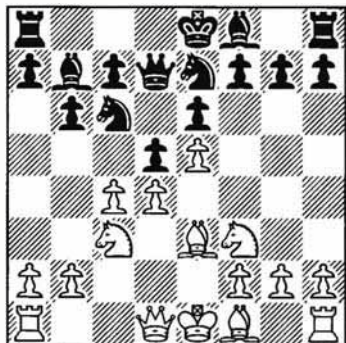


Diagram 25 (W)

The h1-a8 diagonal is likely to open

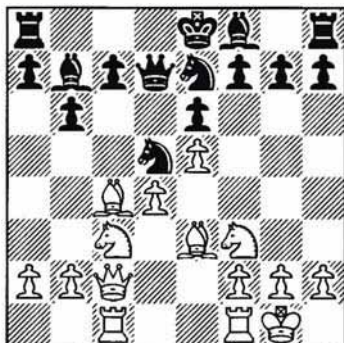


Diagram 26 (B)

d5 is a key square

We should think about the pawn structure here.



NOTE: A hole is a square of strategic importance in a player's pawn structure that can no longer be defended by a pawn.

At some point White is going to play cxd5, to open lines for his pieces, or likewise Black will play ...dxc4. In either case the d5-square is revealed to be a hole in the white centre. As Black can put a knight on this square, and it is also controlled by the bishop on b7, it seems like a serious concession by White.

On the other hand, apart from the d5-square, Black is short of space for his pieces: in particular, he has two knights but only one of them can sit on the dream square. Furthermore, when a knight is on d5 the bishop on b7 finds its way blocked.

Black still has to watch out for Qa4+ tricks. Thus the alternative 7...Na6, with the centralizing plan of ...dxc4, ...Nb4 and then ...Nbd5, runs into 8 cxd5! Nxd5 9 Nxd5 when recapturing with the queen loses after 9...Qxd5? 10 Qa4+ Qd7 11 Bb5 c6 12 Bxa6. So Black would be obliged to make the positionally undesirable recapture 9...exd5. In that case the hole on d5 vanishes, leaving the bishop on b7 shut in and White with much the superior pawn structure.

If at all possible Black wants to recapture on d5 with a piece, not a pawn.

8 Rc1 0-0-0?

In the game A. Wagner-H. Dobosz, Bayern 1998, Black held the draw with 8...dxc4 9 Bxc4 Nb4 10 0-0 Nbd5 11 Qc2 (**Diagram 26**) 11...Nxc3 (strengthening the white pawn structure, but creating room for the other knight to go to d5) 12 bxc3 Nd5 13 Bd3 Be7 14 Qe2 Nxe3 (another exchange that helps the white pawns, but Dobosz trusts in the bishop-pair and the solidity of his own structure to see him through) 15 fxe3 0-0 16 Nd2 (if Black plays passively White will get a clear edge with 17 Ne4, already threatening the combinative 18 Nf6+) 17...f5! (an important move that activates Black's game and leads to more simplification) 17 exf6 Rxf6 18 Rxf6 Bxf6 19 Qh5 g6 20 Qg4 Rf8 21 Rf1 Qe7 22 Be4 Bc8 23 Qg3 e5 24 Bd5+ Kg7 25 Ne4 Bh4 26 Qxe5+ Qxe5 27 dxe5 Rxf1+ 28 Kxf1 Bf5 and ½-½; White can't make anything of his extra pawn, as next move Black intends ...Bxe4 forcing an opposite-coloured bishop endgame.

Dobosz's way of handling the position seems OK for Black, but it's not very exciting. Instead Jurek holds out from making the exchange 8...dxc4 – he wants White to make the exchange himself with cxd5, when Black gains counterplay by activating his queen. This is all very fine and good, but what if White finds a way to avoid the exchange, thereby leaving the black pieces all dressed up on the d-file but with nowhere to go?

If Black wants to avoid playing like Dobosz, I think he should prefer 8...Rd8! as the black king could have become a target on b8. If then 9 cxd5 Nxd5 10 Nxd5 Qxd5 Black has counterplay similar to the game, while 9 c5, spurning the exchange on d5, is unclear after 9...bxc5 10 Na4 c4 11 Nc5 Qc8 12 Qa4 Nf5.

9 cxd5?

As we said above, Black's build-up has been designed to achieve counterplay after this exchange. Therefore White might have left the black pieces frustrated with the pawn offer 9 c5! (**Diagram 27**), bypassing the d5-square. Then 9...bxc5 10 Na4! c4 11 Nc5 Qe8 12 b3, opening lines, looks very dangerous for the black king. Alternatively, White could have tried 9 Qa4!? when 9...dxc4 10 Bxc4 leaves Black facing a very awkward pin on c6 with 11 Bb5.

9...Nxd5 10 Nxd5 Qxd5 11 Bc4 Qa5+!?

Also possible was 11...Qe4!?: for example, 12 Bd3 (and not 12 0-0? Nxe5!, while 12 Kf1! Nb4!? 13 a3 Nd5 is equal) 12...Qg4 13 h3 Qxg2 14 Rh2 (the black queen is trapped, but...) 14...Bb4+ 15 Rc3 (15 Ke2? Nxd4+ 16 Nxd4 Qxh2 and wins) 15...Nxd4 16 Rxc2 Nxf3+ 17 Kf1 Nxe5 18 Qc2 Bxc3 19 Be2 Bd4 with some advantage to Black.

12 Kf1

Black has counterplay after 12 Ke2 Bc5 13 Qd3 g5 14 h3 h5 etc.

12...Rd7?

How to Play Against 1 e4

Here 12...Bc5!? (**Diagram 28**) looks good for Black: for example, 13 Bd2 (or 13 h3 Bxd4! 14 Nxd4 Qxe5 and the pin on the d-file will see Black regain his piece, leaving him a couple of pawns up) 13...Bb4 14 Bg5 Nxd4 15 Bxd8 Rxd8 16 Nxd4 Qxe5 17 Qe2 Qxd4 18 Ba6 Bxa6 19 Qxa6+ Kb8 with problems for White due to his passive rook on h1 and awkwardly placed king.

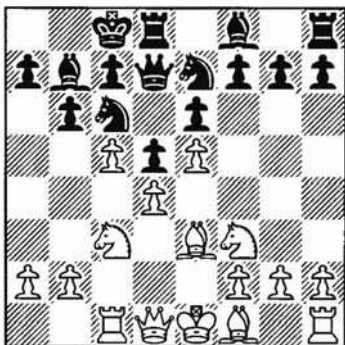


Diagram 27 (B)
Cramping Black

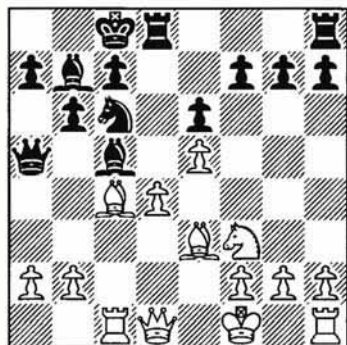


Diagram 28 (W)
Pressuring d4

13 Qe2 g5

Black had to try 13...a6.

14 h3?

The pin on c6 wins material after 14 Bb5! g4 15 Nd2.

14...Rg8 15 a3 h5!

Jurek's queen is now surrounded, so he has to stake his survival on a wild counterattack. It certainly won't be easy, though, for White to cut through the complications and find a safe way to exploit his huge material advantage.

16 Bd2 g4 17 Bxa5 gxf3 18 gxf3 Nxd4 19 Qe3 Nxf3 (**Diagram 29**)

Also insufficient for Black is 19...bxa5 20 Be2.

20 Be2?

The best way to consolidate was 20 Bc3 Bc5 21 Qf4.

20...Nd4 21 Rh2 bxa5 22 f4 Be7 23 h4 Kb8 24 a4?

Giving away the b4-square to Black's bishop is a disaster, but Black already had plenty of activity, as shown by 24 Rc3 Nf5 (or 24...Nxe2 25 Qxe2 Rg4) 25 Qf2 f6, etc.

24...Nf5 25 Qb3 Ng3+ 26 Ke1 Bb4+ 27 Rc3 Ne4 28 Bf1 Rg1 29 Qc4 Ng3

Instead Black has a winning attack after 29...Nc5, intending ...Ba6: for instance, 30 Kf2 Rg4 31 Be2 Ne4+ 32 Ke1 Rg3 and c3 drops. However, after the game move White should play 30 Rf2!.

30 Kf2 Rxf1+ 31 Kxg3 Rg1+ 32 Kf2 Rg4 33 Rc2? (Diagram 30)

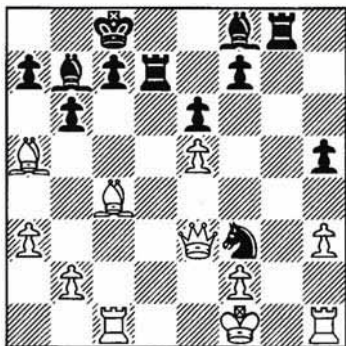


Diagram 29 (W)

Desperation from Black...

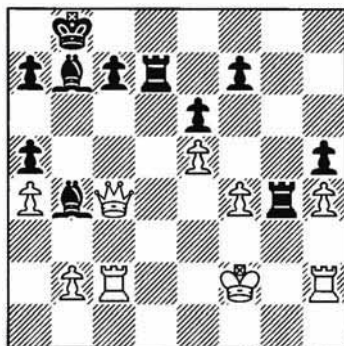


Diagram 30 (B)

...but White lacks a cool head

It was vital to offer the exchange of rooks with 33 Rd3.

33...c5! 34 Kf1 Rd4 35 Qb5 Rxf4+

Correct was 35...Rd1+ 36 Kf2 Rxf4+ 37 Kg3 (or 37 Ke3 Rf3+ 38 Ke2 Re1 mate) 37...Rf3+ 38 Kg2 Rf5+ 39 Kh3 a6 40 Qe8+ Ka7 when there is no good way to stop 41...Rd3 mate.

36 Rhf2??

Falling into a mate. After 36 Rcf2 the game would probably have ended in a draw by repetition with 36...Rd1+ 37 Ke2 Rd2+ 38 Kf1 Rd1+.

36...Rd1+ 37 Ke2 Re1+ 38 Kd3 Rd4 mate (0-1)

Rather a good place to end our examination of 3...b6!

The ...Qb6 & ...Bd7 Variation

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3

Note that White's fourth move, while common, isn't forced and we will examine the alternatives to 4 c3 in the final section of this chapter.

4...Qb6 5 Nf3 Bd7 (Diagram 31)

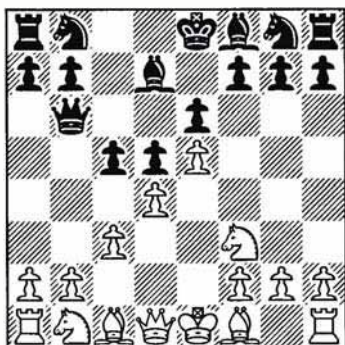


Diagram 31 (W)

Another way to activate the bad bishop

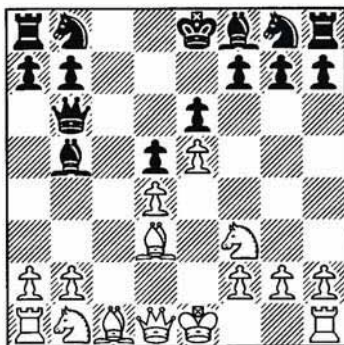


Diagram 32 (W)

Continuing thematically

We now turn our attention to another variation in which Black plans to offer the exchange of light-squared bishops. After 5...Bd7, White has a number of approaches and it makes sense to work our way through the theory of them one by one.

1. White plays 6 Bd3 cxd4 7 cxd4

Game 6

□ G.Dominguez Aguilar ■ R.Djurhuus

Turin Olympiad 2006

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3 Qb6 5 Nf3 Bd7 6 Bd3 cxd4



WARNING: Black could play 6...Bb5, which on the face of it seems a good idea as the white knight on b1 doesn't get access to the c3-square. However, the drawback is 7 dxc5! Bxc5 8 b4! when if Black plays 8...Bxf2+? the bishop is trapped and lost after 9 Ke2, planning 10 Rf1.

Instead the game might continue 8...Bxd3 9 Qxd3 Bf8 (f2 is still taboo) 10 0-0. Then the further advance of the queenside pawns, using the black queen as a target,

gives White a good game. Hence it is sensible for Black to exchange first on d4.

7 cxd4 Bb5 (Diagram 32)

Black sticks to the thematic plan of exchanging bishops. It is also possible to play sharply with 7...Nc6!? 8 0-0 Nxd4, grabbing the d4-pawn and accepting the Milner-Barry Gambit. Incidentally, this gambit is named after Sir Stuart Milner-Barry, who worked at Bletchley Park helping to crack the Enigma Code during the Second World War, and slightly less augustly played for my local chess team during his final years. I never got to face the inventor of the gambit, but I saw him shaking his head in amused fashion when one of my opponents played the gambit all wrong against me.

After 9 Nxd4 Qxd4 10 Nc3 a6! (stopping any tricks with Nb5; it is sensible to spurn the capture of the second pawn on e5 as White has more initiative upon 11 Re1 Qb8 12 Nxd5, although Black is by no means doing badly after 12...Bd6) 11 Qe2 Ne7 Black can continue with 12...Nc6 and then ...Bc5, etc, when White is struggling to justify his pawn sacrifice. On the other hand, the Milner-Barry has developed a lot of complex theory, so until you are up and running with the French it's sensible to adopt the solid 6...Bb5 approach.

8 0-0 Bxd3 9 Qxd3 Qa6!

An unpleasant move for White. He doesn't want to exchange queens, as his space advantage in the centre is most useful if it can be combined with threats to the enemy king. In an endgame, Black would have good chances of attacking d4 and gaining control of the c-file. The black king could go fearlessly to d7, in order to support the action of the rooks along the c-file, whereas the white king could only watch from a distance. Meanwhile White's own natural plan of advancing on the kingside with the eventual aim of f4-f5 would be very hard to implement.

10 Qb3 Nc6 11 Nc3 Bb4 (Diagram 33)

Djurhuus prevents the white knight attacking him with 12 Nb5.

12 a4

An alternative was 12 Na4, avoiding the exchange on c3, when 12...b5 13 Nc5 Bxc5 14 dxc5 Nge7 reaches an unbalanced position.

12...Bxc3

White mustn't be allowed to play 13 Nb5! when he has a bind on the queenside.

13 bxc3 Na5

A plan that will meet with great success: the knight heads for c4 to exchange itself for White's bishop on a3. However, 13...Nge7 14 Ba3 0-0 was a safer way to handle the position.

14 Qc2 Nc4 15 Ba3?

A serious positional mistake. There is some truth in the humorous saying that 'the worst bishop is better than the best knight'. Here the black horse is excellently

How to Play Against 1 e4

placed on c4, a hole in the white pawn structure from which it can never be dislodged by a pawn, even if the game lasted another 10,000 moves. But White still shouldn't have let his bishop be exchanged for it!



NOTE: White needed to keep some dynamism in his set-up, as after his bishop is exchanged off he drifts into a passive position with weak pawns in which he has no real chances to complicate matters.

At least with a bishop versus the knight, there is always going to be some intrinsic imbalance in the position, no matter how bad the objective assessment for White. For this reason the black knight should have been challenged with 15 Nd2!. After its exchange Black can still talk about the weak pawns on a4 and c3 and the hole on c4, but White can point to the bishop which is going to a3.

15...Nxa3 16 Rxa3 Ne7 17 Rb1 Rc8 (Diagram 34)

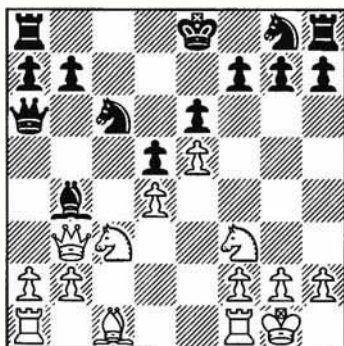


Diagram 33 (W)

Knights like fixed structures

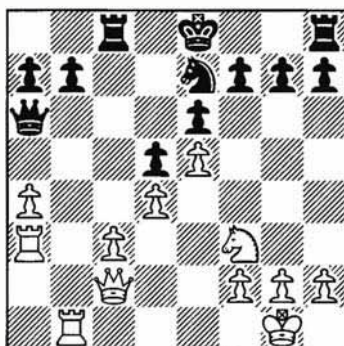


Diagram 34 (W)

Black has most of the trumps

Black has a very easy game, but as so often in the French, he mustn't be in a hurry to castle. If 17...0-0 then 18 Ng5! is awkward as both 18...Nf5 19 g4 and 18...Ng6 19 h4! cause him problems. Thus Djurhuus concentrates for the moment on increasing the pressure against c3.

18 Rb5 Rc7 19 h4 h6!



TIP: This is a vital prelude to castling kingside. We often see in the Advance Variation the value of ...h6 in denying the white knight the g5-square, whether its aim in going there is to directly attack something or to clear the way for the advance of the f-pawn.

20 Qd3 0-0 21 g4 Rfc8 22 h5

White's plan of advancing pawns on the kingside would be very powerful if Black's pieces were boxed in on the queenside, as then the white rooks could be quickly transferred to the kingside to make the attack decisive. However, here the white rooks dare not leave their posts, as a collapse on c3 or a4 would soon follow.

22...Rc4 23 Kg2 R8c7 24 Rbb3 b6 25 Nd2 Qa5! (Diagram 35)

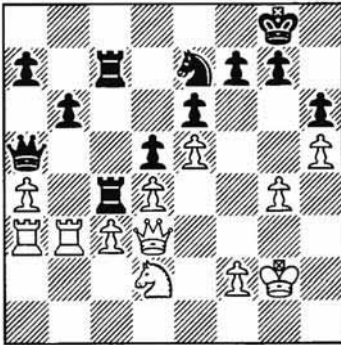


Diagram 35 (W)

The pressure mounts

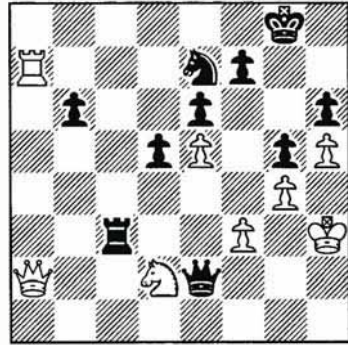


Diagram 36 (W)

Finishing in style

Black's point is that 26 Nxc4 dxc4 sees White lose a rook to the pawn fork. Up until here White has been able to hold on to his pawns thanks to some tricks, but now something has got to give. Seeing that a4 can't be saved, he tries to lay one last trap:

26 Qc2 Rxd4 27 Rb5 Qa6 28 f3

It looks as though the black rook is trapped, but Black's next move wins the f5-square for it.

28...g5! 29 Qa2?! Rxa4!

It turns out the rook doesn't need the f4-square...

30 Rxa4 Qxb5 31 Rxa7 Qe2+ 32 Kh3 Rxc3! (Diagram 36)

The virus that killed the white queenside is about to spread to the kingside.

33 Rxe7 Rxf3+! 34 Nxf3 Qxa2 0-1

2. White plays 6 Bd3 cxd4 7 Nxd4!?

Game 7

□ I.Khairullin ■ S.Volkov

Moscow 2008

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3 Qb6 5 Nf3 Bd7 6 Bd3 cxd4 7 Nxd4! (Diagram 37)

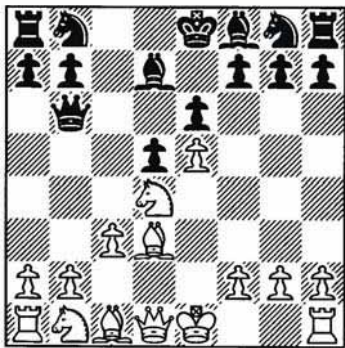


Diagram 37 (B)

Cutting across Black's plans

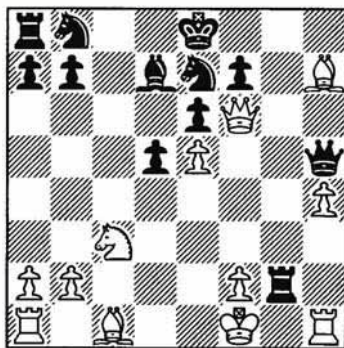


Diagram 38 (B)

Complex stuff!

An important alternative for White. It rules out the possible transposition to the Milner-Barry Gambit after 7 cxd4 Nc6, and also prevents the plan of ...Bb5: for instance, 7...Nc6 8 Nxc6 Bxc6 9 Qe2 still stops 9...Bb5.

7...Bc5!?

I like Volkov's idea of an immediate challenge to the white knight. The drawback is that White can target the g7-pawn, but Black seems to have plenty of activity in the resulting melee.

8 Qg4 Ne7 9 0-0

In an earlier Volkov game, White had accepted the pawn offer with 9 Qxg7, leading to a highly double edged-clash: 9...Rg8 10 Qf6 (a necessary move as 10 Qxh7 Bxd4 11 cxd4 Qxd4 would be awkward for White who has no good way to defend e5) 10...Rxb2 11 Bxh7 Bxd4 12 cxd4 Qxd4 13 Nc3 (and not 13 Qh8+? Ng8 14 Bxg8?? Qxf2+ with mate next move) 13...Qg4 14 h4 Qh5 15 Kf1 (**Diagram 38**).

The white bishop on h7 is hanging, but Black's rook is going to run out of safe

squares on the g-file, so it is a question of how and when he should give up the exchange.

Here Volkov went astray with 15...Rxf2+? and ended up losing after 16 Kxf2 Qxh7 17 Bg5 Nbc6 18 Ra1, as White was just in time to carry out an attack down the c-file before Black could generate counterplay against the exposed white king: 18...0-0-0 19 b4! Kb8 20 b5 Ng8 21 Qf4 Nce7 22 a4 Rc8 23 Ne2 Nf5 24 Rxc8+ Bxc8 25 Rc1 Qg7 26 Qb4 Ngh6 27 Qc5 Ng4+ 28 Ke1 and 1-0 was A.Volokitin-S.Volkov, Dresden 2007.

I gave this game on the *ChessPublishing* website, and one of the subscribers, Tarek Riabi, pointed out that 15...Rg4! was a far better move, as Black reaches the position in the game after 17 Bg5, but *with an extra tempo* after the plausible continuation 16 f3 Rg3 17 Kf2 Rxf3+ 18 Qxf3 Qxh7 19 Bg5 Nbc6 20 Qf6. Black has full compensation for the exchange in view of the bare position of the white king and what David Bronstein once described as ‘the most powerful weapon in chess’ – the right to move next. For example, if we continue in the style of the Volokitin game with 20...0-0-0 21 Ra1 we can use our extra tempo on 21...Kb8!. Now after 22 b4 we have time for 22...Re8!, guarding the knight on e7 and so taking the sting out of 23 b5? which can be answered by 23...Nb4, when White is facing a fork on d3. And if White holds back on advancing the b-pawn after 21 Ra1 Kb8, he has to reckon with the flowering of the black position with moves like 22...d4 and 23...Nd5.

I guess the best evidence that Black is at least OK in this sharp variation is that Volkov was prepared to enter it again, and Khairullin declined the offer.

9...Ng6 10 Nf3 Bb5

So Black gets to exchange the light-squared bishops after all.

11 Bxb5+ Qxb5 12 Nbd2 Nd7 (Diagram 39)

Volkov has emerged from the opening with a promising position: White is starting to fall behind in development and the e5-pawn is hanging. Therefore Khairullin has to find a sharp continuation.

13 c4! Qc6

Of course it would be foolish to play 13...dxc4? when 14 Nxc4 brings the white knight to a good square where it supports the e5-pawn.

14 b3 Ndxе5

Black eliminates the central pawn before it can be defended by 15 Bb2.

15 Nxe5 Nxe5 16 Qxg7 Ng6 17 Nf3

Threatening to win at once with 18 Ne5! when after the black queen saves herself, 19 Nxg6 eliminates the defender of the rook on h8.

Instead 17 cxd5 Qxd5 18 Nf3 0-0-0!? would give Black attacking chances down the g-file with 19...Rhg8. Thus 19 Qxf7? would be a howler because of 19...Rdf8 20 Qg7 Rxf3 21 gxf3 Bd4 – even if a1 wasn’t hanging, White would be losing due to

How to Play Against 1 e4

the weakness on f3 after 22...Ne5.

17...Bf8! 18 Qd4 dxc4 19 Bg5 (Diagram 40)

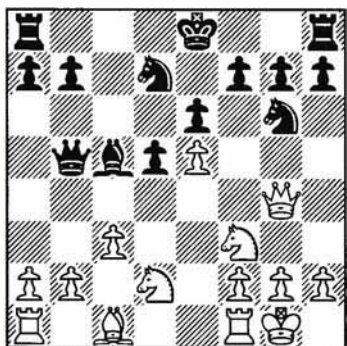


Diagram 39 (W)

Black is comfortably placed

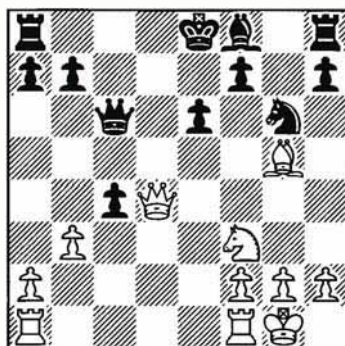


Diagram 40 (B)

White fights for the initiative

White gives up a pawn so that he keeps the initiative. In contrast, after 19 bxc4 Rg8 Black's queen and rook start generating threats against g2.

19...c3 20 Rad1

Intending a good old-fashioned mate on d8 after 20...c2? with 21 Qd8+ Rxd8 22 Rxd8.

20...Be7 21 Qg7 Bf8

Here 21...c2? is still a blunder because of 22 Ne5! when Black loses a couple of queens after 22...cxd1 Q 23 Qxf7+ Kd8 24 Nxc6+ bxc6 25 Rxd1+, while 22...Nxe5 23 Qxh8+ Bf8 24 Rd4! or 24 Qxe5! gives White good winning chances.

Therefore Volkov offers a repetition which White has no reason to refuse in view of the strength of the black pawn on c3.

22 Qd4 Be7 23 Qg7 Bf8 ½-½

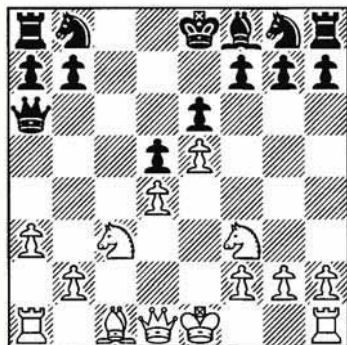
3. White plays 6 a3

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3 Qb6 5 Nf3 Bd7 6 a3

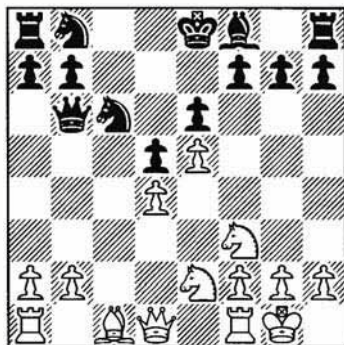
White knows that his opponent intends to offer an exchange on b5, and so leaves his bishop on f1. Instead he makes a useful little move, planning to gain space with b2-b4.

6...cxd4

An interesting alternative played by Volkov is 6...a5!?, intending to get a hold on the b3-square with 7...a4 and then carry out the manoeuvre ...Nc6-a5-c4 to attack b2 (the light-squared bishop stays on d7). White's best reply might be 7 b3! when 7...a4? can be answered by 8 b4, giving White a grip on the c5-square.

7 cxd4 Bb5 8 Bxb5+ Qxb5 9 Nc3 Qa6 (Diagram 41)**Diagram 41 (W)**

Preventing White from castling

**Diagram 42 (W)**

The best square for the king's knight

If White is going to gain any advantage here, he needs to harass the queen by advancing his queenside pawns, perhaps combined with the move Nb5 to threaten a fork on c7.

10 b4!?

This is to the point. Instead in a blitz game Volkov achieved an impeccable development of his pieces after 10 Ne2 Ne7 11 0-0 Nec6 (completing a popular knight manoeuvre in this set-up) 12 Nf4 Nd7 13 Nd3 Rc8 14 Be3 Be7 15 Rc1 0-0 in P.Svidler-S.Volkov, Internet (blitz) 2004.

10...Nd7

Black wisely develops and avoids 10...Bxb4? 11 axb4 Qxa1 12 Nb5, which would give White a very dangerous attack.

Following the text, Black seems to be OK after 11 b5 Qa5 12 Bd2 Qd8 when White's queenside advance has missed its mark. Instead 11 Bd2! is more challenging, when after 11...Ne7 12 a4 (with ideas of 13 Nb5) 12...Qb6 13 0-0 a6 14 a5 Qd8 15 b5 White had the initiative in A.Motylev-A.Anastasian, Dubai 2005, though Black defended successfully for a draw. I would be tempted after 11 Bd2

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by 11...Qd3!? when the queen keeps on hindering White from castling. After 12 Qe2 (or 12 Qa4 a6) 12...Qxe2+ 13 Kxe2 a6 (to stop 14 Nb5), followed by 14...Ne7 and 15...Nc6, I don't see any quick blow by White on the queenside to take advantage of his lead in development.

4. White plays 6 Be2

Game 8

□ **A.Grischuk** ■ **R.Vaganian**

World Team Championship, Yerevan 2001

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3 Qb6 5 Nf3 Bd7 6 Be2



NOTE: Here Black can carry out unobstructed his plan to exchange bishops, but he still needs to be vigilant as White's space advantage allows him to probe for a breakthrough on either flank.

We will now see how French Defence maestro Vaganian handled this position against a very strong opponent:

6...cxd4 7 cxd4 Bb5 8 Nc3

After 8 0-0 Bxe2 9 Qxe2 Qa6! 10 Qxa6 Nxa6 the exchange of queens is annoying for White as he can no longer target the black king.

8...Bxe2 9 Nxe2 Ne7 10 0-0 Nec6! (Diagram 42)

Shades of Shabalov-Seirawan, above in the 3...b6 section. The knight crosses the board to 'steal' the excellent post on c6 from its brother-in-arms on b8.

11 Rb1 a5!

Beginners are often scolded for making aimless moves with their a- and h-pawns, but Vaganian's move is of great merit, as it prevents White from gaining space with b2-b4. If instead he had played the routine 11...Nd7, then 12 b4 would have followed when 12...Bxb4? would, of course, lose a piece to 13 a3.



TIP: When the position is closed, rapid development isn't the priority. It's much more important to put your pieces on their optimum squares, even if it takes a couple of tempi, as for instance with 10...Nec6, and prevent the opponent playing good moves like 12 b4.

12 Qd2

Denied any joy on the queenside, Grischuk intends to transfer his queen to the kingside and begin an attack there.

12...h6! (Diagram 43)

Another little move of great merit. It takes away the g5-square from the white knight and queen and gives the black pawns the power to expand with ...g5, whether for attacking or defensive purposes.

13 h4 Nd7

Frustrated by not getting to go to c6, the knight has to make do with a 'quite reasonable' central square. Still, for the overall harmony of Black's position it's best to have his cavalry on c6 and d7, rather than a knight and bishop both fighting over the e7-square.

14 Rd1 Qa6

One of the benefits of the exchange of light-squared bishops is that the black queen can take command of a strong diagonal.

15 a3 a4!

Again Vaganian is quick to stamp on the idea of b2-b4. He also clears the way for his knight to go on a journey to b3.

16 Nc3 Na5 17 Qf4 Nb3 18 Nd2 (Diagram 44) 18...Nxc1!

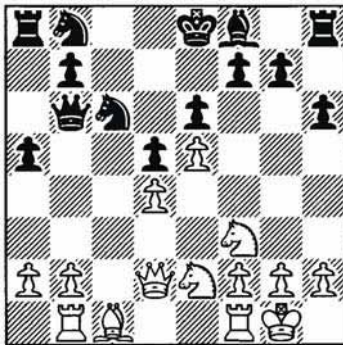


Diagram 43 (W)

Fine prophylactic play from Vaganian

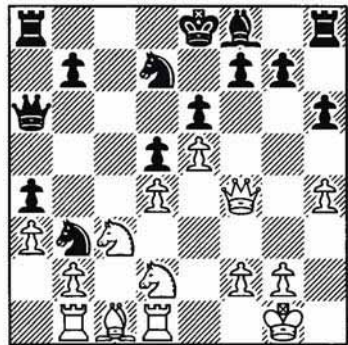


Diagram 44 (B)

Which piece to exchange?

The worst bishop is better than the best knight! – compare the comment to 15 Ba3 on page 33. The black knight makes five moves to eliminate a bishop that hasn't moved once, but Vaganian has realized the white cleric would otherwise pressure his kingside, obstructing the counterplay he achieves in the game.

19 Rbxc1 Be7 20 Qg4 g5!

Black can't castle because of 20...0-0 21 Nxd5! exd5 22 Qxd7. Instead the Armenian Grandmaster intends to wrench the initiative on the kingside from his opponent.

21 Nf3 Nb6 22 Rb1 Rc8 23 Qh5 Kd7!

As so often the black king belongs in the centre in the French Advance. Vaganian finds a way for his queen to connect with events on the kingside.

24 Qxf7 Rcf8 25 Qh5 Rf5 26 hxg5 Qa8! (Diagram 45)

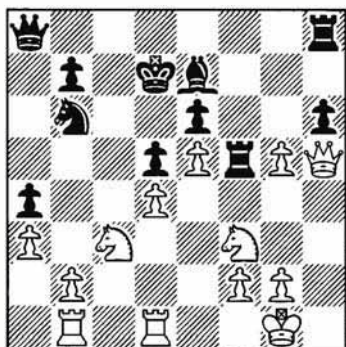


Diagram 45 (W)

Black holds his own on the kingside

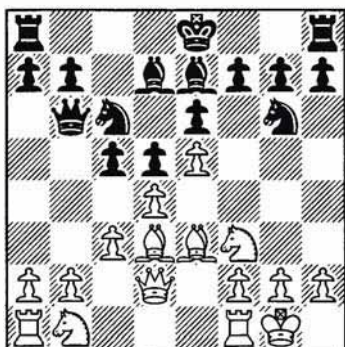


Diagram 46 (B)

Can Black advance his c-pawn?

A pretty move. The queen breaks the pin on h6 by defending h8 after which White has to take care his king isn't mated.

27 b3!

In the opening stage the queenside was Black's 'territory' and the kingside belonged to White, but now the battle is over the whole board.

27...hxg5 28 Qg4 Qf8 29 bxa4 Rf4 30 Qg3 Bd8!

Black defends his knight and so is ready to push back the knight on f3 with 31...g4, when things would get very dangerous for the white king. Thus Grischuk forces a draw with 'perpetual check' on the black rook.

31 Ne2 Re4 32 Nc3 Rf4 33 Ne2 Re4 34 Nc3 Rf4 ½-½



NOTE: As we have seen, players such as Volkov and Vaganian play the French in a highly dynamic manner – no boring defence for them!

Black's queenside pawn push

Finally, I wish to show you a game which isn't part of our Advance repertoire, but is very instructive nevertheless. It will help you to understand the blocked posi-

tions which frequently arise not only after 3 e5, but also in certain variations of the Classical and Tarrasch with 3...Be7.

Above all, it is essential that you grasp the nature of the kingside versus queenside struggle that often takes place in the French Defence.

When the centre is blocked, with white pawns on d4 and e5 and black pawns on d5 and e6, Black has to make an important strategic choice: either he maintains pressure on the d4-point with ...c5, or he advances the pawn one square further to c4 as part of a queenside attacking scheme. In the latter case White usually has more freedom of action to carry out his own strategic advance f4-f5, because he doesn't have to expend energy on guarding d4.

Game 9

□ H.Jonkman ■ G.Hertneck

Saint Vincent 2000

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 c3 Nc6 5 Nf3 Bd7 6 Be2 Nge7 7 0-0 Ng6 8 Bd3 Be7 9 Be3 Qb6 10 Qd2 (Diagram 46)

Here Black made a decision that it is vital to get right because the laws of chess don't allow it to be reversed: he moved a pawn forwards.

10...c4

If now 11 Bc2? Qxb2. Thus the pawn thrust has the virtue of chasing the white bishop from its best diagonal where it aims at the key squares f5 (the breakthrough square for a future f4-f5 advance) and h7 (the weakest square in the black kingside).

11 Be2 0-0 12 g3

White plans to put his knight on g2 after he has retreated it to e1 to get out of the way of the f4-f5 advance.

12...Qd8!

When it comes to chess strategy, a queen sometimes has to demur to the wishes of her lowliest subjects. Here she is obliged to return home to clear the way for her pawns.

13 Ne1

Given time White will build up with a sequence such as f4, Ng2, Qc2, Nd2, g4 and f5, when he would have a crushing attack. Therefore Hertneck takes precautions:

13...f5! (Diagram 47)



TIP: The ...f7-f5 blocking move is often vital in this type of pawn structure.

Here it comes under favourable circumstances, as the response 14 exf6 isn't very

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effective: after 14...Bxf6 White isn't well positioned to take advantage of the opening of lines – the important e5-square is well guarded by the black pieces and he can't attack the e6-pawn. Meanwhile Black could regroup his pieces with moves like ...Ne7, ...Nf5, ...Be8 and ...Bg6.

Normally White would be pleased to have the chance to open lines on the kingside, especially as Black has taken the heat off his centre with ...c4. However, here he is playing minus the services of his knight on b1, and his other pieces aren't that well placed either. Hence we see that Hertneck's decision to play 10...c4 was based on an assessment of the finer points of the specific position in front of him. In a slightly different scenario the German Grandmaster might have kept the pawn on c5 and focused his operations against d4 and along the c-file after the exchange ...cxd4; cxd4.

14 f4

Jonkman fixes the pawns on the kingside, evidently with a view to building up with h2-h3 and g3-g4, but he never gets around to that as events on the queenside distract him.

14...b5 15 Ng2 Rb8

Black continues his steady build up – there is no need to rush with ...b4.

16 b4

White decides to block the pawn advance in the same way as 13...f5 frustrated him on the kingside. However, it is much easier for Black to find a new avenue of attack – it is right next door on the a-file.

16...a5! 17 a3 Ra8! (Diagram 48)

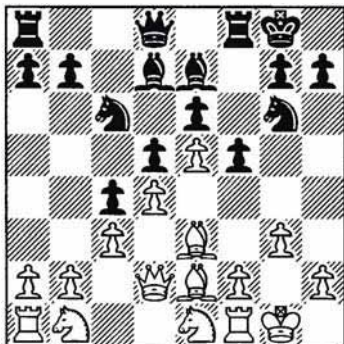


Diagram 47 (W)

Black closes the kingside

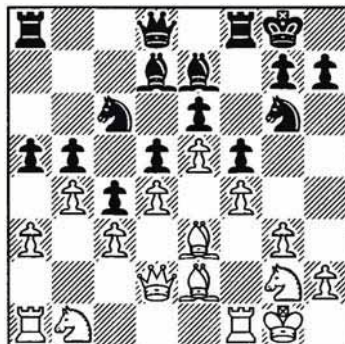


Diagram 48 (W)

Black has queenside pressure

Flexible play by Black: the rook no longer has a function on the b-file and so returns to a8. The threat is 18...axb4 19 cxb4 Bxb4, winning a pawn.

18 Ra2 axb4 19 cxb4?

It's easy to sympathize with White's desire to keep the a-file closed, and there is also some merit in clearing the c3-square for the knight. But here the ancient rule that you should recapture towards the centre holds good. After 19 axb4! the white pawns remain in tight formation, with the base of their chain at c3 difficult to attack; whereas now the base is on a3, a very vulnerable square that can be pulverized by the black pieces.

Therefore it was by far the lesser evil to submit to the loss of control of the open file after 19 axb4 Rxa2 20 Qxa2 Qa8 21 Qb2.

19...Qb6

The queen returns to b6 en route to a7 as part of the tripling of the heavy pieces against the unfortunate a3-pawn.

20 Rc2 Ra6 21 Rb2 Qa7 22 Qc3

White can't add to the defence of a3 as if 22 Ra2, then 22...Bxb4.

22...Ra8 23 h3

White's kingside counterplay only begins as the dam is about to burst on the queenside.

23...Rxa3!

After this exchange sacrifice White won't be able to hang on to both the b4- and d4-pawns, which means that Black will gain connected passed pawns.

24 Nxa3 Qxa3 25 Bd2 Bd8! (Diagram 49)

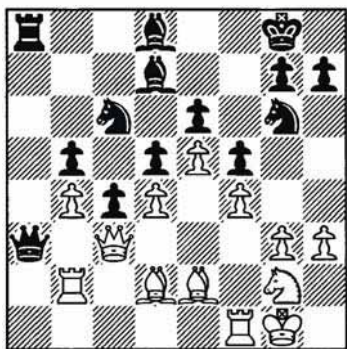


Diagram 49 (W)

A promising exchange sacrifice

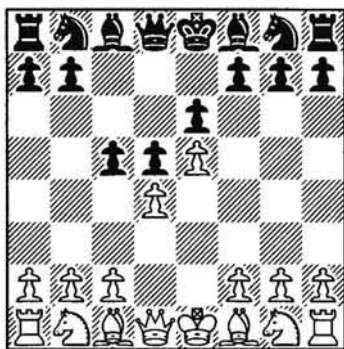


Diagram 50 (W)

4 c3 isn't forced

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The bishop has sat quietly on e7 since move 8, but now its entrance into the battle decides the game. Once it reaches b6, the white defences will be over-stretched.

26 Rd1 Bb6 27 Be1 Qxc3 28 Bxc3 Ra3 29 Rc2 Rb3

At last Black has the b4-pawn in his clutches. After its loss White can do nothing effective to stop himself being crushed by Black's queenside juggernaut.

30 Ba1 Nxb4 31 Rb2 Ra3!

A little trick to keep the rooks on the board. If now 32 Rxb4 Rxa1 33 Rxa1 Bxd4+ 34 Kf1 Bxa1, etc. The rest is pretty straightforward, with White making a forlorn sacrifice that does nothing to ward off his slow demise:

32 Kh2 Na6 33 Rc2 Ne7 34 Bb2 Rb3 35 Ba1 b4 36 g4 Ra3 37 Bxc4 dxc4 38 Rxc4 Bb5 39 Rcc1 Nc7 40 d5 Ncxd5 41 Bd4 Bxd4 42 Rxd4 Bd3 0-1

White's 4th-move Alternatives

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 (Diagram 50)

White doesn't have to defend d4 with 4 c3 here. Instead we will see a completely different strategy in action in our next illustrative game, beginning with 4 dxc5.

Another idea is 4 Nf3 cxd4 5 Bd3 Nc6 6 0-0. White intends to pick up the d4-pawn at his leisure, having developed his pieces to good squares and consolidated his defence of the e5-pawn. However, 6...f6! foils this plan, as the e5-pawn vanishes and it is the black pieces that come alive: for example, 7 Bf4 fxe5 8 Nxe5 Nf6 9 Nd2 Bd6 10 Qe2 0-0 11 Ndf3 Qc7 and Black was at least equal in J.Aagaard-N.McDonald, Budapest 1996.

Finally, 4 Qg4 is sometimes tried as 4...cxd4 5 Nf3 Nc6 6 Bd3 is similar to the 4 Nf3 plan, except that the white queen is on g4.



TIP: I prefer a more precise response by Black: 4...Nc6 5 Nf3 Qa5+! (Diagram 51). The check disrupts White's build up, as 6 Bd2 Qb6 attacks b2 and so gains time, while after 6 Nbd2 the bishop on c1 is shut out of the game.

Instead the natural reply to 5...Qa5+ is 6 c3, but then Black can take on d4 and c3, meaning that he is a sound pawn up: 6...cxd4 7 Bd3 dxc3 and if now 8 Nxc3, Black can force the exchange of queens with 8...Qb4! in view of the threat of 9...d4 pinning the knight. Instead after 8 bxc3 d4 9 0-0 dxc3 White proved unable to justify his pawn sacrifices in F.Jimenez Villena-A.Shabalov, Linares 2000.

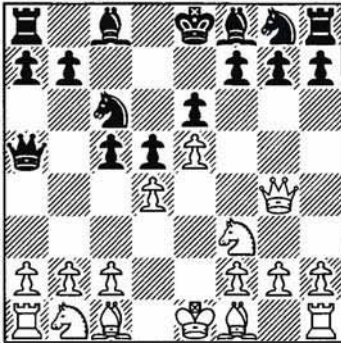


Diagram 51 (W)

Clever play by Black

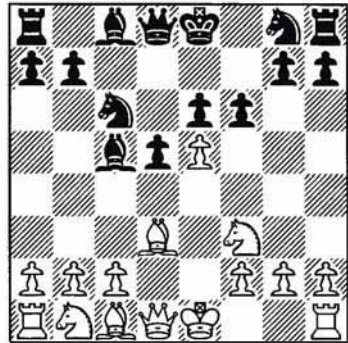


Diagram 52 (W)

White's centre is undermined

Game 10

□ I. Berezovsky ■ I. Glek

German League 2004

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 c5 4 dxc5

White gives up his pawn centre, hoping to gain attacking chances against g7 after 4...Bxc5 5 Qg4.

4...Nc6

A very sensible move. If now 5 Nf3 Black can regain the pawn with 5...Bxc5, when he has more freedom of action than normal due to the missing white pawn on d4: for example, 6 Bd3 (White's best move) 6...f6! (**Diagram 52**) completes the demolition job on the white pawn centre, and after 7 Qe2 fxe5 8 Nxe5 Nf6 Black enjoys the freer game. Note that Black has a superior version of the variation 1 e4 e6 2 Nf3 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 d4 c5 6 dxc5 Nc6 7 Bf4 Bxc5 8 Bd3 f6, which will be covered in Chapter Eight, because he hasn't spent time on ...Nf6 and ...Nfd7.

Berezovsky's choice in the game also isn't very inspiring.

5 Bb5?! Bxc5 6 Qg4

White persists in the plan of attacking g7.

6...Nge7!?

Also possible was 6...Kf8 with the idea of 7...Qb6, hitting both b5 and f2.

7 Bxc6+

How to Play Against 1 e4

White loses the knight after 7 Qxg7 Rg8 8 Qxh7 Qa5+ 9 Nc3 d4.

7...bxc6 8 b4

I suppose the idea of this move is that Black will be denied the chance to attack f2 with ...Qb6 if he retreats the bishop back to b6. However, White shouldn't be indulging in such antics when he is already behind in development.

8...h5! (Diagram 53)

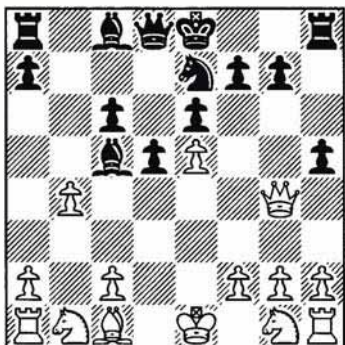


Diagram 53 (W)

Black seizes the initiative

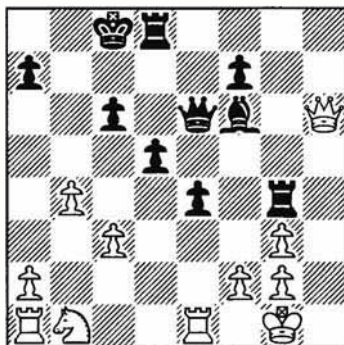


Diagram 54 (W)

Just look at that centre!

Forcing White's hand.

9 Qxg7 Rg8 10 Qh7 Bd4!

Going after the e5-pawn in order to destroy the white centre and so clear the way for the advance of his own pawns.

11 c3 Bxe5 12 Qxh5 Bf6

Black is a pawn down, but he has the bishop-pair, a big lead in development and a dominant centre.

13 Nh3 Nf5 14 0-0 e5?

Crushing would be 14...Nh4! 15 Nf4 (or 15 g3 e5!) 15...e5 16 Re1 Rg5! 17 Qe2 (if 17 Qh6, then 17...Nf3+) 17...Qe7 18 Nd3 Rxd2+ and wins.

15 Re1 Be6 16 Nf4!

White uses the trick 16...exf4? 17 Rxe6+ to get rid of his badly placed knight.

16...Qd6 17 Nxe6 Qxe6 18 Bf4 0-0-0 19 Bg3?

The way to fight on was 19 Nd2!.

19...Nxd3 20 hxg3 Rg4 21 Qh6 e4 (Diagram 54)

A dream centre for Black in the French!

22 a4

Instead 22 Qd2 d4 is overwhelming, while Black's reply to 22 Nd2 is the same as in the game.

22...Rxf3!

So that 23 fxf3 Bd4+ wins the queen with a discovered attack.

23 Qd2 0-1

White will be mated after 23...Rxf3+ 24 Kxf3 Qg4+ 25 Kf1 Rh8.



Chapter Two

The Exchange Variation

-  Introduction
-  White Plays 4 Nf3
-  White Plays 4 Bd3
-  Other 4th Moves

Introduction

The standard move order in the Exchange Variation is **1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 exd5** (Diagram 1).

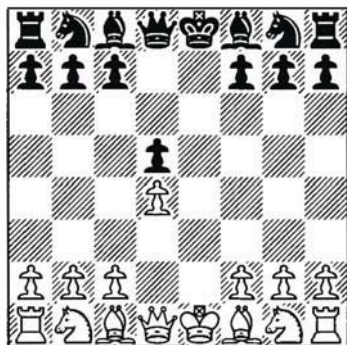


Diagram 1 (W)

The Exchange Variation

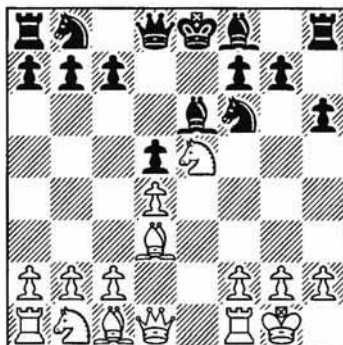


Diagram 2 (B)

A fine square for White's knight

This gives us a symmetrical and fixed pawn structure in the centre, and both sides have their plusses.

The good news for Black

Black has no spatial disadvantage, no weaknesses in his pawn structure, and can readily develop his light-squared bishop from c8, a piece which gives him headaches in many other systems. Furthermore, White's strategic options are limited, as he has renounced the chance to set up a cramping pawn chain with e4-e5, either immediately with 3 e5 or at a later date as in various Tarrasch and McCutcheon lines. Nor can he easily attack the f7-square, as Bc4 is ruled out by the barrier on d5. You might be thinking: 'This French Exchange is no big deal. I just need to develop my pieces to normal squares, such as ...Nf6 and ...Be7, and then castle, and I'll be OK. Let's look at some lines in the McCutcheon, please!'

The bad news for Black

But consider: Garry Kasparov has often used the French Exchange Variation as

How to Play Against 1 e4

White in simuls and occasionally in proper tournament games, and back in the 1850s it was a devastating weapon in the hands of the chess genius Paul Morphy. So there must be *something* going for it!

That *something* is the right to move first in a symmetrical position. Admittedly it is a slender advantage; but we need to understand it and work out how best it can be neutralized. And due to the symmetrical nature of the position, once we know White's most promising plan, if he is careless or plays too passively, we can use his ideas in mirror image against him.

For the above reasons in this chapter we'll begin by looking at a couple of convincing wins for White, but don't become demoralized, as these games are the key to devising an effective and even crushing response for Black. (And who knows, you might fancy trying to play like Morphy as White once in a while!)

White's possible plans

So how does a strong player go about trying to make White's extra move into something more permanent?

Well, the d-file is blocked, but next door is the open e-file. Players with a spare tempo in their pocket love open lines, as they tend to make the value of time more pronounced. So a plan for White might be: develop all the minor pieces rapidly, get the queen out of the way, and then double rooks along the e-file.

The problem is that in the meantime Black might develop all *his* pieces, and then offer to exchange both pairs of rooks along the open file. Thus a future Rael would be answered by ...Rae8, followed by a lot of swapping and perhaps a draw offer (a gloating or a bitter one according to the relative ratings of the two players). Even more damning for the plan of doubling rooks along the e-file is the fact that it might not achieve much, even if the black rooks fail to show up. So White needs another plan, and a chess genius of the 19th Century will show it to us.

The Morphy plan



NOTE: In my book *The Giants of Chess Strategy*, I defined an outpost as 'a square of strategic importance, usually located on an open or semi-open file. This square hosts a piece which is supported by a pawn and cannot be dislodged by an enemy pawn.'

Now consider the e5-square in the French Exchange. This is a key square, a focus of attention on a central open file. It isn't a *true* outpost square as a white knight that lands on e5 can be driven away by ...f6, but it turns out that in a real game

Black is often unable or unwilling to play ...f6. This might be because he has already developed his knight to f6, or he may want to reserve the f6-square for the knight, and so is reluctant to block it with a pawn. Furthermore, playing ...f6 weakens the e6-square and the black kingside.

Therefore the e5-square in the Exchange Variation functions very much like an outpost square. This consideration is the basis of what I have dubbed the 'Morphy Plan' in honour of Paul Morphy, the American chess phenomenon who took Europe by storm in the late 1850s. The strategy is simple: White puts a knight on e5 and if possible supports it with f2-f4. If Black responds with ...Nxe5 or ...Bxe5, to eliminate the powerful knight, then fxe5 strengthens the white centre and clears the way for an attack down the f-file.

Here's a simple example of Morphy's plan in action.

Game 11

□ **P.Morphy** ■ **S.Smyth**

London blindfold simul 1859

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 exd5 4 Nf3 Be6?

Not the best development for the bishop. It should either stay at home and await events, or else go to g4, pinning the white knight.

5 Bd3 Nf6 6 0-0 h6

Due to his inferior fourth move, Black is afraid of an attack on e6 with Ng5, when he would have to move the bishop again or else be left with a weak pawn after the exchange Nxe6 and recapture ...fxe6. However, now Black is a second tempo down in the struggle for the centre. This allows White to build up real pressure.



WARNING: You can blame the Fates for giving you the black pieces, but any further loss of tempi is your own responsibility.

7 Ne5 (Diagram 2)

Here it is, the aforementioned Morphy Plan.

7...Bd6

Smyth is too late in beginning the struggle for the e5-square.

8 f4

The vital supporting pillar is now set in place.

8... Nc6 9 c3 Qe7?

Putting the queen on the open file only creates more problems for Black.

10 Re1

A natural developing move with a big threat: 11 Nxc6 bxc6 12 f5, winning a piece.

How to Play Against 1 e4

10...Bxe5

More or less forced to close the file, but it is an ugly move that hands over the bishop-pair and gives White a pawn clamp on the centre.

11 fxe5 Nd7 12 b4! (Diagram 3)

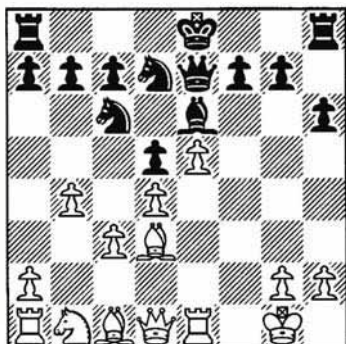


Diagram 3 (B)

Black's king position is problematic

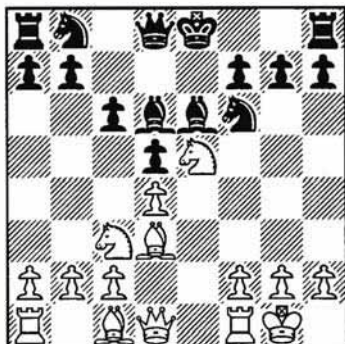


Diagram 4 (B)

Morphy's favourite plan

If Black castles queenside he will run into a pawn storm, but something even worse happens after he goes kingside:

12...0-0? 13 b5 Na5 14 Ba3

Even in a blindfold simul Morphy doesn't miss tactics.

14...Qg5 15 Bxf8 Rxf8 16 Nd2

And White, the exchange up for nothing, won easily.

It wasn't only in simuls and casual games that Morphy got to carry out his plan of Ne5. In the following encounter he outplays one of the strongest players of his era.

Game 12

□ P.Morphy ■ J.Löwenthal

12th matchgame, London 1858

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 exd5 4 Nf3 Nf6 5 Bd3 Be6

Again we must object to the misplacing of the bishop. Black has many superior alternatives: for example, 5...Bd6 or 5...Be7, which keep open the option of a later

...Bg4, or the immediate 5...Bg4, or perhaps even the radical 5...c5.



WARNING: Don't fall asleep in the opening or you might wake up to find your king is mated!

6 0-0 Bd6 7 Nc3 c6

If Black had simply castled, he could have replied to White's next move with 7...c5, counterattacking against d4.

8 Ne5! (Diagram 4)

Here we go again.

8...Qb6 9 Be3

In order to continue his attacking build-up, White is obliged to offer the b2-pawn as a gambit.

9...Nbd7

After 9...Qxb2 10 Qe1 Bb4 11 Bd2 White has pressure for the pawn. A possible variation is then 11...0-0 12 Rb1 Qa3 13 Nxd5! Bxd2? (instead 15...Nxd5! should be preferred, although 16 Rxb4!? favours White) 14 Nxf6+ gxf6 15 Qxd2 fxe5 16 Qg5+ Kh8 17 Qxe5+ Kg8 18 Qg5+ Kh8 19 Qf6+ Kg8 20 Qh6 and the threat of mate on h7 wins the game, in view of 20...f5 21 Qxe6+.

10 f4 Bxe5 11 fxe5 Ng4

The pawn grab 11...Nxe5, so that if 12 dxe5? Qxe3+, is a type of trick you are likely to encounter in the French. Here, however, it loses material to the sneaky response 12 Na4! Qa5 13 dxe5 Ng4 (or 13...Qxa4 14 exf6 and White is a piece up) 14 Qe1! Qxa4 15 Rf4! and Black's queen is trapped!

12 Qd2 Nxe3

Or 12...Ndx5 13 Na4 Qc7 14 Bf4! with some advantage.

13 Qxe3 Qxb2 14 Ne2 Qa3 15 Nf4 (Diagram 5)

Threatening 16 Nxe6 fxe6 17 Bg6+, discovering an attack on the black queen.

15...Qe7 16 Rab1 0-0-0

After 16...b6 17 Nh5 the attack on g7 is hard to meet as Black perishes at once upon 17...0-0 18 Nf6+! gxf6 19 Qg3+ Kh8 20 Qh4! when it's either mate on h7 or goodbye to the black queen after 20...f5 21 Qxe7. However, now Morphy builds up an attack in the rapid and economical fashion for which he was renowned.

17 Be2!

Clearing the way for the white queen to enter the attack on the queenside.

17...Nb6 18 Qb3 Rd7 19 Nd3!

Now the white knight heads for the c5-square.

19...Nc4

How to Play Against 1 e4

The knight should have stayed blocking the attack on b6, though it would have been ousted in any case by an eventual a4-a5.

20 Nc5 Rc7 21 Qa4 (Diagram 6) 21...b6

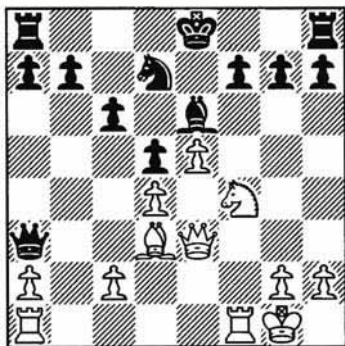


Diagram 5 (B)

Black's queen is attacked!

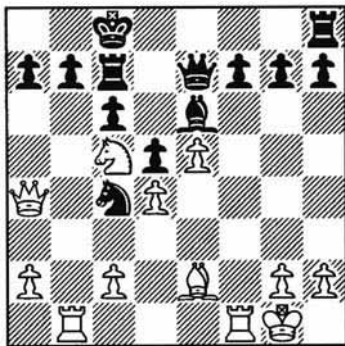


Diagram 6 (B)

The end is nigh

A breach is forced in Black's defensive wall, as if 21...Kb8 there is 22 Na6+.

22 Bxc4 bxc5 23 Ba6+ Kd7 24 Bb7 Rd8 25 Bxc6+! 1-0

Black loses his queen after 25...Rxc6 26 Rb7+.

White Plays 4 Nf3

A dynamic counter to the Morphy Plan

We have seen what befalls Black if he plays carelessly versus the 'harmless' French Exchange. The mere misplacing of a piece can be fatal for his chances of achieving a decent game, because he will then be too slow in countering White's central initiative. The imprecise 4...Be6 and 5...Be6 respectively in the games above gave Morphy just the chance he needed.

Black has many respectable ways of meeting the Exchange Variation, but as you are starting out with the French we'll just choose one for the time being. Not bad, for example, after 3 exd5 exd5 4 Nf3 is 4...Bg4, but that means you'll have to learn a different line against 4 Bd3. We also want a concrete, dynamic line that keeps us

alert so that we don't fall into the trap of making routine 'hazy' developing moves.

So let's leave the bishop on c8 and begin the fight for the e5-square in a different way. This can be done after **1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 exd4 4 Nf3** with **4...Nc6!** (**Diagram 7**).

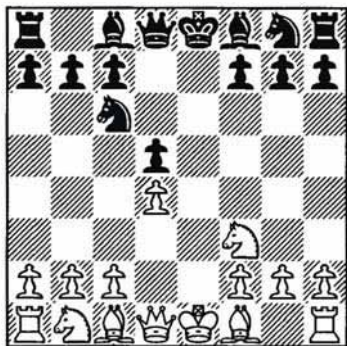


Diagram 7 (W)

Black contests the key e5-square

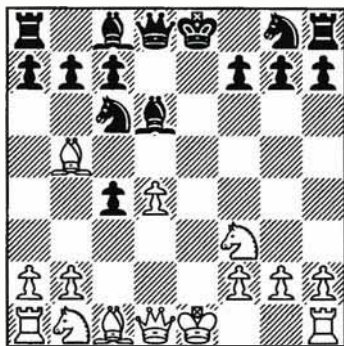


Diagram 8 (W)

Sharpening the struggle

If Black is left to his own devices, he will continue impeccably with ...Bd6, ...Nge7 and ...0-0. He isn't falling behind in development and is keeping a watchful eye on the e5-square. Playing ...Nge7 means that Bd3 by White can be countered with ...Bf5, when Black achieves the positionally favourable exchange of White's light-squared bishop. Another advantage of ...Nge7 over ...Nf6 is that ...f6 might prove useful to guard the e5-square.

5 Bb5!

The natural and best response. White plays homage to the Ruy Lopez (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5). In contrast with the 'Spanish Torture' there is no black pawn on e5 under attack; on the other hand, there is a very real pin on c6, which lessens Black's influence over e5.

5...Bd6

Bolstering the e5-square. Now Black is all set for 6...Nge7, when White can no longer smash up the black queenside pawns with Bxc6+ as the recapture ...Nxc6 would be possible.

6 c4!

White must strive to exploit his queenside pressure at once, as otherwise Black

How to Play Against 1 e4

will play 6...Nge7, 7...0-0 and 8...Bg4 or 8...Bf5, as explained above, with a very easy position.

6...dxc4! (Diagram 8)



WARNING: We said that Black plays ...Nc6, ...Bd6, ...Nge7 and finally ...0-0, but no advice should be followed blindly. Highly embarrassing would be 6...Nge7?? 7 c5 and the bishop is lost.

A forcing sequence now begins, with Black obliged to dislocate his queenside pawns to prevent the loss of a piece to the pin on c6.

7 d5 a6 8 Ba4

Black is fine after 8 Bxc4 Qe7+ 9 Be3 Ne5. Meanwhile 8 Qa4 allows the exchange sacrifice 8...axb5! 9 Qxa8 Nb4, when White is in trouble due to the double threat of 10...Nc2+, winning a rook, and 10...Nd3+, displacing the white king.

8...b5 9 dxc6 bxa4 10 0-0

White should be patient as the a4-pawn can't run away. The immediate 10 Qxa4 allows the disruptive 10...Bg4!, planning to vandalize the future home of the white king with ...Bxf3. There might follow 11 Nbd2 Qe7+ 12 Kf1 Nf6 13 Nxc4 0-0 with excellent attacking chances for Black in A.Ozgibcev-S.Volkov, Sochi 2004.

10...Ne7

In contrast to the note above, 10...Bg4? fails after 11 Re1+ when Black can't develop naturally with 11...Ne7? because of the powerful response 12 Qd4!, as after 12...Bxf3 13 Qxg7 Rf8 14 gxf3 there is no good way to stop 15 Bh6 with a winning attack for White.

11 Qxa4

White's intention is clear: pick up the c4-pawn in a 'clean' way and at the same time instigate a powerful centralization of his pieces with moves like Nc3 (or Nd2 and Nxc4 if convenient), Bg5, Rad1 and Rfe1. Black's pieces on the d- and e-files would soon come under intolerable pressure.

11...Rb8!! (Diagram 9)

Still, Black has a couple of trumps which give him dynamic counterplay. Firstly, he has the bishop-pair.



NOTE: There are a lot of tall stories told about the supposed power of the two bishops or the bishop-pair, but they are unquestionably an advantage in this type of position with its loose pawns and open lines in the centre.

Moreover, for once in the French Defence Black can be proud of his light-squared bishop! It is potentially the best minor piece on the board, with enticing squares on e6, f5, or g4 – and let's not forget the b7-square from which, after the removal

of the pawn on c6, the bishop can take pot-shots at the white king.

Secondly, Black is the first to activate a rook. And what a rook! It is perfectly placed on the b-file. Just consider:

- i. If White develops his bishop from c1, then ...Rxb2 winning a pawn is possible
- ii. The rook can go to b6 and help capture the c6-pawn with ...Nxc6.
- iii. The rook can go to b5, where it cuts off the white queen's defence of c6 so allowing ...Nxc6, and from there swing across its fourth rank to join in the central battle or start an attack on the kingside.
- iv. The rook can go to b4, attacking the white queen, either to defend c4 or, if Qxc4 has occurred, to harass the white queen and activate the rook.

12 a3

White stops 12...Rb4 and prepares to feast on c4 with Nd2 and Nxc4. If immediately 12 Qxc4 then 12...0-0 13 Nc3 Rb4 (**Diagram 10**) 14 Qe2 Nxc6 saw Black regain the pawn with an active game in E.Djingarova-V.Bhat, Andorra la Vella 2006. There followed 15 Bg5 and here Black missed the sharp riposte 15...Nd4! when 16 Nxd4 Qxg5 gives him the initiative, while 16 Bxd8 Nxe2+ 17 Nxe2 Rxb2! 18 Bxc7 (selling one of the two hanging pieces to regain a pawn) 18...Bxc7 is an unpleasant endgame for White.

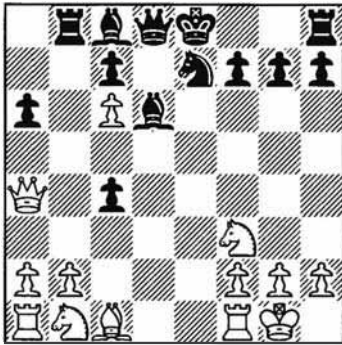


Diagram 9 (W)

A promising gambit

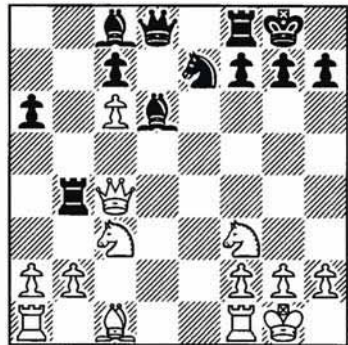


Diagram 10 (W)

The extra pawn cannot be kept

After the alternative 12 Nbd2, aiming to pick up the c4-pawn with Nxc4, the white queen gets pushed around by the black pieces and finally ends up in an awkward pin: 12...Rb4 13 Qc2 Bf5 14 Qc3 0-0 15 Nxc4 Nd5 16 Qd4 Nb6 17 b3 Nxc4 18 bxc4 Be6 19 Bb2 f6 20 Rfc1 Ra4 21 a3 Qe8 22 Qe4 (to defend c6 but...) 22...Bxc4! 23 Qc2

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(23 Rxc4 Qxe4 drops the exchange for White) 23...Bb5 and Black had regained the pawn whilst keeping the bishop-pair and a target on c6 in S.Vajda-J.Glud, Obro 2006.



TIP: You don't need to memorize these lines – it is enough that you realize the nature of Black's counterplay and try to play in the same spirit.

12...0-0 13 Nbd2 Rb5 (Diagram 11)

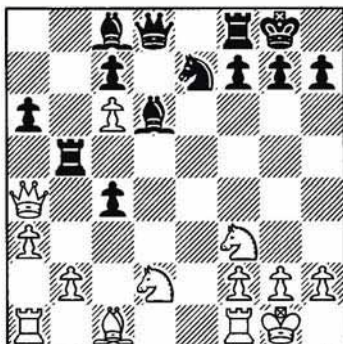


Diagram 11 (W)

Swinging the rook into play

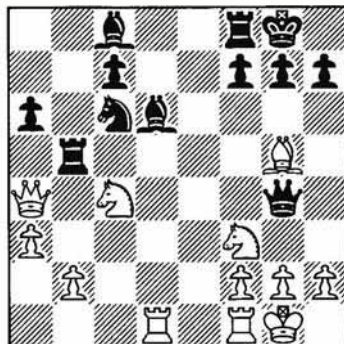


Diagram 12 (W)

Black begins to attack

The rook is activated according to the third option from the list at move 11 above. Let's see how this worked out in a recent game between two very strong women players.

Game 13

□ I.Slavina ■ I.Rajlich

Budapest 2005

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 exd5 4 Nf3 Nc6 5 Bb5 Bd6 6 c4 dxc4 7 d5 a6 8 Ba4 b5 9 dxc6 bxa4 10 0-0 Ne7 11 Qxa4 Rb8 12 a3 0-0 13 Nbd2 Rb5 14 Nxc4 Nxc6

So Black has painlessly restored material equality. Now comes a tricky attempt by White to activate her game, but it actually allows Black to seize the initiative.

15 Bg5

Counterproductive, but Black also has a pleasant position after 15 Nxd6 cxd6 16 Re1 Bb7 when ideas of an attack to exploit the light-squared bishop's pressure

against f3 and g2 begin to emerge.

15...Qd7!

Instead Black is left the exchange down after 15...Rxc5 16 Nxc5 Qxc5 17 Qxc6, while Slavina was probably hoping for 15...f6, when the bishop can retreat to e3, having provoked a weakness in the black position. Rajlich's move is much stronger as the black queen becomes a powerful force on the kingside.

16 Rad1 Qg4! (Diagram 12)

Pinning the knight on c4 and preparing a brilliant sacrifice by attacking the other knight on f3.

17 h3

A natural reply to relieve the pressure, but White gets a rude shock.

17...Qxf3!!

The kind of move that you would rather have expected to see in one of Morphy's games in this chapter.

18 gxf3 Rxc5+

The rook is enjoying its foray along the fourth rank.

19 Kh1 Bxh3 (Diagram 13)

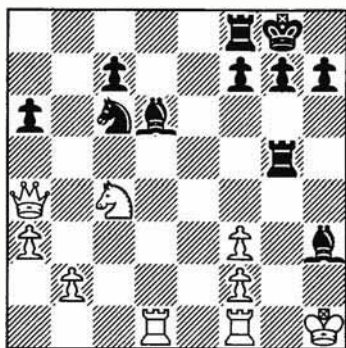


Diagram 13 (W)

A dangerous queen sacrifice

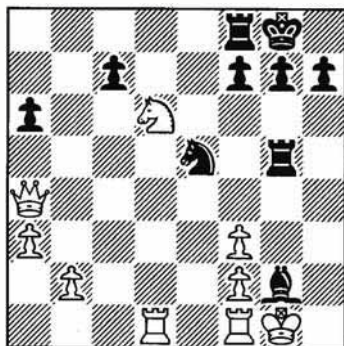


Diagram 14 (W)

There's no defence

Threatening 20...Bg2+ 21 Kg1 Bxf3 mate.

20 Nxd6?

White might still have defended with 20 Rxd6! when the game could have continued 20...cxd6 21 Rd1 Bg2+ 22 Kh2 Bxf3 23 Rxd6 Ne7 (the knight goes over to the

How to Play Against 1 e4

kingside to join in the attack) 24 Ne3 Ng6 25 Rxa6 Bb7 26 Ra7 Ne5 27 Rxb7 Nf3+ 28 Kh3 Ng1+ 29 Kh2 Nf3+ with a draw by repetition as, of course, if 30 Kh1?, there is 30...Rg1 mate.

Of course, there are few players who could have found such a precise sequence of moves for White with their king in jeopardy and the clock ticking ever faster. Besides, very few players would have seen the killer blow that follows on move 21 after the game move.

20...Bg2+ 21 Kg1

It seems that brutal materialism is going to triumph after 21...cxd6 22 Qf4 f6 (or 22...Rg6 23 Rxd6) 23 Qxg5! fxg5 24 Kxg2 and that all Black's ingenuity has only led to a lost endgame. But instead comes a shocker:

21...Ne5!! (Diagram 14)

It's curious that White has no way to save herself, despite having a queen for a bishop and pawn. In order to ward off the threat of 22...Nxf3 mate she has to endure colossal material losses.

22 Rd3 Bh3+ 23 Kh1 Bxf1 24 f4

After 24 Rc3 Black has the choice between 24...cxd6 with a rook, two minor pieces and a pawn for the queen, or 24...Bg2+ 25 Kh2 Nxf3+ 26 Rxf3 Bxf3 with two rooks and two pawns for the queen. The game move leads to an even worse material imbalance for White.

24...Rh5+ 25 Kg1 Bxd3 26 Qd1 Bg6

It's all over now. White deserves some credit for making what follows seem almost like a fight rather than a massacre.

27 fxe5 cxd6 28 exd6 Rb5 29 b4 Rd8 30 Qe2 Rd5 31 Qxa6 R5xd6 32 Qb7 h6 33 a4 Rd1+ 34 Kh2 R8d5 35 a5 Rh5+ 36 Kg3 Rg5+ 37 Kf3 Rd3+ 38 Ke2 Re5+ 0-1

White loses the queen after 39 Kf1 Rd1+ 40 Kg2 Be4+.

White Plays 4 Bd3

The Morphy Plan as Black

The French Exchange might be described as *the tale of two squares*. In a mirror-image position, the squares e4 and e5 are of equal value; so if White is unduly passive, Black might be able to carry out the Morphy plan himself on the e4-square. It is doubtful that his position would have enough energy to put a knight permanently on e4 and then support it with ..f5, but a fleeting raid on the e4-square can be good enough to seize the initiative.

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 exd5 4 Bd3 Nc6!

The same move as against 4 Nf3, and with the excellent bonus that 5 Bb5 would look silly as it just loses a tempo for White.

5 c3

To defend d4 and prevent the bishop being molested with ...Nb4. If instead 5 Nf3 then 5...Bg4, threatening 6...Nxd4, is very comfortable for Black, as also is 5...Nb4 6 Be2 (White doesn't want to be deprived of his light squared bishop by 6...Nxd3) 6...Bf5, etc.

5...Bd6 (Diagram 15)

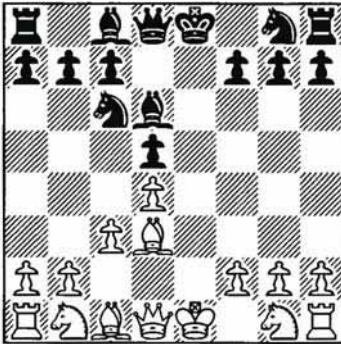


Diagram 15 (W)
Black controls e5

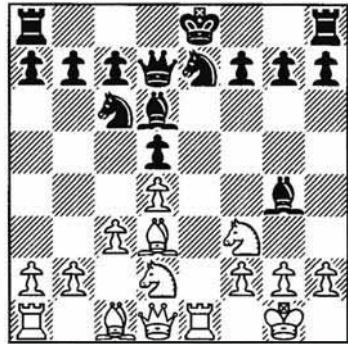


Diagram 16 (B)
Black can castle either side

Black develops and covers the e5-square before White can even dream of putting a knight there. Here we'll look at a couple of games that show how Black can utilize the e4-square and the e-file in general.

1. White tries for simplification

Game 14

□ A.Semeniuk ■ S.Volkov

Ekaterinburg 2002

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 exd5 4 Bd3 Nc6 5 c3 Bd6 6 Qf3

How to Play Against 1 e4

White activates his queen on a square where she attacks d5 and is on hand to support Bf4, exchanging off Black's 'good' light-squared bishop. However, there are drawbacks to having the queen on f3, as Volkov will demonstrate.

Instead 6 Ne2 is considered in the next game, while Black has easy equality or more after 6 Nf3 Nge7 7 0-0 Bg4 8 Re1 Qd7 9 Nbd2 (**Diagram 16**) 9...0-0 (the bold 9...0-0 is also possible) 10 h3 Bf5, etc.

6...Be6!?

It often happens that an author criticizes a move on one page and then applauds it on the next. In Morphy's games with Smyth and Lowenthal, I raged against 4...Be6 and 5...Be6 respectively. However, those were thoughtless centralizations of the bishop that were well deserving of censure, whereas here Volkov has a definite purpose in putting the bishop on the e6-square. It defends d5 and clears the way for ...Qd7 followed by queenside castling, as well as perhaps prodding the white queen with ...Bg4.

7 Ne2 Qd7 8 Bf4

White's efforts are essentially to exchange off pieces and gain a draw. This encourages Volkov to play in adventurous style.

8...Nf6 9 Bxd6 cxd6!! (Diagram 17)

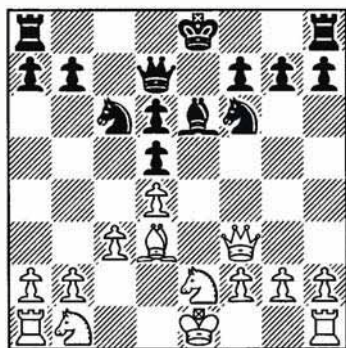


Diagram 17 (W)

The doubled pawns are strong!

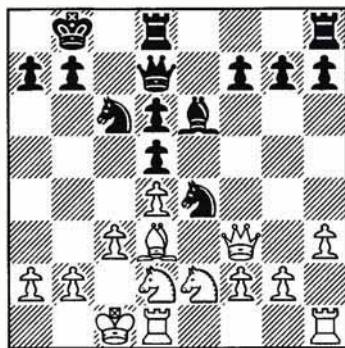


Diagram 18 (W)

Morphy would have approved!

A radical decision. Black's d-pawns might be doubled and isolated, but they are controlling the e5- and e4-squares. The move also contains enormous strength from a psychological point of view. It is a rude shock to Semeniuk if he was expecting a quiet life after 9...Qxd6 10 Qg3 when Black is virtually compelled to exchange queens in view of the attack on g7. Instead the game stays vibrant, with

one idea being ...Bg4 to harass the white queen.



NOTE: I don't want you to be so inspired by this game that you rush out and give yourself doubled, isolated pawns at the first opportunity. You will end up defending for a long time and then lose. In 95% of cases the 'normal' recapture of the ...Qxd6 kind is to be preferred, but I do hope seeing 9...cxd6 will make you look for creative positional decisions of a similar kind – the 5% of decisions that can shock your opponent and win you the game.

10 Nd2 0-0-0 11 h3 Kb8

Another moment that is interesting from a psychological standpoint. Castling on the other side of the board to his opponent isn't appealing to White – that's not why he played the French Exchange against the sharp tactician Volkov! Yet after 12 0-0!? it wouldn't be easy for Black to get a pawn storm going against the black king, as ...g5 would of course leave the knight on f6 hanging. Meanwhile White could play positionally with moves like Rfe1 and Ng3 or Nf4, perhaps followed by doubling rooks along the e-file. But Semeniuk prefers to 'keep it simple' and castle on the same side as his opponent.

12 0-0-0?! Ne4! (Diagram 18)

Volkov grasps his chance to play like Morphy.

13 g4

Semeniuk deters ...f5 and aims to capture on e4 at his leisure. If instead 13 Nxe4 dxe4 14 Bxe4 Bxa2 and the squares around the white king are weakened (and should White follow up with 15 Bxc6 then after 15...bxc6 Black can instigate an attack down the b-file with a well timed ...Ka8 and ...Rb8).

13...f5!

Black completes the Morphy plan, even though it costs a pawn. I believe that the great American player would also have made this dynamic sacrifice, as he was always ready to give up material to speed up the mobilization of his pieces. Here it is the black rooks which will benefit from the opening of lines.

14 gxf5 Bxf5 15 Nxe4 dxe4 16 Bxe4 Rhf8 17 Rdf1?

If instead 17 Bxc6 bxc6 18 Qg3, evacuating the queen from a possible discovered attack, there comes 18...Qe6!, hitting the knight and threatening to invade with 19...Qxa2.

The best defence was perhaps 17 Rde1, guarding the knight, but Black can at the very least play 17...Bxe4 18 Qxe4 Rxf2, regaining his pawn with a good game.

17...Bxe4 18 Qxe4 Rde8 19 Qd3 Qe6! (Diagram 19)

As in the note above, the double attack on e2 and a2 leaves White's game tottering.

How to Play Against 1 e4

20 Ng3 Qxa2 21 Ne4 Qd5 22 Re1 Ne5 23 Qc2 Nf3 24 Re3 Qa1!

White has weaknesses on the f-file, a rook on h1 undeveloped and a vulnerable king. Volkov exploits these factors to force a winning endgame.

25 Rd1

Instead 25 Nxd6 Rxe3 26 fxe3 Nd2!! threatens 27...Qa1+, when 27 Kxd2? Rf2+ wins the white queen while 27 Qxd2 Qa1+ costs the undefended rook on h1.

25...d5 26 Nc5 Rxe3 27 fxe3 Qa1+!

Despite being an attacking player, Volkov is happy to exchange queens to reach an endgame where White has wretchedly weak pawns on e3 and h3.

28 Qb1 Qxb1+ 29 Kxb1

Some precise moves are still required from Black. The pawns on e3 is horribly weak, but that would all change if White were allowed to play 30 e4.

29...Re8! 30 Nd3 Kc7! (Diagram 20)

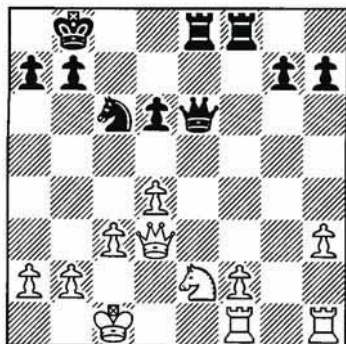


Diagram 19 (W)

Regaining the pawn

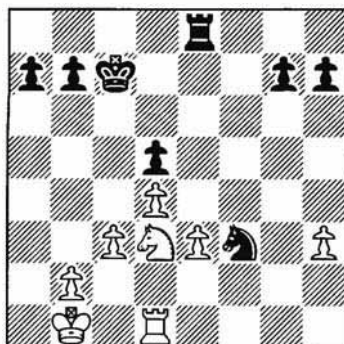


Diagram 20 (W)

Black must activate his king

Black centralizes his king to defend d5. If instead 30...Rxe3?? 31 Nf4 and Black has been conned into swapping the weakling on e3 for the important pawn on d5, after which White acquires a passed pawn.

31 Nf4 Kd6 32 Ng2 Re6 33 Kc2 Rg6 34 Nf4 Rg3

Black is making steady progress. His rook has reached a square where it can attack e3 and h3 at the same time.

35 Rh1 Nh4 36 Kd2 Nf5 37 Re1

Semeniuk has set a little trap: if 37...g5, which appears to win the h3-pawn by

chasing away the knight, there follows 38 Nxd5! Kxd5 39 e4+, regaining the piece and escaping from his travails.

37...Nh4! 38 Rh1 g5 39 Ne2 Rf3 40 b3 Nf5 41 Ra1 Rxe3

Also possible was the simple 41...a6 42 Ng1 Rxe3, winning a pawn. If then 43 Rf1 Ng3! 44 Kxe3 (a better chance is 44 Rf6+, but 44...Re6 will win) 44...Nxf1+ and the knight will escape via d2 or g3.

42 Rxa7 Kc6 43 Ng1 Rg3 44 Ra1 Nd6! 45 Rc1 b5 (Diagram 21)

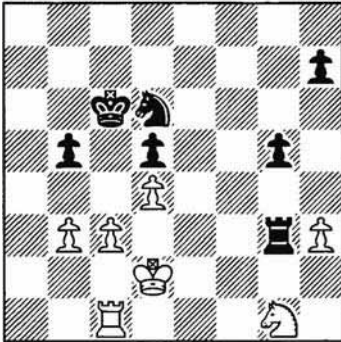


Diagram 21 (W)

White is horribly passive

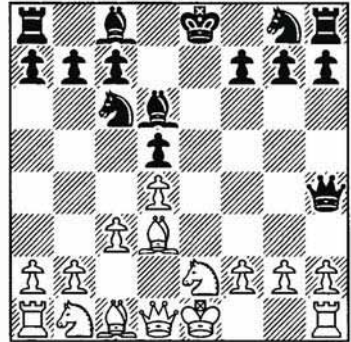


Diagram 22 (W)

Aggressive and strong play

With the white rook and knight tied down to the defence of c3 and h3 respectively, Black has all the time in the world to prepare his final attack.

46 Ke2 h6 47 Kf1 Kd7 48 Rc2 Ne4

At last Volkov decides to force matters by acquiring a passed pawn.

49 c4 b4 50 cxd5 Rxb3

White's pawns on the d-file are opposed by the black king, whereas there is no such barrier to the black pawn on b4.

51 Rc6 h5 52 Re6 Re3 53 Kg2 b3 54 Rb6 Rg3+ 55 Kf1 Kc7 56 Rb4 h4

The white rook can just about stave off the advance of the b-pawn, but the appearance of a second passed pawn on the kingside will be fatal.

57 Ne2

Waiting is hopeless in view of 57 Rb5 g4 58 hxg4 h3 59 Nxh3 Rxh3 when the black pieces shepherd home the b-pawn.

57...Rxh3 58 Kg2 Rd3 59 Nc1 Rd2+ 60 Kf3 b2 61 Na2 h3 0-1

2. Black seizes the e-file after passive play from White

In our next game, Black has it all his own way. The 'Morphy knights' he lands on f5 and c4 are as strong as any horse that reaches e4 in this chapter.

Game 15

□ **W.Winter** ■ **A.Alekhine**

Nottingham 1936

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 exd5 4 Bd3 Nc6 5 c3 Bd6 6 Ne2?! Qh4! (Diagram 22)

Alekhine doesn't need to be asked twice to seize the initiative. The queen deployment prevents White from castling kingside in view of mate on h2.

7 Nd2 Bg4!

Stopping the black queen being challenged by 8 Nf3 as 8...Bxf3 smashes up the white pawns.

8 Qc2

Instead 8 Qb3? runs into 8...0-0-0 9 Qxd5 Nf6 10 Qxf7 Rhe8 when Black has a massive attack for his pawns.

8...0-0-0 9 Nf1 g6 10 Be3 Nge7 11 0-0-0 Bf5

Alekhine not only succeeds in exchanging off the light-squared bishops, which counts as a positional gain for him, but already has his pieces on far more active squares.

12 Nfg3 Bxd3 13 Qxd3 h6 14 f4?

A really poor move that allows Black to gain control of the light square complex e4 and f5.

14...Qg4

He doesn't play 14...f5 as he wants that square for his knight.

15 h3

Winter should have freed his game with 15 f5!. Black would then win a pawn, but it would be a weakling on f5.

15...Qd7 16 Rhf1 h5! (Diagram 23)

Now Alekhine is able to evict the white knight from g3 just in time before White can break out of the bind with 17 f5.

17 Ng1

Or 17 f5 h4 18 f6 Ng8 19 Nh1 Re8 and the f6-pawn falls, as Alekhine later indicated.

17...h4 18 N3e2 Nf5

White has gained no counterplay and can only watch as Black builds up along the e-file.

19 Nf3 f6

Effortlessly meeting the Morphy Ne5 idea

20 Nh2 Rde8 21 Bd2 Re6 22 Ng4 Rhe8 23 Rde1 R8e7 24 Kd1 Qe8 25 Qf3 Na5!

Black's strategic build-up is complete and now it's time to attack! The knight move clears the way for a queen check on a4.

26 b3 Nc4! (Diagram 24) 27 Bc1

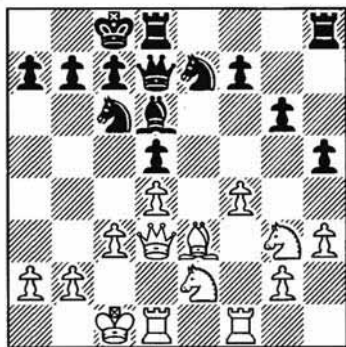


Diagram 23 (W)

Black obtains a handy bind

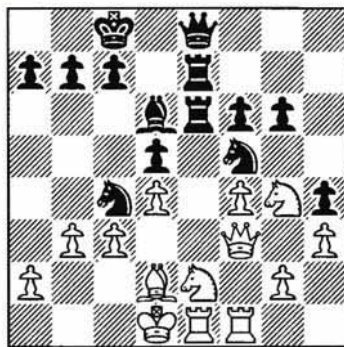


Diagram 24 (W)

White's king comes under fire

White is mated after 27 bxc4 Qa4+ 28 Kc1 Ba3+ 29 Kb1 Rb6+ 30 Ka1 Qc2 31 Rb1 Bb2+.

27...Nce3+ 28 Bxe3 Nxe3+ 29 Nxe3 Rxe3 30 Qf2 Qb5

The threat to invade on d3 compels White to part with the c3-pawn, after which it becomes a massacre.

31 Nc1 Rxc3 32 Rxe7 Bxe7 33 Qe1 Kd7! 34 f5 Re3 35 Qf2 g5 36 Re1 Re4 37 Rxe4 dxe4 38 Kd2 Bd6 39 Kc2 Bf4 0-1

A brilliant effort by Alekhine, but don't forget that it is rarely as easy as that for Black in the Exchange Variation. It took a series of timid moves and the appalling positional blunder 14 f4? to give Black his chance. Most average club players these days would have put up a better show as White in the opening. So to bring us back down to Earth, I'll end by saying:



NOTE: Black's two enemies in the Exchange Variation are complacency and its opposite, an over-anxiousness to create counter-chances. Instead he needs to be vigilant and patient, but alert to spot winning chances should they appear.

Other 4th Moves

In Chapter Five we'll examine the Exchange Variation when reached via the move order 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 exd5 exd5 5 Bg5. That line is OK for Black. Nonetheless, if White tries to enter it via the move order of this chapter with **1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 exd5 4 Nc3**, we aren't obliged to allow him a pin with Bg5. Instead we can play **4...c6!** (**Diagram 25**),

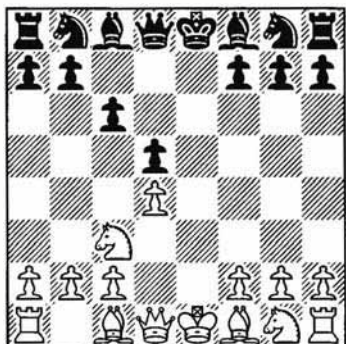


Diagram 25 (W)

...Bd6 will follow

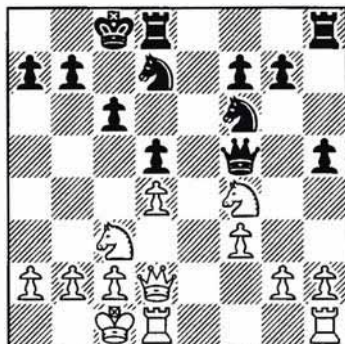


Diagram 26 (W)

Level but not drawn




which defends d5 as a prelude to our next move.

There might follow 5 Bd3 Bd6 6 Nge2 (or 6 Nf3 Bg4) 6...Qf6!, putting the queen on an active square where she facilitates the desirable exchange of light-squared bishops. After 7 Be3 Bf5 8 Bxf5 Qxf5 9 Qd2 Nd7 10 Bf4 Bxf4 11 Nxf4 Ngf6 12 f3 h5 13 0-0-0 0-0-0 (**Diagram 26**) Black had a very comfortable position in L.Kernazhitsky-Y.Kruppa, Kiev 2005. In fact a draw was agreed here, but there is enough imbalance to play on if Black is looking for a win.

Finally, we should note that 4 c4 is sometimes played if White is happy with an isolated queen's pawn position. In response an energetic development of the bishop to b4 ensures Black a good game after 4...Nf6: for example, 5 Nf3 (or 5 Nc3 Bb4 6 Bd3 0-0 7 Nf3 Bg4 8 Be3 dxc4 9 Bxc4 Nd5!, as in a later game between the same players, N.Miezis-B.Socko, Cork 2005) 5...Bb4+ 6 Bd2 Bxd2+ 7 Nbx d2 0-0 8 Be2 dxc4 9 Nxc4 Be6 and the IQP was a concern for White in N.Miezis-B.Socko, Cork 2005.

Chapter Three

The Fort Knox

-  **Introduction**
-  **Positional Lines**
-  **White Attacks with Neg5**

Introduction

The only task in the opening is to reach a playable middlegame.

Lajos Portisch

The opening moves of the Fort Knox are **1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2** (or 3 Nc3) **3...dxe4 4 Nxe4 Bd7 5 Nf3 Bc6** (Diagram 1).

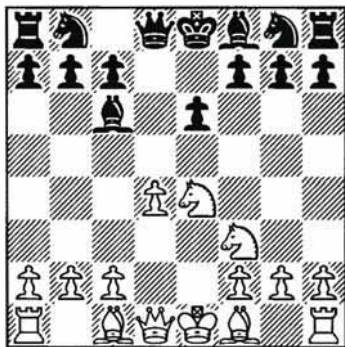


Diagram 1 (W)

The Fort Knox

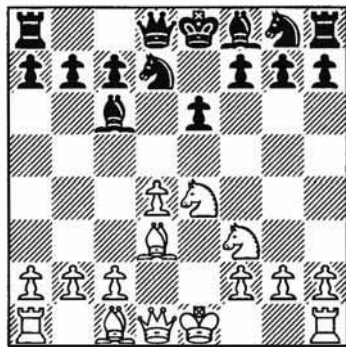


Diagram 2 (W)

Black prepares ...Ngf6

Black is motivated first and foremost by the desire to activate his light-squared bishop. The fixed nature of the pawn centre means that he can afford to spend a couple of moves in achieving this aim at the expense of conventional development.

Black's universal system

The Fort Knox is one of the greatest labour-saving devices ever invented. Firstly, it can be played against both 3 Nc3 and 3 Nd2. This in itself is enough to cut out a huge amount of opening preparation. But it gets even better: in the Fort Knox itself there is essentially only one pawn structure that we need to study. As we shall see, White might vary by putting a pawn on c3 rather than c4, but Black's plan of development remains the same.

So that's two reasons why a lazybones like myself was attracted to the opening. I

also appreciated its solidity, and when I was trying for GM norms often used it to keep strong opponents at arm's length.

The reason for playing the Fort Knox

I guess the purpose of this chapter can either be:

- i. to give you a universal reply to both 3 Nc3 or 3 Nd2 that you can use whilst you are in the process of learning other, more complex, defences; or
- ii. to give you a safe, non-theoretical, but rather unambitious opening that you can use for a lifetime.

The opening moves

Let's look again at the starting sequence:

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3/Nd2

White prefers developing the knight rather than establishing a cramping pawn centre with 3 e5.

3...dxe4

Black seizes the chance to prevent a future e4-e5. This guarantees that his knight on g8 will be able to go to f6, its best square. Though as we shall see, Black shouldn't rush to play ...Nf6.

4 Nxe4

White has been deprived of his big centre, but on the other hand his knight has an excellent central square.

4...Bd7

The defining move of the Fort Knox: the black bishop travels by express to c6. There it will enjoy an open diagonal and be able to challenge the white knight.

5 Nf3

White virtually always makes this natural developing move.

5...Bc6

Mission accomplished.

6 Bd3

Another standard move: White completes his kingside development, defends e4 and puts his light-squared bishop on its favourite square in the French.

The only real alternative is 6 Neg5, which is examined below.

6...Nd7 (Diagram 2)

How to Play Against 1 e4

With the hyperactive bishop sitting on c6, the knight is deployed to d7. This is an important preliminary to a further challenge to the white knight on e4, as if immediately 6...Nf6 then 7 Nxf6+ would oblige Black to incur broken pawns with 7...gxf6 as 7...Qxf6? isn't advisable – see the Fort Knox fiasco at the end of this chapter.

7 0-0

Only now does White have a wide choice of moves, which shows why the Fort Knox saves you a lot of memory work in the opening. He might, for example, have played 7 Qe2 or 7 Neg5.

7...Ngf6

All as planned: Black develops and challenges the white knight. He is ready to answer 8 Nxf6+ with 8...Nxf6. If then 9 Ne5, he can safely capture with 9...Qxd4! when White doesn't have enough for the pawn after 10 Nxc6 bxc6, while the sneaky 10 Nxf7?, hoping for 10...Kxf7? 11 Bg6+ winning the queen by discovered attack, is refuted by 10...Qd5!, putting the queen on a defended square. Then the trapper is trapped, as White must attend to the mate threat on g2, allowing Black to safely win a piece with 11...Kxf7.

8 Ng3 Be7

Black continues his development.



TIP: In the Fort Knox the e7-square is almost always a better post for the bishop than d6.

9 Qe2

If instead 9 Ne5? Nxe5 10 dxe5 Black has the tactic 10...Qd5! which wins a pawn due to the double threat of mate on g2 and 11...Qxe5.

Now, however, White is threatening to play 10 Ne5, when after 10...Nxe5 (or else the queenside pawns will be broken up by 11 Nxc6 bxc6) 11 dxe5 he has a space advantage on the kingside (and 11...Qd5 can be answered by 12 f4!). Black should avoid this – and the way to do so is to exchange off his light-squared bishop for the knight.

9...Bxf3 10 Qxf3 c6 11 Re1 0-0 (Diagram 3)

Black completes his development. He has a safe king and is well entrenched in the centre, with no weaknesses in his pawn structure.

Black gives up his bishop for a knight

In the Advance Variation we saw that Black went to some trouble to get rid of his 'bad' light-squared bishop, which was shut in behind its pawn structure. He did this either with an early ...b6 and ...Ba6, or with ...c5 followed by ...Qb6, ...Bd7 and

...Bb5. In both cases his objective was to swap off the bishop for White's 'good' light squared bishop. In the Fort Knox his aim is different: he is prepared to exchange off his bishop for a *white knight*.

This is an anathema to many chess players – we might recall the quip from Chapter One that 'the worst bishop is better than the best knight'! Yet the Fort Knox shows that if Black exchanges off bishop for knight and sets up a small pawn centre on the light squares, then his position is extremely resilient.



NOTE: In general, Black should only capture on f3 when Ne5 is a positional threat.

The importance of ...c6 to secure the centre

You will have noticed that after 10 Qxf3 Black replied 10...c6, which wards off the direct threat of 11 Qxb7. This little pawn move is also vital in stabilizing the centre. After all, it is to be expected that White will try to break open lines with a future d4-d5 in order to increase the scope of his bishop-pair. This might be part of a kingside attack if he has put his dark-squared bishop on b2 with b2-b3 and Bb2. Alternatively, perhaps White will be 'looking the other way' and be aiming to use his bishops against the black queenside once he has cleared the centre with d4-d5.

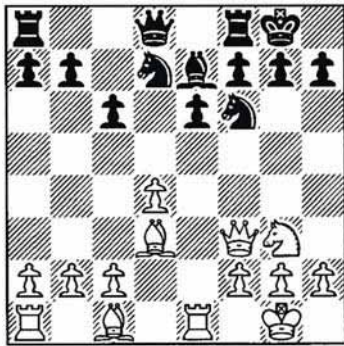


Diagram 3 (W)
Black is very solid

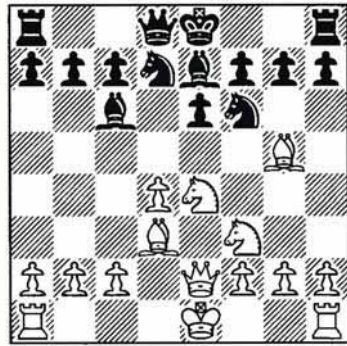


Diagram 4 (W)
Black sets a trap!

The pawn attack on d4 with ...c5 is positionally risky

In many French variations, if Black can play the advance ...c5 without any immedi-

How to Play Against 1 e4

ate mishap befalling him, he has automatically equalized or more. However, this is often not the case in the Fort Knox. Here White has the bishop-pair, or more precisely a light-squared bishop with no rival, so the move ...c5 could actually be a positional disaster that removes a vital piece of shielding from the black queenside.

Positional Lines

Case study 1: Black exchanges on e4 in a favourable way

Game 16

□ K.Kiss ■ J.Thilaganathan

Kemer 2007

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 dxe4 4 Nxe4 Bd7 5 Bd3 Bc6 6 Nf3 Nd7 7 Qe2

White decides to put the queen on e2 immediately.

7...Ngf6 8 Bg5

A vigorous move that works well in other French systems, but merely leads to a simplification that Black welcomes in the Fort Knox. I was coaching England's player Jessica Thilaganathan before this game and suggested to her that she play 8...Bxe4 9 Bxe4 c6, a typical piece of Fort Knox simplification. However, then IM Thomas Rendle joined in the discussion and suggested that Black set a positional trap.

8...Be7 (Diagram 4) 9 0-0-0

Kiss carries on her attacking build-up heedless of the danger. In any case Black is doing fine: for example, 9 Nxf6 Bxf6 10 Bxf6 Qxf6 11 Be4 Bxe4 12 Qxe4 c6 promises White nothing, while after 9 Ng3 Nd5 10 Bd2 Nb4 11 Bxb4 Bxb4+ 12 c3 Be7 Black certainly shouldn't complain about being the possessor of the bishop-pair for once!

9...Bxe4! 10 Bxe4 Nxe4 11 Bxe7

It looks like it will be an equal position after 11...Qxe7 12 Qxe4 c6, but White is in for a surprise.

11...Nc3!

The aforementioned trap. The black knight which is going to be captured anyway desperadoes itself on the c3-square so that White's pawns are messed up.

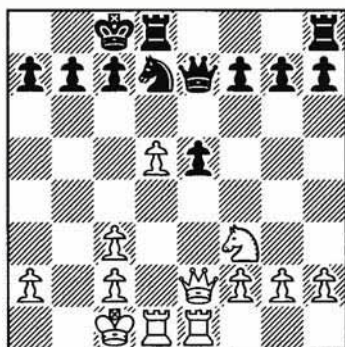
Note that if Black had played 9...Nxe4 White could have bailed out with 10 Bxe7 Nc3 11 Bxd8! Nxe2+ 12 Bxe2 Rxd8, when he has avoided having fractured pawns.

12 Bxc3?

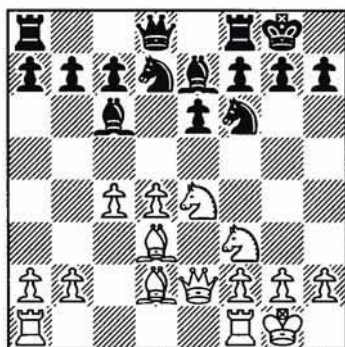
White should have tried 12 Bxd8 when after 12...Nxe2+ 13 Kd2! Nxd4! 14 Bxc7 Nxf3+ 15 gxf3 the pawns on the kingside are wrecked rather than on the queenside. But here with the queens exchanged and having the potentially better minor piece White is just about OK. Things are very different in the game with the queens still on the board and the white king's defences broken up.

12...Qxe7 13 d5 e5

Black could also have attacked at once with 13...Qa3+ 14 Kb1 (or 14 Kd2 0-0-0!) 14...Nc5 with ideas of 15...Na4 and then a mate on b2 or a fork on c3.

14 Rhe1 0-0-0 (Diagram 5)**Diagram 5 (W)**

Black has a pleasant advantage

**Diagram 6 (B)**

White keeps his knight on e4

15 Nxe5?

Frustrated at her unsuccessful opening, Kiss recklessly grabs a pawn.

15...Rhe8 16 Qg4

The lesser evil was 16 f4, although White ends up in a miserable endgame after 16...Qa3+ 17 Kb1 f6 18 Nc4 Rxe2 19 Nxa3 Rg2.

16...h5! 17 Qf5 g6

The white queen is crowded out. She has to stay pinning d7 to avoid e5 dropping, but after 18 Qh3 the way is clear for 18...Qg5+ followed by 19...Rxe5 winning the knight all the same. Therefore White has to kiss goodbye to a piece.

18 Nxc6 Qa3+ 19 Kb1 fxc6 20 Qxc6 Rxe1 21 Rxe1 Qxc3 22 Re8 Qb4+ 23 Kc1 Qf4+ 24 Kb1 Qb4+ 25 Kc1 Qf4+ 26 Kb1 Qb4+ 1/2-1/2

Calculating the variations had taken its toll on Black's clock and so she forced a draw. In fact 26...Nf6 leaves her with a winning position.

Case study 2: Black refuses to unclutter his position and is crushed by d4-d5



WARNING: If White can advance with d4-d5 in the Fort Knox with impunity, something has gone wrong with Black's position.

Game 17

□ C.Cain ■ Aung Aung

Bangkok 2004

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 dxe4 4 Nxe4 Bd7 5 Nf3 Bc6 6 Bd3 Nd7 7 Qe2

By the way, I've changed the move order from 7 0-0 Ngf6 8 Qe2 in order to keep this game in step with the previous one.

7...Ngf6 8 0-0

Rather than 8 Bg5, as in Game 16.

8...Be7 9 c4 0-0 10 Bd2 (Diagram 6) 10...Re8

We shall return to consider Black's play hereabouts after seeing what happens in the middlegame.

11 Bc3 a5 12 a3 a4 13 Rad1 Rb8 14 Neg5 Bxf3 15 Qxf3 Nf8 16 Rfe1 c6

A superficial judgement: 'Black has two pawns, a knight and the queen guarding the d5-square. Meanwhile White has only the pawn on c4 and his queen supporting d4-d5. So Black is 4-2 up in the struggle for d5: White's pawn breakthrough is therefore impossible.'

However, on closer inspection we can see that the defensive role of the knight on f6 is very much restricted: if ordered to capture a white pawn on d5 it would have to shake its head, as leaving the f6-square would allow the white queen to invade on f7, with immediate disaster for the black king. Nonetheless, the power of the knight isn't zero, as it can still support a black pawn which recaptures on d5. That still leaves Black 3-2 up.

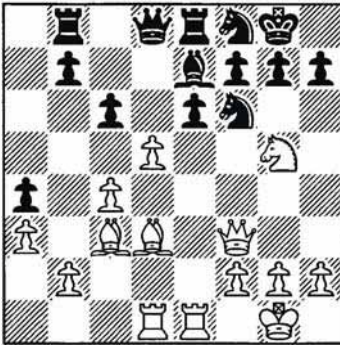
Looking more closely still, we see that the rook on d1 is very well placed to aid the d4-d5 advance. And if the d-file opens, a discovered attack on the black queen will become possible. Indeed, White now found a way to short-circuit the defence of the d5-square:

17 d5! (Diagram 7)

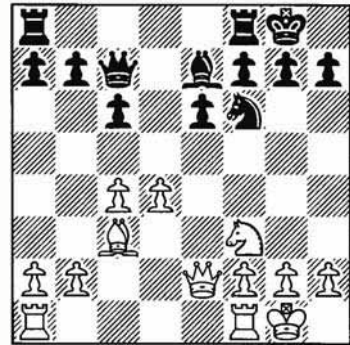
On the other hand, if White had played 17 Bc2 and Black had responded 17...Ra8, there wouldn't have been enough impetus for the d4-d5 advance

17...cxd5 18 cxd5 exd5 19 Bb5!

Bringing the rook on d1 into action against d5 with gain of time. It turns out that the rook on e8 has no moves.

**Diagram 7 (B)**

White blasts through

**Diagram 8 (W)**

Black is happy to trade pieces

19...Qc7

If 19...N8d7 the black queen's view of the d-file is blocked, so that the ratio of attackers to defenders of the d5-square becomes 2-0, taking into account that the black knight on f6 is paralysed. There would follow 20 Rxd5! leaving Black defenceless against the threat of 21 Rxd7 Nxd7 22 Qxf7+ and mate next move. Therefore Aung handed over the exchange, but soon lost. The remaining moves were:

20 Bxe8 Rxe8 21 Rxd5 Rc8 22 Rb5 b6 23 g3 h6 24 Ne4 Nxe4 25 Qxe4 Ne6 26 Rf5 Bxa3 27 Qxa4 Bc5 28 Rd5 1-0

So where did Black go wrong in this game?

If you have played through the early moves you will have noticed that Black had no fewer than *six chances* between White playing 8 Qe2 and 14 Neg5 to exchange twice on e4 and then play ...c6 to increase his grip on d5. Six chances to free his game!

For example at move 10, it was possible to play **10...Nxe4 11 Bxe4 Bxe4 12 Qxe4 c6**. Then the game might have continued **13 Bc3 Nf6 14 Qe2** and now there are two options (**Diagram 8**):

a) 14...Qb6 aims to exchange bishops with 15...Bb4. If then 15 b3 (to answer

How to Play Against 1 e4

15...Bb4 with 16 Bb2), Black can launch an attack on b3 with 15...a5! and 16...a4. White couldn't reply 16 a4, to stop the pawn's advance, because of 16...Qxb3. White's best response to 14...Qb6 is probably 15 a3, to rule out 15...Bb4.

b) Another sensible plan is 14...Qc7!? 15 Rac1 (the white rook gazes at the black queen through a mesh of pawns that might one day be removed with a d4-d5 advance) 15...Rad8!, which sees Black very sensibly bolster the defence of the d5-square. The chances are roughly equal.

You will have noticed that White's space advantage becomes of less importance with every piece that vanishes from the board: he will have fewer pieces to attack the black king or prepare a centre breakthrough. And although we cannot talk about the pawn on d4 being a weakness yet, every simplification removes a potential defender of the white centre. Therefore we might say that:



TIP: Every exchange of more or less equal value favours Black in the Fort Knox.

There is, however, one proviso: a very simplified endgame with White having a bishop versus a knight can be very unpleasant for Black.

Case study 3: Black's bishop belongs on e7, not on d6

The positioning of Black's dark-squared bishop in the Fort Knox is so critical that I'm going to drum it in by giving another win for White. But you don't need to become demoralised as in this game Black goes outside our repertoire on the sixth move.

Game 18

□ **A.Beliavsky** ■ **L.Jensen**

Copenhagen 2004

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 dxe4 4 Nxe4 Bd7 5 Nf3 Bc6 6 Bd3 Bxe4

The alternative 6...Nd7 is the recommended move. However, I have a lot of sympathy for the immediate exchange on e4, not least because White won't now be able to play any scary Neg5 moves. It is also nice for Black that a subsequent ...Nf6 will gain a tempo, assuming that White has no wish to part with his bishop on e4.

The drawback compared to the main line with 6...Nd7 7 0-0 Ngf6 8 Ng3 is that White keeps the better-positioned knight, the one that controls e5, rather than having it eliminated by ...Bxf3.

Of course, White *can* keep the knight on f3 in the main line after 6...Nd7 7 0-0 Ngf6 8 Qe2, but here Black can exchange *two pieces* on e4 with 8...Bxe4 (or delay it for a move or so as in case study 2, above) 9 Bxe4 Nxe4 10 Qxe4 c6 when in contrast to

the 6...Bxe4 line, White is deprived of his strong light-squared bishop. This seriously reduces any hope of a successful attack on the black king.

7 Bxe4 c6 8 c3 Nf6 9 Bc2 Qc7 10 0-0 Nbd7 11 Re1 (Diagram 9)

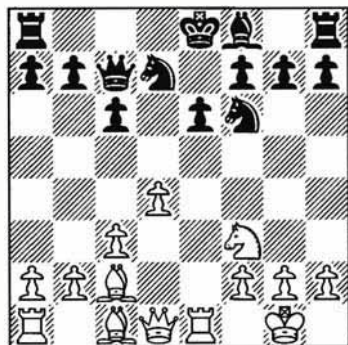


Diagram 9 (B)

Black mustn't be too ambitious

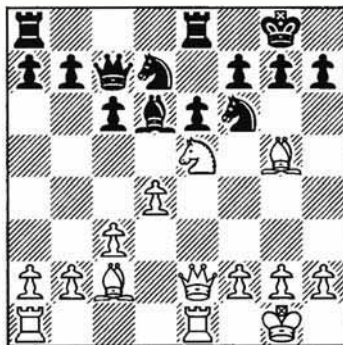


Diagram 10 (B)

Black is under pressure

11...Bd6?

It's best not to resist what you can't prevent. Black should put the bishop where it belongs with 11...Be7!

12 Qe2!

Guaranteeing that the white knight will get to the e5-square.

12...0-0

Black should have sought some relief with 12...Bf4! to exchange off one of the potential enemies of his king and get his bishop out of the way of a fork on e5.

13 Bg5 Rfe8

Black might still have tried 13...Bf4, though here White has 14 Bh4.

14 Ne5! (Diagram 10)

Mission accomplished. Imagine if Black's bishop were on e7 rather than d6. In that case he could ease his game with 14...Nxe5 15 dxe5 Nd5 16 Bd2 b5! (**Diagram 11**), preventing the knight from being dislodged from the centre with c3-c4. Black can as necessary blunt an attack on his king with ...g6, ...Bf8 and ...Bg7.

Returning to the actual game, with the bishop on d6 the exchange 14...Nxe5? just loses a piece to the fork 15 dxe5. Black therefore feels obliged to exchange his bishop on e5, but his knights prove no match for the white bishop-pair:

14...Bxe5 15 dxe5 Nd5 16 Rad1 Nf8

How to Play Against 1 e4

In contrast to the hypothetical situation in the note to move 14 above, where Black retained his bishop, he can't set up a solid defensive line with 16...g6, as there would be fatal dark-square holes on f6, h6 and g7.

17 h4! Ne7 18 h5 h6 19 Bf6! (Diagram 12)

White's bishops have a field day exploiting the absence of Black's bishop.

19...gxf6 20 exf6 Qf4 21 fxe7 Rxe7 22 Rd4 Qf6 23 Qd3 Ree8 24 Re3 Red8 25 Rg4+ Kh8 26 Reg3 Rxd3 27 Rg8+ Kh7 28 Bxd3+ Qg6 29 Rxf8 1-0

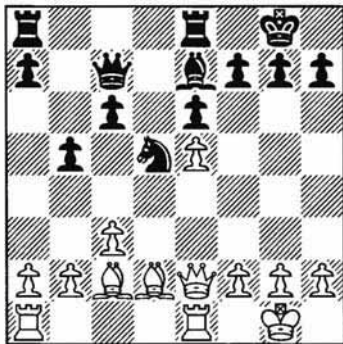


Diagram 11 (W)

The bishop is much happier on e7

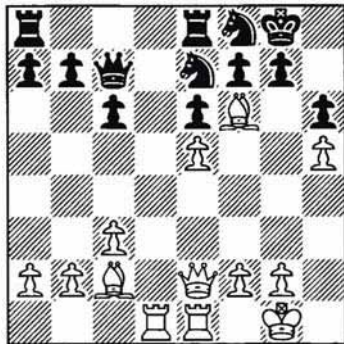


Diagram 12 (B)

A disaster for Black

Case study 4: It's about time we saw Black win a game!

If White loses in the positional lines of the Fort Knox, it is almost always because some sort of mishap occurs on the d-file. Perhaps due to his negligence the pawn on d4 is restrained and then captured; or else White optimistically advances the pawn to d5 thinking he is making a powerful clearance sacrifice, but the compensation never emerges; or maybe he allows the d4-pawn to be liquidated in such a way that the black rooks are able to seize control of the resulting open file.

A common theme is that White gets carried away by his thoughts of attack on the kingside, and neglects to defend d4 adequately; the Fort Knox often lulls White into a false sense of security.

Game 19

□ M.Blushtein ■ E.Rozentalis

Montreal 2004

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 dxe4 4 Nxe4 Bd7 5 Nf3 Bc6 6 Bd3 Nd7 7 0-0 Ngf6 8 Ng3

Another idea is 8 Ned2!? aiming to play 9 Nc4 and then 10 Nce5, when the knight is established on the e5-square, or, if Black has been careless, 10 Na5! threatening to wreck Black's queenside pawns with 11 Nxc6. Note that 10...Bxf3 wouldn't help much at this point, as after 11 Qxf3 the b7-pawn would be attacked twice, meaning that 11...c6 wouldn't beat off the pressure.

I like the response 8...Be7 9 Nc4 Bd5!? (**Diagram 13**) when due to White's slow manoeuvre the ...c5-break seems appropriate for once: for example, 10 Ne3 c5 or 10 Nce5 c5 and Black achieves counterplay. I don't see any meaningful way that White can take advantage of the uncastled black king.

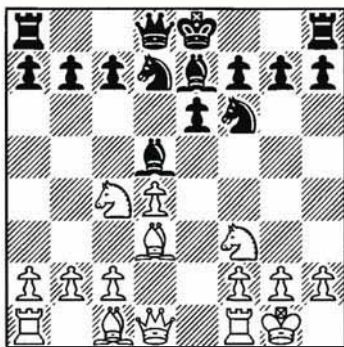


Diagram 13 (W)

Black will break with ...c5

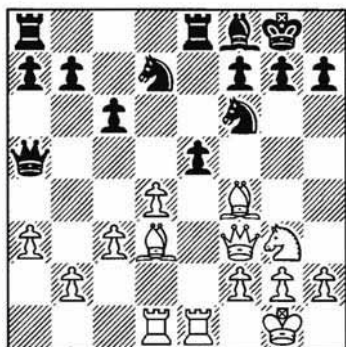


Diagram 14 (W)

Thematically equalizing

8...Bxf3

It is curious to say the least that Rozentalis captures straightaway when he might have waited a move with 8...Be7 which abides by the rule 'only take on f3 when White is about to play Ne5!' After all, 9 Ne5? would fail to 9...Nxe5 10 dxe5 Qd5!, both attacking e5 and threatening mate on g2.

After 8...Be7 9 Qe2 Bxf3 10 Qxf3 c6 Black had wangled an extra tempo in the elite encounter S.Karjakin-B.Gelfand, Odessa (rapid) 2008. This game is all the more interesting as it features c2-c3 by White rather than the usual c2-c4 move: 11 Re1 0-0 12 c3 Re8 13 Bf4 Qa5 14 a3 Bf8 15 Rad1 (perhaps White should try 15 Be5 to stop Black's freeing reply) 15...e5! (**Diagram 14**) 16 Be3 Rad8 (with straightforward centralizing moves Gelfand has equalized, as the white bishops are nothing special; unfortunately for him at move 20 he falls for a tactical trap) 17 Bb1 Qd5 18 Ne4 exd4 19 Bxd4 Nxe4 20 Bxe4 Qg5? (instead 20...Qb3! looks at least OK for Black, as b2 is hanging and if White tries the same combination as in the game,

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Black will have ...Qxd1 mate at the end of it) 21 Bxh7+! Kxh7 22 Rxe8 Rxe8 23 Qh3+ Kg8 24 Qxd7 (if Black had played 20...Qb3 White's combination would have failed because of 24...Qxd1 mate) 24...Qd2 25 Be3! (if it wasn't for this clever move White would be in trouble after 25 Rf1 Re1 as if nothing else b2 will drop) 25...Qe2 26 h3 Re6 27 Qd2 Qxd2 28 Rxd2 a6 29 Rd7 Re7 30 Rd8 Re5 31 b4 Rd5 32 Rc8 1-0.

9 Qxf3 c6 10 b3 Be7 11 Bb2 0-0 12 c4 Qa5 (Diagram 15)

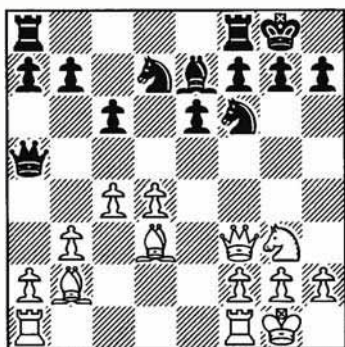


Diagram 15 (W)

Black prepares ...Ba3

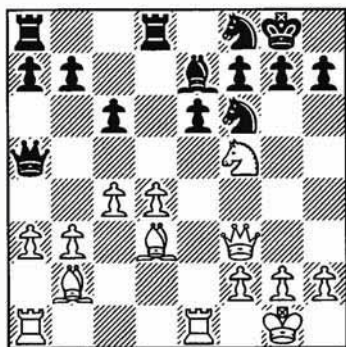


Diagram 16 (B)

An idea to avoid



NOTE: This is an important idea in the Fort Knox. The black queen goes to a5 to support the offer to exchange bishops with 13...Ba3. Such an exchange would be downright unappealing for White, as it would weaken the d4-pawn and his dark squares in general. It would also crush any aspirations he had to break through in the centre with d4-d5 and use the bishop on b2 as a weapon against the black king.

Imagine for a moment that it is Black's move, not White's, in the diagram above, and he uses it to play 13...Ba3. Then the most sensible course for White would be to reply 14 Bc3, not allowing the exchange of bishops. Now 14...Qxc3? would drop the queen to 15 Bxh7+, so Black plays 14...Bb4. White would once again avoid the exchange of bishops with 15 Bb2 and Black presses for it again with 15...Ba3. The result is a curious draw by repetition.

However it is White's move. Ideally he would like to reply 13 Rad1, so that if 13...Ba3 he can tuck the bishop away with 14 Ba1, but the problem is that 13 Rad1? just blunders a pawn to 13...Qxa2. Bluvshstein finds another way to block the ...Ba3 move.

13 a3! Rfe8

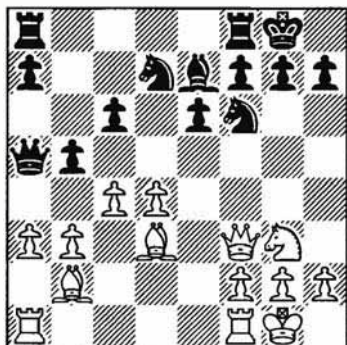
After 13...Rfd8?! 14 Rfe1 Nf8? (he should play 14...Bf8), Black would be hit by 15 Nf5! (**Diagram 16**) when 15...exf5 16 Rxe7 is near winning for White.



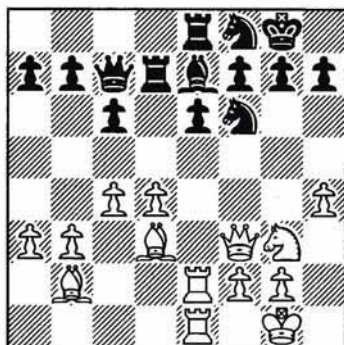
WARNING: You should always be alert for this trap if you play the Fort Knox. Even if you fall for it in a milder form, the exchange of the e7-bishop for the white knight is positionally poor for Black.

The way to avoid it is either to defend the bishop with the rook, as with the game move 13...Rfe8, or else to make sure the bishop has left e7 before White has time to play both Rfe1 and Nf5. If the bishop does go off somewhere, it will most likely mean the ...Ba3 move has been permitted. Otherwise it is probably best to keep the bishop on e7 and defend it with ...Rfe8. Therefore Rozentalis guards his bishop in anticipation of White's next move, when otherwise 15 Nf5 would become a threat. At the same time he clears the f8-square for his knight, which can be manoeuvred to g6 to help bolster the kingside against a white attack.

Some years ago your author introduced the move 13...b5!? (**Diagram 17**) into tournament play, the idea being that 14 Qxc6? loses to 14...Qd2! when White has two bishops hanging, while otherwise White's queenside pawns can be undermined with 14...bxc4, followed after 15 bxc4 by 15...Rab8 when Black has good counterplay. Instead after 14 cxb5 (or 14 d5 cxd5 15 b4 Qb6 16 cxb5 Bd6 with sufficient chances for Black in A.Berelovic-McDonald, Elec 1996) 14...cxb5 15 Rfe1 Black came under attack following 15...Nd5? 16 Nf5! in V.Ivanchuk-A.Chernin, Warsaw (rapid) 2002, but 15...Rfe8! to answer 16 Nf5 with 16...Bf8 (and not 16...exf5 17 Rxe7!) seems safe enough for Black.

**Diagram 17 (W)**

The McDonald method

**Diagram 18 (W)**

Black remains very solid

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14 Rfe1 Rad8 15 Re2 Nf8

Black's pieces are harmoniously centralized, which means that a white breakthrough with d4-d5 has little chance of success, unless the black kingside can be sufficiently softened up. With this in mind, Bluvshstein advances his h-pawn.

16 h4 Rd7 17 Rae1 Qc7 (Diagram 18)

Not 17...Red8? when Black has fallen for the 18 Nf5! trick after all.

18 Nf1?!

White loses confidence in his plan and retreats the knight. Instead 18 h5 threatens to ram the black kingside with 19 h6, when if 19...g6 the breakthrough 20 d5 would be of terrible power, as 21 Bxf6, winning a piece, would be the threat. So Black would answer 18 h5 with 18...h6!. Then the following sharp line would be possible, in which attack and defence cancel each other out: 19 Ne4 N8h7! 20 d5 cxd5 21 Nxf6+ Bxf6 22 Bxh7+ Kxh7 23 Bxf6 gxf6 24 cxd5 Rxd5 25 Qxd5 exd5 26 Rxe8 Qc3 27 R1e7 Qc1+ 28 Kh2 Qf4+ 29 Kg1 Qc1+ with a draw by perpetual check.

18...Red8 19 Bb1 Rxd4!

A fine strategic exchange sacrifice that removes the menace of White's dark-squared bishop.

20 Bxd4 Rxd4 21 Qe3?

White underestimates the strength of Black's kingside attack. He should have played 21 g3, guarding h4, and then after 21...Bxa3 challenged the black rook with 22 Rd2. That said, 22...Bc5 23 Rxd4 Bxd4 looks rather worse for him as his remaining rook has no open file, for if 24 Rd1 Black has 24...c5.

21...Rxh4 22 Qxa7 Rh5! (Diagram 19)

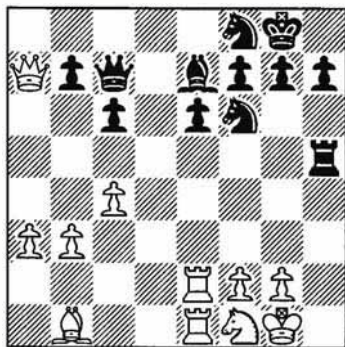


Diagram 19 (W)

Black is attacking!

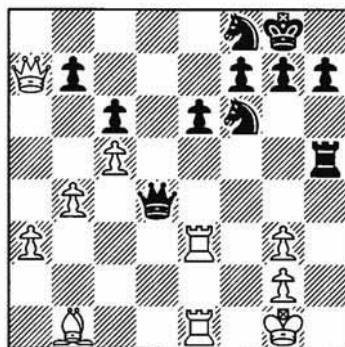


Diagram 20 (W)

There's no defence

A great move that Bluvshstein may have missed. Now he has to reckon with both 23...Bc5 and the entry of the black queen on f4 followed by ...Qh4 or ...Qh6, whereas 22...Qf4? can be met by 23 g3.

23 b4 Qf4 24 Ng3 Bd6! 25 c5

It's a back-rank mate after 25 Nxh5 Qh2+.

25...Qh4 26 Re3

Or 26 cxd6? Qh2+ 27 Kf1 Qh1+ 28 Nxh1 Rxh1 mate.

26...Bxg3 27 fxg3

White has to make a hole on f2 for his king, but now the rook on e3 becomes hopelessly pinned.

27...Qd4! (Diagram 20) 28 Qb8

Or 28 Kf1 Ng4 with a winning attack.

28...Nd5 29 Qd6 e5 30 g4 Rg5 31 Qd8 Rxg4 32 Bf5 Rg3 33 Kh2 0-1

There's no purpose in playing on once e3 drops.

White Attacks with Neg5

At top international level White's plan of pressuring the kingside with h2-h4 is probably the thing that scares Black the most. But for the rest of us an early Ng5 move by White, aiming at the f7-point, is the most unnerving. If we are going to lose in 12 moves, this is how it is going to happen!

Why is this so?

It's pretty logical. The weakest square in the white position at the start of the game is f2; the weakest square in the black position is f7. One of the good things about the French Defence is that 1...e6 immediately puts up a barrier to an attack on f7 by a white bishop on c4. But the idea of a catastrophe on f7 rears its ugly head again in the Fort Knox. This is because Black not only delays his kingside development for two moves whilst he puts the bishop on c6, but also because *the bishop is moving away from the defence of the e6-square.*

Scenario 1: White plays the pointless 5 Ng5

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 dxe4 4 Nxe4 Bd7 5 Ng5 is an empty gesture by White, as the bishop is on d7, still guarding e6, so no sin has been committed yet. Thus **5...h6 (Diagram 21)**, chasing the knight away is a simple reply. However, it won't always be that easy for Black!

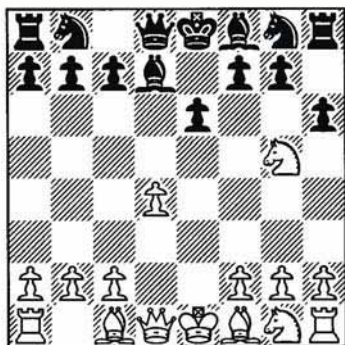


Diagram 21 (W)

There's no plausible sacrifice

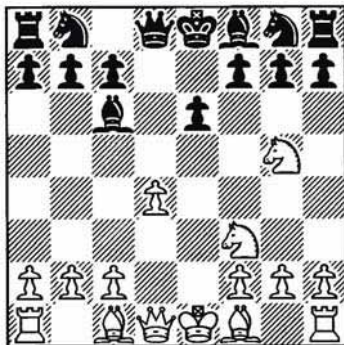


Diagram 22 (B)

Black must be careful

Scenario 2: White plays the terrifying 6 Neg5

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 dxe4 4 Nxe4 Bd7 Nf3 Bc6 6 Neg5! (Diagram 22)

This is much scarier. Indeed, it looks at first glance that it is time for Black to resign: for if 6...Nf6? 7 Ne5 and there is no defence against 8 Ngxf7; nor does it help much to capture on f3, as after 6...Bxf3? 7 Qxf3 both f7 and b7 are hanging.



WARNING: Moreover, this time we had better not try booting away the knight with 6...h6?, as the sacrifice 7 Nxf7! Kxf7 8 Ne5+ is decisive: 8...Ke7 9 Ng6+ and White picks up the rook on h8, while it is forced mate upon 8...Ke8 with 9 Qh5+ Ke7 10 Qf7+ Kd6 11 Nc4+ Kd5 12 Qf3+ Kxd4 13 Be3 mate. Black got his bishop to c6 all right, but unfortunately his king got to d4.

By the way, the most resilient move in this sequence is 8...Kf6, but all the same 9 Qg4 g5 10 h4 gives White a crushing attack.

Returning to 6 Neg5, you might be wondering what the fuss is about, as Black has the natural 6...Nd7?, the move he *always* plays after 5...Bc6. It guards the e5-square: surely White won't dare to sacrifice on f7 now? That's exactly what I thought many years ago in one of my first Fort Knox games, but 7 Nxf7! (Diagram 23) occurred all the same. The game ended in a draw after 7...Kxf7 8 Ng5+ Ke8 9 Nxe6? Qe7 10 Qe2 (threatening 11 Nxc7+) 10...Kf7 11 Ng5+ Ke8 12 Ne6 Kf7 with a repetition. I could have speculated with 11...Kf6 in this sequence, but 12 Be3 leaves Black with a lot of frights ahead of him. When I sit down to play the Fort Knox I

prefer to have my knight developed on f6 rather than the king.

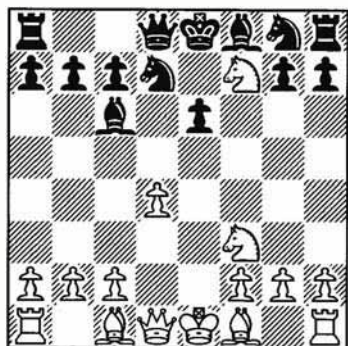


Diagram 23 (B)

One to avoid

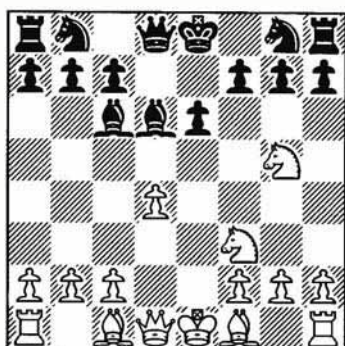


Diagram 24 (W)

The correct defence



NOTE: I was disappointed at being forced into a quick draw, but in fact I got off lightly, as 9 Bc4! (rather than 9 Nxe6) gives White a highly dangerous initiative.

The antidote to 6 Neg5 is 6...Bd6!

Game 20

□ L.Aronian ■ M.Turner

Hastings 2000/01

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 dxe4 4 Nxe4 Bd7 5 Nf3 Bc6 6 Neg5 Bd6! (Diagram 24) 7 Bc4?

No one has been tempted by 7 Nxf7 here, as 7...Kxf7 8 Ng5+ Ke8 doesn't give White anywhere near enough for the piece: for example, 9 Nxe6 Qh4!? or 9 Bc4 Bxg2 10 Nxe6 (or 10 Rg1 Bd5) 10...Qh4 11 Nxg7+ Kd7 etc.

More solid for White is 7 Bd3, but after 7...h6 8 Ne4 his attempt to attack has missed the mark, as shown by 8...Be7 (8...Nf6!? is interesting as after 9 Nxd6+ cxd6!? Black gains control of the e5-square) 9 c3 Nf6 10 Qe2 Nxe4 11 Bxe4 Bxe4 12 Qxe4 c6 13 0-0 Nd7 14 Re1 Nf6 15 Qe2 0-0 and White was gradually outplayed in O.Brendel-A.Rustemov, Warsaw 2005.

7...h6 8 Nxe6?

Preparing the sort of sacrifice that belonged in Hastings 1895 rather than Hastings

How to Play Against 1 e4

2001. This game was played on the 2nd January, with January 1st having been a rest day. 'It was my first game of the year, and so I wanted to play a sacrifice' was Aronian's surprising explanation to his opponent after the game.

Nonetheless, 8 Nh3 g5! threatening a fork on g4 would be unpleasant for White.

8...fxe6 9 Bxe6 Qf6! (Diagram 25)

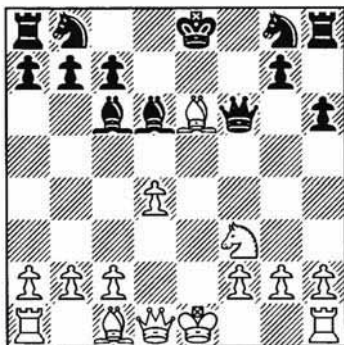


Diagram 25 (W)

An unconvincing sacrifice

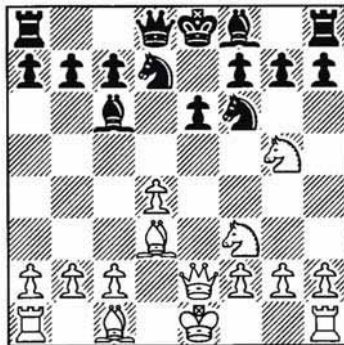


Diagram 26 (B)

Black must be careful

For once we have no objection to the black queen going to f6. She bolsters the kingside with gain of time by attacking the white bishop and introducing the idea of 10...Bxf3.

10 d5 Bd7 11 Nd4 Qe5+

Now the queen clears the way for the knight to go to f6.

12 Be3 Nf6 13 Qd3

White can't even castle as it is mate on h2.

13...Nxd5 14 Qg6+ Kd8 15 0-0 Nxe3 16 fxe3 Be8 and Black beat off the attack and won on move 58.

Scenario 3: White plays 7 Neg5 (or 8 Neg5)

This is somewhat confusing because the Neg5 move can be combined with a quick Qe2 or 0-0, and either of these supporting moves can be played before or after Neg5.

Thus we have line one: **1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 dxe4 4 Nxe4 Bd7 5 Nf3 Bc6 6 Bd3 Nd7**

7 Neg5 Ngf6 8 0-0, which can also arise from a **7 0-0 Ngf6 8 Neg5** move order. Meanwhile line two runs **1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 dxe4 4 Nxe4 Bd7 5 Nf3 Bc6 6 Bd3 Nd7 7 Neg5 Ngf6 8 Qe2** (Diagram 26), which equates to **7 Qe2 Ngf6 8 Neg5**.



NOTE: Against line one the natural response is **7...Ngf6** and **8...Bd6**. However, in line two the white queen puts immediate pressure on **e6** and, moreover, supports the idea of **Ne5**, so Black's development needs to be warped with the more wary **7...Ngf6** and then **8...Qe7!**

Game 21

□ P.Hopper ■ N.McDonald

London 2005

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 dxe4 4 Nxe4 Bd7 5 Nf3 Bc6 6 Bd3 Nd7 7 Neg5 Ngf6 8 0-0

Actually the move order of this game was **7 0-0 Ngf6 8 Neg5**, but I've changed it to clarify matters.

After **8 Qe2** the recommended reply is **8...Qe7!** (Diagram 27), shoring up the **e6**- and **f7**-pawns. Now if White plays slowly with **9 0-0**, the knight can be kicked back by **9...h6** when **10 Ne4 Nxe4 11 Bxe4 Bxe4 12 Qxe4 c6 13 c4 Nf6 14 Qh4 g6 15 Re1 Bg7 16 Qh3 g5 17 Ne5 0-0-0** fully mobilized the black position in E.Sutovsky-A.Rustemov, Esbjerg 2001.

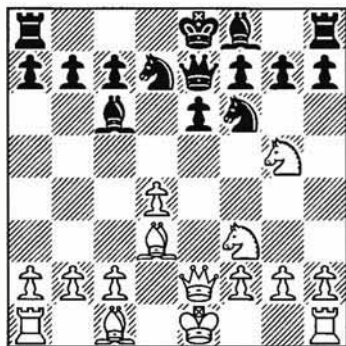


Diagram 27 (W)

A prudent defensive move

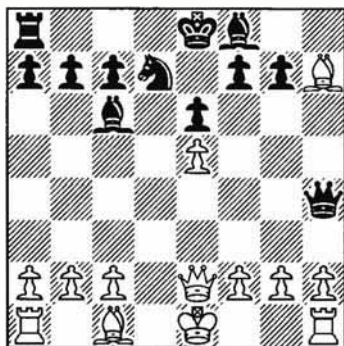


Diagram 28 (W)

White is in trouble

Instead **9 Ne5** is the obvious attacking move, but White is playing with fire due to the hanging **g2**-pawn: **9...Nxe5 10 dxe5 Nd7 11 Nxh7?** (he should settle for **11 0-0**)

How to Play Against 1 e4

when Black can activate his game with 11...h6 12 Nf3 Qb4(!?) 11...Rxh7! 12 Bxh7 Qh4 (**Diagram 28**) 13 Bd3 Bxg2, which is the point of Black's combination; he is going to regain the exchange and be a pawn up after 14 Rg1 Qxh2. In the game D.Pruess-V.Golod, Santa Monica 2004, White tried to confuse matters with 14 Bg5, but his king ended up under a fatal attack: 14...Qxg5 15 Rg1 Nc5 16 Kd1 0-0-0 17 f4 Qf5 18 Rxg2 Nxd3 19 cxd3 Rxd3+ 20 Ke1 Rd4 21 Kf1 Bc5 22 Rg4 Re4 23 Qf3 Re3 24 Qd1 Qe4 25 Rg3 Qh1+ 26 Rg1 Rf3+ 27 Ke2 Rf2+ 28 Kd3 Qd5+ 29 Kc3 Rf3+ 30 Kc2 Qe4+ 0-1.

8...Bd6 9 Re1 h6! (**Diagram 29**)

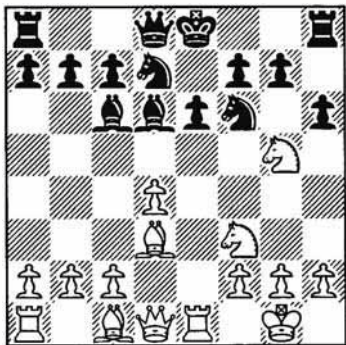


Diagram 29 (W)

The knight must be driven back

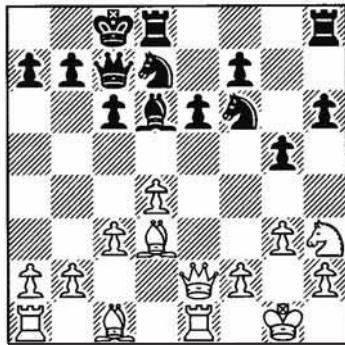


Diagram 30 (W)

Aggression from Black

Instead 9...0-0 allows White to play his dream move 10 Ne5! when the Fort Knox has failed in its fundamental aim of stopping the knight seizing the central post.

10 Nh3

After the spectacular 10 Rxe6+? Black would face a huge attack if he took the rook (thus not 10...fxe6? 11 Nxe6 when 11...Qe7? loses the queen to 12 Bg6+), but Black can decline the offer with 10...Kf8! when White has shot his bolt as both the rook and knight are hanging and he has no convincing follow-up.

10...Bxf3

All according to the Fort Knox 'rules': Black eliminates the knight just in time before White can play 11 Ne5.

11 Qxf3 c6

Guarding the b7-pawn. During the game I was expecting 12 Nf4, restoring the knight to the centre, and was intending 12...0-0 in reply.

12 c3

After this rather passive move I became ambitious and decided to prevent the knight escaping from h3.

12...g5! 13 Qe2

Of course the queen must avoid being forked by 13...g4.

13...Qc7

Black wins time for queenside castling by renewing the threat of 14...g4, which would trap the wretched white knight.

14 g3

Not only saving the horse, as 14...g4? lets it gallop away after 15 Nf4, but also preventing 14...Bxh2+.

14...0-0-0 (Diagram 30) 15 c4

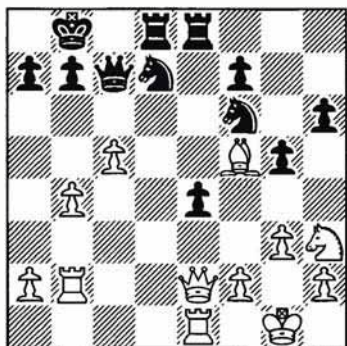
White will in effect be a piece down in the central battle thanks to his entombed knight. Perhaps he should have tried 15 f4 to give it an escape route, but then Black can start a promising kingside attack with 15...g4! 16 Nf2 h5 when a breakthrough with 17...h4 is already on the cards.

15...c5

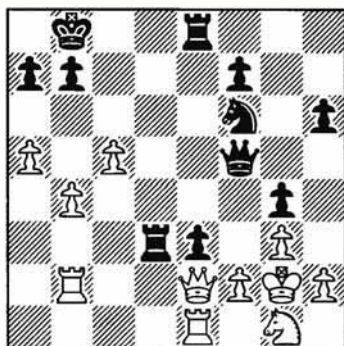
Black is happy to leave things as they are on the kingside and exploit his extra firepower in the centre.

16 dxc5 Bxc5 17 Rb1 e5

Again menacing the stranded knight, this time with 18...g4.

18 b4 Bd4 19 Bf5 Kb8 20 Bb2 Rhe8 21 c5 Bxb2 22 Rxb2 e4 (Diagram 31)**Diagram 31 (W)**

The attack gains momentum

**Diagram 32 (W)**

The battering-ram continues!

How to Play Against 1 e4

Having methodically centralized his pieces it is time for Black to launch the final attack. The big threat is 23...Ne5 followed by an invasion on d3 or f3. White can't allow this, but once he has parted with his light-squared bishop his resistance soon crumbles away.

23 Bxd7 Qxd7 24 Kg2 Qf5 25 Ng1 Rd3 26 a4 g4

The knight proves just as boxed in on g1 as on h3.

27 a5 e3! (Diagram 32) 28 f3 Qd5 29 Reb1 Rd2 30 Rxd2 exd2 31 Qf1 Qa2?

The irony of the position is that Black's simplest way to win is 31...gxf3+ 32 Nxf3, letting the knight out, but killing White stone dead with 32...Ng4 and 33...Ne3.

32 Rd1 Nd5 0-1

Short of time White saw the big fork on e3 and resigned. In fact he could fight on with 33 Qb5!, hitting e8 and with ideas of 34 c6 to threaten mate.

A Fort Knox fiasco or the danger of a premature ...Nf6

Finally, here is what might happen if Black is in too much of a rush to challenge the white knight on e4.

Game 22

□ T.Gelashvili ■ F.Patuzzo

Bulgaria 2000

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 dxe4 4 Nxe4 Bd7 5 Nf3 Bc6 6 Bd3 Nf6

We should play 6...Nd7 and then 7...Ngf6, planning to recapture on f6 with the knight.

7 Nxf6+ Qxf6?

He had to play 7...gxf6.

8 Bg5! (Diagram 33) 8...Bxf3

It looks as though White has blundered as he loses a piece after 9 Bxf6 Bxd1, but...

9 Qd2!

Now the black queen is suddenly trapped, as 9...Qxd4 10 Bb5+ wins her by discovered attack.

9...Bxg2 10 Bxf6 Bxh1 11 Be5 c5?

Choosing a quick end, or more likely missing the reply. He could have battled on with 11...Bc6.

12 f3! (Diagram 34)

The bishop won't escape from the corner as 12...Bxf3 13 Bxb8 Rxb8 14 Qf4 attacks

both b8 and f3. The remaining moves are all fun for White:

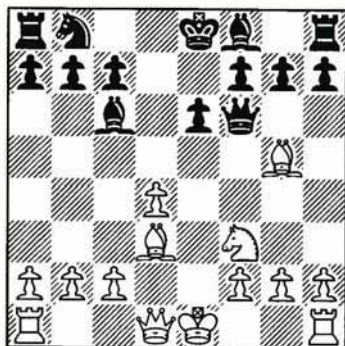


Diagram 33 (B)

Black's queen is trapped

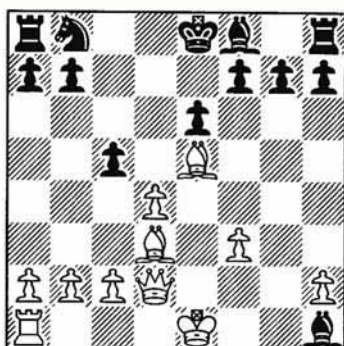


Diagram 34 (B)





Black might resign

12...Nc6 13 Kf2 Bxf3 14 Kxf3 f6 15 Bg3 cxd4 16 Bb5 Bc5 17 Qe2 Kf7 18 Bxc6 bxc6 19 Qc4 Bb6 20 a4 Rac8 21 a5 1-0

I guess that's a rather sad way to end our discussion of the Fort Knox, but play 6...Nd7 and you'll come out fighting!

Chapter Four

The Classical 4 e5 Variation

-  **Introduction**
-  **White Plays 5 f4**
-  **White Plays 5 Nce2**
-  **Early Deviations**

Introduction

If you fancy something more adventurous than the Fort Knox after **1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3**, you might try counterattacking against e4 with **3...Nf6**. Then 4 Bg5 leads us to the McCutcheon Defence, which is the subject of our next chapter. Here we shall look chiefly at what might happen if White closes the centre at once with **4 e5**, and Black responds **4...Nfd7** (**Diagram 1**).

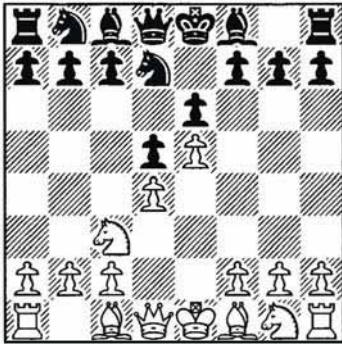


Diagram 1 (W)

The centre is blocked

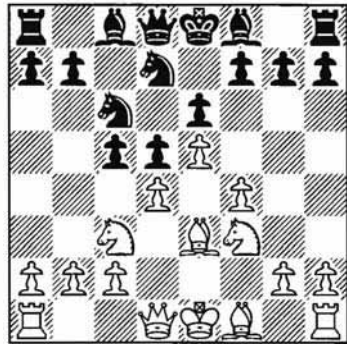


Diagram 2 (B)

White overprotects d4



NOTE: Playing 4 e5 introduces a line officially known as the **Steinitz Variation**. However, most people refer to it simply as the **Classical 4 e5 Variation**.

Strategic overview

With 4 e5 White seizes space and drives the black knight from its best square. The pawn on e5 becomes his pride and joy, and can readily be supported with f2-f4; this will allow White to build up an attack on the kingside which could be either positional in nature (smothering the opponent under a blanket of white pawns) or tactical (hitting the black king on the head with a sharp instrument, notably a bishop sacrifice on h7 – see the coverage of the Greek Gift, below).

Turning our attention to the queenside, things are less rosy for White as his pawn on d4 is denied its natural support with c2-c3 due to the knight sitting on c3. Therefore it is to be expected that Black will make a concerted attack on the pawn beginning with ...c5, aiming to conquer the centre.

There are two distinct ways for White to handle the position, depending on

How to Play Against 1 e4

whether he chooses to bolster the e5-pawn with 5 f4 or the d4-pawn with 5 Nce2 c5 6 c3.

White Plays 5 f4

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 f4

This is White's most popular move, after which both players often focus their pieces on the critical d4-square with **5...c5 6 Nf3 Nc6 7 Be3 (Diagram 2)**, although 7 Ne2 is possible too, transposing to our next section.

The key d4-square

It is worth reminding ourselves that it is not the white pawn centre *per se* that Black has to be afraid of in the French, but rather the consequences of it being dissolved in a way that is unfavourable to him. In the diagram above, the exchange of White's d-pawn for Black's c-pawn is surely inevitable, but whose pieces will benefit the most?

It is one of the bitter ironies of chess that Black might work hard to get rid of the pawn, only to find that the empty square that replaces it is more of a threat to him. Thus a white knight finds d4 a wonderful centre post, as Black has already 'spent' his ...c5 thrust, which might otherwise have driven it away, on getting rid of the d4-pawn. The d4-square is so important that a tough fight often develops for control of it. Black might play ...cxd4, combined with ...Nc6, ...Bc5 and ...Qb6, bringing all available resources into contact with the square. Not to be outdone, White will add to the Nf3 and Be3 moves with Qd2 and 0-0-0; the latter move bringing a rook into the struggle for the key square. The spearhead of this concentration of white forces will be a knight sitting on d4.

Black's brilliant 7...Be7 move

It might seem strange that I want to recommend 7...Be7 (**Diagram 3**) for Black, when he could get the bishop fighting for the d4-square immediately with 7...cxd4 8 Nxd4 Bc5. But let's count some tempi. If Black plays ...cxd4 and ...Bc5, he has taken two moves to get his bishop to c5; for his part, White has taken only one move to get his knight to the desirable d4-square, i.e. in recapturing Nxd4. The tempo count to get the Nd4/...Bc5 scenario: one move for White, two moves for Black.

Now imagine if after 7...Be7 White plays d4xc5 and Nd4 to get the knight to its best central square – it takes two moves. Black meanwhile has played ...Be7 and

...Bxc5, rather than ...cxd4 and ...Bc5, so it has still taken him two moves to get the bishop to c5. The tempo count to get the Nd4/Bc5 scenario: two moves by White, two moves for Black. In other words, Black has gained a tempo in establishing the ...Bc5/Nd4 battle over the d4-square.

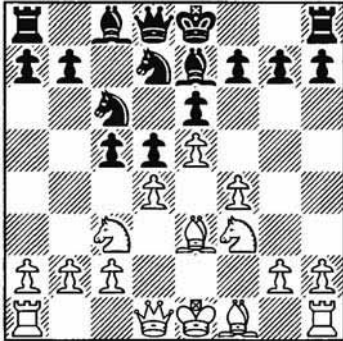


Diagram 3 (W)
A modern finesse

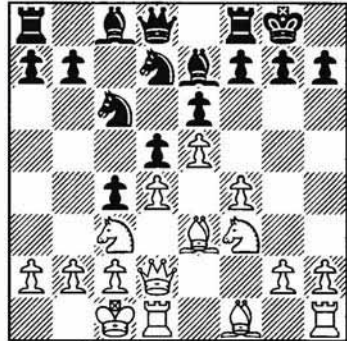


Diagram 4 (W)
Black will attack!

I hope you can see why this makes 7...Be7 such a clever idea – White can't play as he normally does after the standard 7...cxd4 8 Nxd4 Bc5, and instead has to re-think his strategy.



NOTE: With the paradoxical 7...Be7 Black ignores the d4-square in order to increase his influence over it!

Case study 1: White immediately castles queenside – a positional disaster

Some very strong players have been confused by 7...Be7 and suffered sharp defeats. Notably they can't seem to understand why the position is bad for them if they castle queenside as they do in the 7...cxd4 8 Nxd4 Bc5 main line.

Indeed, White wants his knight on d4, but doesn't want to be a tempo down after dxc5 as discussed above, and so 8 Qd2 0-0 9 0-0-0 appears to be a sensible way to proceed. White is waiting for 9...cxd4 when 10 Nxd4 transposes to 7...cxd4 8 Nxd4 Bc5 9 Qd2 0-0 10 0-0-0, but instead comes a nasty surprise: 9...c4! (**Diagram 4**) sees Black close the centre and lay the foundations for a rapid attack on the white king. He can bash out moves like ...b5, ...Qa5, ...Rb8 and ...b4; a sequence that is simple

How to Play Against 1 e4

to understand and easy to carry out. In contrast, White's possible counterplay on the kingside is less obvious and more difficult to arrange. At all levels of chess White is going to start wilting as soon as 9...c4 is played. Let's see a recent example.

Game 23

□ S.Abu Sufian ■ B.Lalic

Hastings 2007/08

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 f4 c5 6 Nf3



WARNING: Throughout the French Classical, Black must avoid falling for a Greek Gift!

Imagine if White plays 6 dxc5 here. Then 6...Bxc5 7 Qg4 gives him an attack on g7, so we'll play 6...Nc6 first:

a) If White replies 7 Qg4 anyway, then 7...Nb4 attacking c2 will force him to retreat his queen back, or hand over his light-squared bishop with 8 Bd3 when 8...Nxd3+ 9 cxd3 is fine for Black.

b) Meanwhile after 7 Nf3 Bxc5 White no longer has Qg4.

c) So let's say he waits with 7 a3. There could follow 7...Bxc5 8 Qg4 0-0 9 Nf3 (**Diagram 5**).

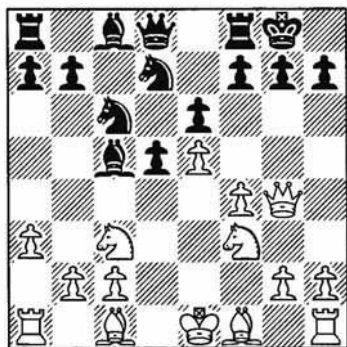


Diagram 5 (B)

Black must avoid accidents on h7

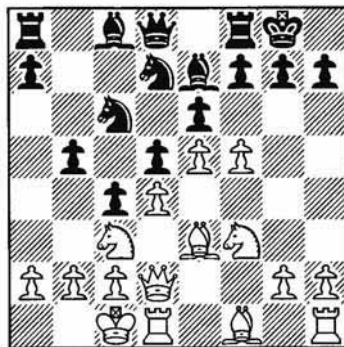


Diagram 6 (W)

Black is very fast

Now Black can get a good game with the active 9...Nd4! 10 Bd3 f5, but if he plays passively he will lay himself open to the famous Greek Gift sacrifice: 9...a6?! 10

Bd3 b5? (Black can still save himself with 10...f5) 11 Bxh7+! Kxh7 12 Qh5+ Kg8 13 Ng5 and Black has no good answer to the threat of 14 Qh7 mate: if 13...Re8 it is mate with 14 Qxf7+ Kh8 15 Qh5+ Kg8 16 Qh7+ Kf8 17 Qh8+ Ke7 18 Qxg7.



NOTE: The Greek Gift comes in many guises, but the basic mechanism is that White plays Bxh7+, then Ng5+ and Qh5, with Black being unable to reply ...Nf6 to cover the h7-square. Often the white queen is back on d1 or e2, behind the knight on f3, which conceals the trap further.

The Bxh7+ sacrifice doesn't always work, but whenever you have castled kingside and your knight has been driven away from f6, keep an eye out for it!

Returning to the more standard 6 Nf3:

6...Nc6 7 Be3 Be7 8 Qd2 0-0 9 0-0-0 c4!

Grandmaster Bogdan Lalic is a fine player whose Elo rating never does justice to his strength as he is too peacefully inclined with the black pieces. So when he starts a big attack on your king it's time to be very afraid, as it must be something special to have provoked a sleeping giant!

10 f5

White tries for counterplay on the kingside, as 10...exf5? 11 Nxd5 would leave the black centre shattered.

10...b5! (Diagram 6)

No time is to be wasted in launching the second black pawn on the queenside. Now 11 Nxb5 Rb8 leaves White in terrible trouble: for example, 12 Nc3 Qb6 (threatening mate on b2) 13 b3 Qa5! with ideas such as 14...Bb4 pinning the white knight.

11 fxe6?

White should have plunged his own dagger into the black kingside with 11 f6!. Then Lalic analyses a very promising exchange sacrifice for Black: 11...gxf6 12 Bh6 (Black has an even bigger attack after 12 exf6 Bxf6 13 Bh6 b4 14 Ne2 c3 15 bxc3 Qa5, etc) 12...fxe5! 13 dxe5 Ndx5 14 Bxf8 Qxf8 15 Nxb5 Qg7 16 c3 Rb8 17 Nbd4 Bd7 and Black has an unbreakable pawn centre and a strong dark-squared bishop that can aid the attack on b2.

11...fxe6 12 h4

White plans to put his knight on g5 and his queen on h5 to threaten mate, but it turns out the black queen can do greater things on the a-file.

12...Qa5!



TIP: After White castles queenside, Black normally wins if his queen can go to a5 without being attacked by Nb3.

13 Ng5 b4 14 Qe2

Or 14 Nb1 Qxa2 15 Nxe6 c3! 16 bxc3 bxc3 17 Qxc3 (it's a faster mate after 17 Nxc3 with 17...Ba3) 17...Rb8 18 Nd2 Ba3+ and mates.

14...bxc3 15 Qh5 h6 16 Qg6 Bxg5 17 hxg5 cxb2+ 18 Kb1 Ndx5! (Diagram 7)

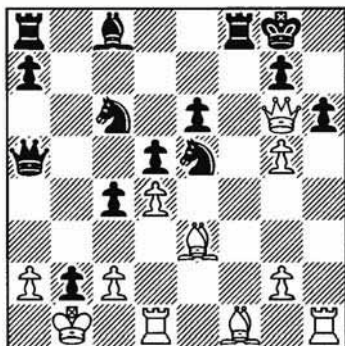


Diagram 7 (W)

There's no defence

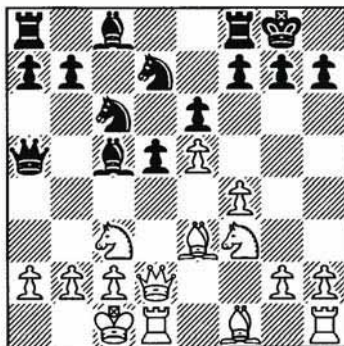


Diagram 8 (W)

Black still wants to attack!

Not permitting a check on e6 to disturb the queenside denouement.

19 dxe5 Nb4 0-1

Mate looms on a2 and there is no escape: 20 Kxb2 c3+ 21 Kxc3 Nxa2+ 22 Kd3 Ba6+ 23 c4 Bxc4+ 24 Kc2 Qc3+ 25 Kb1 Rfb8+ and it's overkill on the b-file.

Case study 2: White falls for a mild form of the castling trap

Let's imagine that White notices the danger in immediate queenside castling, and instead plays 9 dxc5, and only after 9...Bxc5, 10 0-0-0. However, 10...Qa5! (**Diagram 8**) still gives Black the makings of a strong attack.

Note that if the white knight were already on d4 here, the queen foray could be answered by Nb3! attacking the black queen and forcing an exchange of dark-squared bishops which would clarify White's advantage. Thus if the game had begun 7 Be3 cxd4 (instead of 7...Be7) 8 Nxd4 Bc5 9 Qd2 0-0 10 0-0-0, the queen move 10...Qa5? would be feeble after 11 Nb3 Bxe3 12 Qxe3.

We can now further appreciate that 7...Be7! has won Black time for ...Qa5 without having the queen molested by the white knight. As a result, Black manages to build up an attack in effortless style. We'll look at two games after 10...Qa5. The

first features 11 Bxc5, the second a belated 11 Nd4. White has no luck after either move, although Saric produces an incredible swindle against Mikhail Gurevich in the notes to the first game.

Game 24

□ Y.Solodovnichenko ■ A.Grigoryan

Belgorod 2008

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 f4 c5 6 Nf3 Nc6 7 Be3 Be7 8 Qd2

If 8 dxc5 at once Black might profitably delay the recapture on c5, as 8...0-0 9 Qd2 Bxc5 transposes to the main game.

8...0-0 9 dxc5 Bxc5 10 0-0-0 Qa5 11 Bxc5 Nxc5 12 Kb1 Bd7 13 h4

Black also gained a strong initiative after 13 Bd3 Nb4 14 Nd4 Rfc8 15 g4 Ba4! (**Diagram 9**) in I.Saric-M.Gurevich, Cannes 2007.



Diagram 9 (W)

Strong queenside pressure

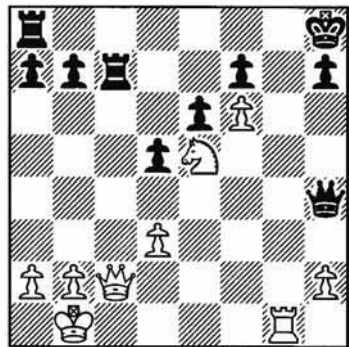


Diagram 10 (B)

A vicious tactic

Here White felt obliged to give up the exchange to stem the pressure against a2 and along the c-file as 16 Be2 Ne4 wins at once: for example, 17 Nxe4 Bxc2+ 18 Nxc2 Qxa2+ 19 Kc1 Qa1 mate.

So White tried 16 f5 when after 16...Nbx3 17 cxd3 Bxd1 18 f6 gxf6 19 exf6 Kh8 20 Rxd1 Black should consolidate and win with 20...Nd7. In the game Gurevich played 20...Na4?! and later fell for a foul swindle: 21 Nxa4 Qxa4 22 Nf3 Qxg4 23 Ne5 Qh5 24 Re1 Rc7 25 Rg1 Qh4?? (he had to play 25...Rac8, though it's doubtful that Black can win as he is in a positional bind) 26 Qc2!! (**Diagram 10**) and now 26...Rxc2 27 Nxf7 is mate, while 26...Rac8 27 Nxf7+ Rxf7 28 Qxc8+ mates. Gurevich

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tried 26...Re7, but resigned after 27 fxe7 Qxe7 28 Nxf7+! as there is a killer check by the white queen next move on c3.

13...Rfd8

Over the next half dozen moves Grigoryan brings every black piece to a square where it contributes to the attack on the white king.

14 Rh3 Be8

The bishop clears the way for the rook on d8 to support the central thrust ...d4, which would drive the white knight from its important post on c3, where it defends the a2-square and shields c2. White's reply prevents this for the moment.

15 Nd4 Rac8 (Diagram 11)

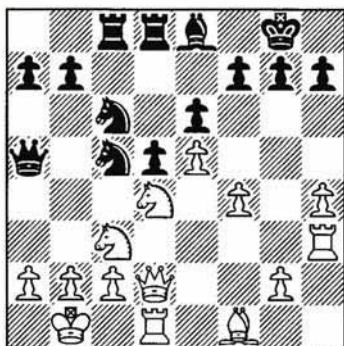


Diagram 11 (W)

Black builds up

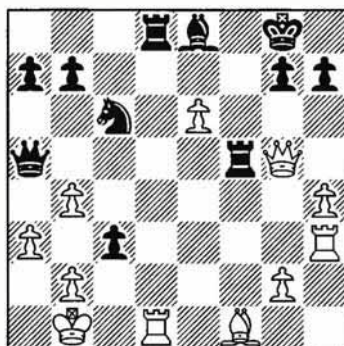


Diagram 12 (W)

Black wins material

The rook prepares to put pressure on either c3 or c2.

16 Nb3 Nxb3 17 cxb3

Horrendous for White is 17 axb3 Nb4 when he must already reckon with an exchange sacrifice on c3.

17...f6! 18 exf6 Nb4

Here we see another reason for 14...Be8: the bishop threatens to enter the battle with a deadly check on g6. White tries for a counterattack, but the black pieces are far better organized for a tactical fight:

19 f5 d4 20 Qg5 Rc7 21 f7+ Rxf7 22 a3

If the knight moves from c3, the a2-pawn drops.

22...Nc6 23 fxe6?

Losing, but 23 Ne4 Rxf5 leaves White a pawn down and still facing an attack.

23...Rf5 24 b4 dxc3! (Diagram 12) 0-1

However he plays, White drops a lot of material, as shown by 25 bxa5 Rxd1+ 26 Kc2 Rxf5.

Game 25

□ **A.Shomoev** ■ **V.Potkin**

European Championship, Dresden 2007

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 f4 c5 6 Nf3 Nc6 7 Be3 Be7 8 dxc5 0-0 9 Qd2 Bxc5 10 0-0-0 Qa5 11 Nd4

White decides it is better late than never, and puts his knight on d4 with the positional threat of 12 Nb3. It meets with a noteworthy response:

11...Bxd4! 12 Bxd4 Rb8! (Diagram 13)

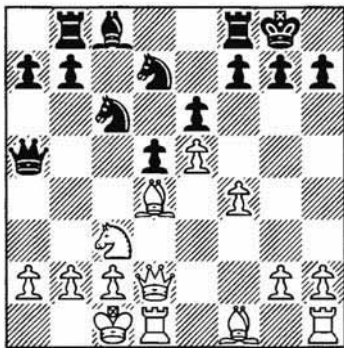


Diagram 13 (W)

Facilitating ...b5

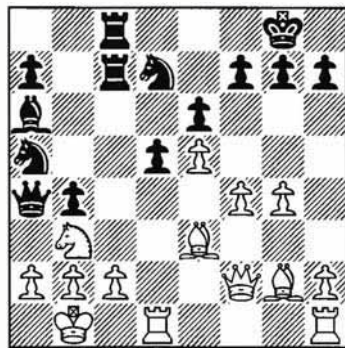


Diagram 14 (W)

The pressure mounts



NOTE: You might think it odd that Black has exchanged his 'good' bishop for the white knight, and if we were talking about steady positional chess, I would have to agree with you. However, here Black is intending to bulldozer his way through the b-file, and so his main enemy was the white knight, not the bishop.

Besides, after the more 'logical' 11...Nxd4 12 Bxd4 the dark-squared bishops are likely to be exchanged as well; not an appealing prospect for Black who wants to keep as many pieces on the board as possible to implement his assault on the white king.

How to Play Against 1 e4

13 Kb1 b5 14 Ne2 b4 15 Be3 Ba6 16 Nd4 Rfc8 17 Nb3 Qa4 18 g4

As usually happens in this variation, White's kingside activity begins far too late to distract his opponent from his queenside operations.

18...Rb7!

Black's rooks can take up attacking positions along the c-file, as the white rooks have no effective role. It is therefore no wonder that Shomoev finds himself out-gunned.

19 Bg2 Rbc7 20 Qf2 Na5 (Diagram 14)

The power of Black's well-organized pieces contrasts with the meanderings of his opponent's.

21 Nd4 Rxc2!

Black's heavy pressure culminates in a sacrificial breakthrough which exploits the weakness of both the a2- and c2-squares.

22 Nxc2 Bc4 23 b3 Bxb3!

Stripping away all the white king's pawn cover.

24 axb3 Qxb3+ 25 Kc1 Qa2 (Diagram 15)

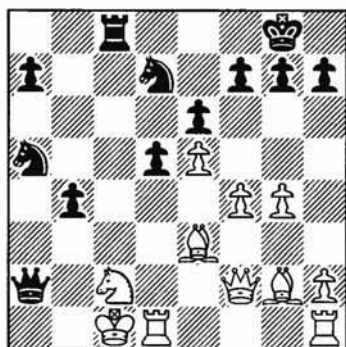


Diagram 15 (W)

There's no defence

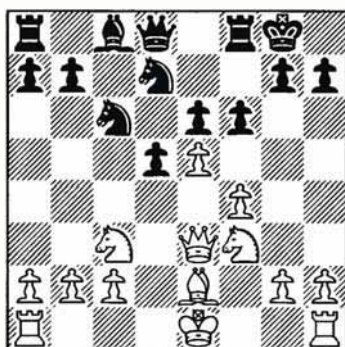


Diagram 16 (W)

A typical undermining break

Threatening 26...Nb3 mate and clearing the way for the advance of the b-pawn.

26 Rd3 b3 27 Kd1 bxc2+ 28 Kc1 Qa1+ 29 Kd2 Qxh1 30 Ke2

After 30 Bxh1 c1Q 31 Ke2 Qxh1 Black has regained his material investment with a piece and two pawns as interest.

30...c1Q 0-1



TIP: It is noteworthy that the 7...Be7 variation offers Black's light-squared bishop a useful attacking role should White castle queenside.

This bishop is supposed to be Black's 'problem piece', but consider: in the Gurevich game, it went to d7 and then a4 to attack c2; in the Grigoryan game it went from d7 to e8 intending to emerge on g6 to assail c2 after ...f6; while in the Potkin game it went to a6 and then c4 to attack the other vulnerable light square on the queenside, namely a2. In other words, it proved a 'problem piece' not for Black, but for the white king!

Case study 3: White takes on c5 but avoids 0-0-0

Game 26

□ A.Shomoev ■ A.Riazantsev

Moscow 2007

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 f4 c5 6 Nf3 Nc6 7 Be3 Be7 8 dxc5 0-0 9 Be2

We may talk about the value of general principles such as 'bring your pieces out rapidly and centralize them', but there is no escaping from the fact that vague developing moves often lead to defeat.

9...Bxc5 10 Qd2

White feels obliged to lose time with his queen as after 10 Bxc5 Nxc5 11 0-0, 'completing his development', Black has 11...Qb6! with the double threat of 12...Qxb2 and discovered check.

10...Bxe3 11 Qxe3 f6! (Diagram 16)

Apart from the almost universal ...c5, this is Black's most typical pawn stab in the standard French pawn centre. It eliminates the white pawn on e5 and so allows the black knight to return to f6, which is its best square. At the same time the rook on f8 is granted a semi-open file along which it can attack f4. And to crown it all the black centre is freed to advance with the 'explosive' ...e5.

White has no wish to be left with an isolated pawn on e5, and so takes on f6:

12 exf6 Nxf6

Now White is obliged to waste more time as 13 0-0? drops a piece to 13...d4, while 13 0-0-0 loses a pawn to 13...Ng4 14 Qg1 (avoiding a fork on f2) 14...Rxf4. The white king is therefore obliged to stay longer in the centre than is good for its health.

13 Nd4

How to Play Against 1 e4

Even so, if White is allowed just one move to consolidate, say with 13...Qb6 14 0-0-0, he will have a promising game. Here we would see the drawback to ...f6: the e6-pawn and the e5-square in front of it are weak. This weakness is made worse by the fact that Black doesn't have a dark-squared bishop: in the 3...Nf6 Tarrasch Defence he normally has a bishop sitting on d6 to guard e5.

Therefore it is imperative that Black exploits the latent dynamism in his set-up before White has the chance to castle queenside.

13...e5! 14 fxe5 Ng4 15 Bxg4 Bxg4 (Diagram 17)

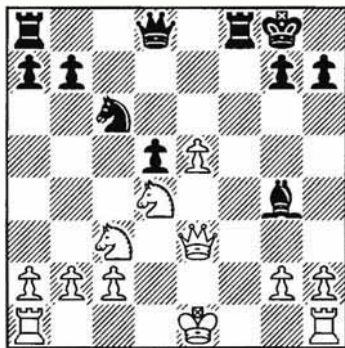


Diagram 17 (W)

White can't castle!

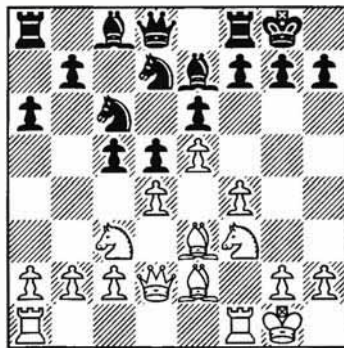


Diagram 18 (B)

Prudent play by White

A very unpleasant turn of events for the white king. Black's sacrifice has freed his light-squared bishop, which now prevents White from castling queenside or bringing his rook to the centre with Rd1 to support the knight on d4. In addition, the pawn offer has opened the f-file, stopping White from castling kingside.

The threat of 16...Qb6, pinning and winning the knight on d4, provokes an exchange of knights on c6, after which the remaining white knight must flee from the 17...d4 advance. The upshot is that the white pieces are either in retreat from their central positions or stuck out of the action on a1 and h1. White's king can only watch in alarm as his pieces lose all coordination:

16 Nxc6 bxc6 17 Nd1 d4 18 Qg3 Qa5+!

Black forces White's reply after which the opening of the d-file becomes inevitable.

19 c3 Rae8! 20 Kd2

Alternatively, 20 Qxg4 Qxe5+ 21 Kd2 Rf4! (forcing the white queen away from the

defence of e2) 22 Qd7 Qe2+ 23 Kc1 d3 and the mate threat on c2 decides the game.

20...Bh5 21 Re1 Rd8 22 Kc2 Bg6+ 23 Kc1 Qa4 24 b3 Qa3+ 0-1

It is bedlam after 25 Nb2 d3 and 26...d2+, while 25 Kd2 dxc3+ 26 Kxc3 Qc5+ 27 Kb2 Rd2 is mate.

Case study 4: White wises up, avoids dxc5 and plays 0-0

After all the excitement of hounding the white king in the earlier games it is something of an anticlimax to see it tucked away on the g1-square. However, that is what happens when White plays with a sensible lack of ambition in the following game. Nevertheless, Black still comes out on top after winning the positional struggle in the centre.

Game 27

□ Wang Li ■ E. Gleizerov

Dubai 2008

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 f4 c5 6 Nf3 Nc6 7 Be3 Be7 8 Qd2 0-0 9 Be2 a6 10 0-0 (Diagram 18)

Here Gleizerov has no wish to hand over the d4-square to the white knight with 10...cxd4 11 Nxd4 – if the square is going to be opened up, he wants his opponent to spend a tempo on dxc5. Instead he chooses a plan of queenside expansion, which if allowed will culminate in the moves ...b5-b4 and ...a5, driving the white knight from c3 and clearing the way for his light-squared bishop to challenge its opposite number with ...Ba6.

10...b5 11 a3!

Alas this useful preventive move ends Black's interest in further advances on the queenside, as 11...b4 12 axb4 cxb4 deprives him of pressure against d4, while the recapture 12...Nxb4 leaves the a6-pawn isolated. Still, 10...b5 remains a very useful move even if it doesn't lead to a pawn rush: the b7-square is now available for the black bishop, and his queen can't be harassed by 12 Na4 after his next move.

11...Qb6

Gleizerov reverts to the idea of attacking the d4-point which he began with 5...c5.

12 dxc5

Rather too compliant. After 12 Kh1 Bb7 13 Bg1 White can prepare the f4-f5 advance to attack on the kingside. Therefore it would be a good moment for Black to capture on d4 after all and simplify the position: 13...cxd4 14 Nxd4 Nxd4 15 Bxd4 Bc5 (Diagram 19) 16 Bxc5 Nxc5 17 Rad1 Ne4 18 Nxe4 dxe4 19 Qd4 Qc7! (counterattacking against c2; it's very important that Black avoids 19...Qxd4? 20 Rxd4, when

How to Play Against 1 e4

he has no activity and White controls the d-file) 20 c3 Rfd8 21 Qe3 h6 and Black held the balance in D.Sadvakasov-Ni Hua, Moscow 2007. The e4-pawn isn't hard to defend and if White loses control of the position, it could become a strong passed pawn.

12...Bxc5 13 Bxc5 Nxc5 14 Kh1 d4! (Diagram 20)

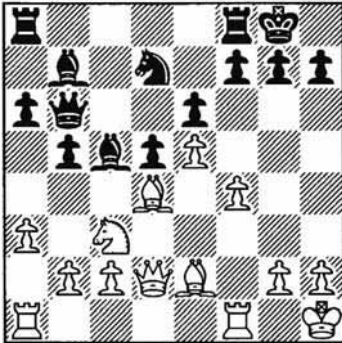


Diagram 19 (W)

Black equalizes

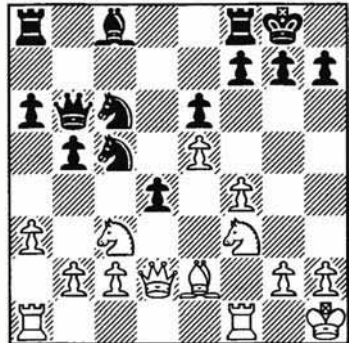


Diagram 20 (W)

An ideal advance

This pawn advance prevents White from consolidating his hold over the d4-square with 15 Rad1 and 16 Nd4, when he would have a good game. Of course, the pawn can't be captured because 15 Nxd4? Rd8 costs the knight.

No black piece is more pleased by this turn of events than the light-squared bishop, which faced a secluded life if White had been able to establish a knight on the d4-square blockading the d5-pawn, but now has a beautiful diagonal awaiting it on b7.

15 Nd1 Rd8

Having gained possession of the d4-square, Black has won the opening battle. Gleizerov went on to win the tactical battle on move 44. The remaining moves of the game were:

16 Nf2 Ne7 17 b4 Na4 18 Bd3 Nf5 19 Ne4 Bb7 20 Qf2 Nb2 21 Nc5 Nxd3 22 cxd3 a5 23 Nb3 axb4 24 axb4 Ra4 25 Nc5 Rxb4 26 Rfc1 Ne3 (Diagram 21) 27 Qh4 Nf5 28 Qxd8+ Qxd8 29 Nxb7 Qb8 30 Nd6 Ne7 31 Ng5 Ra4 32 Rab1 b4 33 Rc4 Qa8 34 h3 h6 35 Nf3 Qa5 36 Nb7 Qa7 37 Nd6 Nd5 38 f5 Ra1 39 Rxa1 Qxa1+ 40 Kh2 exf5 41 Rxd4 Ne3 42 Rxb4 Qa2 43 Nh4 Qf2 44 Ne8 Ng4+ 0-1

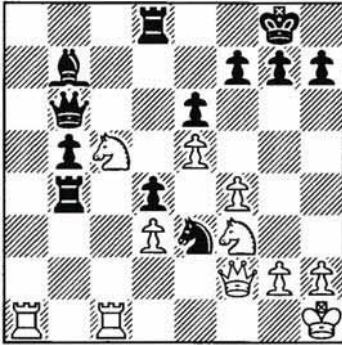


Diagram 21 (W)
A fine outpost

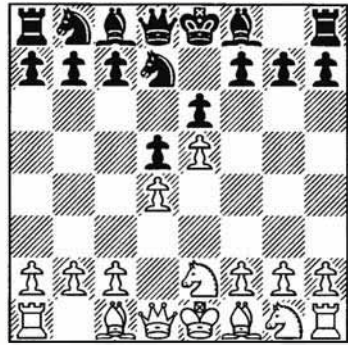


Diagram 22 (B)
White intends f2-f4 and c2-c3

White Plays 5 Nce2

White builds a wall of pawns, but will it come tumbling down?

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 Nce2 (Diagram 22)

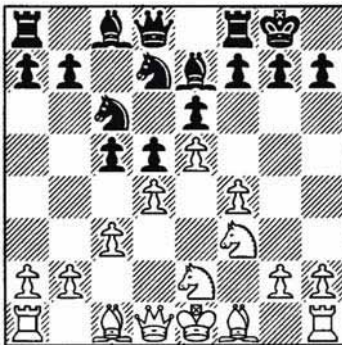


Diagram 23 (W)
Black must challenge White's centre

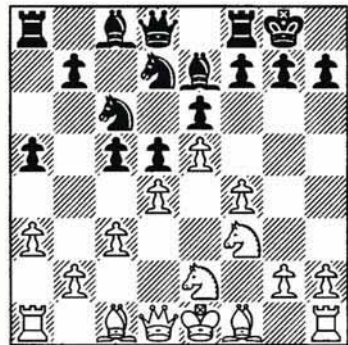


Diagram 24 (W)
Wisely preventing b2-b4

How to Play Against 1 e4

Here White decides to remove the knight from c3 at once, allowing c2-c3 to be played in response to ...c5. In this way he keeps a pawn on d4 and builds a central structure, including the move f2-f4, that restricts the black pieces in the style of the Advance Variation. On the other hand, the big centre can prove unwieldy and vulnerable, as White has neglected his development in order to establish it.

Nonetheless, this method of play for White has been adopted by some great players and certainly shouldn't be underestimated.



NOTE: There are two distinct move orders that reach our standard position at move eight. After 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 there is either (i) 5 Nce2 c5 6 f4 Nc6 7 c3 Be7 8 Nf3 0-0 or (ii) 5 f4 c5 6 Nf3 Nc6 7 Ne2 Be7 8 c3 0-0 (Diagram 23).

Scenario 1: Black attacks the centre with ...f6 after inferior play by White

As we said above, White is taking a considerable liberty with his development in playing 5 Nce2, as he moves the knight a second time and shuts in the bishop on f1. Therefore he is likely to face a swift and deadly punishment if he is guilty of any reckless or overoptimistic act in the early middlegame. And the means of punishment is often the move ...f6!, which cuts like a knife into the white centre.

Game 28

D.Baramidze M.Prusikin

German Championship, Koenigshofen 2007

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 Nce2 c5 6 c3 Nc6 7 f4

The battle lines have taken shape: Black is putting typical pressure on d4, while White has achieved f2-f4 on the kingside. You may recall that in the Advance chapter we said that White should try to engineer f4-f5, to put another pawn alongside his furthest advanced pawn on e5; here he has already got in the first stage of that plan.

7...Be7!

Black got good positions with 7...Be7 in the first half of this chapter and we're going to keep faith with it here. It strikes me as being more flexible than 7...Qb6, which is also often played.

8 Nf3 0-0 9 a3

Hoping to encroach on even more space with his pawns by advancing 10 b4. At the same time White takes away b4 from the black pieces: it may well prove important to have stopped ...Bb4, giving check, or ...Nb4 if the centre opens up.

9...a5! (Diagram 24)

Black prevents the aforementioned 10 b4.

10 g3?

We have reached a key position. Other moves are 10 h4, considered further below in this first scenario, and 10 Neg1 and 10 Ng3, which are examined in our second scenario section.

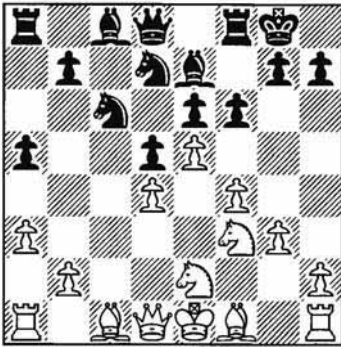
Schematically speaking, 10 g3 should be a good move: an outlet is made for the bishop to go to h3, where it supports a future f4-f5 advance. Black is also apparently being deterred from playing ...f6, as e6 will become vulnerable to Bh3 and Bxe6+.



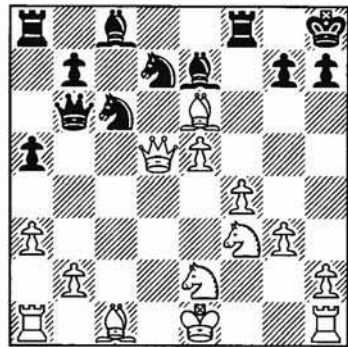
NOTE: Unfortunately for White the dynamics of the position seem to indicate that Black can play ...f6 anyway, and achieve at least good practical chances.

10...cxd4

As Black intends to cut down the white centre, this is a good preliminary move. Now 11 Nexd4 Nc5 would be at least a moral victory for Black and perhaps a real one, as he can build up comfortably with moves like ...Bd7 and ...a5-a4, always keeping in mind that the ...f6 move might become attractive.

11 cxd4 f6! (Diagram 25)**Diagram 25 (W)**

A key pawn break

**Diagram 26 (B)**

Very greedy and risky play

At first glance you might imagine that 10 g3 has strengthened the white pawns, as f4 is further bolstered. However, it is more to the point that the knight on f3 is left

How to Play Against 1 e4

undefended, so that if Black plays ...fxc5 White can't recapture with the f-pawn as ...Rxf3 follows. That means that he feels obliged to recapture with the d-pawn, which is an antipositional move that weakens his grip on the centre and in particular allows the black queen to take up a fine post where she prevents White from castling.

12 Bh3

After 12 Bg2 fxc5 White has to make an unappetising choice between 13 dxc5, when after 13...Qb6 14 Ned4 Nc5 Black has an active game with moves like ...Bd7 and ...Ne4 to follow, and 13 fxc5 Qb6! which stops him castling as 14 0-0? Ndx5! costs a pawn.



NOTE: A trick of the type 14 0-0? Ndx5! often appears when Black has played ...Qb6 in this set-up. Keep an eye put for it in your own games!

12...fxc5 13 dxc5

Black also has the initiative after 13 Bxe6+ Kh8 14 Bxd5 Nxd4: for example, 15 Nexd4 exd4 16 Nxd4 Nf6 17 Bf3 Re8! and White is in great peril as 18 0-0 loses the knight to 18...Bc5.

13...Qb6!

The critical move. Black is prepared to offer the lives of both his e-pawn and d-pawn in order to strike at White before he has the chance to castle.

14 Bxe6+

The pawns White snatches are by no means a free lunch. The disappearance of e6 means that the hitherto pitiful black bishop on c8, which had very little scope, is either going to end up exchanged for White's own beautifully mobile bishop or become a very active piece itself. Furthermore, the black rook on f8, which was more or less entombed, is going to be presented with the open d-file. Thus capturing the pawns will turn a couple of ugly ducklings into swans with very sharp beaks.

The alternative 14 Nc3 is considered after this game.

14...Kh8 15 Qxd5 (Diagram 26)

After 15 Bxd7 Bxd7 Black's bishop can go to either g4 or h3 to aid the attack, while after 15 Bxd5 Nc5 16 Be3 Rd8 White's bishop on d5 finds itself in a highly unpleasant pin.

15...Nc5 16 Bxc8 Rd8! 17 Qxd8+

There is no choice, as 18 Qc4 Nd3+ gives White the choice between losing the queen after 19 Kd1 Nxb2+ or the king with 19 Kf1 Qf2 mate.

17...Qxd8 18 Bf5 Nd3+ 19 Kf1

The material count is by no means hopeless for White. Indeed, given time he

might consolidate with 20 Kg2, when he threatens to win the knight on d3 with 21 Rd1, but Black's reply gives him no such breathing space.

19...Ndx5! (Diagram 27)



Diagram 27 (W)

Black emerges well on top

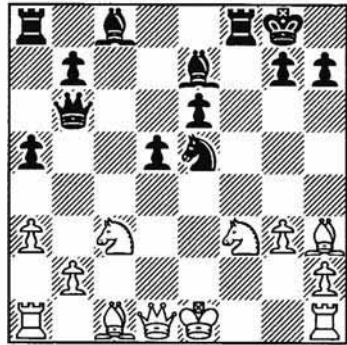


Diagram 28 (W)

A powerful sacrifice

Winning a key pawn as 20 fxe5 Qd1+ 21 Ne1 (else either h1 or e2 drops) 21...Rf8 22 g4 g6 and 23...gxf5 gives Black an overwhelming attack.

In the remainder of the game White's position was gradually worn down: **20 Kg2 Nxf3 21 Kxf3 Qd5+ 22 Be4 Qh5+ 23 g4 Qh3+ 24 Ng3 Nd4+ 25 Kf2 Qxg4 26 Be3 Bh4 27 Rae1 Nf5 28 Bxf5 Qxf5 29 Re2 Qh3 30 Rg1 Qxh2+ 31 Kf3 Qh3 32 Bf2 h5 33 Re5 Qg4+ 34 Kg2 Bxg3 35 Bxg3 h4 36 Rg5 Qe2+ 37 Bf2 Rc8 38 Re1 Qxb2 39 Kg1 Rc1 0-1**

Black's centre-busting ...Nxe5! sacrifice

Returning to the position after 13...Qb6 in the game above, here's what might happen if White turns down the pawn offer with 14 Nc3: 14...Ndx5! 15 fxe5 Nxe5 (**Diagram 28**) and now White must avoid 16 Nxe5? Qf2 mate. Somewhat better is 16 Bg2 when there is no immediate win for Black, but the white king is trapped in the centre. Moreover, despite his extra piece White is too disorganized to fight off the attack from the active black pieces, which can if necessary be boosted by the advance of the central pawns. In the following game it didn't even come to that: 16...Bd7 17 Rf1 Nc4 18 Rb1 Bf6 19 Qd3 Rac8 20 Ng5 Bxg5 21 Bxg5 Rxf1+ 22 Bxf1 Rf8 23 Qe2 Rf5 24 Bf4 g5! 25 Nxd5 (desperation, as 25 Bc1 Re5 wins the queen, while after 25 Bb8 Rf8! Black can pocket the bishop as in the game) 25...exd5 26 Bb8 Rf8 and 0-1 was the course of V. Bologan-M. Gurevich, Cap d'Agde 2002.

How to Play Against 1 e4

Returning to the position at move 10, another rather dubious move is 10 h4?!. Once again Black can prepare a forceful counter-action in the centre with 10...f6! (**Diagram 29**), which seems more accurate than the preliminary 10...cxd4 as that gives White the chance to bail out with 11 Nxd4 before we get the chance to play ...b6 and ...Ba6. Following 10...f6 11 Rh3 b6! and 12...Ba6 Black activates his light-squared bishop with good counterplay. He is actually a tempo up on well-known theory where he goes 7...Qb6 and then has to move his queen again to clear the way for ...b6 and ...Ba6.

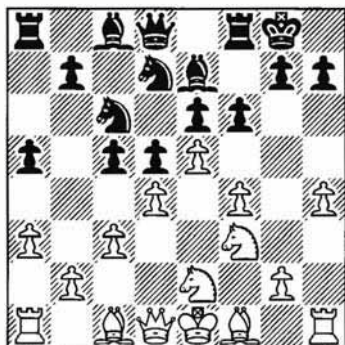


Diagram 29 (W)

The key break again

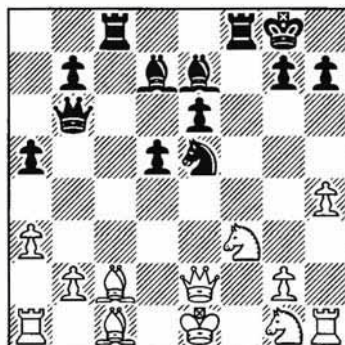


Diagram 30 (W)

Fabulous compensation once more

After 10...f6 White has also tried 11 Neg1?, a slow move that got crushed in the style of the Bologan-Gurevich game, above: 11...cxd4 12 cxd4 Qb6 13 Bd3 fxe5 14 fxe5 Ndx5! (a familiar sacrifice to gain two mobile centre pawns and open lines against the white king which is stranded in the centre) 15 dxe5 Nxe5 16 Bc2 Bd7 17 Qe2 Rac8 (**Diagram 30**) and the black pieces closed in for the kill. If now 18 Nxe5 there follows 18...Bxh4+! with a gruesome choice for White:

a) 19 Kd1 Ba4!! (a brilliant move that deflects White's bishop to a4 where it can be captured with check) 20 Bxa4 Qd4+ 21 Nd3 Qxa4+ 22 Kd2 Rc2+ and Black soon mates.

b) 19 Rxh4 Rxc2! 20 Qxc2 Qxg1+ 21 Kd2 Rf2+ 22 Kc3 d4+ 23 Kb3 a4+ 24 Ka2 Rxc2 and wins.

In the game White preferred 18 Bxh7+ but to no avail: 18...Kxh7 19 Qxe5 Bd6 20 Be3 Qb3 21 Nd2 (or 21 Qxd6 Qxe3+ 22 Ne2 Rc2) 21...Rf1+! (Black sets up a check to move his own queen to safety before pocketing his opponent's queen) 22 Kxf1 Qd3+ 23 Kf2 Bxe5 24 Ngf3 Bxb2 25 Rab1 Rc2 26 Rhd1 e5 27 g3 Bg4 and 0-1 in B.Macieja-V.Ivanchuk, Moscow 2001.



NOTE: It is beyond the ability of most Grandmasters to calculate their way through all these complications. I suspect that Ivanchuk trusted in his intuition when he made the initial piece sacrifice. And why not? It would have been strange indeed if White's scattered forces had been able to successfully defend their king.

By showing you this game and Gurevich's effort above, I hope I've helped you to develop a similar intuitive feel for the ...Nxe5 sacrifice.

Scenario 2: Black blocks the centre with ...f5 after correct play by White

Black doesn't always have as much fun as in our last scenario. In general, white players look after their king and avoid having him stripped bare in the wide open. Returning to the position again after 9...a5 (**Diagram 31**),

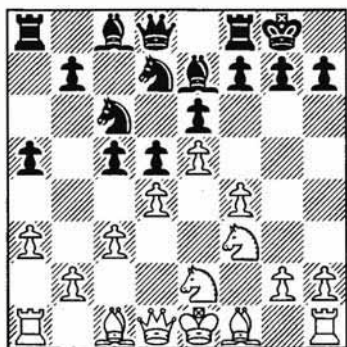


Diagram 31 (W)

White must be careful

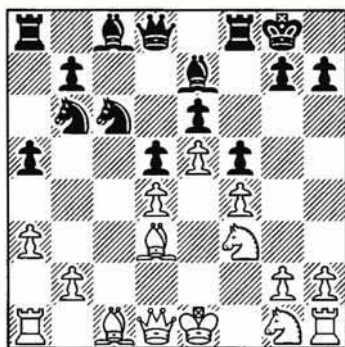


Diagram 32 (W)

Ruling out any Greek gifts

we should consider the more sensible choices 10 Nc3 and 10 Ng3.

Perhaps at first glance they don't seem very sensible, as White is moving his knight yet again – and in the case of 10 Nc3 he has made a most remarkable manoeuvre with his queen's knight: Nc3-e2-g1, putting it on the starting square of his other knight! On the other hand, both knight moves are positionally well based as they clear the way for Bd3, finally developing the bishop from f1. And unlike 10 g3 or 10 h4 they don't gratuitously create any weaknesses in White's pawn structure.

How to Play Against 1 e4

Therefore Black should reject the idea of trying to punish these moves with ...f6, and instead think about strengthening his defences against the Bd3 move with ...f5.

Game 29

□ E.Paehtz ■ Peng Zhaoqin

Ekaterinburg 2006

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 f4 c5 6 Nf3 Nc6 7 Ne2 Be7 8 c3 O-O 9 a3 a5 10 Neg1

Rather paradoxically, putting the knight back on g1 is the first stage in Paehtz's plan of mobilizing her kingside pieces.

10...cxd4 11 cxd4 Nb6

As will be seen, this knight will support its brother-in-arms in a campaign of light-square domination on the queenside with ...a5-a4, ...Na5 and ...Nac4.

12 Bd3 f5! (Diagram 32)

Black does best to fix the kingside and block out the white bishop's attack on h7.

13 Ne2

The oppressive restriction that the e5-pawn exerts on the black pieces is lifted after 13 exf6 Bxf6 – compare this position with the following game.

13...a4 14 Nc3 Bd7 15 O-O Na5 16 Bc2

Stopping 16...Nb3. Both players have gone about their business: Black has established a semi-bind on the queenside, whereas White has developed with a view to an eventual g2-g4 advance, aiming to break through on the kingside.



NOTE: Here I think Peng Zhaoqin should have anticipated her opponent's plan with 16...Nac4, saving the a4-pawn from capture, followed by a bishop manoeuvre to the kingside with 17...Be8 intending ...Bg6 (or possibly ...Bh5).

By putting the bishop on g6, Black would bolster her defence both of the f5-pawn and along the g-file, although after 17...Be8, a further preparatory move with 18...Qd7 would be necessary to secure the defence of the a4-pawn before moving away the bishop to the kingside.

16...Qe8?! 17 Kh1 Nac4 18 Rg1

White builds up towards g2-g4. I hope you can see why it would be nice for Black to have a bishop on h5 or g6 here.

18...Rc8 19 Qe1 Kh8 (Diagram 33) 20 Rb1

White should strike at once with 20 g4 when she gets a winning attack if Black tries to bring her queen into the action: 20...fxg4?! 21 Rxc4 Qh5?! 22 Qg3 Rf7 23

Ng5 Bxg5 24 Rxc5 Qh6 25 Rg4! and Black has no answer to the double threat of 26 Rh4 or 26 f5. A better try is to answer 20 g4 with 20...g6, but White certainly has the better of it after, say, 21 Ng5 Bxg5 22 fxg5 fxg4 23 Rxc4 when she can continue her attacking build-up as Black can do nothing meaningful on the f-file: for example, 23...Rf3 24 Bd1 Rf5 25 Ne2 and the white pieces converge on the kingside.

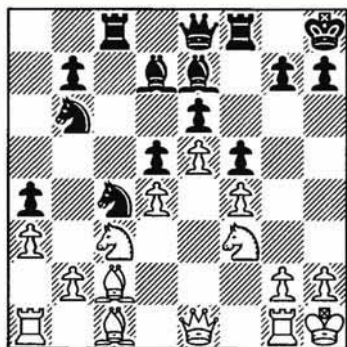


Diagram 33 (W)

White should break with g2-g4

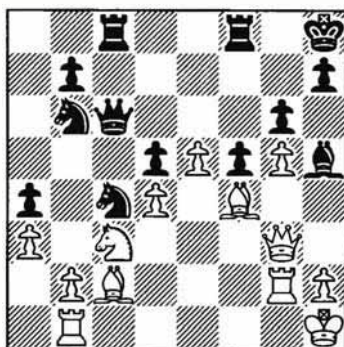


Diagram 34 (W)

No way through on the kingside

20...Qd8!

Given a respite, Black takes the chance to manoeuvre her bishop over to the kingside after all.

21 g4 Be8!

The pawn has to be maintained on f5 if at all possible. Instead 21...fxg4 would be a strategic mistake as White's bishop on d3 is granted a powerful attacking diagonal.

22 gxh5 exf5

Note that White's e5-pawn is strong because it takes away the d6- and f6-squares from the black pieces, and blocks the e-file which Black might otherwise use for counterplay to offset the attack down the g-file. On the other hand, the fact that the pawn is a passed pawn isn't one of its strengths, or at least not in this middle-game struggle.

23 Ng5 Bh5 24 Qg3 Bxc5 25 fxg5 Qe8

Black had an interesting resource in 25...Nxe5!? when 26 Qxe5? Bf3+ 27 Rg2 f4! supplies a strong initiative; the white queen's retreat back to g3 is cut off and there is a threat of 28...Re8 aiming for 29...Re1+. However, 26 dxe5 d4 27 g6! is far from

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clear (if 27...Bxg6 then 28 Rd1 pins d4).

26 Bf4 Qc6 27 Rg2 g6 (Diagram 34)

With all lines shut on the kingside, White is deprived of her natural plan of attack.

28 Bd3 Na8

Peng Zhaoqin has succeeded in instigating a light-square blockade on the kingside to match that on the queenside. Now she wants to do the same in the centre with ...Nc7 and ...Ne6, putting the knight on its ideal square. Paehtz hastens to prevent this, hoping to achieve something by utilizing the e5-square for her dark-squared bishop and advancing her passed pawn. Nonetheless, Black's light-square dominance proves the decisive factor.

29 e6 Rfe8 30 Bxc4 Qxc4 31 Re1 Kg8 32 Qe3 Nb6 33 Rc2 Qc6 34 Ne4 fxe4

Black should take the rook: 34...Qxc2 35 Nf6+ Kg7 36 Be5 Rxe6 37 Nxh5+ Kg8 38 Nf6+ and here she can force a winning endgame with 38...Rxf6! 39 Bxf6 Qe4+ 40 Qxe4 (or 40 Kg1 Rc2) 40...dxe4 followed by 41...Nd5, with a crushing positional advantage due to the passed pawns and the light-square bind. Naturally it's much easier to deduce this calmly sitting here drinking tea and consulting a computer. Peng Zhaoqin instead decides to play it safe with a positional queen sacrifice to reach a position she can hardly lose.

35 Rxc6 Rxc6 36 Rc1 Nc4 37 Qg3 Rcx6 38 Rxc4 dxc4 39 d5 Rb6 40 Be5 0-1

White is still worse after the mutual blunders in time pressure, but can fight on. Perhaps she lost on time here.

Game 30

□ **Ni Hua** ■ **Yu Shaoteng**

Wuxi 2006

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 Nce2 c5 6 f4 Nc6 7 c3 Be7 8 Nf3 0-0 9 a3 a5 10 Ng3 (Diagram 35)

Here I think the idea of ...f5 is particularly appropriate for Black.

10...cxd4 11 cxd4 f5

I should point out that Black actually played 11...f6 in this game, which after 12 exf6 amounted to the same thing. I prefer 11...f5, as it gives White fewer options if he decides against taking on f6, but I won't mind too much if you disagree with me on this.

If now 12 Bd3, keeping the centre blocked, White's knight on g3 gets in the way of his natural plan of g2-g4. So an obvious riposte is to capture on f6, in order to keep open the b1-h7 diagonal for the white bishop.

12 exf6

The drawback to this exchange is that White is relinquishing his iron grip on the

centre, and giving the black pieces room to manoeuvre.

12...Bxf6!?

An interesting recapture, although the normal 12...Nxf6 doesn't seem bad either.

13 Be3

White is unable to play 13 Bd3 because Black can simplify to a favourable position with 13...Nxd4 14 Nxd4 Bxd4 15 Bxh7+ Kxh7 16 Qxd4 Qb6!.

13...Qb6 (Diagram 36)

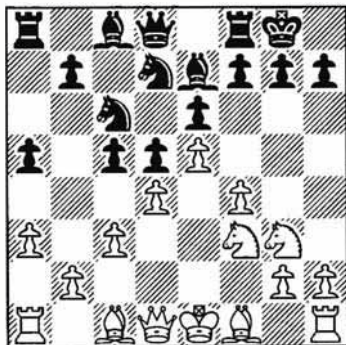


Diagram 35 (B)

The other square for White's knight

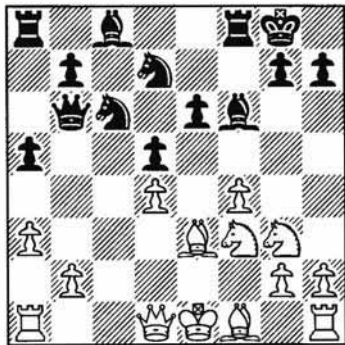


Diagram 36 (W)

Black begins his counterplay

Attacking the b2-pawn and so cajoling the white queen to a square where she will be presented with an unwelcome offer to be swapped off.

14 Qd2 a4 15 Rc1 Qa5 16 Rc3

White disdains 16 Qxa5 Nxa5 when Black can unwind with ...Nb6 and ...Bd7, looking to exploit the b3- or c4-squares with his knight. Instead he wants to attack, even at the cost of the exchange.

16...Na7 17 Qd3

The calmer course was 17 Bd3 Nb5 18 Rc2.

17...Nb6 18 Qc2 Nb5 19 Bd2

Thanks to his skilful manoeuvring Black would have a grip on the light squares after 19 Bxb5 Qxb5.

19...Nxc3 20 Bxc3 Qa7 21 Bd3

White hopes to justify his sacrifice on the basis that the black queen is shut away and can't help defend her king. Of course, we don't have to believe him.

21...h6 22 Bh7+ Kh8 23 h4 Nc4 24 Qd3 (Diagram 37)

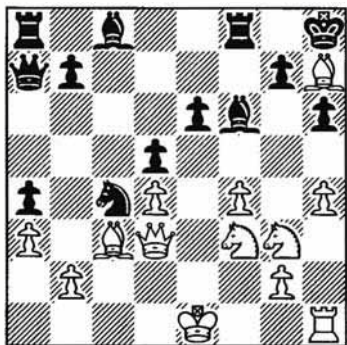


Diagram 37 (B)

There shouldn't be enough compensation

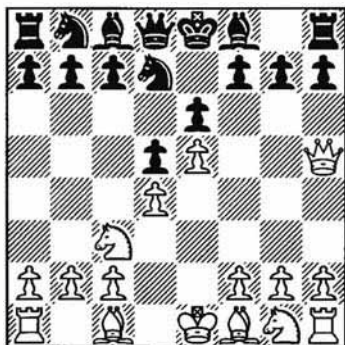


Diagram 38 (B)

The Haldane Hack

24...Nd6?

This weakens the e5-square and allows the knight to be pinned. Instead I don't see anything adequate for White after 24...Bd7, although he can still try to terrorize his opponent with a move like 25 Ng5!?

25 Bb4 Qa6 26 Ne5 Bxe5

After 26...Qxd3? White even wins because of the pin on d6: 27 Bxd3 Rd8 (or 27...Be7 28 Ng6+) 28 Bxd6 Rxd6 29 Nf7+ and 30 Nxd6.

27 dxe5 Nf5 28 Bxf5 Rxf5 29 Qxa6 Rxa6 30 Nxf5 exf5 1/2-1/2

White even has a minuscule edge in the endgame, but the opposite-coloured bishops make it a draw.

Early Deviations

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6

Here White usually chooses either to advance his e-pawn or to develop his dark-squared bishop, but he can also exchange on d5, as we will see in the final subsection of this chapter.

4 e5 Nfd7

As well as 5 f4 and 5 Nce2, two other moves should be mentioned for White.

Firstly, 5 Nf3 transposes to 1 e4 e6 2 Nf3 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 d4, which is examined in Chapter Eight. The other move is somewhat more bizarre-looking:

5 Qh5!? (Diagram 38)

In English chess circles this is known as the ‘Haldane Hack’ in honour of the creative amateur player Robin Haldane who has done much to popularize it. Black has gone to a lot of trouble to block any possible attack on f7 with 1...e6 and 2...d5, so it is rather annoying that White is still able to target the pawn. And even more mortifying for Black is the fact that the roof quickly collapses on him if he indulges in some natural but careless moves. For example, here is what happened in A.Damia-K.Rakay, Stare Mesto 2006:

5...c5 6 Nf3 Nc6?

Just the automatic move that White was hoping for, as now the defence of f7 becomes a nightmare for Black:

7 Ng5! g6 8 Qf3 Qe7 9 Nb5! (Diagram 39)

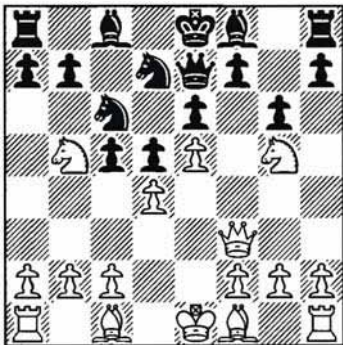


Diagram 39 (B)

White's knights are rather effective

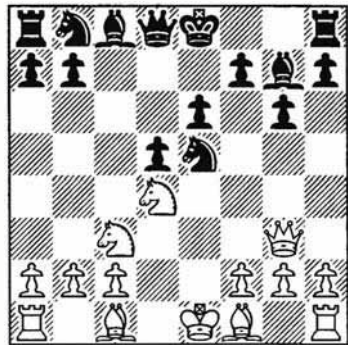


Diagram 40 (W)

Black should be better with care

Cannon to the left, cannon to the right... There is no way to prevent the knight from invading on either c7 or d6.

9...Nxd4 10 Nd6+ Kd8

Of course, if 10...Qxd6 then 11 Qxf7+ followed by taking the queen.

11 Ngxf7+ Kc7 12 Qc3! Nxe5

A despairing bid to escape from the bind, as if Black saves the rook with 12...Rg8 then 13 Bg5 leaves the queen with nowhere to run. Perhaps the best chance is 12...Bg7, but after 13 Bg5 Qf8 14 f4! Black remains in a stranglehold.

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13 Bg5 Qd7 14 Nxe5 Qxd6 15 Nf7 Qd7 16 Bd8+ 1-0

Black resigned in view of 16...Kb8 17 Qg3+ or 16...Kc6 17 Ne5+.

One year later the winner of this game tried his luck again. His opponent, a Spanish IM, played the critical line, which involves Black grabbing the e5-pawn:

5...c5 6 Nf3 cxd4

Much better than 6...Nc6?. Actually Garcia Roman played 6...g6 7 Qg4 cxd4, but I prefer the move order given here as White might be able to answer 6...g6 with 7 Qg5!?.

7 Nxd4 g6 8 Qg4 Nxe5 9 Qg3 Bg7 (Diagram 40) 10 Bf4

Black has an extra centre pawn but has to be wary of White's initiative.

11...Nbc6 11 Nxc6 Nxc6

In A.Damia-D.Garcia Roman, Andorra 2007, Black consolidated and won after 12 Bd6 a6 (a sensible move to take away the b5-square from the white pieces; however, I rather like 12...Qa5!? so that if White castles queenside there is an option of ...Bxc3, breaking up his king's defences) 13 0-0-0 Ne7 14 Ba3 0-0 etc.

An important alternative is 12 Bc7, but I think that Black can get the advantage with some sharp play: 12...Qf6 13 Bd6 Ne7 14 Bd3 (after 14 Bb5+ Bd7 15 Bxd7+ Kxd7 Black king's is safe behind his pawns and the threat is 16...Nf5, winning the white bishop) 14...0-0 15 f4 and Black is menaced by 16 Be5, but 15...Nf5 16 Bxf5 Rd8! (saving the exchange) 17 Bc7 Rd7 looks good for Black who is sure to regain his piece.

The French Exchange via a Classical move order

Game 31

□ S.Stange ■ V.Malakhatko

Vlissingen 2005

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 exd5

A final possibility is 4 Bd3, when 4...c5 hitting the undefended d4-point is the best response. Then 5 Nf3 c4!? 6 Be2 Bb4 7 exd5 exd5 8 Bd2 0-0 already looks good for Black, while after 5 exd5 exd5 6 dxc5 (or 6 Bg5 Be6) 6...Bxc5 we have a comfortable IQP position in which White has played the 'second best' Nc3 and Bd3 moves (rather than Bb5 and Nd2 followed by Nb3). Black had few problems after 7 Nf3 0-0 8 0-0 h6 9 h3 Nc6 10 a3 Re8 in N.Skare-G.Mohr, Sibenik 2007.

4...exd5 (Diagram 41)

This recapture opens the diagonal for the bishop on c8, keeps the space balance in the centre and leaves White with a rather ineffective knight on c3.

Nevertheless those of you who want to take the opponent out of a familiar set-up might like to consider the little-known 4...Nxd5 when after 5 Nxd5 exd5 there is no Bg5 pin. Or you might like to answer 5 Nxd5 with 5...Qxd5!?. In that way Black spurns the offer of a fair share of the centre in order to keep more tension in the pawn structure, and hopes that this will set his opponent more problems.



Diagram 41 (W)

Solid play from White

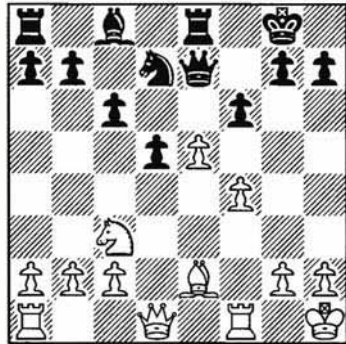


Diagram 42 (W)

Black is already for choice

5 Bg5 Be7 6 Nf3 0-0 7 Be2

More natural was 7 Bd3 to fight for the e4-square, but then 7...Bg4 8 0-0 Nc6 is at least equal for Black, who threatens to capture on d4.

7...Re8

A rather routine move that gives White the chance to set up a bind. Instead Black might have prepared his own Morphy plan with 7...Be6 when both 8 Ne5 Ne4! and 8 0-0 Ne4! give him an active game.

8 Ne5 c6

Another slow move. He still had 8...Be6 with ideas of 9...Ne4.

9 0-0 Nbd7 10 Kh1?

If you have played through the Morphy games in Chapter Two, you'll be aware that White should support his knight with 10 f4!. If then 10...Qb6 White has 11 Rb1. As you can see I'm not as generous with my b2-pawn as Morphy in his game with Löwenthal!

Now, though, there comes a centre liquidation that completely frees Black's game

How to Play Against 1 e4

and gives him the better position.

10...Nxe5 11 dxe5 Nd7 12 Bxe7 Qxe7 13 f4 f6! (Diagram 42)

White is forced to exchange off his pawn spearhead on e5 after which Black has pressure down the e-file.

14 exf6 Nxf6

Imagine a parallel universe in which White had played 10 f4 rather than 10 Kh1. If the game had progressed in the same way, he would have been able to recapture fxe5, when his rook on f1 enjoys a semi-open file with a target on f7. As a consequence, the move ...f6 would have been more risky for Black; at worst for White, he would have maintained a centre pawn on d4 rather than be left with a stump on f4.

15 Qd2 Bd7 16 Rae1 Qb4!

The black queen takes a good look at b2 and f4, the two vulnerable pawns in White's camp. The pawn on f4 could (and probably should) be defended with g3 at some point, but Stange is reluctant to weaken any further his king's defences.

17 Bd3 Rxe1 18 Rxe1 Re8 19 Rxe8+ Bxe8 (Diagram 43)

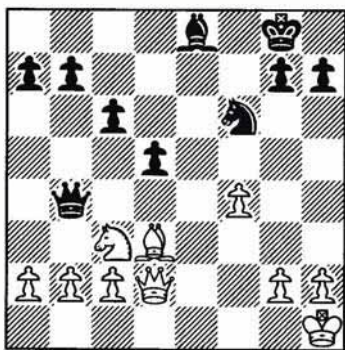


Diagram 43 (W)

The exchanges haven't helped White

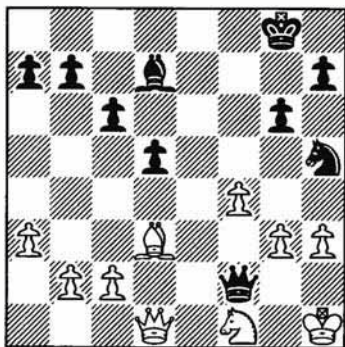


Diagram 44 (W)

White's kingside collapses

Normally the double exchange of rooks along the e-file would be unwelcome to an ambitious player of Black (and here GM Malakhatchko is rated exactly 400 Elo points above his opponent). However, the looseness of White's pawn structure gives Black plenty of scope to grind out a win; in fact the exchange of pieces actually helps him by lessening the number of defenders.

20 Qc1

One of the drawbacks to weak pawns is that the necessity of defending them reduces the power of the other pieces. Here the white queen has to submit to being dominated by her enemy counterpart in order to guard b2 and f4. Malakhatko exploits this to a maximum.

20...Bd7 21 a3 Qb6 22 Nd1 Bg4 23 Ne3 Qd4 24 Nf1

The only chance was 24 f5, though the pawn would remain in jeopardy.

24...Bd7 25 h3 Nh5 26 Qd1

If now 26 f5 then 26...Nf4, planning to take on d3 and then f5, is horrible for White.

26...g6 27 g3

At last White feels obliged to defend f4 with his g-pawn, resulting in an immediate collapse of his kingside.

27...Qf2 (Diagram 44) 28 f5 Nxc3+ 29 Nxc3 Qxc3 30 Qf1 Kg7 31 b3 c5 32 a4 b6 33 Qa1+ d4 34 Qf1 Bc6+ 0-1

Black had an impressive-looking queenside pawn majority, but he never needed to utilize it. The fragility of White's pawns was enough to win him the game. After a slightly hesitant start, this was a model game for Black in the Exchange Variation. Malakhatko played forceful yet patient chess; he didn't fear exchanges, but used them to increase his advantage.

Game 32

□ **A.Sorokina** ■ **E.Sedina**

Athens 2005

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 exd5 exd5 5 Bg5 Be7 6 Qd2

White plans to castle queenside, when after several pawns are pushed one of the kings is liable to be mated.

6...h6!

This pawn push is somewhat surprising as Black voluntarily creates a potential target on h6. On the other hand, 'putting the question' to the bishop (to borrow Nimzowitsch's phrase) leaves White in a dilemma. For if the bishop goes to h4, to maintain contact with f6, it is further away from events in the centre or on the queenside, while if it retreats back to f4, as in the game, it no longer 'bites' at the black knight.

7 Bf4

An ancient game J.Mieses-S.Levitsky, Breslau 1912, went 7 Bh4 Bf5 8 Bd3 Bxd3 9 Qxd3 Nc6 10 Nge2 (one of the drawbacks to the bishop being on h4 is that the plan of Ng3 by White, aiming at the f5-square, would allow the poor cleric to be smothered by ...g5) 10...Qd7 (**Diagram 45**).

How to Play Against 1 e4

Here we have more 1s and 0s than on a computer chip after 11 0-0 0-0 or 11 0-0-0 0-0-0, in either case with balanced chances. Instead White chose an inferior move: 11 h3 0-0-0 12 b4 Rhe8 13 0-0 Ne4! (White's half-hearted attempt to attack on the queenside is met by counterplay in the centre with our Morphy move; if now 14 Nxe4? dxe4 and White loses a piece no matter how he plays: 15 Qxe4 Bxh4 16 Qxh4 Rxe2 or 15 Qg3 g5! and it's goodbye to the bishop) 14 Bg3 and now rather than the game move 14...Nxc3, 14...Bf6! leaves White doomed to lose his d4-pawn after 15...Nxc3, since 16 f3 would make things even worse after 16...Nxc3 17 Nxc3 Re3!, exploiting the potential pin of 18 Qxe3 Bxd4 to win a piece after 18 Qd2 Rxc3!.



Diagram 45 (W)

Black is comfortably placed



Diagram 46 (W)

The pressure mounts on White

Instead Sorokina chose a third alternative in a game with Volkov: 7 Bxf6 (it's impossible not to shudder at this unforced exchange of White's beautiful bishop) 7...Bxf6 8 Qe3+ (a pointless move) 8...Be6 9 f4 (apparently White dreams of the Morphy bind with Nf3 and Ne5, but Volkov scotches this by putting severe pressure on d4) 9...0-0 10 Nf3 c5 11 0-0-0 Nc6 12 Ne2 Qb6 (**Diagram 46**) 13 Qb3 (White hastens to exchange queens before Black develops an all-out attack with ...Rac8, etc) 13...cxd4 14 Qxb6 axb6 15 Kb1 (there's no time to take on d4 as a2 is hanging) 15...d3!! (clearing lines of attack for the black bishops before White can consolidate with 16 Nexd4) 16 Rxd3 d4 (a second black pawn appears on d4, but this one can be supported by ...Rfd8; Black not only opens the way for the bishop to attack a2, but also prevents the white knights using d4 as a blockade square) 17 a3 (White is annihilated by the bishop-pair after 17 Nexd4 Bxa2+ 18 Kc1 Nxd4 19 Nxd4 Bc4 when 20 Rd1 Ra1+ leads to the loss of the knight on d4) 17...Rfd8 18 Ng3 b5! (the next wave of the attack destroys the white king's cover) 19 Nh5 Be7 20 Ne5 g6 21

Ng3 b4 22 Nxc6 bxc6 23 f5 (White is thrashing around in the centre and on the kingside, but nothing can divert the juggernaut that is about to hit her king) 23...gxf5 24 Ne2 bxa3 25 Nxd4 Bf6 26 c3 Bxd4 27 Rxd4 Rxd4 28 cxd4 Rb8 0-1 was A.Sorokina-S.Volkov, Korinthos 2004.

Returning to 7 Bf4:

7...0-0 8 Bd3 Re8 9 0-0-0 c6 10 h3 Be6 11 Re1 Nbd7 12 Nf3 b5 13 g4 b4 14 Nb1 Ne4!
(Diagram 47)

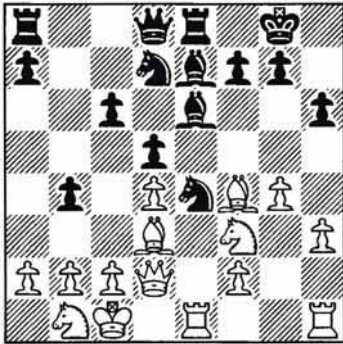


Diagram 47 (W)

Black exploits the initiative

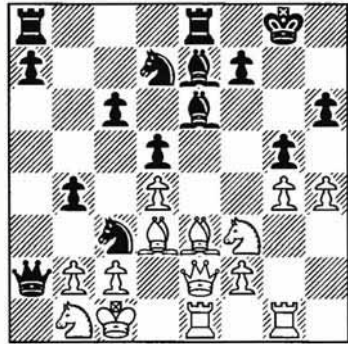


Diagram 48 (W)

Too speculative

A move to be compared with 12...Ne4! from Semeniuk-Volkov in Chapter Two. Black takes advantage of the weakness of a2 to land the knight on the key central square.

15 Qe2

White doesn't relish the damage to her king's defences after 15 Bxe4 dxe4 16 Rxe4 Bxa2.

15...Qa5 16 Rhg1

Now White is poised to begin her counterplay along the g-file with 17 g5, but Black's reply is a thunder clap:

16... g5!

A clever blocking move that justifies 6...h6 big time.

17 Be3 Qxa2 18 h4

If nothing happens fast on the queenside, the white attack might yet overcome the barrier on the g-file. Therefore it is time for a black knight to decide the game on the queenside, but which one?

18...Nc3? (Diagram 48)

Instead it was time for the other knight to do some work: 18...Nb6! intending 19...Na4 would have won rather easily: for example, 19 c3 (or 19 b3 a5 20 hxg5 a4 21 gxh6 a3 and 22...Qb2+ picking up b1 is a winning threat) 19...Na4 20 c4 c5!, breaking open the c-file to pulverize the white king with a rook on c8.

The game move was tempting, but we shouldn't part with the 'Morphy' knight for anything less than a clear win!

19 Nxc3

Correct, whereas after 19 bxc3? bxc3 20 Nxc3 (or else 20...Qb2+ picks up the knight on b1) 20...Qa3+ 21 Kd2 Bb4 Black regains the piece with a decisive attack.

After the text move, Black eventually won after a hard fight: **19...bxc3 20 bxc3 Nf6 21 hxg5 Ne4 22 Bxe4 dxe4 23 Ne5 Bb3 24 Kd1 Ba3 25 Qd2 Rxe5 26 cxb3 Qxb3+ 27 Qc2 Rb5 28 Qxb3 Rxb3 29 Bd2 hxg5 30 Ke2 Rab8 31 Rg3 Rb2 32 Rd1 Bd6 33 Re3 Re8 34 Kf1 a5 35 Ree1 Bf4 36 Be3 Rc2 37 Ra1 Rxc3 38 Rxa5 f6 39 Bxf4 gxf4 40 g5 Kg7 41 d5 fxg5 42 dxc6 Kf6 43 Rd1 Re5 44 Ra6 Kf5 45 Kg2 Kg4 46 Kh2 Kf3 47 Rd2 Re6 48 Ra1 Rexc6 49 Rb2 Rc2 50 Ra3+ e3 0-1**

Chapter Five

The McCutcheon

- Introduction
- Inferior 6th Moves
- The Main Line: 6 Bd2
- Fashionable Bishop Retreats
- White Avoids 5 e5

Introduction

Of all the variations of the French Defence I like this best, because it gives Black more chances to obtain the initiative.

Capablanca, *Chess Fundamentals*

The Cuban World Champion was talking about **1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4 (Diagram 1)**, which is the McCutcheon Variation.



Diagram 1 (W)

The McCutcheon Variation

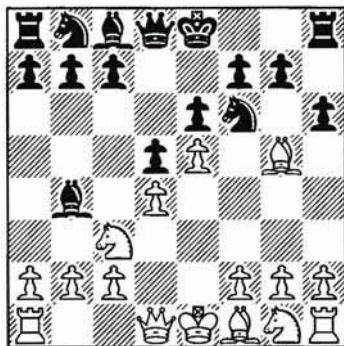


Diagram 2 (W)

White has a plethora of moves

Black decides to ignore the apparent threat of 5 e5 in order to gain counterplay on the queenside. By rejecting 4...Be7, which would break the pin on f6, he shows he has no wish for a steady game; he is playing for higher stakes, removing his dark-squared bishop from the kingside and so allowing White to attack there with a quick Qg4. Overall, Black hopes that in time the weaknesses he creates with ...Bxc3+ will prove the decisive factor.



NOTE: Although the McCutcheon often features a lot of slow and concealed manoeuvring in the early middlegame, there is usually a violent explosion when the two armies finally meet.

Black's two ideas with ...Bb4: the McCutcheon and the Winawer

For a long time the McCutcheon was rather snubbed, being regarded as an infe-

rior version of the Winawer, 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4. However, at the time of writing it is enjoying a lot of attention. This is no surprise, as the tense and double-edged positions that arise fit in well with the dynamic ethos of modern chess, and can be studied in depth using a computer.

Nonetheless, the average chess player remains far less familiar with the ideas and theory of the McCutcheon than of the Winawer, which I believe makes it a more dangerous weapon. Here I might quote William Napier in his book *Paul Morphy and The Golden Age of Chess*:

John McCutcheon, of Pittsburgh and undying fame for his research in the French Defense, often said about opening moves, 'Not new, but old enough to be new.'

In this chapter we'll look at an old but very new opening.

White has a lot of ways to respond to the McCutcheon

The usual continuation from the diagram above is **5 e5 h6 (Diagram 2)**.

Here White has tried every plausible-looking move, and some not-so-plausible moves, such as 6 Bc1. The only move rejected out of hand has been 6 Bf4 presumably as after 6...Ne4 7 Qg4 Black can gain time to deal with the threat to g7 by hitting the white bishop with 7...g5!. If the reason why this is good for Black evades you at the moment, have a second look after you have read this chapter. By then it should be crystal clear why gaining a tempo in this fashion warms the cockles of Black's heart.

In this chapter we'll look at six options for White after 5...h6, and then three divergences for him on move five. We'll begin right at the birth of the McCutcheon Variation more than 100 years ago.

Inferior 6th Moves

1. White plays 6 Bxf6 – a poor decision

In simuls in the old days, if he were lucky an amateur player might get the chance to try out a secret, home-brewed opening variation against a World Champion. The new idea didn't necessarily need to be sound to be effective: perhaps the Champion, distracted by having to think about a dozen or more other games, would fail to find the best response and suffer a humbling defeat. Alas, these days are over – when Kasparov gave simuls against strong opponents he would check up their openings beforehand to avoid surprises.

John Lindsay McCutcheon (1857-1905), a lawyer from Pittsburgh, got such a

How to Play Against 1 e4

chance. He played the line now named after him against Wilhelm Steinitz, the World Champion, in a simultaneous display in New York in 1885. Facing a surprise in a simul doesn't come any bigger than having to face a brand new opening system – and a perfectly sound one!

Game 33

□ **W.Steinitz** ■ **J.McCutcheon**

New York simul 1885

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4 5 e5

White's natural space-gaining move obliges Black to weaken his kingside in order to save his knight.

5...h6

Of course this is the only move. Black must push the white bishop away, and for a second time if necessary after 6 Bh4 with 6...g5, or else he will lose the knight on f6 for nothing.

6 Bxf6?

Taken by surprise and needing to make a quick decision, Steinitz makes a feeble exchange on f6.

He breaks up the black kingside, but this isn't enough compensation for handing over his important dark-squared bishop; on the contrary, it could be said that Black's pawn structure has been improved by the exchange, as he now has one more pawn on f6 fighting for control of the centre.

6...gxf6 7 Nf3 f5?

Rather letting White off the hook. McCutcheon intends to castle queenside in time, and then attack along the open g-file. This plan works perfectly in the game, but only after errors by White.

I would prefer a more dynamic approach with 7...Nd7! (**Diagram 3**), intending to detonate the white centre with ...c5, as after 8 exf6 Qxf6 Black has a very promising position.

8 Bd3 c5 9 dxc5 Bxc5 10 0-0 Nc6 11 Qd2 Qe7 12 Qf4?

With more time to think, Steinitz might have anticipated Black's plan of queenside castling with 12 a3! when after 12...Bd7?! 13 b4 Bb6 14 Nb5 White's knight gets to the powerful d6-square. So Black might have had to respond with 12...a6, to prevent Nb5, when queenside castling becomes less attractive as the pawn on a6 is a target for a b4-b5 advance.

12...Bd7 13 Nb5 0-0-0 14 c4 Be8 15 Rfc1 Kb8 (Diagram 4) 16 a3?

Unclear was 16 cxd5 Rxd5 17 Bc4, when Black has a strong bishop on c5 but a passive one on e8.



Diagram 3 (W)
Black prepares ...c5

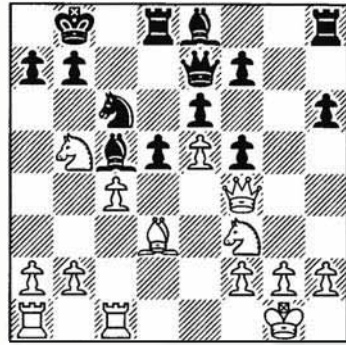


Diagram 4 (W)
A tough struggle

16...a6 17 Nc3 dxc4 18 Bxc4 Nd4!

McCutcheon takes control by clearing the way for his light-squared bishop to enter the fray on c6, where it aims at the vulnerable g2-square.

19 Ne2 Nxf3+ 20 Qxf3 Bc6

Black has everything he can want from the French when the 'bad' bishop becomes a powerful attacking piece.

21 Qh3 Ka7

Instead direct attacking play on the kingside gives Black a lethal attack: 21...Rdg8 22 g3 h5! and then 23...h4 should win quickly.

22 b4 Bb6 23 Nc3 Rhg8 24 Bf1

A speciality Steinitzian defence involving the retreat of the pieces to the back rank, but the last chance was to bite the bullet with 24 g3.

24...Rd2 25 Nd1 Qg5 (Diagram 5) 26 Rxc6

If 26 g3 the quiet 26...Bf3 and 27...Rgd8 is crushing, as the knight dare not leave d1 on pain of mate on f2. The crude 26...Bxf2+ 27 Nxf2 Qe3 would also win quickly.

26...bxc6 27 Qc3 Qf4 28 Qxc6 Rxd1 0-1

What a fantastic start for the McCutcheon!

This was 'only' a simul game, but it must have been startling at the time to see a World Champion defeated by an amateur in such convincing style. You might expect Steinitz to lose occasionally when he made a tactical oversight, but not to be outplayed like this!

How to Play Against 1 e4

There was dynamism in the black set-up that Steinitz underestimated, and of which McCutcheon himself was rather unaware – hence he selected the blocking 7...f5 move rather than going for an immediate attack with 7...Nd7.



Diagram 5 (W)

There's no defence

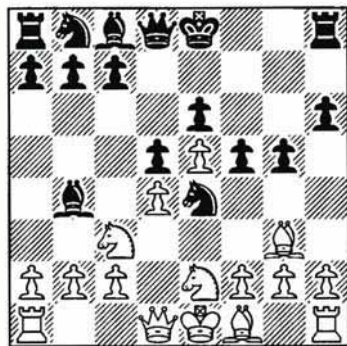


Diagram 6 (W)

White's bishop is misplaced

2. White plays 6 Bh4 – another inferior move

In 1904, McCutcheon played a two game correspondence match against another reigning World Champion, Emanuel Lasker, in which his opening was tested. He played White in one game, Black in the other game; and White won 2-0! Well, McCutcheon the opening pioneer must have been disappointed that his brainchild was thrashed, but I bet McCutcheon the man wasn't too aggrieved as he had taken a full point off one of the greatest players of all time. The game our hero won gives us the chance to look at the reply 6 Bh4.

Game 34

□ J.McCutcheon ■ Em.Lasker

correspondence 1904

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4 5 e5 h6 6 Bh4

McCutcheon shows too much respect for the McCutcheon! White saves his bishop, but the problem is that it ends up buried on g3.

6...g5 7 Bg3

After 7 exf6 gxh4 the pawn on f6 soon falls.

7...Ne4 8 Nge2 f5! (Diagram 6)

A very good decision, although 8...c5 isn't bad either. White's bishop just can't seem to get any peace from the black kingside pawns – the threat is to snuff it out with 9...f4.

9 f4

A game played exactly one hundred years later went 9 exf6 Qxf6 10 a3 (not 10 Be5?? Qxf2 mate) 10...Nxc3 11 Nxc3 0-0 (a highly aggressive defensive move as it threatens mate in one) 12 f3 Bxc3+ 13 bxc3 e5 (Black frees his game in typical French style) 14 Be2 Nc6 15 dxe5 Qxe5 16 0-0 Be6 17 Qd2 d4 and here a draw was agreed in A.Galkin-A.Belozerov, Tomsk 2004, although Black already had the better of it, as his kingside was solid whereas White faced an endgame with disjointed queenside pawns after 18 cxd4 Qxd4+ 19 Qxd4 Nxd4.

9...c5?

He should simply play 9...Nc6, asking White: how are you going to bring out your bishop on f1? Note that there is no such dilemma for Black who has an easy development available to him with ...Bd7, ...Qe7 and ...0-0-0. White would surely have to break the pin on c3, but after 10 a3 Ba5 (not 10...Nxc3+ 11 Nxc3 when White gets to develop) 11 b4 Bb6, the threat is 12...Nxc3 13 Nxc3 Nxd4 winning a pawn, or better still 12...Nxd4!. Thus White more or less has to exchange on d4 with 12 Nxe4 fxe4, with good chances for Black.

The game move is very natural, but rather than allowing Black to strike a meaningful tactical blow, the opening of the centre allows White's pieces to gain freedom.



TIP: When you start getting excited at the idea of provoking a crisis in the centre, pause a little while and calmly ask yourself: am I really opening lines for the benefit of my pieces, or is it actually my opponent's pieces that are going to come alive?

10 a3 Ba5 11 dxc5 d4 12 Qxd4 Bxc3+

Alas for Black after 12...Qxd4 13 Nxd4 Nxc3 14 Nb3! White will get the piece back with a good game.

13 bxc3 Qe7 14 h4 (Diagram 7) 14...Nc6 15 Qe3 Nxc3

Or else White's bishop might enter the action at some point, if only after 15...g4 16 Bf2.

16 Qxc3 gxf4 17 Nxf4 Bd7 18 Qe3 Qg7 19 0-0-0!

White castles his king on to a file with tripled pawns in front of him. Unfortunately for Black his pieces are too passive to take advantage – here we see the possible downside of surrendering the dark-squared bishop in the opening.

19...Qxe5 20 Qxe5 Nxe5 21 Re1 Nc6 22 Nxe6

How to Play Against 1 e4

And White eventually won with his extra pawns:

22...Kf7 23 Bc4 Kf6 24 Nd4 Ne5 25 Bd3 Nxd3+ 26 cxd3 Rac8 27 c6 bxc6 28 Rhf1 Rhg8 29 Rf2 Rg3 30 Nxf5 Bxf5 31 Ref1 Rxd3 32 Rxf5+ Ke6 33 R5f3 Rxf3 34 Rxf3 Rg8 35 g3 Kd5 36 Kd2 1-0

As we said above, this was a great result for John Lindsay, but a sad outcome for McCutcheon the opening. But you'll agree that Black was doing well after Lasker's inventive move 8...f5!.



Diagram 7 (B)

Black is under pressure

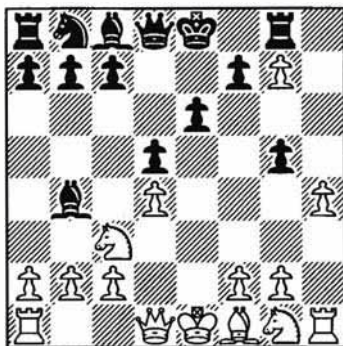


Diagram 8 (B)

Activating the h1-rook

3. White plays 6 exf6 – too direct

Instead of moving his bishop, White can capture the knight and smash up the black kingside with 6 exf6 hxg5 7 fxg7. Indeed, it doesn't look bad after seven moves to have a passed pawn that is threatening to capture a rook and queen! However, this is the high point of White's escapade, as after 7...Rg8 there is no good follow-up to his spectacular play.

Game 35

□ **A.Thakur** ■ **A.Das**

Mumbai 2008

1 d4 d5 2 Nc3 e6 3 e4 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4

It's not uncommon for a Veresov to end up as a McCutcheon. It's also not alto-

gether surprising that White doesn't prove to be an expert on the intricacies of a sharp French variation, when presumably he played 2 Nc3 to dodge theory.

5 e5 h6 6 exf6 hxg5 7 fxg7 Rg8

The g7-pawn is stopped in its tracks and will soon be captured. Meanwhile, Black has a strong dark-squared bishop with no rival, and the spearhead of White's pawn structure is missing from e5. This means he has no space advantage in the centre – indeed, Black has an extra central pawn and can try to increase his dominance there with a well timed ...c5. Overall, Black's plusses outweigh the inconvenience to his king in not being able to castle kingside.

Nevertheless, White can justify his play if he manages to strike a blow on the kingside before his opponent manages to organize his game. Thus Black must be careful and alert!

8 h4 (Diagram 8)

If 8 Qh5, hoping for 8...Rxc7 9 Qh8+ Bf8, when White has at least forced the black bishop to a passive square, Black has a good reply in 8...Qf6! attacking d4 and intending 9...Qxc7.

8...gxh4

Not letting White acquire a passed pawn after 8...Rxc7 9 h5, although that is far from clear.

9 Qh5

An aggressive gesture that prepares queenside castling.

After 9 Qg4 Qf6 10 Rxc4, rather than the usual 10...Rxc7, I rather like 10...Nc6!?: for example, 11 Rh7 Nxd4; or 11 Bb5 Rxc7 12 Qh3 Rxc2!, again grabbing a pawn as the white rook will hang to the black queen either on h4 or, if he gives a check, on h8; and, finally, after 11 Nf3 (a sensible move) 11...Rxc7 12 Rh8+ Ke7 I prefer Black as White is looking rather fragile on the squares c3, d4, g4 and h8.

9...Qf6

The standard entrance by the black queen.

10 Rxc4 Qxc7 11 0-0-0 Bd7 (Diagram 9)

Black develops his pieces rapidly, knowing that if he gets his king to safety, he will have a good game thanks to his bishop-pair and more compact centre pawns.

12 Rd3 Nc6 13 Rg3 Qf8 14 Rxc8 Qxc8 15 Rf4

It looks as if White's unsophisticated opening is going to triumph after all, as Black can't castle without leaving f7 hanging...or can he?

15...0-0-0!

Anyway: it turns out that 16 Rxf7 Be8 fatally pins the rook, while White also gets into trouble after 16 Qxf7 Bd6! 17 Rf3 (there is of course a killing zwischenzug in reply to 17 Qxc8??, while after 17 Rf6 Qh8! White has to deal with the threat of

How to Play Against 1 e4

18...Rf8, winning the rook, not to mention that d4 is hanging) 17...Qg5+ 18 Kb1 Nxd4 and Black has gained the d4-pawn for the f7-pawn, which is a good swap, besides having obtained the initiative.

16 Nf3 Bd6! 17 Rg4 Qh8 18 Rh4 Qxh5 19 Rxh5 Rg8 (Diagram 10)

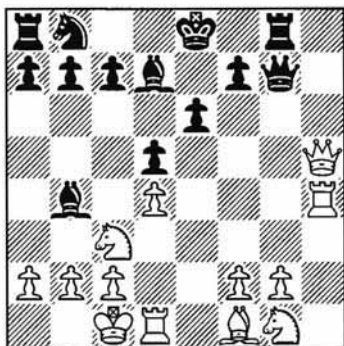


Diagram 9 (W)

Black wants to castle long

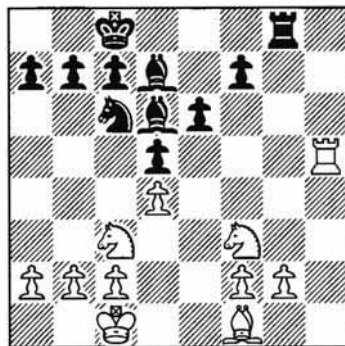


Diagram 10 (W)

The bishop-pair is a useful asset

Das has carried over his positional advantages into the endgame. It's instructive to see how he increases the mobility of his bishops by arranging the liquidation of White's d4-pawn.

20 g3 a6

He wants to play ...Nd8 without being disturbed by Nb5. White has no constructive plan, so why should Black hurry?

21 Ne2 Be8

Defending f7 and getting the bishop out of the range of Ne5 once he goes ...Nd8.

22 Kd2 Nd8!

And here is the much-heralded move, which clears the way for the advance of the c-pawn.

23 Nc1 c5 24 dxc5 Bxc5 25 Nd3 Bd6 26 Nd4 Nc6 27 Nxc6 Bxc6

White's position has seriously deteriorated. Once the black centre starts to advance, the f2- and g3-pawns come under huge pressure. But as usual, Das is in no rush, and first of all brings his king over to defend f7.

28 Bh3 Kd8 29 Rh7 Ke8 30 Bg2 e5 (Diagram 11)

At last the pawns start to roll, and the white defences crack quickly.

31 c3 e4 32 Ne1 Bc5 33 f3

A horrific move to have to make, but after 33 Ke2 Bb5+ the f2-pawn will drop. The rest is easy for Black:

33...Rxc3 34 fxe4 dxe4 35 Rh5 e3+ 36 Kc1 Bxc2 37 Rxc5 Bc6 38 Kc2 Ke7 39 Kd3 Kd6 40 Rh5 Bd7 41 Ke4 Rg1 42 Nf3 e2 0-1

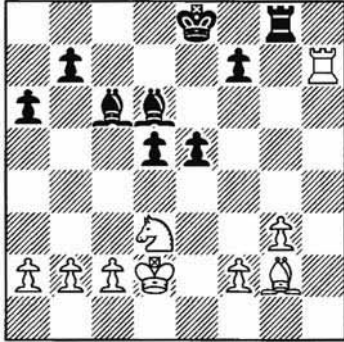


Diagram 11 (W)

A mobile, advancing centre

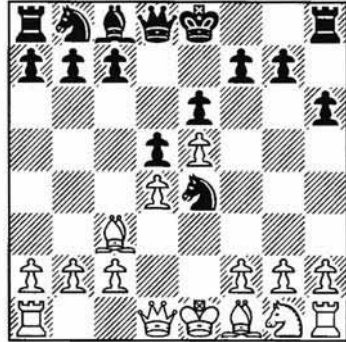


Diagram 12 (W)

An unusual recapture on c3

The Main Line: 6 Bd2

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4 5 e5 h6 6 Bd2

If you play somebody who knows a fair amount of theory, but not too much, he or she will very likely drop the bishop back to d2. After all, this is the continuation given in opening books as the main line of the McCutcheon. It makes a lot of sense: White saves the bishop from capture and breaks the pin on c3. We had better examine it with great care.

Black should reply **6...Bxc3** in order to win the e4-square for his knight.

The unusual 7 Bxc3

White normally recaptures with the pawn, but we should spare a thought for the alternative recapture when Black replies 7...Ne4 (**Diagram 12**).

If White now attacks g7 with 8 Qg4, Black has no need to choose between the lesser evil of 8...g6 or 8...Kf8. The body check with 8...Qg5 might be a decent reply, but I actually rather like 8...0-0!

How to Play Against 1 e4



NOTE: Castling would be a blunder after the alternative 7 bxc3 because White would then have 9 Bxh6, winning at once due to the pin on g7. Here, however, Black can safely evacuate his king from the centre.

So White had better forget about the idea of 8 Qg4 and consider 8 Bb4. If nothing happens for a while, during which he gets to develop his pieces, White can pat himself on the back for keeping the bishop-pair, avoiding doubled pawns on the c-file and getting to castle kingside – three things that he doesn't normally manage to do after 7 bxc3. Could this be the refutation of Black's whole opening line?

It's not, but Black has to play forcefully to break up the white centre or else he'll end up with an inferior game. This can be done with 8...c5!, which is a thematic advance that sets a nasty trap: White wants to capture with 9 dxc5? but then he gets hit by 9... Nxf2! 10 Kxf2 Qh4+ 11 g3 Qxb4 and Black regains his piece, leaving White with a shattered position. This is a splendid tactical resource, without which we'd see a lot more of the 7 Bxc3 recapture. In fact could we even say that it makes the McCutcheon playable?

After 8...c5 White therefore has to make do with 9 Bxc5, but then 9...Nxc5 10 dxc5 Nd7 (**Diagram 13**) regains the pawn for Black, as 11 Bb5? falls for another tactic: this time a more obvious one with 11...Qa5+, winning the bishop.

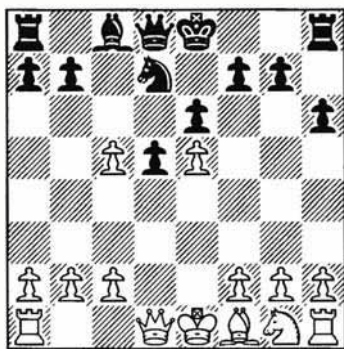


Diagram 13 (W)

Black is doing quite well

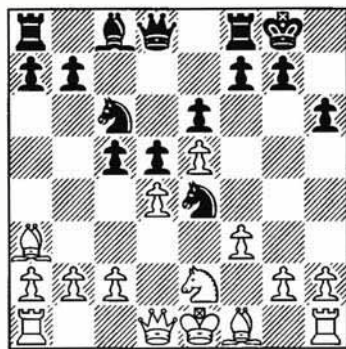


Diagram 14 (B)

Is Black in trouble?

A continuation such as 11 Qd4 Qc7 12 f4 Nxc5 13 0-0-0 Bd7 14 Nf3 Rc8 15 Kb1 0-0 then looks very comfortable for Black. I can't resist showing you the final moves of the game A.Kovchan-S.Vysochin, Swidnica 1999, in which another tactic with the queen had the final word: 16 Bd3 a5 17 g4 f6 18 Rc1 Ne4 19 exf6 Rxf6 20 Bxe4

Rxf4 21 Nd2 dxe4 22 Nxe4 Bc6 23 Rhe1 Bxe4 and White resigned, seeing to his consternation that he is mated upon 24 Rxe4 Qxc2+!!.

Nor is this quite the final word on 7 Bxc3, as the big name game P.Svidler-A.Morozevich, Frankfurt (rapid) 1999, went 7...Ne4 8 Ne2 0-0 9 Bb4 c5! 10 Ba3 (the penalty for 10 dxc5 is still 10...Nxf2!) when again White hoped that things would stay quiet long enough for him to enjoy his dark-squared bishop. However, a master of dynamic chess such as Morozevich wasn't going to leave him in peace: 10...Nc6! 11 f3 (**Diagram 14**) and now it looked as if Black was going to have to retreat his knight, when 12 Bxc5 would have won a clear pawn, but 11...b5! (preparing to blot out the bishop) 12 fxe4 b4 13 Bxb4 Nxb4 14 c3 Nc6 15 exd5 Qxd5 16 dxc5 Qxc5 gave Black an excellent position, since he was way ahead in development and about to regain his pawn on e5.

The standard 7 bxc3

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4 5 e5 h6 6 Bd2 Bxc3 7 bxc3 Ne4

Here 8 Qg4! (**Diagram 15**) is the only move to set Black problems. It forces him to make an unpleasant choice in dealing with the threat of 9 Qxg7: should he give up the right to castle (almost certainly queenside) with 8...Kf8, or is it better to prefer 8...g6, despite the weaknesses created in his pawn structure? There is no clear answer to this question. Both moves have their plus and minus points.

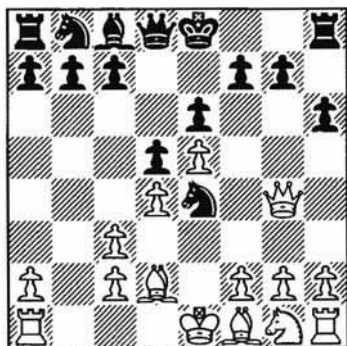


Diagram 15 (B)

The main line McCutcheon



Diagram 16 (W)

Black fixes the queenside



NOTE: In this 6 Bd2 section I have chosen to analyse 8...Kf8, whereas against both 6 Be3 and 6 Bc1 the alternative with 7...g6 is explored.

Scenario 1: White avoids 8 Qg4

Now let's imagine that White for whatever reason avoids 8 Qg4. Perhaps he doesn't like bringing his queen out too early, or finds it unappealing that after a subsequent ...Nxd2 he would have to recapture on d2 with his king – he wants his king sitting on g1, not floating around in the centre. In short, he finds playing against the McCutcheon a rather unpleasant experience, and there are many people who feel exactly the same!

If White avoids 8 Qg4 in favour of straightforward developing moves, the game might unfold as follows:

8 Bd3?! Nxd2

Black has been allowed to eliminate White's dark-squared bishop without suffering any of the punishment on the kingside that occurs after 8 Qg4. Still, perhaps 8...0-0 is an even better way to play it, as the bishop can't move from d2 without letting c3 drop, and 9 Bxe4? dxe4 would leave White weak on the light squares.

9 Qxd2 c5 10 Nf3 c4!

The emphasis in our discussion of the 6 Bd2 variation will be very much on the virtue of Black closing the queenside in this fashion. Here 10...c4 is all the more attractive as it gains a tempo by hitting the bishop on d3. Fans of the Winawer for Black are usually reluctant to make this move as White has a dark-squared bishop sitting on c1 which can go to a3 where it enjoys a powerful diagonal. There is, of course, no such problem for Black in the main line McCutcheon.

11 Bf1 Qa5 (Diagram 16)

The first move in a six-stage plan to remove the c3-pawn from the board. Black casts all ideas of rapid development to the winds; and the reason he can do this is that the position is very blocked. Indeed, if you try to copy Black's plan in an open position you are most likely to be murdered very quickly.

12 g3

White goes about his methodical development. His idea – to build up to a breakthrough with f4-f5 – is in general an excellent one, but he didn't weaken his opponent when he had the chance with 8 Qg4, meaning that the black kingside he wants to attack remains a solid fortress. And now he fails to take precautions against the demise of the c3-pawn.

12...Nd7 13 Bh3 Nb6 14 Rb1 Qa3

If 14...Na4 then 15 Rb4 shields c3, so Black puts the queen on a3 to start with.

15 0-0 Na4 (Diagram 17)



TIP: In blocked positions, the important thing is to put pieces on their best squares, not develop them rapidly to decent squares.

The knight completes its journey to a4 and almost unbelievably White is doomed to lose the c3-pawn. The fact that he is so far ahead in development fails to provide compensation, because the position is so bunged up. Indeed, following 16 Nh4 Qxc3 17 Qd1 Rb8 and a few further adventures Black went on to win in R.Legaspi-B.Nadera, Manila 2006. His daring raid on c3 proved a striking success. White's demise in the above game shows that 8 Qg4! is imperative for him.



NOTE: If Black is allowed to eliminate White's dark-squared bishop, he must be made to pay the price of a displaced king on f8 or a king-side weakened by ...g6.

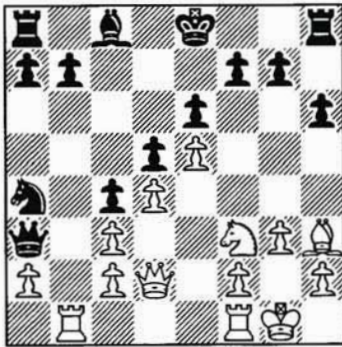


Diagram 17 (W)
Targeting c3

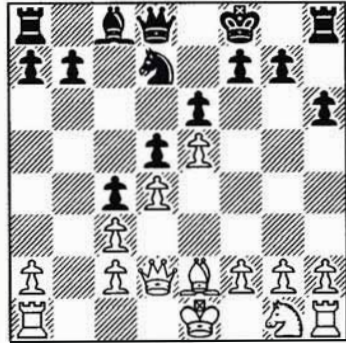


Diagram 18 (W)
The knight again heads for a4

Opening theorists and practical players have long grasped this fact. Nowadays it is accepted that if White hopes to keep an opening advantage in the main line McCutcheon he must play 8 Qg4, whether the early queen move appeals to his aesthetic sense or not.

Scenario 2: White plays 8 Qg4, but avoids Kxd2

Game 36

□ E.Romanov ■ I.Nepomniachtchi

European Championship, Dresden 2007

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4 5 e5 h6 6 Bd2 Bxc3 7 bxc3 Ne4 8 Qg4! Kf8

How to Play Against 1 e4

Also popular is 8...g6, but we shall concentrate on the king move here.

9 Qf4?!

White decides that he wants to recapture on d2 with his queen. The direct and preferable 9 Bd3 is considered next in our third scenario.

9...c5 10 Bd3 Nxd2 11 Qxd2 c4 12 Be2 Nd7! (Diagram 18)

As in scenario one, Black avoids the obvious 12...Nc6 and sends his knight off to attack the pawn on c3.

13 Nf3 Qa5 14 g4

At first glance this is an attractive idea: the g-pawn will be used to ram h6, when the open file that results after gxh6 can be exploited by the white queen and rooks to attack g7. If Black responded to g4-g5 with ...h5, trying to keep the position blocked, the reply g5-g6 would nevertheless ensure the opening of lines on the kingside.

Nonetheless, it turns out that Romanov has no time to carry out this kingside campaign due to Black's counterattack against the c3-pawn, which effectively paralyzes his queen.

14...Nb6 15 Qe3

White sees the threat of 15...Na4 and so clears the way for his king to go to d2.

15...Qa3!

Another familiar idea from our first scenario. Instead after 15...Na4? 16 Kd2 Black's impatience means that White can block the attack on c3 with a later Rb4 move, or in some cases play a2-a3 to obstruct Black's ...b5-b4 queenside pawn advance .

16 g5 Na4 17 Kd2

White has put his king on d2, but in a far more time-wasting and inefficient manner than occurs in scenario three below.

17...b5! (Diagram 19)

In scenario one it was enough for Black to attack the c3-pawn to win it. Here he requires a second wave of attack to dismantle the white queenside.

18 Rab1

Already White feels obliged to take measures against 18...b4.

18...Bd7 19 Rhg1 Be8!



NOTE: This is a typical positioning of the bishop in the 6 Bd2 McCutcheon. It defends both b5 and f7 against attack, and in this specific case deters 20 g6, as Black could just capture the pawn.

20 gxh6 Rxh6

One of White's built-in positional plusses after 8...Kf8 is that the rook on h8 re-

mains shut out of the game. So seeing it escape its prison so easily makes Romanov's strategy appear very suspicious.

21 Rg3

Of course, the attacking move 21 Qg5 would give White a fine game if nothing were happening on the queenside, but the riposte 21...Qxc3+ 22 Kd1 Rg6 is winning for Black.

21... Rb8 22 Ng5 b4 (Diagram 20)



Diagram 19 (W)

Striving to open the queenside

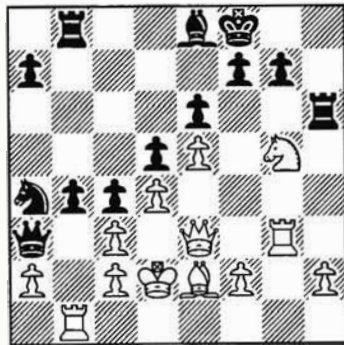


Diagram 20 (W)

The culmination of Black's play

After meticulous preparation, Black's attack finally hits the c3-pawn. Now White's defences buckle and his king becomes the object of mating threats.

23 cxb4 Qxa2!

Of course this is no time to blunder the queen with 23...Rxb4?? 24 Qxa3.

24 Rc1 Rxb4 25 Rh3 c3+!?

Also winning is 25...Rxh3: for example, 26 Nxh3 Rb3! 27 Qf4 Rxh3 winning a piece, or 26 Qxh3 Qb2! 27 Qh4 (27 Qe3 Rb3!) 27...Qc3+ 28 Kd1 Nb2 mate.

26 Kd1 Rxh3 27 Qxh3 Rb1 28 Nxe6+

Alternatively, 28 Qe3 Nb2+ 29 Ke1 Qa1 30 Rxb1 Qxc1+ with mate to follow.

28...Kg8 29 Bd3 (Diagram 21) 29...Rxc1+ 30 Ke2

If 30 Kxc1 Qa1 mate, but now White is actually threatening mate in one himself. His joy doesn't last long, though.

30...Rxc2+ 31 Ke3 g6 32 Ng5 Re2+ 0-1

It's trivial for Black after 33 Bxe2 Qd2+ 34 Kf3 Qxg5.

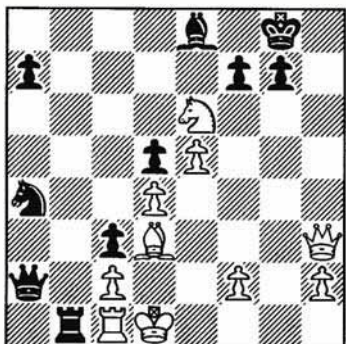


Diagram 21 (B)

The white king's days are numbered



Diagram 22 (B)

White prepares to activate his rook

Scenario 3: White plays Qg4, Kxd2 and Rh3

Game 37

□ A.Das ■ A.David

Kolkata 2008

1 e4 e2 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4 5 e5 h6 6 Bd2 Bxc3 7 bxc3 Ne4 8 Qg4 Kf8 9 Bd3!

White accepts that his king will be best placed on d2 where it defends the c3-pawn.

9...Nxd2 10 Kxd2 c5 11 h4! (Diagram 22)

Das clears the way for his rook to go to the third rank where it not only defends c3 against an anticipated attack with ...b5-b4 but can also take up an aggressive posture on either f3 or g3. In fact the rook quite often visits both squares, going first to f3 to assail the f7-pawn and then switching its attention to g7, or vice versa.

Against 11 Nf3 Black can carry out his plan of 11...c4 12 Be2 b5 just the same. Thus it might seem a good idea for White to develop the knight to e2 order to keep the way open for an f2-f4 advance, but plain embarrassing would be 11 Ne2?? c4 when the bishop is lost. Someone rated over Elo 2000 recently fell for this trap!

11...c4!

As always, Black does best to close the centre and look for counterplay with ...b5-

b4. One advantage of doing so straightaway is that White is denied the chance he gets after 11...Nc6 of playing 12 Qf4 c4 13 Bg6 (if he had played 11 Qf4 straight-away Black could have tried 11...Qg5!? to exchange queens.)

12 Be2 b5

I also like this immediate advance, as it prevents White from putting up a barrier on the queenside, as might occur after 12...Nc6 13 a4.

After the game move White had better leave well alone on the queenside, as 13 a4 would allow Black a formidable passed pawn after 13...bxa4 14 Rxa4 a5.

13 Rh3 Nc6 (Diagram 23)

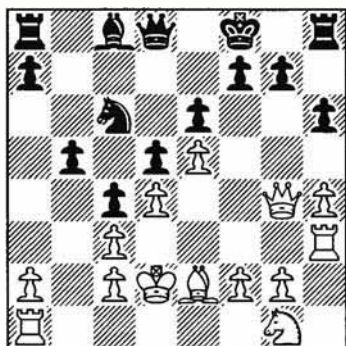


Diagram 23 (W)

Both sides have their trumps



Diagram 24 (B)

Prudently holding up ...b4

14 Qf4

If 14 a3 then Black can get on with his queenside advance with 14...a5. He wants to hit the c3-point at an appropriate moment with ...b5-b4, but great care is needed not to open lines on the queenside that the white rooks can exploit more than the black pieces. After all, Black still has a rook sleeping on h8!

White's plan is also beginning to take shape: he will hit the f7-pawn three times, with queen, bishop and rook in order to tie down a couple of black pieces. Then with luck he will be able to carry out a pawn advance g4-g5 to open lines, and, not forgetting to give his knight a leading role, mate the black king.

Does that sound easy? Well the position is truly head-splitting from a positional point of view. It somehow feels like one of those toy puzzles I played with as a child where you have to slot all the different shapes together to form a larger shape without any overlapping or gaps. White and Black are going to pack a large

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number of pieces together in a small area on the kingside; and it is difficult to work out where they belong. For example, when should the white rook go to f3, and when should it choose g3? Or similarly, when should the black king go to g8, and when should it remain on f8 or flee to e8?

Along with working out the best squares for the attackers and defenders on the kingside, we also have to add Black's advance with ...b5-b4 into the equation. White might be poised for a breakthrough on the kingside, only to find that he has no time to finish off his attack as his position has collapsed on the queenside. In that case it might well be the white king which ends up being mated, as we saw in scenario two.



NOTE: The McCutcheon is a difficult opening for both White and Black. Not only do you have to keep a close watch over events on both sides of the board, but you also have to tread a fine line between overaggressive and over-passive play. If you want a more quiet life, there's always the Fort Knox!

14...Bd7 15 Bh5 Qe7

The queen not only bolsters f7, but also supports the ...b5-b4 advance on the queenside. Another way to play it is 15...Be8, waiting to see if White goes 16 Rf3 before committing the queen to e7.

16 Rf3?!

Surprisingly enough, this rather obvious move might well be a positional mistake. It seems to me that White should first of all play 16 a3 (**Diagram 24**) to rule out a 16...b4 counter-attack. Then Black has various possible replies.

a) If the black king heads for h7 with 16...Kg8?!, it is time to activate the knight with 17 Nf3!: for example, 17...Kh7 (or 17...Be8 18 Nh2 Kh7 19 Ng4 with a similar check on f6 in mind) 18 Nh2 Rhf8 19 Ng4 Be8 20 Nf6+! with a very dangerous attack after 20...Kh8 21 Rg3 – note that Black can't take the knight as 20...gxf6 21 exf6 Qb7 leads to a quick mate: 22 Rg3 Rg8 23 Rxc8 Kxc8 24 Qg3+ and 25 Qg7.

b) If the black king heads in the other direction with 16...Ke8?! then 17 Rf3 is unpleasant as there is no 17...Be8 move available. After 17...Rf8 (17...Nd8 is very passive) 18 Rg3 Black would be forced to weaken his pawn front with 18...g6 as 18...Rg8 loses a pawn to the neat trick 19 Qxh6!.

c) If Black perseveres with his queenside advance with 16...a5!? then 17 g4! gets White's pawns involved in his kingside attack. (The reason why I don't recommend 16 g4 at once, is that Black can counterattack with 16...b4, whereas here the similar attempt 17...b4? is useless as after 18 axb4 the a5-pawn is pinned, meaning that Black has just thrown away a pawn.) After 17...Kg8 (hoping to trap the bishop with 18...g6), 18 g5 follows and Black can't try to block up the position with 18...g6? planning 19...h5, as White can ruin the idea with 19 gxh6! when 19...gxh5?! 20 Qg3+ Kf8 21 Qg7+ wins at once.

Nevertheless, after 18...Rb8 or perhaps more precisely a move earlier 17...Rb8!? the battle continues, with Black aiming for counterplay at an opportune moment with ...b4. A similar struggle between wing attacks as in the Romanov-Nepomniachtchi game might develop, but with White on a much sounder footing here.



NOTE: Of course I want to demonstrate that the McCutcheon is a sound and enterprising opening for Black, but at the same time I don't want to give you the impression that it is a forced loss for White. In order to master an opening you have to be aware of the plans available for both sides.

16...Be8 (Diagram 25)

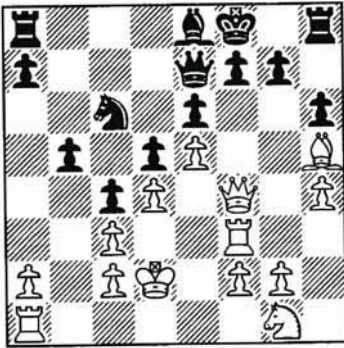


Diagram 25 (W)

A good defensive post for the bishop

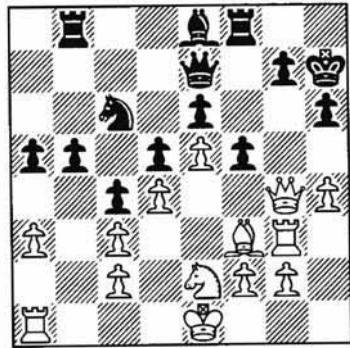


Diagram 26 (W)

Black strikes back

As we pointed out in scenario two, this is useful post for the bishop as it defends both b5 and f7.

17 a3 a5 18 Ne2 Rb8 19 Ke1

Black has methodically built up his position using his pawns on the queenside, but how is White to reciprocate on the kingside? If 19 g4 then 19...Kg8 is highly awkward for him. Black is threatening to trap the bishop with 20...g6, and 20 g5? hxg5 leaves it hanging to the black rook. Meanwhile after 20 Ng3 g6 Black would be rather foolish to feast on the bishop at once, as the reply Nxh5 would give White a ferocious attack. But Black wouldn't need to hurry – he could leave the bishop helplessly floundering on h5 and make as many preparatory moves as he saw fit before lopping it off.

Unable to find a way to use his foot soldiers in his kingside campaign, White can

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only shuffle around with his big pieces. In the meantime Black is able to swap the places of his king and rook – a tremendous achievement.

19...Kg8 20 Rg3 Kh7 21 Bf3 Rf8

White's strategy has ended in disaster as the two positional factors that were in his favour (Black's vulnerable king and the rook shut in on h8) have both vanished. Instead the black king is safely ensconced on h7, and the rook is nicely centralized and about to support a counterattack. It is a matter of bitter irony for White that he is now the player with a king in jeopardy and a rook cut off from its fellow pieces on a1.

22 Qg4 f5! (Diagram 26)



TIP: In the McCutcheon, White normally begins his strategic operations on the kingside, and Black looks for activity on the queenside. But it would be wrong to conclude from this that in the middlegame the kingside 'belongs' to White and the queenside 'belongs' to Black.

As we can see in this illustrative game, Black can counterattack on the kingside if his opponent is inert there or has built up his assault in a clumsy manner. Similarly, if Black had been in too much of a rush to play ...b5-b4 then the white rook on a1 might have profited the most from the opening of lines there.

23 exf6

If White keeps it blocked with 23 Qf4 then he will have to endure Black's attack after 23...b4 without any hope of counterplay.

23...Qxf6 24 Nf4

Hoping against hope for 24...Qxf4?? 25 Qxg7 mate.

24...Rb7!

Bringing up his reinforcements, after which White's knight really is hanging.

25 Nxe6

After this reckless move Black will win the tactical battle because he is able to use all his pieces, whereas White won't get any help from the rook on a1. Still, it's no surprise that Das had no stomach for defending passively after 25 Ne2 Bg6, etc.

25...Re7 26 Bxd5 Rxe6+

Quite good enough, but 26...Qxf2+ was totally crushing: 27 Kd1 Qg1+ 28 Kd2 Rf2+ 29 Ke3 Rf1+ 30 Kd2 Qf2+ (exchanging the queens) 31 Qe2 Qxe2+ 32 Kxe2 Rxa1 and Black is a rook up in the endgame.

27 Bxe6 Qxf2+ 28 Kd1 Bh5! (Diagram 27)

Black's bishop makes a brief but vital entrance into the game. It prevents mate on g7 and destroys any hope of a white attack by enabling his queen to pick up g3.

29 Qxh5 Qxg3 30 Qe2 Qxc3 31 Rb1 Nxd4 0-1

White is only a pawn down but we can't blame him for giving up the ghost here.

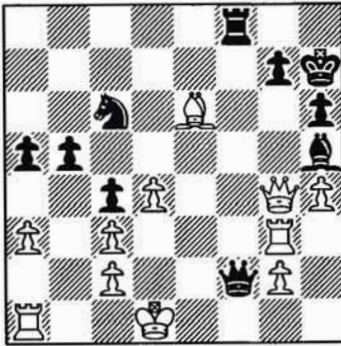


Diagram 27 (W)

The bishop is activated with some effect

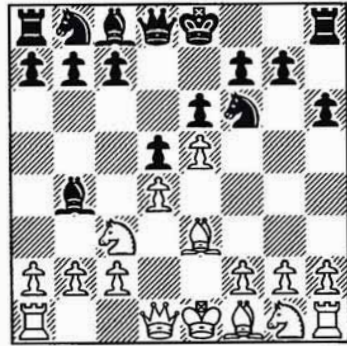


Diagram 28 (B)

White doesn't cover c3

In this game Black's king had a blessed life as he was able to find a safe haven on h7. Things aren't always so easy, and in the middlegame the king often heads in the other direction, assuming the g7-pawn is no longer hanging. This makes positional sense, as even if the king gets no further than e7 he will be allowing the rook on h8 to enter the game, if only to bolster the vulnerable f7-square with ...Rf8. Moreover, if the black monarch is feeling particularly energetic, he might go for a hike all the way to the queenside. Though we mustn't forget that Black's counterplay often consists of advancing ...b5-b4, so if his king did make the journey he might find his queenside residence stripped bare of pawns. Yes, chess is a very complicated game!

Fashionable Bishop Retreats

1. White plays 6 Be3 – ignoring the pin

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4 5 e5 h6 6 Be3!? (Diagram 28)

There is an old chess saying that the best answer to a threat is to ignore it. Here White shows an exaggerated lack of concern about the pin on c3. Assuming no disaster occurs on that square, there are two good reasons for retreating the bishop to e3 rather than d2.

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i. The bishop is a strong piece, the master of the dark squares: therefore White should try to hold on to it. The move 6 Be3 does the trick; whereas 6 Bd2 Bxc3 7 bxc3 Ne4 leads to its exchange.

ii. Putting the bishop on e3 means that *in most cases the white king gets to castle kingside*. In contrast after 6 Bd2 Bxc3 7 bxc3 Ne4 8 Qg4 Kf8 9 Bd3 Nxd2 10 Kxd2 the king is stranded in the centre. From a strategic point of view the trouble that White endures to get his king to g1 means that 6 Be3 isn't objectively better than 6 Bd2 – but speaking practically most players are rather uncomfortable with their king stuck in the centre, and so prefer to have him tucked away on g1.

6...Ne4

The only good response. Black's knight takes up an aggressive central post where it adds to the pressure on c3.

7 Qg4!

First Black and then White hit each other where they are weakest: the c3- and g7-squares. Alas, Black can't capture on c3: 7...Nxc3? 8 Qxg7 Rf8 (giving a discovered check with the knight is useless: for example, 8...Ne4+ 9 c3 when both the bishop on b4 and the rook on h8 are hanging) 9 a3 (this seems more effective than the simple 9 Bd2) 9...Ba5 10 Bxh6 Qe7 (White drove the bishop back to a5 to make the black queen defend f8) 11 Bd2! and White will regain his piece with a couple of extra pawns thrown in.

7...g6

The alternative was of course 7...Kf8, but versus 6 Be3 I like to keep the option of queenside castling, albeit at the price of weakened kingside pawns.

8 a3!

Putting the question to the black bishop as Nimzowitsch would say. It cannot retreat to e7 without allowing Nxe4, winning a pawn, while 8...Nxc3? 9 axb4 leaves Black weak on the dark squares – and besides the poor knight ends up being chased all the way back to h7 after 9...Ne4 10 f3 h5 11 Qh3 Ng5 12 Qg3 Nh7.

Instead 8...Ba5 is more respectable, but White has the initiative after 9 Nge2 c5 10 dxc5 Nc6 11 b4 Nxe5 12 Qh3 Nxc3 13 Nxc3 Bc7 14 Nb5. Black has a compact pawn centre here, but hasn't made any dent in the white queenside pawns. Furthermore, his dark-squared bishop is a long way from its optimum post on g7 where it would guard the fragile dark squares on his kingside.

Therefore Black decides to part with his strong bishop in return for winning a pawn and smashing up the white queenside structure.

8...Bxc3+ 9 bxc3 Nxc3 10 Bd3 (Diagram 29)

White has two bishops and his queen pointing at the weakened defences of the black kingside. On the other hand, he doesn't enjoy the assistance of any pawns in his attack – so any immediate breakthrough would require a sacrifice of a piece, most likely on g6. White's advantage in firepower isn't enough to justify such an

extreme measure, which means that Black has time to consolidate before the white infantry can be brought to bear against the g6-pawn.

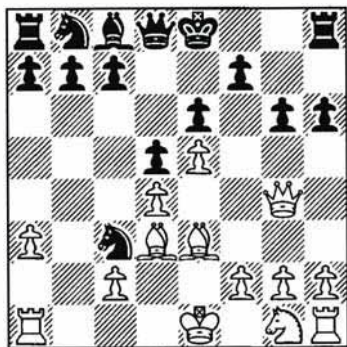


Diagram 29 (B)

White has some compensation



Diagram 30 (W)

Trying to keep lines closed



TIP: Almost any attack, even of the most tactical nature, requires the use of pawns at some point. The Greek Gift, in which the attack is carried out with the major pieces, is one of the few exceptions.

Game 38

□ E.Ubiennykh ■ T.Grabuzova

Cheliabinsk 2008

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4 5 e5 h6 6 Be3 Ne4 7 Qg4 g6 8 a3 Bxc3+ 9 bxc3 Nxc3 10 Bd3 Nc6

Black plans to castle queenside at the earliest reasonable moment. Therefore the knight, bishop and queen must be developed forthwith.

11 h4

Here comes the aforementioned pawn support for the white attack: the h-pawn will ram itself into g6.

11...Bd7

An interesting alternative is 11...Ne7!?, with the idea of ...c5 to break up the white centre.

12 h5 g5 (Diagram 30)

How to Play Against 1 e4

It is rather ominous for Black that her kingside pawns are fixed on g5 and h6. If White manages to arrange f2-f4 in a favourable way, then after the exchange ...gxf4 and recapture Bxf4, or more likely Rxf4 once White has castled, the h6-pawn would be permanently under the gaze of White's dark-squared bishop. Losing the pawn would be a great positional crisis for Black, as White would then have a passed pawn on h5. Of course, as Ubiennykh intends to castle kingside, it will be far from easy for White to exploit her positional superiority there, as advancing her pawns puts her king at risk.

13 Ne2

After 13 f4 Black's game comes alive: 13...f5! 14 exf6 (it would be a victory for Black to be allowed to block the kingside with 14...g4) 14...e5!, etc.

13...Nxe2 14 Qxe2 Qe7 15 0-0 0-0-0 16 Rfb1

A very important moment. White is tempted by the open b-file into launching a direct attack with her pieces, and so forgoes the chance to exert positional pressure on the kingside. The critical move was 16 f4! when if 16...Rdg8? there follows 17 fxg5 hxg5 18 g4! (**Diagram 31**).

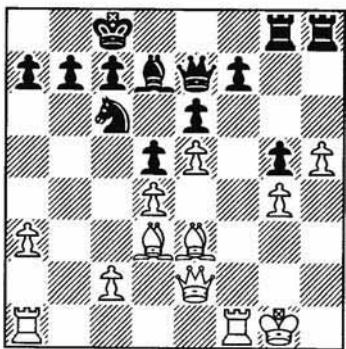


Diagram 31 (B)

An ideal scenario for White

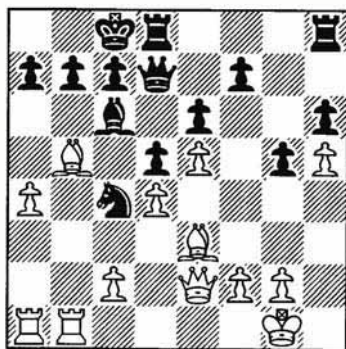


Diagram 32 (W)

Making good use of the c6-bishop

Take a long hard look at the position, as this is the kind of thing you need to avoid when you play the McCutcheon. Black has an extra pawn, a safe king and developed pieces, but is nevertheless strategically busted. There are no pawn breaks available on the kingside as 18...f5 loses to 19 exf6, while otherwise there is no counterplay against the white king.

This means that Black can only sit there whilst White builds up with moves like Rf6, then c2-c3 to guard d4, and Qd2, intending Bxg5. White's protected passed

pawn on h5 is massively strong and can in time be shepherded to the queening square with the help of all White's pieces.



WARNING: Black has to avoid such prospectless positions at all cost. Therefore after 16 f4 the pawn sacrifice 16...g4! should be played.

Following 17 Qxg4 f5 18 exf6 (White doesn't want the kingside blocked, as this would leave his bishop-pair shut out) 18...Qxf6 19 f5 e5! 20 dxe5 (or 20 Qg6 Qh4!) 20...Nxe5 21 Qd4 Rdg8 22 Qxa7 Bc6 Black has dangerous counterplay along the g-file, with 23...d4 on the cards. The quieter approach here is 19 c3, after which Black can reply 19...Ne7 when moves like 20...Nf5 and 21...Rdb8 will follow. White will be trying to prove that he can keep control of the position and eventually push through a g4-g5 advance; Black will be claiming that he can use the g-file for his own ends to attack the white king. A tough double-edged battle is in prospect; and that of course is why you chose the McCutcheon rather than the Fort Knox! We should now return to our main game, in which Ubiennykh has been side-tracked by dreams of a mate along the b-file.

16...Na5!

Black frees the c6-square for her bishop in order to add to the defence of b7. Instead she would lose quickly after 16...f5? 17 Ba6! Na5 18 Bxb7+ Nxb7 19 Qa6 etc. when there is no good way to stop the capture on b7.

17 Ba6 Bc6 18 Bb5

Threatening 19 Bxc6 Nxc6 20 Qb5 when b7 is again indefensible. Therefore the black queen has to lend a hand to the defence.

18...Qd7 19 a4 Nc4! (Diagram 32)

Offering back her extra pawn in order to bring the light-squared bishop to life after 20 Bxc4 dxc4: for example, 21 Qxc4 Rhf8 22 a5 f5 23 exf6 Rxf6 when Black looks pretty comfortable.

20 Rb3 a5!

We are normally told it is inadvisable to move the pawns in front of our king when under attack, but this is a clever defensive move. The reason is explained in the next note.

21 Bxc6

After 21 Rab1 Bxb5 22 axb5 b6 the white attack is stymied, as all the files on the queenside are firmly blocked. However, if Black hadn't played 20...a5, the pawn would still be on a7, allowing White to switch her attack to the a-file with 23 Ra1, etc.

21...Qxc6 22 Bc1 Rdf8

Intending to activate her rooks via the f-file with 23...f5, which would also remove the hole in her kingside structure on f6. White puts a stop to it, but this allows the

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black queen to become active along the b-file.

23 Rf3 Qb6 24 Qd1 Qb4 25 Ba3

Now Black is able to stage a break out along the f-file. On the other hand, Ubiennykh was running out of constructive moves, as if 25 Rf6 Black can strike against the d4-pawn with 25...c5 when 26 dxc5 Qc3 (26...Qxc5!?) 27 Rb1 Qxe5 dismantles the once proud white centre.

25...Nxa3 26 Rxa3 f5! 27 exf6 Rxf6 28 Rab3 (Diagram 33)

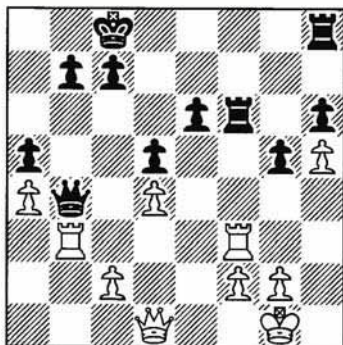


Diagram 33 (B)

Black is pressing for the full point



Diagram 34 (W)

An unexpected retreat!

Black has every chance to win after 28 Rxf6 Qxa3 29 Rxe6 Qxa4. Now with her extra pawn you might be expecting a technical display from Grabuzova, but instead she wore down her opponent's defences on the kingside until eventually a mate appeared. Here are the remaining moves:

28...Qe7 29 Qe1 b6 30 Rfc3 Rhf8 31 f3 Qd6 32 g4 Rf4 33 Qd1 e5 34 dxe5 Qxe5 35 Re3 Rd4 36 Qe1 Qf4 37 Kg2 Kb7 38 Qc3 Rxa4 39 Re6 Rc4 40 Qb2 Qd2+ 41 Kg3 Rxc2

Now it gets deceptively exciting for a while, whereas 41...Rxc2+ mates in five moves: 42 fxg4 (42 Kxg4 Qg2 mate) 42...Qf2+ 43 Kh3 Qh4+ 44 Kg2 Rf2+ 45 Kg1 Qh2 mate.

42 Rxb6+ Kc8 43 Rb8+ Kd7 44 Re7+ Kxe7 45 Qg7+ Rf7 46 Qe5+ Kd7 47 Qe8+ Kd6 0-1

White has one more serious check on d8 after which the black king goes to c5. Hair-raising stuff!

2. White plays 6 Bc1 – a quirky retreat

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4 5 e5 h6 6 Bc1!? (Diagram 34)

The reason for this paradoxical retreat might be better understood if we relate a conversation about its merits between a sceptic and a believer.

Sceptic: 'What a ridiculous move! I can just about sympathize with White wanting to avoid 6 Bd2 because it leads to the exchange of his dark-squared bishop; but that's no excuse to move it all the way back to c1! Why not put it on e3 where it remains developed and helps defend d4?'

Believer: 'Ah, but the c1-square is full of possibilities for the bishop. Modern science talks about hidden dimensions, and here you have noticed the diagonal c1-h6, but you have missed the two other diagonals available to the bishop on c1.'

Sceptic: 'Nonsense – there are no other diagonals for the bishop on c1.'

Believer: 'Not yet, but all good things come to those who believe! By the way, how do you think Black will try for counterplay?'

Sceptic: 'He'll play 6...Ne4 and then attack the white centre with ...c5 – a plan all the better because there is no white bishop on e3.'

Believer: 'Well, as soon as Black plays ...c5, new vistas will open for the white bishop on c1 that it could never dream of on e3. It will soon be sitting proudly on the a3-f8 diagonal.'

Sceptic 'I will believe that when I see it'.

Let's check out the theory to see who is right. Of course, we don't want to have to agree with our believer friend that 6 Bc1 is a great move, as we are playing this position as Black; but at the same time I don't want you to assume like Sceptic that 6 Bc1 is a feeble move, as then you might be in for a nasty shock when you get mated in 23 moves.

We'll examine the bishop retreat with the help of a tough battle between two of the best young players in the world.

Game 39

□ P.Negi ■ I.Nepomniachtchi

Wijk aan Zee 2007

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4 5 e5 h6 6 Bc1 Ne4

Increasing the pressure on c3 is the only logical continuation for Black.

7 Qg4!

As with the 6 Be3 variation, White must strike quickly to force a positional concession from Black on the kingside; either the forfeiting of castling or the weakening of his pawn structure.

7...g6



WARNING: Black comes to grief after 7...Nxc3 8 Qxg7 Rf8 9 a3! Ba5 (or 9...Be7 10 bxc3 and Black is material down for nothing) 10 Bxh6 Qe7 11 Bd2 and White will regain his piece a couple of pawns up.

8 Nge2

Now, however, White must attend to the threat to c3. The fact that the bishop is shut in on f1 encourages Black to launch a vigorous counterattack against d4.

8...c5! (Diagram 35)

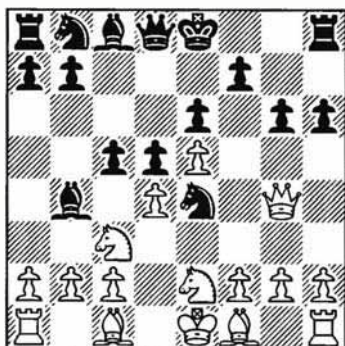


Diagram 35 (W)

Black strives to open the position

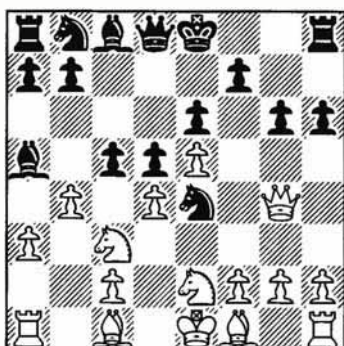


Diagram 36 (B)

A sharp gambit

It used to be good enough when talking about the French to say that in such a situation White has to take care or else his centre will crumble after 9...cxd4. No more explanation needed to be given to justify a white response that added support to his centre; it was a given rule of strategy that holding together your centre is a vital thing.

Nowadays things are much cloudier.



NOTE: We need to remind ourselves that in this age of dynamic chess White doesn't necessarily mind if his centre crumbles – in fact, he might rejoice in its crumbling, *as long as it crumbles in a way that is favourable to his pieces.*

The old positional certainties that stated Black is doing well if he demolishes the white centre have been replaced by a concrete appraisal of each specific act of demolition, often with the aid of a computer. This new dynamic approach may

have undermined a lot of rules that were useful positional sign posts, but it has also enriched chess: after all it permits us to find worth in 'ridiculous looking' moves such as 6 Bc1.

So instead of talking about White's centre, we might say instead that if White doesn't watch out, Black's 9...cxd4 is going to cause havoc in combination with ...Nxc3, when the c3-point collapses.

9 a3 Ba5 10 dxc5!?

The alternative was 10 b4!? (**Diagram 36**), which breaks the pin on c3 with a sharp pawn offer. For example, 10...Nxc3 11 Nxc3 and now Black must choose whether to take on b4 or d4:

a) The bishop on c1 comes alive after 11...cxb4?! 12 Nb5 bxa3+? (Black should try 12...b3+, although White keeps an attack after 13 Bd2) 13 c3 and White has a very dangerous initiative for the pawns, as the bishop is ready to seize the a3-f8 diagonal with 14 Bxa3 in combination with Nd6+. And if 13...0-0, then 14 Rxa3!? and this time the bishop on c1 trains its fire along another diagonal with the threat of 15 Bxh6.

b) So 11 ...cxd4! is to be preferred: for example, 12 Nb5 Bc7 13 Qxd4 (or 13 f4 a5 with a hard fight) 13...Nc6 14 Nxc7+ Qxc7 15 Bb5 Bd7 16 Bxc6 Qxc6 17 Be3 Qa6 and Black was OK in E.Berg-I.Nepomniachtchi, Wijk aan Zee 2007.

10...Nc6 11 b4

If White defends the e5-pawn he will be hit by ...d4. Here is a plausible disaster for him: 11 Bf4 d4 12 b4? (White has to fish in troubled waters with 12 Rd1 Qc7) 12...dxc3! 13 bxa5 (there is a cruder finish after 13 Rd1 Qxd1+!) 13...Qd2+! (a sham queen sacrifice to set up a fork on f2) 14 Bxd2 cxd2+ 15 Kd1 Nxf2+ 16 Kxd2 Nxc4 and Black wins.

11...Nxe5 (**Diagram 37**)

Nepomniachtchi completes the destruction of the white centre and brings a second black knight to a good centre post. On the other hand, he is opening the diagonal a1-h8 for White's bishop on c1. He needs to be especially vigilant as his own dark-squared bishop is away on the queenside, rather than sitting on the 'Indian' g7-square. Nepomniachtchi tries to make amends by putting the bishop on c7 to bolster e5.

12 Qh3 Bc7 13 Nxe4 dxe4 14 Nc3 a5!

An important move. Black stabs at the b4-pawn and as a consequence wins an open file for his rook on a8.

15 Rb1 axb4 16 axb4 Bd7 17 Bb2

Here White could grab the pawn on e4, but it is risky with his king stuck in the middle. When I analysed this game on the *ChessPublishing* website, I pointed out a charming variation that *Fritz* showed me: 17 Nxe4 Bc6 18 Bg5 (it looks as if Black is in deep trouble, but...) 18...Qd4 19 Nf6+ Kf8 20 c3 Bxg2!! 21 Bxg2 Nd3+ 22 Kd1

How to Play Against 1 e4

Nxf2+ 23 Ke1 Nd3+ 24 Kd1 Nf2+ with a draw by repetition.

17...Bc6! (Diagram 38)

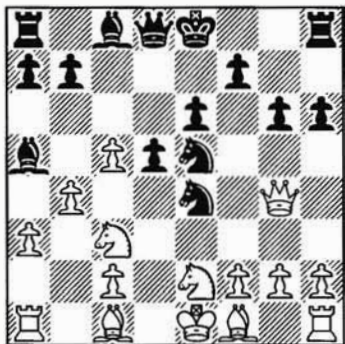


Diagram 37 (W)

White's centre has vanished



Diagram 38 (W)

Not such a bad bishop!



NOTE: Over the past few moves Black has avoided defending the e4-pawn with ...f5. Instead he has used dynamic means to deter White from capturing it, until now he is able to defend it in a far more efficient way.

Hence he has avoided weakening his kingside with 17...f5, and also brought his so called 'problem' piece, the light-squared bishop, to an active square.

It is all too easy to be lazy in chess, and automatically play a move like 14...f5 or 16...f5. In contrast, the strongest players are always looking to get as much as they can from any position, and try to avoid stereotyped decisions.

18 Rd1 Qf6

The black queen fearlessly takes up a post on the same diagonal as the white bishop on b2.

19 Nb5 Bb8

The trapper is trapped: if now 20 Nd6+ Bxd6 21 cxd6 Nf3+! 22 Qxf3 (best) 22...Qxb2 and Black picks up White's bishop, with a near winning position.

20 Bd4 Qf5 21 Qc3 0-0 22 Nd6 Bxd6 23 cxd6 Nd7 24 b5 Bd5 (Diagram 39)

Not 24...Bxd5? 25 g4 when White wins a piece.

After the text, White can be proud of his dark-squared bishop and his passed pawn. On the other hand, Black is well entrenched on the light squares and is

ready to complete the activation of his pieces with 25...Rfc8. Meanwhile the white king is rather awkwardly placed in the centre. Here we'll conclude our analysis of the game.

Negi tried to force matters with a pawn sacrifice, but ended up with the worse chances before escaping into an endgame. For the record, here are the remaining moves:



Diagram 39 (W)

White is under pressure

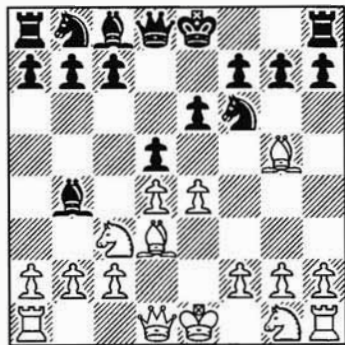


Diagram 40 (B)

Not too challenging

25 g4 Qxg4 26 Qg3 Qf3 27 Bg2 Qh5 28 0-0 f5 29 f4 Rfc8 30 Rd2 Ra2 31 Rc1 g5 32 Bf1 Qf3 33 Rf2 Qxg3+ 34 hxg3 Bc4 35 c3 Ra3 36 Rh2 Kh7 37 Bxc4 Rxc4 38 fxg5 e5 39 Rxh6+ Kg7 40 Bf2 Raxc3 41 Rxc3 Rxc3 42 Re6 e3 43 Re7+ Kg6 44 Be1 Rc1 45 Kf1 Nc5 46 Ke2 f4 47 d7 f3+ 48 Kxf3 Nxd7 49 Rxd7 Rxe1 50 Rxb7 Kxg5 51 b6 Kf6 52 Rc7 Rb1 53 Rc6+ Kf5 54 g4+ Kg5 55 Kxe3 Kxg4 ½-½

That finishes our survey of White's possible moves after 5 e5 h6. As you can see, Black has good counter-attacking options in every line.

White Avoids 5 e5

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4

If White wants to avoid 5 e5 then his main alternatives are 5 exd5 and 5 Nge2, as we will now explore. A third move is 5 Bd3 (**Diagram 40**), which strikes me as being rather defensive. Black can try to counterattack with 5...c5, but I like the simple approach 5...dxe4 6 Bxe4 Nbd7, when White is going to have to waste time retreat-

ing his bishop from e4 or else submit to its exchange: for example, 7 Nge2 h6 8 Bxf6 Nxf6 9 Bf3 c5 (already Black looks at least equal) 10 a3 (better to bail out to a slightly worse endgame with 10 dxc5 Bxc5 11 Qxd8+ Kxd8) 10...Bxc3+ 11 bxc3 Qc7 12 0-0 0-0 13 Rb1 Rb8 14 Qd3 b6 and White had a grotty position due to his weaknesses on the c-file in A.Gipslis-D.Bronstein, Baku 1961.

1. White plays 5 Nge2

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4 5 Nge2

By shutting in his bishop on f1 White is clearly renouncing any chance of landing a quick knock-out blow. Instead he wants to guide the game down more quiet, positional channels. Thus instead of fighting for the initiative on the kingside, his first concern is to avoid having his queenside pawns broken up by ...Bxc3+. He is letting Black temporarily win the e4-pawn, but he will recover it in a couple of moves, albeit at the price of having to give up his good dark-squared bishop for a knight. Then the question will be one that is central to the Classical and Rubinstein variations of the French in which Black has conceded the centre with ...dxe4: is a white knight sitting pretty on e4 of more value than Black's bishop-pair?

5...dxe4

With his queenside counterplay neutralized for at least the time being, Black has to prevent White from carrying out his own plan of 6 e5 on the kingside.

6 a3 Be7

The bishop returns to e7, breaking the pin on f6 and so compelling White to hand over the dark-squared bishop in order to regain the e4-pawn.

If instead 6...Ba5 then 7 b4 Bb6 8 Nxe4 is good for White, while 6...Bxc3+? is seen to be a pointless and bad move after 7 Nxc3: it gives up the bishop-pair and eases the congestion in the white camp without causing any damage to the white pawns or ultimately saving the life of the e4-pawn.

7 Bxf6 gxf6!? (Diagram 41)

More fighting than the solid 7...Bxf6. Black breaks up his kingside pawns in order to increase his grip on the centre. In particular, he will be able to drive the white knight from its strong centre post with ..f6-f5 – a luxury he doesn't have in a normal French set up after, say, 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 dxe4 4 Nxe4 as the move 4...f5? creates far too many holes in his pawn structure. However, even here the move ...f5 has to be treated with caution, as if it is played too soon the hole it creates on e5 might prove awkward for Black. Another benefit of 7...gxf6 is that Black gains attacking chances down the half open g-file; while a third is that the dark-squared bishop is preserved from exchange, as might happen after 7...Bxf6 8 Nxe4.

In our next illustrative game Nepomniachtchi manages to utilize all three of these potential advantages.

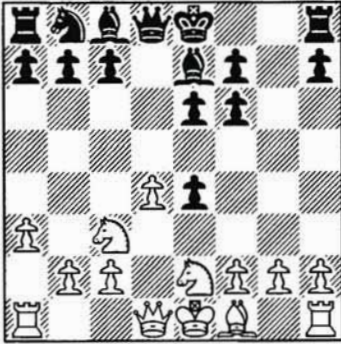


Diagram 41 (W)

Living up the struggle

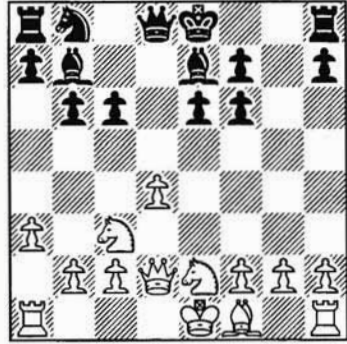


Diagram 42 (W)

Black had to rule out d4-d5

Game 40

□ T.Willemze ■ I.Nepomniachtchi

Wijk aan Zee 2007

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4 5 Nge2 dxe4 6 a3 Be7 7 Bxf6 gxf6 8 Nxe4 b6

It appears that Black's light-squared bishop won't be complaining about its chances in this game. It is developed to a splendid diagonal where it can attack the white knight.

9 Qd2

After 9 Nf4 f5 10 Nc3 Black should rule out any d4-d5 ideas with 10...c6! and then develop as in the main game. Meanwhile after 9 g3 (probably the best move as it allows White to keep his knight on e4) 9...Bb7 10 Bg2 c6 (again this stabilizing move, and certainly not 10...f5?, losing the exchange to 11 Nf6+ Bxf6 12 Bxb7) 11 0-0 White has more options than after 9 Qd2, although I still believe in the durability of the black position.

9...Bb7 10 N4c3 c6! (Diagram 42)

A rude surprise for Black's bishop, which has the door slammed in its face.



TIP: We should remember, though, that it is the overall health of a player's position that matters, not the mobility of one or more of his pieces.

Willemze's last two moves indicated that he was building up towards a break-

How to Play Against 1 e4

through with d4-d5, and this would have happened immediately after 10...Nd7? 11 d5!. If then 11...exd5 12 Nxd5, and Black has doubled and isolated f-pawns; while the alternative 11...e5? 12 Ng3, with the white knight going to f5, looks even worse for him; and against other moves, White can probe the weakness on e6.

Therefore the preventive 10...c6 was vital. Black's bishop can at least take heart in the fact that it persuaded the white knight to retreat from the powerful e4-square.

11 g3

White decides to fianchetto as the pawn on g3 forms a bulwark to Black's pressure along the g-file with ...Rg8. In any case, with the knight on e2 there was no other way out for the bishop.

11...Nd7 12 Bg2 Qc7

Black's development proceeds harmoniously. The move 10...c6 has provided the queen with a cubby hole on c7, which gets her off the back rank and so in turn allows queenside castling.

13 Qh6

Having been denied a central breakthrough with d4-d5, Willemze doesn't find a good alternative plan. He ends up wasting a lot of time with his queen, until finally he hits on the idea of a queenside pawn advance. However, by that time the black attack on the kingside has become quite threatening.

13...0-0 14 Qh5 Rdf8 15 0-0 f5 (Diagram 43)

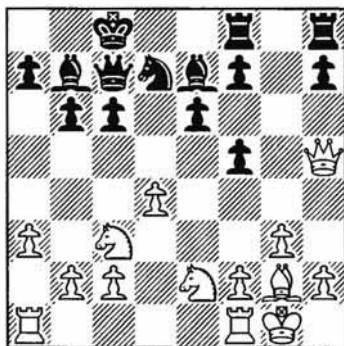


Diagram 43 (W)

Black begins to advance

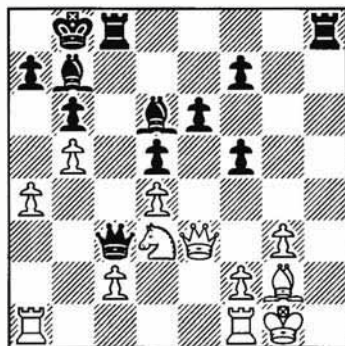


Diagram 44 (W)

White is undone down the c-file

As we said above, Black should consider carefully before making this move as it weakens the e5-square. However, Nepomniachtchi wants to eject the white queen

from the h-file so that he can begin the advance of his h-pawn, and to do so needs to clear the f6-square for his knight. Besides, the white knights aren't well placed to exploit the e5-square in this specific position.

16 Nf4 Nf6 17 Qf3 Rd8 18 Rad1 h5!

The onslaught begins. White is understandably nervous and pushes his b-pawn in search of counterplay, but it only leads to fresh weaknesses along the c-file.

19 b4 Bd6 20 Nd3 h4 21 b5 Nd5! 22 Nxd5 cxd5

Thanks to his 21st move, Black's pawn centre has increased in size and strength, while exposing White's weaknesses along the c-file.

23 Qe3 hxg3 24 hxg3 Kb8 25 a4 Rc8 26 Ra1 Qc3 (Diagram 44)

It is interesting that Nepomniachtchi doesn't look to mate White along the h-file, but instead uses his central superiority to pick off White's d4-pawn.

27 a5 Rc4 28 a6 Bc8 29 Rfd1 Qxd4 30 Qe2?

A blunder of course, but White was already beyond hope.

30...Bxg3 0-1

2. White plays 5 exd5

White responds to the threat to e4 in the style of the Exchange Variation. He hopes that with a semi-open centre his lead in development will amount to something, especially in view of the absence of Black's bishop from the kingside.

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4 5 exd5 Qxd5! (Diagram 45)

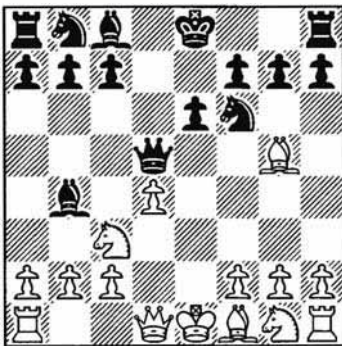


Diagram 45 (W)

The active and best recapture

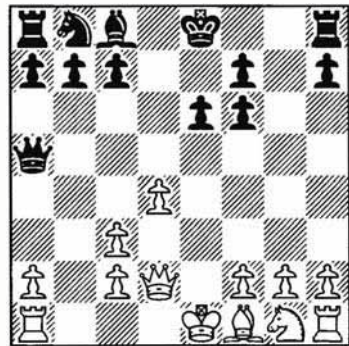


Diagram 46 (W)

c3 might become vulnerable

How to Play Against 1 e4

The correct recapture. Black activates his queen, breaks the pin on f6 and even threatens the impertinent white bishop. If now 6 Nf3 White already has to reckon with 6...Ne4, increasing the pin on c3 and hitting g5 again.

6 Bxf6 Bxc3+

Not strictly necessary, but Black wants to inflict doubled pawns on his opponent, rather than give him the chance to avoid them after 6...gxf6 7 Qd2.

7 bxc3 gxf6

Now both White and Black have a compromised pawn structure, but on opposite wings. Capablanca believed that 5 exd5 was the best way for White to meet the McCutcheon, because 'the breaking up of the kingside is of more importance than a similar occurrence on the queenside'. As a general principle this is no doubt true, as damage to the future king's residence, which is most likely to be the kingside, should cause more trouble than a similar outrage on the queenside. However, in this case Black is able to make the queenside the home of his king, or even keep it advantageously in the centre. Meanwhile should White castle kingside he'll find that the damage to the black kingside is no source of joy to him, as it means that the black rooks can attack him along the g-file. It is noteworthy that Capablanca himself chose to castle queenside with the white pieces in at least two games where he faced the McCutcheon!

8 Nf3



WARNING: White can try to be sneaky by delaying the development of his knight to f3. Thus after 8 Qd2, if Black plays 8...b6?! then 9 Be2! is awkward for him, as 9...Qxg2?? and 9...Bb7?? both lose grievously to 10 Bf3. Of course, Black doesn't need to fall for the trap, but a continuation like 9...Nc6 10 Bf3 Qd6 11 Qh6 isn't all that appealing for him.

So I would recommend you answer 8 Qd2 with 8...Qa5! (**Diagram 46**).

If then 9 Bd3 (or 9 Be2), still wanting to cause Black grief after 9...b6 with 10 Be4 (or 10 Bf3), it's time to wheel out the Fort Knox again: 9...Bd7!. One game went 10 Ne2 Bc6 11 f3 Nd7 12 0-0 0-0 with reasonable chances for Black in J.Magem Badals-I.Glek, Cap d`Agde 1996.

It's interesting that Glek has taken the idea of ...Qa5 one stage further, and also answers 8 Nf3 with 8...Qa5. There are good points to the second queen move, but I prefer to develop the bishop at once to b7, now that 8 Nf3 has ruled out White's Bf3 ideas.

8...b6

Black's bishop will be developed on to a fine diagonal where it attacks the g2-square.

9 Be2 Bb7 10 0-0 Rg8 (**Diagram 47**)

Already it's impossible not to be attracted to the black position.

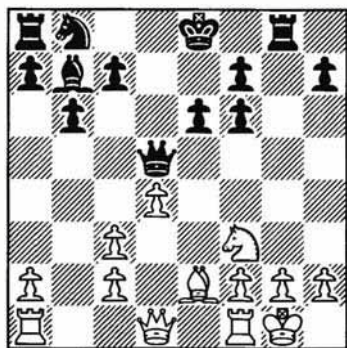


Diagram 47 (W)

Decent pressure against g2

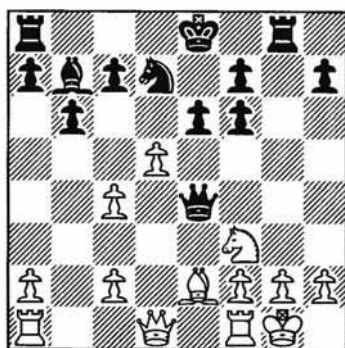


Diagram 48 (W)

Black doesn't want to pawn-grab

Game 41

□ A.Martin ■ S.Knott

British League 2006

1 d4

A lengthy detour, but we'll get to the French in the end.

1...Nf6 2 Nc3 d5 3 Bg5 e6 4 e4 Bb4 5 exd5 Qxd5 6 Bxf6 Bxc3+ 7 bxc3 gxf6 8 Nf3 b6 9 Be2 Bb7 10 0-0 Rg8 11 c4

White tries to blot out the pressure on g2 and at the same time open a line of attack against the black king.

11...Qe4 12 d5 Nd7! (Diagram 48)

Black would be very foolish to get involved in 12...exd5? 13 Re1 when conscientious development will ensure he gets a splendidly active position.

13 Re1 0-0-0 14 Bf1 Qg4

White's central action has run out of steam and now he must beg to be allowed a bad endgame, as otherwise 15...Nc5 and 16...exd5 will crush him.

15 Nd4 Ne5! 16 Qxg4 Rxg4 17 c3 c5!

Also not bad was the simple 17...exd5, but Knott is in no hurry. He ensures that his kingside pawns remain compact, while leaving his opponent with doubled and isolated pawns on the queenside that he can attack at his leisure.

How to Play Against 1 e4

18 dxc6 Nxc6 19 Nxc6 Bxc6 20 Rad1 Rxd1 21 Rxd1 Rg5! (Diagram 49)

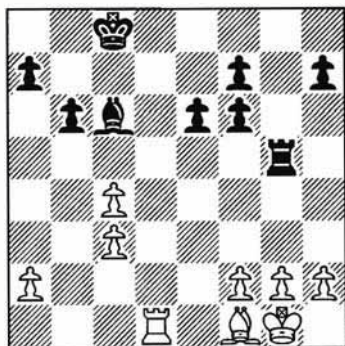


Diagram 49 (W)

A very miserable ending for White

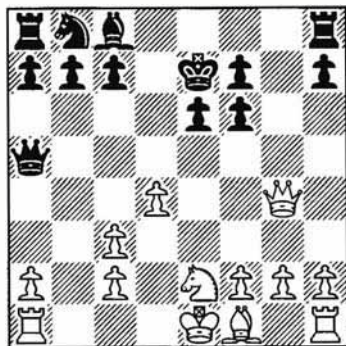


Diagram 50 (W)

Black's king is quite safe

The rook heads for a5 and then a3 in order to attack the a2- and c3-pawns at the same time.

22 f4 Ra5 23 Rd2 Ra3 24 Bd3

White's pawns can't all be defended, as after 24 Rc2 Be4 25 Re2 Bd3 the c3-pawn will drop off.

24...f5 25 h3 Rxc3 26 g4

White's attempt to gain counterplay on the kingside just leads to the loss of more pawns.

26...Be4! 27 Bf1 fxg4 28 hxg4 Rg3+ 29 Kf2 Rf3+ 30 Ke2 Rxf4 31 g5 Bb7 0-1

Game 42

□ **O.Brendel** ■ **I.Glek**

Swiss League 2004

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4 5 exd5 Qxd5 6 Bxf6 Bxc3+ 7 bxc3 gxf6 8 Qg4

An extremely aggressive attempt to refute Black's opening.

8...Qa5!

Simply 8...Qg5 can't be bad for Black, but Glek wants more from the opening. Therefore he attacks c3 in order to provoke Brendel's reply, after which he can't develop his bishop from f1 and his king has to stay in the centre.

9 Ne2 Ke7! (Diagram 50)

A multipurpose move. Black meets the threat of 10 Qg7 and 11 Qxf6 by defending the f6-pawn with his king. The automatic choice for most of us would have been 9...Nd7, but Glek wants to reserve that square for his bishop. A further point to the move is that the king is making way for the rook on h8 to enter the game, as 10 Qg7 can now be answered with 10...Rd8 11 Qxh7 Rxd4!. And to add to everything else, in some cases the white queen can be attacked by the bishop on c8 after ...e5.

10 Qe4

No longer attracted by the idea of grabbing a pawn on the kingside, the white queen wanders on to e4.

10...Bd7!

The Fort Knox approach once again. If Black is allowed to play 11...Bc6 with impunity then White's queen manoeuvres have clearly been a fiasco. He therefore grabs the pawn on b7, but this can hardly turn out well for him when he is so far behind in development.

11 Qxb7 Nc6!

After 11...Bc6?? 12 Qb4+ Qxb4 13 cxb4 Black would be fighting for a draw. Instead his strategy depends on keeping the queens on the board so that he can target the white king.



TIP: In any unbalanced position, the exchange of queens can have a dramatic effect.

12 Qb3 Rab8 13 Qc4 Rb2 (Diagram 51) 14 g3

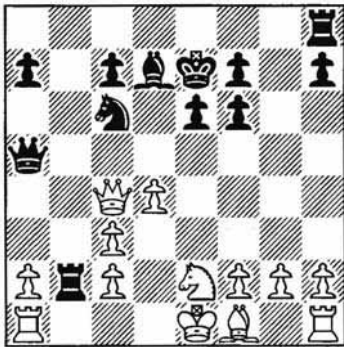


Diagram 51 (W)

An early initiative

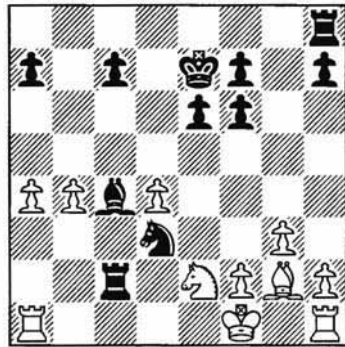


Diagram 52 (W)

The pin is too strong

Black's initiative continues after 14 Qd3 Rxa2 or 14...Rhb8.

How to Play Against 1 e4

14...Rxc2 15 Bg2

It looks as if White is going to escape with 16 0-0, but now comes a chilling surprise:

15...Ne5!!

If now 16 dxe5 Rxe2+! then 17 Kxe2 Bb5 wins the white queen, while 17 Qxe2 Qxc3+ loses the rook on a1 with check, and thirdly 17 Kf1 (the only move in the circumstances) 17...Rxe5 leaves White a pawn down with a ruined game.

16 Qb4+

So White gets to exchange queens, but the situation is very different to the notes to move 11, above. Here Black's rook is on the seventh rank and can be aided by the bishop and knight in causing havoc.

16...Qxb4 17 cxb4 Nd3+ 18 Kf1 Bb5 19 a4 Bc4 (Diagram 52) 20 Be4 f5 21 Bxd3 Bxd3 22 Re1 Rd8 23 f3 Rxd4 24 Kf2 Rxb4 0-1

I hope the exciting games in this chapter have persuaded you to make the McCutcheon part of your opening repertoire!

Chapter Six

The Tarrasch 3...Be7

- Introduction
- White Plays 4 Bd3
- White Plays 4 Ngf3 Nf6 5 e5
- White Plays 4 Ngf3 Nf6 5 Bd3
- White Plays 4 e5

Introduction

Here we look at an alternative to the Fort Knox versus 3 Nd2, namely **1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Be7 (Diagram 1)**.

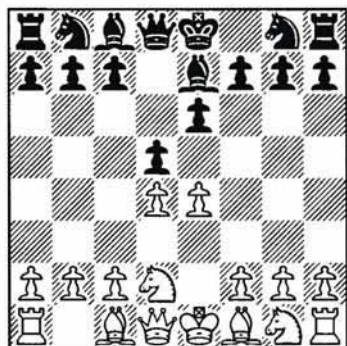


Diagram 1 (W)

A modern development

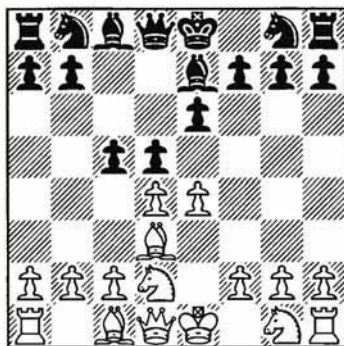


Diagram 2 (W)

Challenging White's centre

Formally speaking this is the Romanishin Variation, but most people know it simply as the Tarrasch 3...Be7.

Strategic Overview

I hope that after reading the Classical 4 e5 chapter, the very idea of putting the bishop on e7 gives you a warm glow. But then again, maybe you are wondering why exactly we should play 3...Be7 here?

A comparison with another popular move in the Tarrasch Defence might be helpful. After 3...Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 White has been able to establish his pawn centre with gain of time through hitting the black knight on f6. He can either play 5 f4 or 5 Bd3 c5 6 c3 Nc6 7 Ne2, which keeps the way clear for the f2-f4 advance. Black then typically responds 7...cxd4 8 cxd4 f6 9 exf6 Nxf6, when he has won back the f6-square for his knight, but in the process has weakened the e5-square and the e6-pawn. Because Black (very sensibly) agrees to accept these weaknesses, we don't often see White advancing f2-f4, but that was the underlying idea behind his early moves.



NOTE: In contrast, 3...Be7 doesn't allow White to play 4 e5 with gain of tempo. Therefore, White can never get a situation like in the Tarrasch 3...Nf6 where he has either played f2-f4 or kept the way clear for a future f2-f4. If White does advance e4-e5 versus 3...Be7, it won't be as part of establishing a broad centre.

Instead White will have a knight sitting on f3, blocking the f2-f4 move, and most likely his d4-pawn will have vanished from the board; or else e4-e5 will be played as part of a quick attack with Qg4. In short, 3...Be7 has struck a fatal blow against White's idea of building a big centre.

An obvious objection to 3...Be7 is that it seems to lose a tempo if White plays dxc5, as the bishop must move a second time to recapture the pawn.



TIP: Leaving aside the fact that dxc5 doesn't sound a particularly fearsome move, we should remember that Black doesn't have to recapture on c5 straightaway. In fact, in the main line suggested here he recaptures on c5 not with the bishop, but with a knight.

It is time to look at some concrete examples. White has four main methods of meeting 3...Be7. We shall begin with that which is generally regarded as the main line.

White Plays 4 Bd3

Game 43

□ S.Kristjansson ■ F.Caruana

Reykjavik 2008

1 d4 e6 2 e4 d5

That fooled you.

3 Nd2 Be7 4 Bd3

By now you will have realized that this is undoubtedly the favourite square for White's light-squared bishop in the d4/e5 versus d5/e6 pawn centre...

4...c5! (Diagram 2)

...and that this move is Black's favourite in the whole of the French. Imagine if Black had played 4...Nf6 instead, which on the face of it looks like a natural move. However, in fact it is a big strategic mistake, as White can then establish the broad f2-f4 centre we talked about above with 5 e5 Nfd7 6 f4 c5 7 c3, and then support it with 8 Ne2 and 9 Ndf3.



WARNING: This large centre has an important difference compared to the one we saw White trying to construct after 5 Nce2 in the Classical 4 e5 Variation. There White's light-squared bishop was shut in on f1, but here it is already ideally placed on d3 and so he has no need to redeploy his knight from e2.

5 dxc5

White captures on c5 in the hope of making the bishop on e7 move again, but Black refuses to fall behind in development.

5...Nf6!

Only now is the knight developed. The reply 6 e5 is strategically harmless after 6...Nfd7, as White can no longer build a centre – in fact the e5-pawn becomes a liability for him.

6 Qe2

The best move: White overprotects e4 and avoids an unwelcome simplification that occurs after 6 Ngf3 dxe4 7 Nxe4 Nxe4 8 Bxe4 Qxd1+ 9 Kxd1 Bxc5, when the white bishop can be driven away by ...Nd7 and ...Nf6, followed if possible by ...b6 and ...Ba6+. OK, I guess I'm dreaming a bit here, but Black certainly has a comfortable endgame.

It is also fruitless for White to try to hold on to the c5-pawn after 6 b4 a5! 7 c3 Nc6 (**Diagram 3**): for example, if 8 b5 Ne5 attacking d3, followed by 9...Bxc5; or 8 a3 axb4 9 cxb4 Nxb4; or finally 8 Rb1 Ne5!? 9 Bc2 dxe4 10 Nxe4 Qxd1+ 11 Kxd1 axb4 12 cxb4 Rxa2 and Black has regained the pawn with advantage.

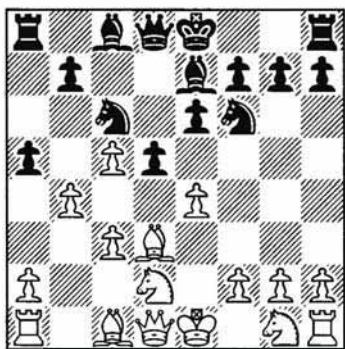


Diagram 3 (W)

Black will regain the pawn

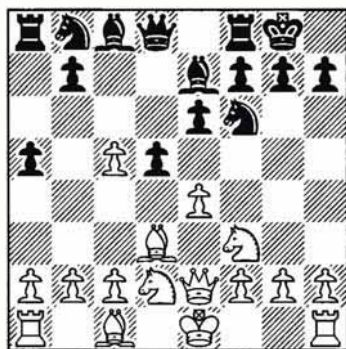


Diagram 4 (W)

Facilitating ...Na6

A third alternative is to clear the centre of pawns with 6 exd5 Qxd5 7 Nf3. This is

examined in the third theoretical section of this chapter, where it is reached via the alternative move order 3 Nd2 Be7 4 Ngf3 Nf6 5 Bd3 c5 6 exd5 Qxd5 7 dxc5.

6...0-0

Shock! Horror! Black castles before move 20! We have grown so used to Black delaying or even avoiding castling elsewhere in this book that it comes as a shock to see this eminently sensible move here. Jumping ahead, in our next section we will once again be seeing the black king performing his tricks in the centre with 15...Kd7, while in the penultimate section he chooses 15...0-0-0.



TIP: We should remember Pillsbury's advice: 'castle because you want to or because you must, not just because you can.'

7 Ngf3 a5!? (Diagram 4)

Black prevents the pawn on c5 being supported by b2-b4 and prepares to recapture it with ...Na6 and ...Nxc5, without allowing his pawns to be messed up as is the case after 7...Na6 8 Bxa6 bxa6.

8 0-0

The sharp 8 e5 Nfd7 9 h4 will be considered at the end of this game.

Instead White can try to hold onto the pawn on c5 with 8 c3 Na6 9 e5 Nd7 10 Bxa6 Rxa6 11 b4, but this is a risky strategy to say the least. Black can break out with our familiar pawn stab 11...f6! (**Diagram 5**): for example, 12 exf6 Bxf6 13 b5 (White has to act fast as both 13...Bxc3 and 13...axb4 are on the cards) 13...Ra8 and after 14 Ba3! we have:

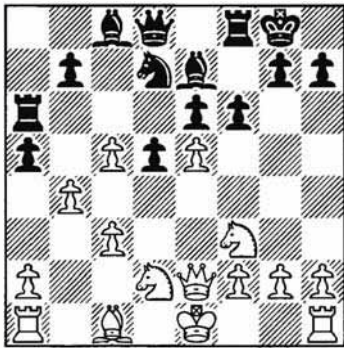


Diagram 5 (W)

White can easily lose control

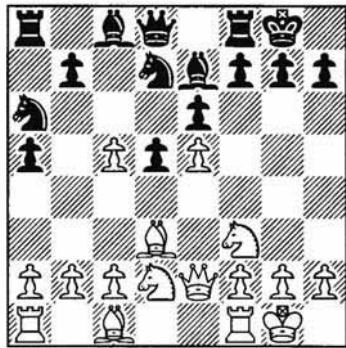


Diagram 6 (W)

Black is fairly solid

a) 14...Bxc3 15 Rc1 d4 16 0-0 leads to complications that might favour White,

How to Play Against 1 e4

S.Kudrin-Y.Shulman, Philadelphia 2008. Black, though, has many other interesting ways to handle the position.

b) I quite like the simple alternative 14...Re8!?, planning to expand in the centre after 15 0-0 with 15...e5, followed perhaps by 16...e4, 17...Ne5 and 18...Bg4 etc.

Meanwhile here's the fate that might befall White if instead he decides to grab the centre pawns with 14 Qxe6+ Kh8 15 Qxd5 (it's too late to turn back as 15 0-0 Bxc3 16 Rb1 Nxc5 is simply bad for White) 15...Qe7+ 16 Kf1 Bxc3 17 Rb1 Re8 and Black has a huge attack. He annihilated his opponent in impressive style in the following game: 18 Ba3 Qe2+ 19 Kg1 Nf6 20 Qc4 Bf5 21 Re1 (White doesn't even have time to exchange queens as 21 Qxe2 Rxe2 22 Rd1 Rd8 will win a piece) 21...Qxe1+ 22 Nxe1 Rxe1+ 23 Nf1 Rd8 24 h3 (White gets a lost endgame after 24 Qxc3 Rdd1 25 Qxe1 Rxe1 26 f3 Bd3 27 Kf2 Re2+ 28 Kg3 Bxb5 and 29...Rxa2) 24...Be5 25 f4 Bd3 26 Qa4 Rxf1+ 27 Kh2 Bxf4+ 28 g3 Rf2+ 29 Kg1 Be3 and 0-1; complete destruction in M.Nekrasov-P.Vavrak, Edmonton 2006.

Now we should return to Kristjansson-Caruana where White has just played 8 0-0:

8...Na6

All according to plan.

9 e5!

The most common move. Instead Black has a safe position he can play to win in the style of Critelli-Shulman, below, after 9 exd5 Qxd5 10 Ne4 Nxc5 11 Nxc5 Qxc5, when he is ready to play 12...b6 and 13...Bb7.

9...Nd7 (Diagram 6) 10 c3

Alternatively, White might decide to allow the exchange of his light-squared bishop in return for getting in the f2-f4 move. This can be done with 10 Nd4 Ndx5 11 f4. Here I would suggest 11...f5!? when 12 g4? would be very bad for White after 12...Nxd3 13 cxd3 (or 13 Qxd3 Nb4) 13...Qb6. After the solid and preferable 12 N2f3 Black could choose between 12...Ne4!? 13 Be3 Nac5 and 12...Bd7 13 Be3 Nb4 14 a3 Nbx3 15 cxd3 a4, with a reasonable game in either case.

10...Naxc5 11 Bc2

White has made an escape route for his bishop to avoid the positionally unfavourable exchange on d3.

11...b6!

This won't be the last time in this chapter that we see Black solve the problem of his bad bishop with ...b6. But here it is particularly effective, as White's rook on f1 and queen both feel obliged to escape the attentions of the newcomer on a6.

12 Re1 Ba6 13 Qe3 f6!

In Chapter Four we extolled this method of undermining the centre when White has been amiss with his development. Here the concealed weakness of the f2-square and the fact that White's bishop on c1 is shut in supply the positional justi-

fication for Black's ambitious move.

14 b4!

The critical response. Instead 14 exf6 Bxf6 is at least OK for Black, such as after 15 Nd4 Re8 16 Qh3 g6 when he can even expand in the centre with 17...e5.

14...fxe5! (Diagram 7)

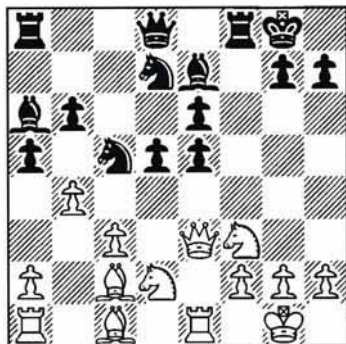


Diagram 7 (W)

The struggle sharpens

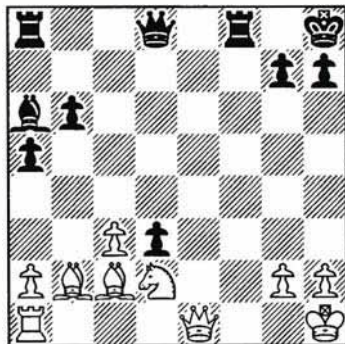


Diagram 8 (W)

White is in trouble

15 Nxe5

Taking on c5 is a blunder: 15 bxc5? Bxc5 16 Qg5 Qxg5 (or even 16...Bxf2+, as 17 Kxf2 Qxg5 pockets the queen) 17 Nxc5 Bxf2+ 18 Kh1 Bxe1 and White has lost a lot of material.

15...Nxe5 16 bxc5 Bxc5 17 Qxe5 Bxf2+ 18 Kh1 Bxe1 19 Qxe6+?

Too greedy. Black has a rook and two pawns for a knight and bishop after 19 Qxe1!, but the main fight would still be ahead. If, for example, 19...d4 in the style of the game, then 20 Ba3!? is far from clear. Alternative moves for Black would be 19...e5 or 19...Qf6, but none promise more than the chance to fight for the initiative.

19...Kh8 20 Qxe1 d4!

The open e-file adds a vital boost to this move as 21 Ba3 Re8 saves the rook and attacks the white queen, with an invasion to follow similar to the game.

21 Bb2 d3 (Diagram 8)

Caruana is now in his element and quickly sweeps away his opponent.

22 Bd1 Qg5 23 Nf3 Rae8! 24 Qf2 d2!

How to Play Against 1 e4

The themes of Black's attack include: back rank mates on either the e-file or f-file with the rooks, pressure against g2 and f3 involving all the pieces, and the strong passed pawn.

25 Ba4 Re2 26 Qg1 Qe7 27 c4 Bb7 28 Rf1 Re1! 29 Bd1 Rxf3! 30 gxf3 Rxd1 0-1

A catastrophe follows on f3. A superb final attack.

The Greek Gift revisited

In the Classical 4 e5 chapter, we briefly discussed the so-called Greek Gift sacrifice. As explained there, the basic mechanism is that White plays the sacrifice Bxh7+, then Ng5+ and Qh5, with Black being unable to reply ...Nf6 to cover the h7-square.

Here we shall examine the Greek Gift in a more sophisticated form, as the white rook can get in on the act.

Game 44

□ E.Rozentalis ■ F.Vallejo Pons

Calvia Olympiad 2004

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Be7 4 Bd3 c5 5 dxc5 Nf6 6 Qe2 0-0 7 Ngf3 a5

Thus far we've followed the game Kristjansson-Caruana, but now White tried something very aggressive:

8 e5 Nfd7 9 h4 (Diagram 9)

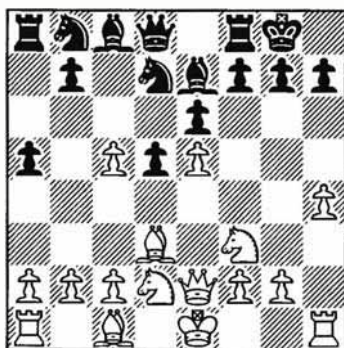


Diagram 9 (B)

White has a certain threat!

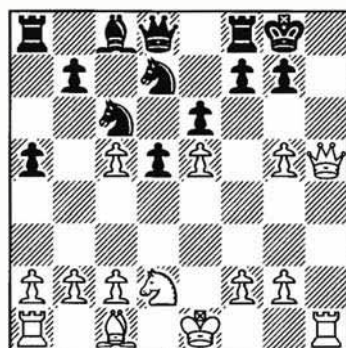


Diagram 10 (B)

The Greek Gift is decisive

If Black now plays the obvious 9...Nc6, completing his development, he will be struck down by 10 Bxh7+! Kxh7 11 Ng5+ which leaves him with a dismal choice:

a) Going forwards does nothing for the black king's health. After 11...Kh6 12 Ndf3 he will be ripped apart by the discovered check 13 Nxe6+, unless he staggers on with 12...Kg6 when there is a rather cute mate with 13 h5+ Kf5 14 Nh4.

b) Or if at once 11...Kg6 then 12 h5+ Kxg5 (12...Kh6 13 Ndf3) 13 Nb1+ Kf5 and a commoner assassinates the king with 14 g4 mate.

c) 11...Bxg5 12 hxg5+ Kg6 (12...Kg8 13 Qh5 transposes to variation 'd') 13 Qh5+ and the black king is soon mated after 13...Kf5. In fact White can indulge in some party tricks to find the nicest mate, which might be 14 Qh7+ Kxg5 (or 14...Kxe5 15 Nf3 mate) 15 Nf3+ Kg4 16 Nh2 mate.

d) Entirely hopeless too is 11...Kg8 in view of 12 Qh5 Bxg5 (or 12...Re8 13 Qh7+ Kf8 14 Qh8 mate) 13 hxg5 (**Diagram 10**) 13...f6 (the only way to stop mate on h8 is to create air on f7 – 13...f5 leads to the same thing) 14 g6! (sealing off the escape hatch) and mate on h7 or h8 can't be averted.

It would be embarrassing to lose in 14 moves playing for your country, and so rather than 9...Nc6? Vallejo Pons played:

9...h6!

This rules out 10 Bxh7+. Now if White were bloody-minded he could continue with 10 Ng5 when 10...hxg5?? (Black has just played to keep the h-file closed with 9...h6, so it is plain stupid to open it) 11 Bh7+! is a curious reversal of the usual Greek Gift moves Bxh7+ and Ng5. Now after 11...Kxh7 (or 10...Kh8 11 Qh5 Re8 12 Bg6+ and mate in two moves) 12 Qh5+ Kg8 13 hxg5 here we are again, with the black king mated after 13...f6 14 g6.

However, there is of course no rule in chess that says that you have to accept a piece offer. True, 9...Nc6 10 Bxh7+ was lethal whether or not it was accepted, but 9...h6 10 Ng5 is a milder affair. Indeed, Black can ignore it and get on with his development with 10...Nc6 (**Diagram 11**).

Then White is looking overextended on the kingside – he has no breakthrough there and his centre is under defended.

Having provoked 9...h6, which creates a 'hook' on g5 for a pawn advance, White might have tried 10 g4. This would be best met by 10...Nxc5! 11 g5 Nxd3+ eliminating the dangerous white bishop. Then after 12 Qxd3 Black can block the kingside with 12...h5! when 13 g6 Nc6 sees him take over the initiative.

Instead Rozentalis lost confidence in his attacking plan:

10 c3 Nxc5 11 Bc2 f5!

An important move. White has to either submit to the shutting of the b1-h7 diagonal, with a further humiliation looming with ...Ne4, or else concede his strong pawn on e5, which allows Black freedom to expand in the centre.

12 exf6 Bxf6 13 Ne5 Bxe5 14 Qxe5 Nc6 15 Qg3 e5 (Diagram 12)

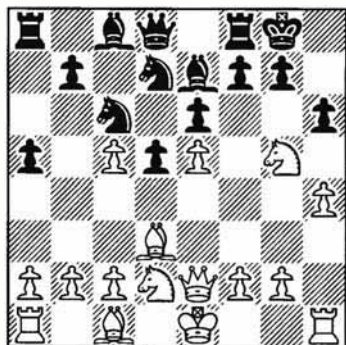


Diagram 11 (W)

Wisely declining the knight

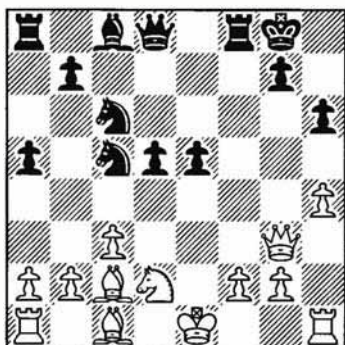


Diagram 12 (W)

Black has seized the initiative

Black has a good game and went on to win in splendid attacking style. The remaining moves were: 16 Nb3 Nxb3 17 Bxb3 Rf6 18 a4 Be6 19 0-0 Qb6 20 Bc2 Raf8 21 Bd3 Kh8 22 Bb5 Bf5 23 Bxc6 Rg6 24 Qxe5 Be4 25 g3 bxc6 26 Bf4 Rg4 27 Qc7 Qxb2 28 Bd6 Qxc3 29 Rae1 Rxf2 30 Qc8+ Kh7 31 Qxg4 Rg2+ 32 Kh1 Re2+ 0-1

The best trap in the world?

Although it isn't part of your repertoire (thank goodness!), I can't help showing you the following curious trap.

Game 45

□ M.Mahjoob ■ K.Chernyshov

Abu Dhabi 2004

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Be7 4 Bd3 dxe4

You should play 4...c5 here, as the Fort Knox and the Tarrasch 3...Be7 don't really mix.

5 Nxe4 Nf6 6 Nf3 Nxe4 7 Bxe4 Nd7 8 Qe2 Nf6??

Black, with an Elo rating of 2585, played this obvious, natural and automatic move to chase back the white bishop as a preliminary to ...0-0, ...b6 and ...Bb7.



WARNING: Positionally speaking it is a thoroughly good move; but no move, no matter how strategically desirable, should be played if it fails the tactical test.

Black should have castled first with 8...0-0 and only then played 9...Nf6.

9 Bxb7!! (Diagram 13)

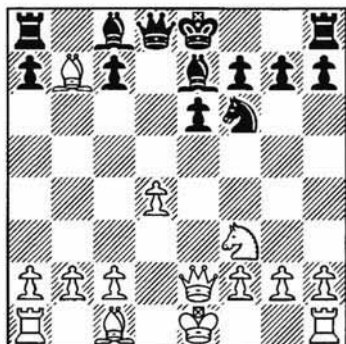


Diagram 13 (B)

A pawn drops off

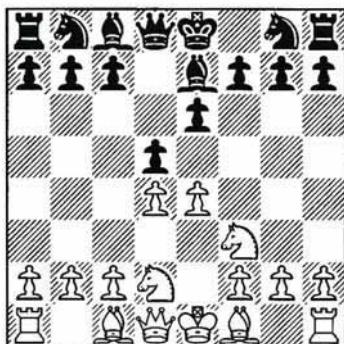


Diagram 14 (B)

Natural development

The point. White steals a pawn in broad daylight.

9...Bxb7 10 Qb5+ Qd7 11 Qxb7 0-0 12 Qa6 c5 13 dxc5 Bxc5 14 0-0 Rab8 15 Qe2

The former British Champion Bill Hartston once quipped that it was one of the mysteries of chess that a player *always* gets some sort of compensation for a pawn, even when he has lost it as an outright blunder. Here, however, any compensation is very meagre indeed. The open b-file doesn't bring Black any joy, as if Black is going to create any counterplay it is where he has a pawn majority, which is on the kingside.

Grandmaster Chernyshov battled on with **15...Rfe8 16 b3 e5 17 Be3 Bf8 18 Rfd1 Qc7 19 c4 Ng4 20 h3 Nxe3 21 Qxe3 f5**, but couldn't undo the damage and resigned at move 46.

The latest victim of 9 Bxb7! that I know about was in Norway a couple of weeks before writing this. It's pretty lethal as White has scored 13.5/15 in recent games – Black scraped a draw and actually won once when an IM fell for the trap against an amateur who must have been kicking himself for letting his opponent escape. It's a difficult tactic to see, though, as Paul Keres, one of the top players in the

world for 25 years, failed to spot it when playing White and dutifully retreated his bishop with 9 Bd3, although being Keres he still later won with a big attack.

White Plays 4 Ngf3 Nf6 5 e5

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Be7 4 Ngf3 (Diagram 14)

A natural developing move that is a prelude to seizing space in the centre.

4...Nf6

Black takes the chance to develop his knight before it is prevented with 5 e5.

5 e5

The alternative 5 Bd3 is the subject of our next section.

5...Nfd7 6 Bd3 c5

I hope by now you are familiar with this way of undermining the white centre.

7 c3

At the time of writing, this position is often reached in international tournaments. It can lead to huge complications: for example, 7...Nc6 8 0-0 g5!? (**Diagram 15**) is just one sharp test of your nerves (and theoretical knowledge).

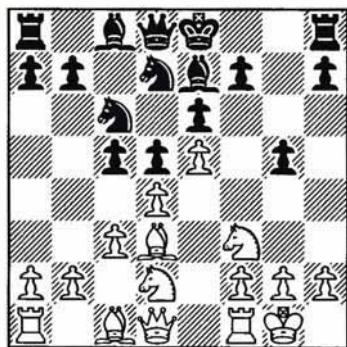


Diagram 15 (W)

There are safer approaches...

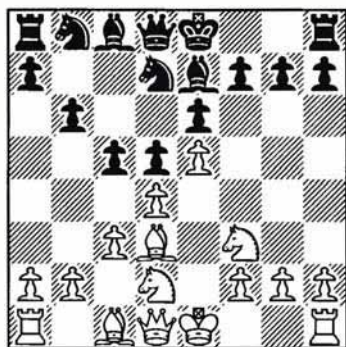


Diagram 16 (W)

...including this sensible one

I'm going to suggest that you avoid all this by playing a solid and respectable line that is the current favourite of GM Ian Nepomniachtchi (my apologies to him by the way for frequently shortening his name to 'Nepo'). The Russian star plays

7...b6!? (**Diagram 16**) with the idea of ...Ba6, exchanging off White's light-squared bishop. As this is also our plan in the Advance chapter, you shouldn't find it too difficult to understand the kind of positions that arise.

Let's look at one of Nepo's best games.

Game 46

□ Z.Andriasian ■ I.Nepomniachtchi

Kirishi 2007

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Be7 4 Ngf3 Nf6 5 e5 Nfd7 6 Bd3

Instead of 6 c3 c5 7 Be2 we can continue as planned with 7...b6 8 0-0 Ba6. However, 6 c4!? with an immediate attack on the black centre is tricky. French devotee Smbat Lputian tried 6...dxc4 in Mahjoob-S.Lputian, Yerevan 2001. The game went 7 Bxc4 (or 7 Nxc4 Nb6 8 Nxb6 axb6 and the fact that a piece has been exchanged off eases the congestion in the black position: 9 Bd3 Bd7 10 0-0 Bc6 11 Re1 Bd5 12 Be3 Nc6 13 a3 0-0 14 Nd2 f5! and Black had no problems in P.Svidler-Y.Visser, Groningen 1990) 7...Nb6 8 Bd3 Bd7 9 0-0 Bc6 (**Diagram 17**) 10 Re1 Bd5 11 Bc2 Nc6 and Black's play was a cross between the Fort Knox and the Advance 3...b6 system.



Diagram 17 (W)

Fort Knox-like development

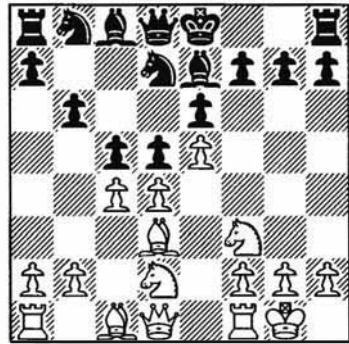


Diagram 18 (B)

To be avoided

He could be proud of the d5-square, but otherwise he was slightly constricted. It's interesting to see the method by which Lputian restrained his opponent and then created active play of his own: 12 Ne4 Qd7 13 a3 a5!? (to stop White expanding with 14 b4) 14 b3 0-0-0 15 Bb2 Kb8 16 Rc1 Qe8 (the queen heads for f8 where she can support the ...f5 stab that we saw in the Visser extract) 17 Bd3 Qf8. Now 18

How to Play Against 1 e4

Ra1 f5! is good for Black, so Mahjoob played 18 Nc5, but was outwitted in the melee that followed: 18...Bxc5 19 dxc5 Nd7 20 b4 axb4 21 axb4 Nxb4 22 Ba3 Bxf3 23 Qxf3 Nxe5 24 Rxe5 Rxd3 25 Qe4 Rxa3 26 Qxb4 Ra7 and Black consolidated his extra pawn and eventually won.

6...c5 7 c3

An important alternative is 7 0-0!?



WARNING: By delaying c2-c3, White makes the plan of ...b6 and ...Ba6 less attractive: 7...b6?! 8 c4! (Diagram 18) and the situation in the centre is too unstable for Black's liking when he is two moves behind in development – he wants the white c-pawn to take two moves, not one, to reach c4.

A solid alternative for Black is 7...cxd4, taking the chance to break up the white centre, when after 8 Nb3 Nc6 9 Re1 h6 (a precaution as after 9...Nc5 White can try the double-edged 10 Nxc5 Bxc5 11 Ng5!?) 10 Nbx4 Nc5 an attempt by White to force matters with 11 c4? fails: 11...Nxd3 12 Qxd3 Nb4 13 Qc3 dxc4 14 Qxc4 Bd7 15 Bd2 Rc8 16 Qb3 Qb6 and Black was doing well with active pieces and the bishop-pair in Z.Severiukhina-L.Mkrtchian, Sochi 2006.

7...b6 8 0-0

After 8 Qe2, trying to avoid the exchange of bishops, Black can nevertheless play 8...a5 9 0-0 Ba6 (Diagram 19).

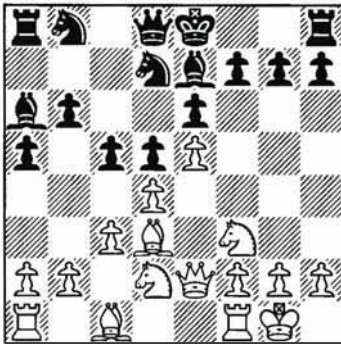


Diagram 19 (W)

Forcing the bishops off

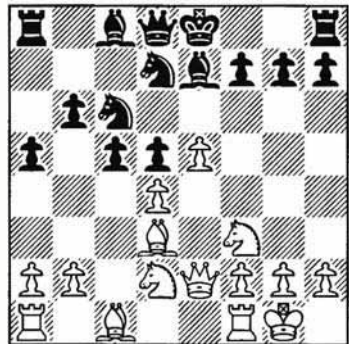


Diagram 20 (B)

Where should the d7-knight go?

Then if things proceed in the style of the main game, the move ...a5 is useful as part of Black's queenside pawn advance, whereas Qe2 looks of less value for

White. The subsequent attempt to play actively in the centre would also achieve less than nothing for White after 10 c4 Nc6! (an excellent move as the knight lands on the active d5-square after a couple of exchanges) 11 cxd5 Bxd3 12 Qxd3 Nb4 13 Qe2 Nxd5 14 Nc4 0-0 15 b3 cxd4 16 Nxd4 Bc5 17 Bb2 a4 with an attacking set-up for Black, who already threatened to win a piece with 18...a4 in D.Kalashian-I.Nepomniachtchi, Belfort 2005.

More incisive for White here is 9 c4, but Black responded with a noteworthy knight manoeuvre in the following game: 9...Nc6 10 cxd5 exd5 11 0-0 (**Diagram 20**) and now 11...Nf8! heads for e6 to restrain White's advance e5-e6. At the same time the way is cleared for the light-squared bishop to be activated: 12 dxc5 bxc5 13 Rd1 Ne6 14 Nf1 Ned4 15 Nxd4 Nxd4 16 Qe3 Bg4! and Black was OK in F.Caruana-I.Farago, Budapest 2007.

We now return to the immediate 8 0-0:

8...Ba6

Shades of the Advance Variation, where 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 b6 and then 4...Ba6 is one of the recommended lines.

9 Bxa6 Nxa6

Black is delighted to have been able to exchange off a bishop which had few prospects for its opposite number on d3, which was the best minor piece on the board. Of course, it has cost him time; both in the fact that he has spent a move on ...b6 and will also have to re-route the knight back from a6 to the centre. Still, as we have said in earlier chapters, in a blocked position rapid development isn't a priority. It is better to spend time getting things right from a strategic point of view rather than rushing to get the pieces out. And no one can deny that the exchange of light-squared bishops is a big achievement for Black.

10 Re1 b5! (Diagram 21)

Here 10...0-0 is an obvious move, but if you are expecting Black to castle you are going to be waiting a long time. As we will see in the King's Indian Attack chapter, there is no reason why White should be presented with a target on g8 which he can use as the guiding light for his plan of a kingside attack. Instead Nepo gets on with his queenside attack, and leaves his opponent to puzzle out what he is meant to be doing.

11 Qe2?!

And it is by no means easy for White to deduce what his plan should be in this type of pawn structure – in the Advance chapter we even saw Kasparov going astray. Instead if 11 Nf1, then 11...b4, immediately undermining the c3-pawn, looks good for Black. However, the queen move wastes time as if White wanted to deter ...b4 he had available the immediate 11 a3, after which he could start action on the kingside with 12 Nf1. Of course, Black could still play 11...c4, as in the main game.

How to Play Against 1 e4

11...c4 12 a3 Nc7

The knight returns to the centre and clears the way for ...a5, though surprisingly enough the pawn advance is never required of Black.

13 Nf1 Nb6 14 g3

White begins a tentative pawn advance of his own on the kingside.

14...h6

The beginning of a manoeuvre that has been known in similar situations for a long time, but that I still find remarkable.

15 h4 (Diagram 22)

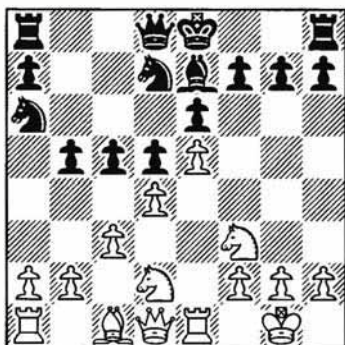


Diagram 21 (W)

Beginning a queenside offensive

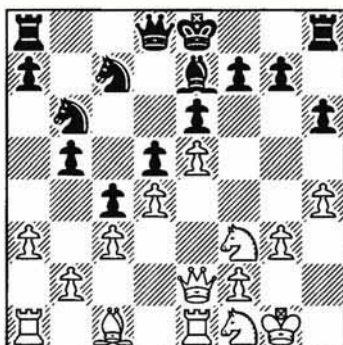


Diagram 22 (B)

Where to put the king?

If now 15...0-0 White could build up an attack with 16 N3h2, with ideas of Qh5 and Ng4, planning a sacrifice on h6 similar to that seen in the first game of our next chapter. In that case, 14...h6 would be exposed as a serious weakening of the black king's defences. However, if we imagine the pawn is still on h7 for a moment, White would still have an attack after Black castled with Ng5 intending Qh5, when if Black played ...h6 to force the knight to retreat, Nh3 and Qh5 would again set up ideas of a sacrifice on h6.



NOTE: It's clear that castling kingside plays into White's hands, whether or not Black has played ...h6. Thus Nepo decides it is better to castle his queen!

15...Kd7!!

And why not? The king is far safer on d7, where everything is blocked and he has

a couple of knights to help defend him, than on the kingside where White has open lines and a big advantage in firepower available to him.

16 N3h2 Qg8

The point of Black's last move. The way has been cleared for the queen to go to h7, where she not only helps bolster the kingside against any attack by Qg4, but even more importantly controls the longest open diagonal on the whole board.

17 Nd2 Qh7 (Diagram 23)

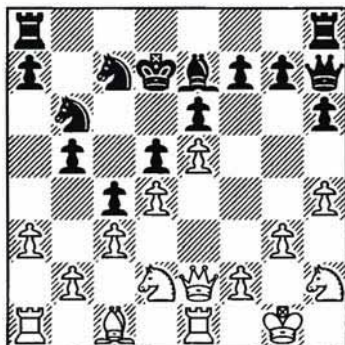


Diagram 23 (W)

A further instructive manoeuvre

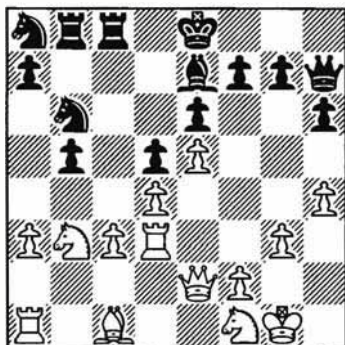


Diagram 24 (W)

The knights head for a4 and c4

Now White really misses his light-squared bishop.

18 b3??

Of course it is easy to criticize this move, which leaves the a3- and c3-pawns weak and creates a horrendous hole on the c4-square. Perhaps Andriasian was afraid of an attack with ...g5, and so wanted to deflect his opponent with some queenside action, but 18 Ndf1 was a far better move, as 18...g5? could be answered by 19 h5, when Black has done nothing but weaken himself. In fact, ...g5 would in principle be a strategic mistake by Black, whose minor pieces are too far away to make a kingside attack work. Instead, he should be trying to increase his queenside pressure with an eventual ...a5 and ...b4.

By playing 18 b3? White is doing a lot of his opponent's work for him, as Nepo no longer needs to arrange ...a5 and ...b4 to open lines. Instead after 18 Ndf1, White could in time have tried to engineer the f4-f5 pawn advance, such as with Ne3, Rf1 and f2-f4, leading to a complex battle between pawn advances on both wings.

18...cxb3 19 Nxb3 Rhc8

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The rook heads straight for the c-file to attack the backward c3-pawn. Here we see another benefit of the manoeuvre 15...Kd7, 16...Qg8 and 17...Qh7 – it has cleared the way for the rook on h8 to take an active role in the game (no skulking on h8 which was often its fate in the McCutcheon chapter).

20 Rd1 Ke8 21 Rd3

White no longer has a constructive plan and can only defend in the hope that his opponent will mishandle the eventual breakthrough.

21...Rab8 22 Nf1 Nca8 (Diagram 24)

An elegant move. Black wants one of his knights sitting in the hole on a4 and the other one sitting in the hole on c4.

23 Ne3 Na4 24 Nd1 N8b6 25 f3 Rc7

Black doesn't rush to play 25...Nc4 as then the knight would block the attack on c3.

26 Kg2 Rbc8 27 Bd2 a6 28 Ra2 Qg8 29 Na1 Nc4 30 Bc1 Qh7 31 Nb3

A highly instructive moment. White's pieces are completely tied down, whereas all the black pieces are seemingly on their optimum squares. Nevertheless, despite his probing, no decisive breakthrough has presented itself to Nepo. Moreover, if he advances with ...a5 and ...b4 the a4-knight will be left hanging after axb4.

Nepo realizes that he can only solve the conundrum by bringing his queen back over the board to c6, where she defends the knight on a4 and adds pressure along the c-file, thereby giving the ...a5 and ...b4 breakthrough the extra strength it needs. In other words, the queen may be well placed on h7, but it is only when her power is joined more directly to that of the other pieces on the queenside that Black can win the game.



TIP: Like any other group sport, chess requires team work from its players!

31...Kf8!

First of all the black king has to slide to h8 so that it doesn't get in the way of the queen.

32 Kh2 Kg8 33 Na1 Na5 34 Bd2 Kh8 35 Nc2 Nc4 36 Bc1 Qg8! (Diagram 25)

Beginning the long journey back.

37 Nb4 a5 38 Nc2 Qe8 39 Kh3 Ncb6 40 Bd2 Qc6 41 Nce3 Nc4 42 f4?

Making things easy for Black. He had to play 42 Bc1 to hold on to the a3-pawn, although Nepo would be ready to open lines, perhaps with the immediate 42...b4!? when the bishop on c1 would become a target.

42...Nxa3 43 g4 b4 44 cxb4 axb4 45 f5

This type of breakthrough should have been White's aim 20 moves ago. Here it is too late as Black's passed pawn decides matters on the queenside.

45...Qb5 46 f6 b3 47 Rxa3 Bxa3 48 fxg7+ Kxg7 49 Nf5+ Kf8 50 Qe3 exf5 51 Qxh6+ Ke8 52 Rf3 Qe2 53 Rxf5 Qxd1 0-1

If 54 Qh8+ Bf8, while after 54 e6 Rc3+ the white king is going to be butchered first.

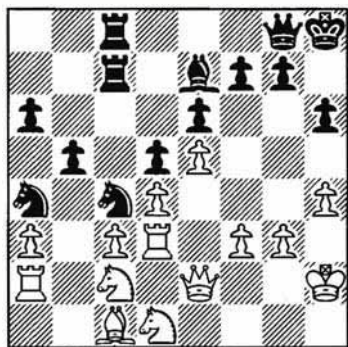


Diagram 25 (W)

Deft handling of Black's royalty

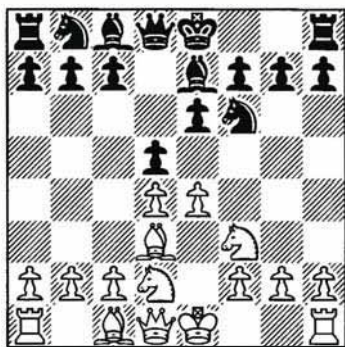


Diagram 26 (B)

Maintaining the central tension

White Plays 4 Ngf3 Nf6 5 Bd3

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Be7 4 Ngf3 Nf6 5 Bd3 (Diagram 26)

We should first of all note the possible transpositions after the reply 5...c5:

- White can transpose back to Andriasian-Nepomniachtchi in our last section with 6 e5 Nfd7 7 c3 b6.
- However, 6 exd5 is something different. After 6...Qxd5 7 dxc5 Nbd7 we have a position that can be reached by two distinct move orders:
 - 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Be7 4 Ngf3 Nf6 5 Bd3 c5 6 exd5 Qxd5 7 dxc5 Nbd7; and
 - 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Be7 4 Bd3 c5 5 dxc5 Nf6 6 exd5 Qxd5 7 Ngf3 Nbd7.

Game 47

□ J.Critelli ■ Y.Shulman

Philadelphia 2008

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Be7 4 Ngf3 Nf6 5 Bd3 c5 6 exd5?!

I must say this move leaves me completely underwhelmed. How can White hope

How to Play Against 1 e4

for advantage when all the central pawns disappear, he has no significant lead in development and there are no obvious targets in the black camp? I guess I'm answering my own question: White is hoping for a draw against his very strong opponent, and killing off the tension in the position is one way to try to achieve it.

6...Qxd5 7 dxc5 Nbd7! (Diagram 27)

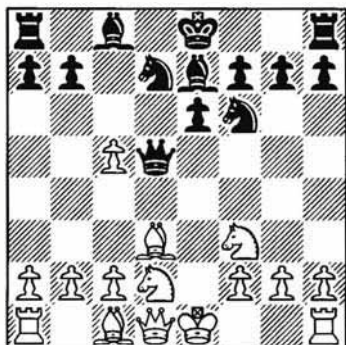


Diagram 27 (W)

...Nxc5 is again the best recapture

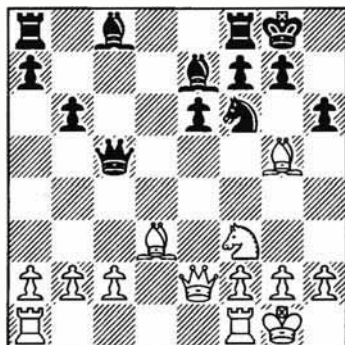


Diagram 28 (W)

A major blunder

Very astutely Black decides to recapture on c5 with his knight.

8 Nb3 Nxc5 9 Nxc5 Qxc5

Already Shulman has got rid of the passive knight on b8. His next aim is to solve the problem of the bad bishop on c8.

10 0-0 0-0 11 Qe2 b6 12 Ng5?!

Time-wasting play.

Imagine if White had played 12 Bg5 here and Black had decided to kick the bishop with 12...h6?? (**Diagram 28**).

In that case White can win a piece with 13 Bxf6 Bxf6 14 Qe4! with the double threat of mate on h7 and 15 Qxa8. I once watched a girl fall for this trap in a simul given at a European Junior Championship by Karpov – it was her birthday and a big crowd of spectators were cheering her every move, but the applause stopped suddenly after ...h6. (Now that's what you call a knowledgeable audience!)

Instead of 12...h6, which would be a weak move anyway even if it didn't lose a rook, Black should simply develop with 12...Bb7. Then it is White who has to watch out for the tactical threat of 13...Bxf3, removing the defender of the bishop on g5.



WARNING: All moves, no matter how obvious, should be checked – Capablanca.

12...Bb7

You might have read about the value of a queenside pawn majority in books on chess strategy, but that tends to be in the endgame. Here Black's 4-3 pawn majority on the kingside is of more use than White's 3-2 on the queenside, as the 'extra' pawn on e6 prevents White achieving any counterplay along the e-file with his queen and rooks, while also controlling the d5- and f5-squares.

13 Ne4 Qd5 14 Nxf6+ Bxf6 15 f3 Rfd8 (Diagram 29)

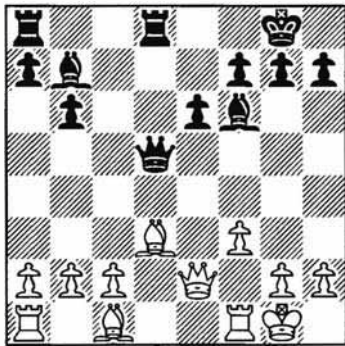


Diagram 29 (W)

Black is pretty comfortable

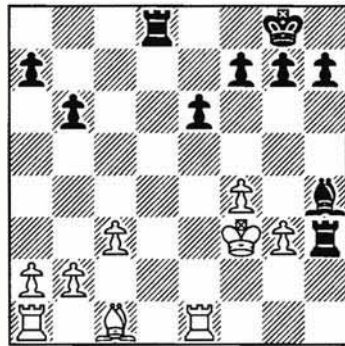


Diagram 30 (W)

White's king won't survive

As I said above, White may have played this simplifying variation against his much higher-rated opponent in the hope of achieving a steady draw, but in fact these are the type of positions in which it is easy to be outplayed. Already in his rush to exchange off knights Critelli has lost control of the d-file, and things grow worse when he hurries to exchange off the bishops as well.

16 Be4 Qe5 17 c3 Rd7 18 Re1 Bxe4 19 Qxe4 Qxe4 20 Rxe4

White doesn't want to be left with an isolated pawn on e4, but allowing the black rook to invade on d1 is fatal.

20...Rd1+ 21 Kf2 Rh1 22 f4

Or 22 h3 Rd8 and the other rook enters on d1, in view of 23 Re1 Bh4+.

22...Rd8 23 Re1 Bh4+ 24 g3 Rxh2+ 25 Kf3 Rh3! (Diagram 30)

Ensuring a pretty end to a game that might have been routine after 25...Bf6.

26 Kg4

How to Play Against 1 e4

White is suddenly winning a piece, but his joy doesn't last long.

26...Rxg3+ 27 Kxh4 Rdd3

Threatening mate in two beginning with 28...Rh3+.

28 Rh1 f5!

The point; Black's pawns will weave a mating net around the white king.

29 b3 h6 30 Ba3 Rg4+ 0-1

After 31 Kh5 Black could even showboat with 31...Rh3+ 32 Rxh3 Kh7 and 33...g6 mate.

White plays 4 e5

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Be7 4 e5 (Diagram 31)

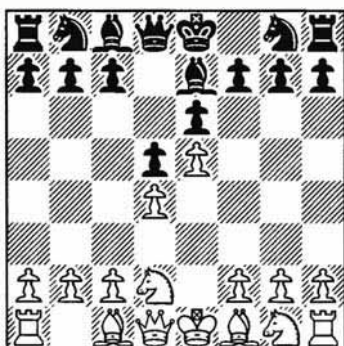


Diagram 31 (B)

Immediately closing the centre

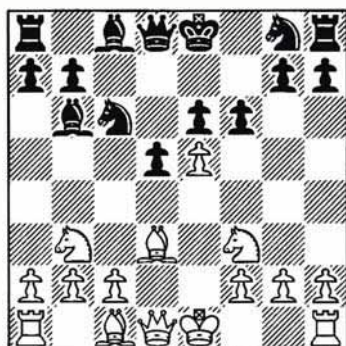


Diagram 32 (W)

A typical undermining

White fixes the centre and takes away the f6-square from the black knight as a prelude to putting his queen on g4. Less effective would be the immediate 4 Qg4, as after 4...Nf6 5 Qxg7 Rg8 6 Qh6 dxe4 Black has ample counterplay to compensate for his loss of kingside castling. The game might continue 7 Qe3 Nc6 8 c3 Qd5 9 Ne2 (or 9 Bc4 Qf5) 9...e5! 10 dxe5 Qxe5, etc.

4...c5

Our beloved French move. White can now hold his centre intact with 5 c3, but it doesn't promise much if Black responds actively: 5...cxd4 6 cxd4 Nc6 7 Ndf3 (Black could try for the initiative after 7 Ngf3 with 7...Qb6 8 Nb3 a5! etc) 7...Bb4+

(not giving White time for a smooth build-up with Bd3 and Ne2) 8 Bd2 Qa5 9 Ne2 Bxd2+ 10 Qxd2 Qxd2+ 11 Kxd2 f6 and Black was fine in the endgame in V.Korchnoi-N.Short, Wijk aan Zee 2000.

Also ineffective for White is 5 dxc5 Nc6 6 Ngf3 Bxc5 7 Nb3 Bb6 8 Bd3 f6! (**Diagram 32**), disposing of the e5-pawn, after which Black gains the f6-square for his knight, opens the f-file for his rook and frees his central pawns to conquer space in the centre: 9 Qe2 fxe5 10 Nxe5 Nf6 11 0-0 Nxe5 12 Qxe5 0-0 13 Bg5 Bc7 14 Qd4 h6 15 Bh4 e5 saw Black achieve as much as he could expect from the opening, and he went on to win a double-edged fight in M.Adams-A.Morozevich, Dortmund 2001.

The best move for White is 5 Qg4! (**Diagram 33**), which hits the g7-pawn in McCutcheon style. Now Black can play 5...g6, a solid move which, however, weakens the dark squares somewhat. Alternatively, 5...Kf8!? defends g7 and gets the king away from a potential Bb5 pin. The downside is that Black renounces castling and his king may become a target once he seeks counterplay with ...f6. Nonetheless, at the time of writing, 5...Kf8 is the most common move and has been played with success by Radjabov and others.

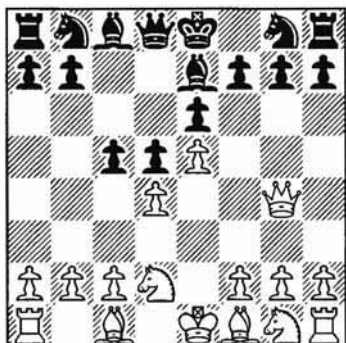


Diagram 33 (B)

The queen's most active square

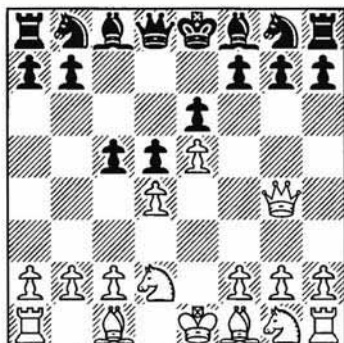


Diagram 34 (W)

Calm play from Black

However, I'm going to recommend something else, namely: 5...Bf8!? (**Diagram 34**), which sees the bishop returns home. I think this move has been unjustly neglected. After all, the not too dissimilar idea of retreating the bishop after 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 b6 5 Qg4 Bf8 has been used by players such as Petrosian, Bronstein, Korchnoi, Portisch, Andersson, Timman, Lputian, Psakhis, Beliavsky, Gulko, Vaganian and Short!

The concept of answering 5 Qg4 with 5...Bf8 certainly isn't ridiculous. The white

How to Play Against 1 e4

queen went to g4 in the hope of feasting on the g7-pawn, and with that denied she might find herself misplaced and/or a target, or so Black hopes. The big question is whether Black will be able to restrain the potential energy of the white pieces, since after 4...c5 the centre has become slightly destabilized (whereas in the 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5 b6 5 Qg4 Bf8 variation the centre remains firmly closed).

The fact that 5...Bf8 is little explored means that Black comes armed with the weapon of surprise. Let's see what might happen when White is suitably bemused by the retreat.

Game 48

□ P.Malysheva ■ A.Riazantsev

Biel 2004

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Be7 4 e5 c5 5 Qg4 Bf8 6 Ndf3

The alternative is 6 dxc5! makes a lot of sense. An instructive game went 6...Qc7! (I think this early queen move is an important part of Black's set-up) 7 Ngf3 Nd7 8 Nb3 (perhaps White should have settled for dominance of the d4-square with 8 Bb5 Qxc5 9 Nd4 a6 10 Bxd7+ Bxd7, but it's nothing special for him) 8...Nxe5 9 Nxe5 Qxe5+ 10 Be3 Bd7 11 0-0-0 Nf6 12 Qb4 b6 13 Qd4 Qc7 14 cxb6 axb6 15 Kb1 b5 and Black had taken over the initiative and came within a whisker of winning against a player rated over 2600 in I.Khamrakulov-J.Lopez Martinez, Ayamonte 2007.

If instead 6 Ngf3 then 6...Qc7 (that move again!) 7 dxc5 Nd7 transposes to 6 dxc5.

6...h5 (Diagram 35)

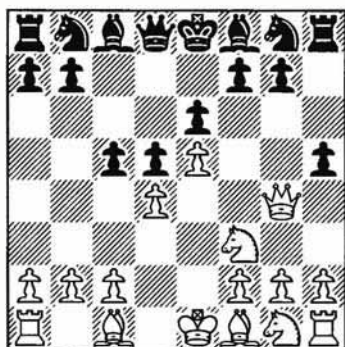


Diagram 35 (W)

Not letting the queen settle

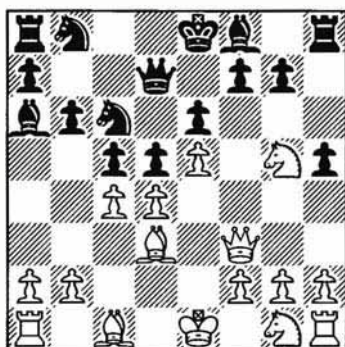


Diagram 36 (W)

Black is already somewhat better

With the idea that if the white queen goes to g3, as in the game, she can be harassed with ...Ne7 and ...Nf5; whereas if she goes to f4, then the pressure is off g7 and the bishop on f8 will be free to move again. Nonetheless, I prefer 6...Qc7!? in the style of the Khamrakulov game: for example, 7 c4? Nc6 and the white centre collapses, or 7 dxc5 Nd7 when both c5 and e5 are hanging and 8 Bb5? loses a piece to 8...Qa5+.

7 Qg3

I prefer 7 Qf4 here.

7...Ne7 8 Bd3 b6 9 c4?

This isn't as bad as 9 Ne2?? c4 and our very old friend the Noah's Ark Trap has struck again. Still, the game move develops nothing and makes the white centre more rickety, so piece play with 9 Bg5, pinning the black knight, looks like the way to handle things.

9...Ba6 10 Ng5

If White's queen had gone to f4 on move seven, this would involve a decisive threat to f7. Therefore Black would have had to play differently and perhaps less effectively, which is why despite his success in this game I prefer 6...Qc7.

10...Qd7!

Avoiding the trap 10..Bxc4? 11 Bxc4 dxc4 12 Qf3! when both a8 and f7 are hanging.

11 Qf3?

White had to bail out with 11 cxd5.

11...Nec6! (Diagram 36)

Not only securing the defence of f7, but breaking the pin on d5 and leaving White with hanging pawns on c4 and d4.

12 N1h3

Or 12 dxc5 Nxe5 13 Qg3 Nxd3+ 14 Qxd3 Bxc5 with promising play.

12...Nxd4 13 Qg3 Bxc4 14 Bb1 Nbc6 15 Be3 0-0-0 16 Qf4 f6! 17 exf6 Bd6 18 Qh4 gxf6

Now that's what I call a pawn centre!

19 Nf3 Nxf3+ 20 gxf3 Ne5 21 Qxf6 Rdf8 0-1

A terrific result for 5...Bf8, as White is about to lose the queen, either to the black rook or to a knight fork if she retreats.

Chapter Seven

The King's Indian Attack

- ▨ Introduction
- ▨ Black Delays Castling
- ▨ White Plays 3 Qe2
- ▨ The Immediate 2 Qe2

Introduction

The most respected of lines in which White avoids 2 d4, the King's Indian Attack (often shortened to KIA) typically begins **1 e4 e6 2 d3 d5 3 Nd2 (Diagram 1)**, although White can also prefer 3 Qe2 at this point.



Diagram 1 (B)

The King's Indian Attack

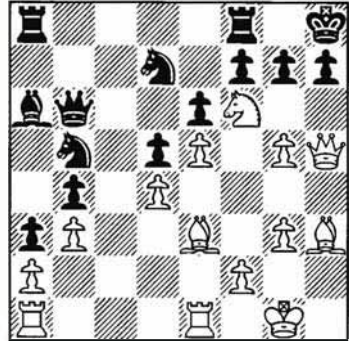


Diagram 2 (B)

A brutal attack

In the KIA, White puts his pawn on d3 and normally fianchettoes on g2 – a sensible decision now that there is no way out for the bishop to c4 or b5. He tries to hold his opponent at arm's length until he has developed his pieces. Only then will he strike out for advantage, with a plan often based around gaining space with e4-e5.

Black has various ways to respond to the King's Indian Attack, but in this chapter I will focus on what might be regarded as the 'classical' system: namely, Black takes advantage of White's omission of d2-d4 to seize space on the queenside with a rapid pawn advance involving ...c5 and ...b5. As we shall see, this is a promising strategy *if modern subtlety is added to classical logic.*

A winning recipe for White

White's set-up might appear restrained, but once his attack gets into full swing it can quickly become unstoppable. I used to play the King's Indian Attack myself when I was young via a move order beginning 1 Nf3. I was attracted by the following type of game:

Game 49

□ **J.Flesch** ■ **G.Kluger**

Hungary 1966

1 e4 e6 2 d3 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 Ngf3 c5 5 g3 Nc6 6 Bg2 Be7 7 0-0-0 8 e5 Nd7 9 Re1 b5 10 h4 a5 11 Nf1 b4 12 N1h2 a4 13 Bh3 a3 14 b3 c4 15 d4 cxb3 16 cxb3 Na7 17 Ng5 Qb6 18 Be3 Bxg5 19 hxg5 Nb5 20 Qh5 Ba6 21 Ng4 Kh8 22 Nf6 (Diagram 2) 22...gxf6 23 gxf6 Nc3 24 Bh6 1-0

White threatens 25 Qg4 Rg8 26 Bg7+ with mate to follow, while after 24...Rg8 25 Qxf7 and 26 Bg7+ the black king meets the same fate.

White's attacking plan is very clear and easy to learn. We might summarize it as follows:

- i. Put the pawn on e5 in order to chase away the black knight from f6.
- ii. Defend the pawn with Re1, and, if it is attacked again by ...Qc7, also with Bf4 or Qe2 (this extra support wasn't needed in the game above).
- iii. Play h2-h4 to provide an attacking base on g5 for the knight, or as part of a ramming pawn advance h5-h6. At the same time Black is prevented from making his own pawn thrust with ...g5 in response to Bf4 by White (again this latter consideration doesn't arise in the game above).
- iv. Play Bh3! to deter Black from counterattacking in the centre with ...f6, as then the e6-pawn would hang.
- v. Make a couple of defensive moves on the queenside to keep the black attack from breaking through there. It doesn't matter if the pawns are fixed in a favourable manner for Black – White is going to mate on the kingside before Black can exploit this long-term advantage!
- vi. Put the knight on g5 (in the game above, Black avoided chasing it back with 17...h6 out of fear of 18 Nxe6 fxe6 19 Bxe6+ Kh8 20 Bxd5 when White has the better of it with two connected passed pawns for the piece; still, this was by far the lesser evil for him).
- vii. Put the queen on h5 and by attacking h7 persuade Black to take the knight on g5 with the bishop.
- viii. The recapture hxg5 opens the h-file and so introduces the long-term threat of Kg2 and Rh1, lining up a mate on h7. It also gives White's pawns on e5 and g5 a pincer like hold on the f6-square which allows the violent knight offer that concluded the game above.

Even a bonehead like myself could understand a straightforward plan such as this, and I used it with success in junior tournaments. In contrast, Black's counterplay on the queenside is of a nature difficult for an inexperienced player to han-

dle. A genius of the French Defence such as Uhlmann might have no problems fending off the white attack whilst wreaking havoc with his own queenside pawns; but it isn't so simple for the rest of us. Therefore we need a bit of creativity, some inspiration to rule out White's automatic attack.

Black Delays Castling

The golden rule for Black versus the KIA

I guess so far I'm not exactly selling the French Defence to you; perhaps you are all rushing out to buy John Emms' book on the King's Indian Attack! However, there is an Achilles' heel to the white set-up. It is designed to mate a black king sitting on g8, and you will agree it does that pretty well. *But what if there is no black king sitting on g8?*



TIP: Black should avoid castling until it is absolutely necessary.

In recent years French Defence maestros have learned to hold back from 0-0. And why not? The elaborate and unwieldy white set-up loses a lot of its power when there is no target on g8. Meanwhile Black can press ahead with his queenside pawn advances. Let's see how the opening might unfold if Black avoids castling:

1 e4 e6 2 d3 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 Ngf3 Be7 5 g3 b5! (Diagram 3)



TIP: A useful rule of thumb is: as soon as White plays g3, reply with ...b5!

White's fianchetto is thus met with a move that not only gains space on the queenside, but also clears the way for Black's own bishop to go to b7, neutralizing the pressure from White's bishop on g2. Because ...b5 has this double function it makes sense to play it before the other typical space gaining thrust ...c5, though here it makes no real difference as ...c5 follows on the next move.

Waiting until g3 occurs before playing ...b5 means that White can't 'change his mind' and develop the bishop from f1 in an alternative fashion with say exd5 and then d3-d4, when the b5-pawn might become a target. Once he has played g3 White is more or less committed to the follow-up Bg2.



NOTE: As we shall see, experts like Volkov don't always stick to the rule of answering g3 with ...b5, but it will certainly help you choose a good moment to unleash your counterplay. And if White has played instead 3 Qe2 then there is every reason to follow the precept, as we shall see later in the chapter.

How to Play Against 1 e4

6 Bg2 c5

Philidor would have applauded such play: the pieces are the servants of the pawns, being obliged to hold back until they have advanced.

7 0-0 Nc6 8 Re1

A tough battle is in prospect, and by no means an easy one for White, as his attack has been denied its easy meat on g8 and the black queenside pawns are racing forwards. White now has two main strategies.

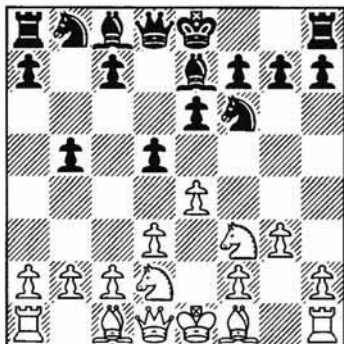


Diagram 3 (W)

Beginning counterplay

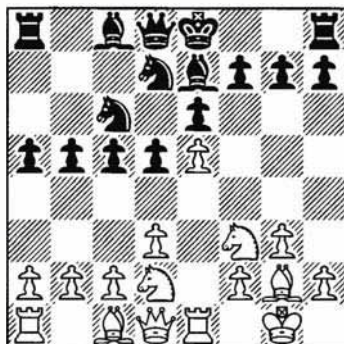


Diagram 4 (W)

An unbalanced position

1. White plays e4-e5 and c2-c4

1 e4 e6 2 d3 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 Ngf3 Be7 5 g3 b5 6 Bg2 c5 7 0-0 Nc6 8 Re1 a5

For reasons which will be explained later, 8...Bb7 looks a more precise move.

9 e5 Nd7 (Diagram 4)

White has set up his kingside space advantage, but the stubborn black king is intent on making a non-appearance on g8. With a direct attack no longer on the cards, the most popular alternative plan for White, or perhaps we should say the only idea available to him, is to try to punch a hole in the black queenside and central structure with c2-c4.



NOTE: As we shall see, Black has to defend very carefully to hold together his structure; but if he does so then he is sure to get a decent position, because *White has done Black's work for him by opening lines on the queenside.*

We should examine how French Defence hero and former Russian Champion Sergey Volkov handles the position as Black.

Game 50

□ E.Ubiennykh ■ S.Volkov

Tomsk 1999

1 e4 e6 2 d3 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 Ngf3 b5

As we noted above, Volkov is willing to play ...b5 without even waiting for g3.

5 g3 c5 6 Bg2 Be7 7 O-O Nc6 8 Re1 a5

To be preferred was 8...Bb7, as Volkov plays in the next game.

9 e5 Nd7 10 c4

This sharp thrust sends vibrations through the whole black pawn front, but a hard battle on the queenside was exactly what Volkov was aiming for.

10...bxc4 11 dxc4 Nb6 (Diagram 5)

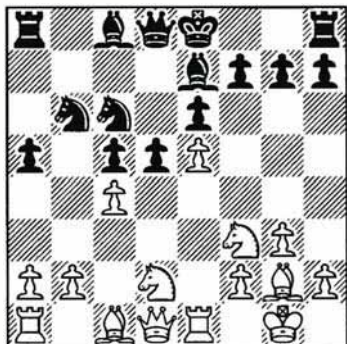


Diagram 5 (W)

Central tension

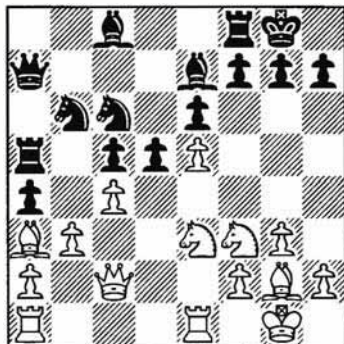


Diagram 6 (W)

Strong queenside pressure

This strengthens the d5-pawn and puts pressure on its assailant on c4.

12 b3

With the devilish plan of Ba3, combined with a move like Rc1, or Qc2 as in the game, to create the threat of cxd5 and then Bxc5. Black doesn't want to be forced to play ...d4 to prevent this, not only because of danger from the bishop on g2, but also because he doesn't want to hand over the e4-square to a white knight. Besides, playing ...d4 would still leave the c5-pawn as a target to Ba3 and Ne4, and

How to Play Against 1 e4

Black would have relinquished any chance for counterplay with ...dxc4.

12...a4!

Volkov finds a solution to the problem of defending c5: he clears a5 for the rook. Here we might ask: just who is attacking whom? After all, Black's 'defensive' manoeuvre increases the pressure on White's queenside pawns. Such is the double-edged nature of the queenside battle.

13 Ba3 0-0

With White fully committed to the struggle on the other wing, the black king can castle without danger of becoming the centre of attention.

14 Qc2 Ra5!

All as planned: the rook defends the c5-pawn against the threat of cxd5 followed by Bxc5. In doing so it is deployed to an aggressive post where, in co-operation with the black queen, it will create threats of its own along the a-file.

15 Nf1 Qc7 16 Ne3 Qa7 (Diagram 6)

Black's queenside manoeuvres have become more about attack than defence, and vice versa for White, who must guard against 17...axb3, winning the bishop on a3.

17 Qc1 Rd8 18 h4

It appears that White has despaired of success on the queenside and is now looking to start up a kingside attack. However, the situation is too fluid to allow him to commit his pieces to such an assault, as they have important jobs in holding the fort on the queenside and in the centre.

18...Bf8

After this quiet retreat White has to reckon with the possibility of 19...Nd4!? when 20 Nxd4 cxd4 leaves both a3 and e3 attacked. To avoid this and to further his kingside attacking aspirations, White removes the knight from e3, but this leaves the c4-pawn under defended.

19 Ng4?

White might have tried 19 Rd1 when the chances are still fairly balanced.

19...axb3 20 axb3 dxc4 21 bxc4 Nxc4!

Black's queenside pressure is finally rewarded with a gain of material.

22 Qxc4 Rxa3 23 Rxa3 Qxa3 24 Ng5 Nd4 (Diagram 7) 25 Be4?

It's very tempting to attack h7, but White should make do with 25 Kh1, avoiding the fork which decides the game.

25...Ba6!

Rather remarkably, the white queen is trapped.

26 Bxh7+ Kh8 27 Qc1 Ne2+ 0-1

The immediate check on e2 decides the game at once, whereas White might have

fought on for a while after 27...Qxc1 28 Rxc1 Ne2+ 29 Kh2 Nxc1 30 Nxf7+ Kxh7 31 Nxd8 etc.

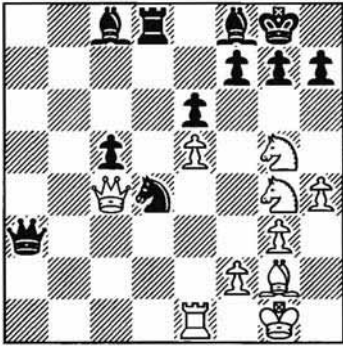


Diagram 7 (W)
White is in trouble



Diagram 8 (W)
Refining Black's move order

2. White prefers exd5 to e4-e5

We should return to the position after 8 Re1. In the game above, Volkov played 8...a5, a move that turned out perfectly well after his opponent blocked the centre with 9 e5, but there was an alternative plan available to White, namely 9 a4! which undermines the black pawns, followed by 10 exd5, breaking open the centre. In that case, Black would doubtless have preferred to have made the developing move 8...Bb7, rather than a pawn move on the wing. Volkov himself must have realized this, and when he reached exactly the same position a couple of years later, he chose 8...Bb7.



WARNING: Check carefully the opening moves of all the games you have played. An easy victory might contain the germs of a defeat a couple of years into the future.

Game 51

□ M.Mrva ■ S.Volkov

European Championship, Ohrid 2001

1 e4 e6 2 d3 d5 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 Ngf3 Be7 5 g3 b5 6 Bg2 c5 7 0-0 Nc6 8 Re1 Bb7! (Diagram 8)

How to Play Against 1 e4

Even an expert on an opening can improve on his earlier games.

9 a4

Mrva isn't attracted by the idea of e4-e5, seeing that there is no king to target on g8 once the black knight has been driven from f6. Therefore he first probes the black queenside pawns and then captures on d5 in the hope that he can profit through the e-file.

9...b4 10 exd5 exd5!

A serious positional mistake would be 10...Nxd5 when 11 Nc4 puts the knight on a great blockading square. The black queenside pawns would then be dead wood, and White could attack in the centre beginning with Nfe5.

11 d4 c4

Again Black avoids having his pawns blockaded by a white knight, this time after 11...cxd4 12 Nb3 and 13 Nfxd4, when he has to endure an isolated queen's pawn.

12 Ne5! (Diagram 9)

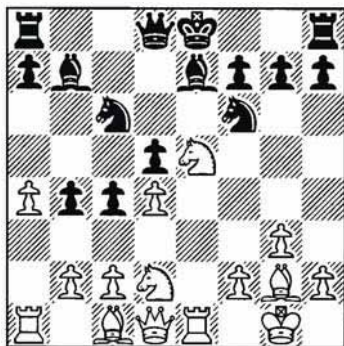


Diagram 9 (B)
Morphy-like play

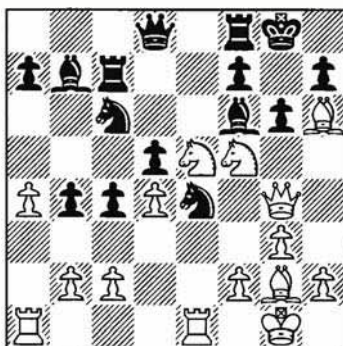


Diagram 10 (W)
Not so clear

The central pawn structure is now akin to that in the French Exchange, where I suggest that the 'Morphy plan' (seizing the e5-square with the knight) is White's best try for advantage. Here Mrva unleashes the bishop on g2 with the threat of 13 Nxc6 Bxc6 14 Nxc4!, winning a pawn thanks to the pin on d5, or even 13 Ndxc4! at once. 12...Nxd4 13 Ndxc4 is also unpleasant for Black. Therefore another consolidating move on the queenside is required from Black:

12...Rc8

Defending c6 a second time and so ruling out White's combinations.

13 Ndf3

White's combinations against c6 have been thwarted, but it is still a good plan to increase his grip on the e5-square.

13...0-0!

Volkov has developed all his pieces and built an imposing mass of pawns on the queenside; it is time to castle.

14 Bf4?

The critical point in the game has been reached, but White doesn't realize it. Generally speaking it is good advice to overprotect a key central square, but the text move is much too routine.

He should have prepared to invade the one undefended/uncontested square in the black centre, namely f5, with 14 Nh4!. Then 14...g6 15 Bh6 gives White an attack, so the game might have continued sharply with 14...Ne4 15 Nf5 Bf6 16 Qg4 Rc7! (a vital move; it meets the threat of 17 Nh6+ Kh8 18 Nxf7+ by guarding f7 and also clears c8 to challenge the knight on f5 with ...Bc8) 17 Bh6 (or 17 Bf4 Bc8) 17...g6 (**Diagram 10**), which sees Black sacrifice the exchange to break the white attack: 18 Bxf8 Kxf8 19 Nxc6 (19 Nh6 Nxd4 favours Black) 19...Bxc6 20 Ne3 Bxd4 21 Rad1 Qf6 (attacking f2) 22 Qf3 Bxb2 23 Nxd5 Bxd5 24 Rxd5 Qxf3 25 Bxf3 Nc5 and Black's queenside pawns give him good compensation for the exchange.

14...Ne4

Now 15 Nh4 is ruled out by 15...Bxh4, so White has no obvious way to improve his position, especially as 15 Nxc4 Nxf2! 16 Kxf2 dxc4 favours Black.

15 Nxc6 Rxc6!

Taking the chance to bring his rook into the struggle along the third rank.

16 Ne5 Re6 17 Bh3

Provoking Black's reply so that the knight on e5 can never be driven back by ...f6.

17...f5 18 f3 Nd6 (Diagram 11)

As we remarked above, the position has characteristics of the French Exchange Variation. White has put his knight on the e5-square, whilst denying Black's knight the e4-square. It all sounds well and good for him, but what can he do now? He has no way to land a blow with his pieces, and his pawns are inert. In contrast, Black's pawns have the power to advance on either side of the board: they have a dynamic capacity. The dominance of the black pawns is demonstrated over the next few moves.

19 Re2 g5! 20 Bd2 Rh6 21 Qf1?!

Allowing a breakthrough that hands the initiative to Black. White should have sat tight with 21 Bg2 when after 21...a5 Black might have prepared an attack based on ...Qe8 and ...Qh5.

21...c3! 22 bxc3 bxc3 23 Bxc3 Qc7!

How to Play Against 1 e4

But not 23...Ba6? 24 Nc6 when e7 drops.

24 Bb4 Ba6 25 Nd3 Bf6

The white knight has been obliged to retreat, allowing Black to put the d4-pawn under fatal pressure.

26 Bc5 Qg7 27 Bg2?

Instead 27 Bxd6 Bxd4+ 28 Kh1 Rxd6 is excellent for Black, but White might still have escaped with the calm 27 Ree1! as after 27...Bxd4+ 28 Bxd4 Qxd4+ 29 Qf2! Qxf2+ 30 Nxf2 the bishop on h3 is defended.

27...Bxd4+ 28 Bxd4 Qxd4+ 29 Kh1 f4! (Diagram 12)

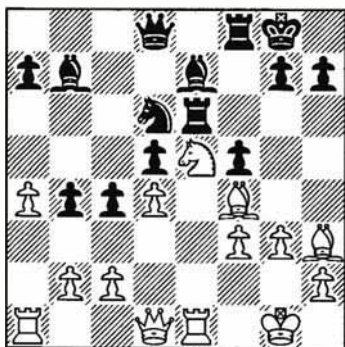


Diagram 11 (W)

Black has options on both flanks

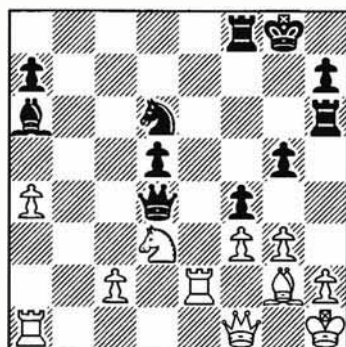


Diagram 12 (W)

The attack is overwhelming

Positionally decisive: if 30 g4 the bishop on g2 is entombed and Volkov can put his knight on e3 via c4 with a dark-square bind. The game move makes things much easier for Black.

30 Qg1 Rxh2+!?

Most of us would be delighted to be able to find such a move; the point being that 31 Kxh2 fxg3+ gives White the choice between an instant death with 32 Kxg3 Qh4 mate or total dismemberment after 32 Kh1 Qh4+. But sometimes we can be too clever for our own good. Instead the quiet 30...Nf5!!, with the threat of 31...Nxb3 mate, forces White to resign at once, as 31 Qxd4 Nxb3+ 32 Kg1 Nxe2+ 33 Kf2 Nxd4 costs him a rook.



TIP: The old rule holds good: if you see a good move, look for an even better one!

31 Qxh2 Qxa1+ 32 Re1 Qc3 33 Re5

Blundering a piece, though White was surely doomed anyway after 33 Rg1 Bxd3.

33...Bxd3 34 Rxd5 Nf5!

If now 35 Rxd3 Nxc3+ and White loses his king after 36 Kg1 Qe1+ or his queen after 36 Qxg3 Qa1+ 37 Kh2 fxc3+.

35 gxf4 Qe1+ 0-1

White plays 3 Qe2

We should now return again to the position at move three. After **1 e4 e6 2 d3 d5** Black can answer 3 Nf3?! with 3...dxe4 4 dxe4 Qxd1+ 5 Kxd1 Bc5 when he has swapped off to an equal endgame. Therefore it is obvious that White must add another defender to e4. So far we have looked at 3 Nd2, a very natural developing move, but as a matter of fact White frequently prefers **3 Qe2 (Diagram 13)**.



Diagram 13 (B)

A closely related system to 3 Nd2

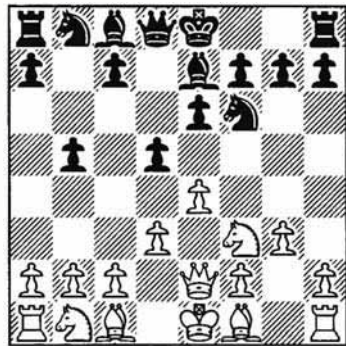


Diagram 14 (W)

Again an early ...b5

You might be wondering why this should be the case. One reason is that the move Qe2 provides a defender for the pawn on e5 should White advance it there. Moreover, in contrast to Nbd2, it leaves the way clear for the development of the bishop from c1 and adds potency to a possible c2-c4 strike at the centre, with Nc3 being available as a follow up to put more pressure on d5.

There are also less obvious benefits to 3 Qe2 due to the potential pin that the queen exerts on the e6-pawn. For example, one of Black's most solid systems after 3 Nd2 is 3...c5 4 Ngf3 Nc6 5 g3 Bd6 6 Bg2 Nge7, and then ...f6 as needed to guard

the e5-square. But things start to go awry as soon as Black begins to play it against 3 Qe2 as now 3...c5 gives White the option of 4 exd5 Qxd5 (against 3 Nd2 this would have been simply met by 4...exd5) 5 Nc3. And if this doesn't satisfy White, he can play 4 Nf3 Nc6 5 g3, when 5...Bd6? is now an outright blunder after 6 exd5. Of course, this is no problem for us as we aren't playing the 3...c5 system, but it helps to explain why White often plays 3 Qe2 or even 2 Qe2.

How to embarrass the white queen

We said above in the discussion of 3 Nd2 that a useful rule of thumb for Black was *reply ...b5 as soon as White plays g3*. This becomes even more important after 3 Qe2; in fact we might add to the rule:



TIP: After 3 Qe2, reply ...b5 as soon as White plays g3; i.e. before ...c5.

This means that upon 1 e4 e6 2 d3 d5 3 Qe2 Nf6 4 Nf3 Be7 5 g3 Black should straightaway stake his claim for queenside action with 5...b5! (**Diagram 14**), which should be given precedence over the similar space-gaining move 5...c5. The point is that after 6 Bg2 (to be preferred is 6 e5, as discussed below) 6...dxe4 7 dxe4 b4! Black is ready to activate his bishop on a6, attacking the white queen. Thus castling has become problematical for White as 8 0-0? loses the exchange to 8...Ba6. Let's see what happened in a recent game.

Game 52

□ A.Illner ■ D.Kosic

Budapest 2007

1 e4 e6 2 d3 d5 3 Qe2 Nf6 4 Nf3 Be7 5 g3 b5 6 Bg2

In the next game, White prefers the more accurate 6 e5.

6...dxe4 7 dxe4 b4 8 c4

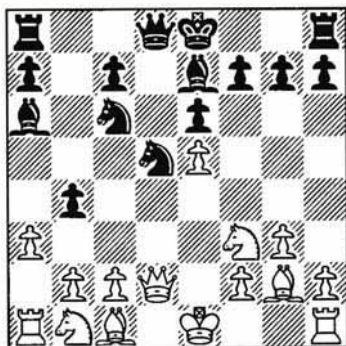
After 8 a3 Ba6 9 Qd2 Nc6 Black gains a lead in development. The game might continue 10 e5 Nd5 (**Diagram 15**) 11 Bf1 (a shamefaced retreat by the bishop, but White must secure the exit of his king from the centre) 11...Bxf1 12 Kxf1 a5 13 Kg2 0-0 14 Qe2 Qd7 15 Re1 Rfd8 with a fine mobilization of the black pieces in J.Timman-V.Korchnoi, Wijk aan Zee 2000.

8...bxc3 9 bxc3 Ba6 10 c4 Nc6 11 0-0 Nd4!

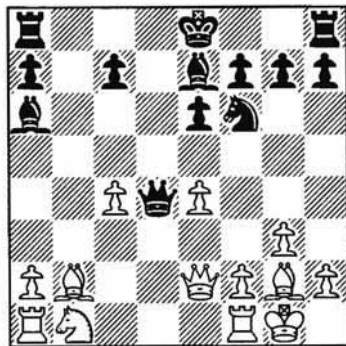
In many games we see the importance of Black utilizing the d4-square once White has gone c2-c4. Note that Kosic strikes while the iron is hot: there is no time for the timid 11...0-0 when 12 e5 Nfd7 13 Rd1 allows White to exert positional pressure.

12 Nxd4 Qxd4 13 Bb2 (Diagram 16)

Instead 13 e5 Nd5! blocks the attack on a8 and leaves a1 hanging. Then 14 Bb2 Qxc4 is even worse for White than the game continuation.

**Diagram 15 (W)**

Black is the better co-ordinated

**Diagram 16 (B)**

Black is already winning a pawn

13...Qxc4 14 Qxc4 Bxc4 15 Rc1 Bd3 16 e5 Nd5 17 Bxd5 exd5 18 Rxc7

Illner regains his pawn, but has had to concede to his opponent the bishop-pair and a dangerous lead in development.

18...Rb8 19 Ba3

The only way to avoid losing material is to threaten e7.

19...Bd8!

Pushing the white rook back as it must defend b1.

20 Rc1 Bg5?!

Kosic should strengthen his position with 20...Kd7! when after 21 Nc3 Ke6 the king defends d5 and attacks e5. Having an active king would become a significant factor as the game simplified.

21 f4 Bd8 22 Bc5 g5 (Diagram 17)

This is the idea behind his 20th move, and it will win Black the game as the tension is too much for his opponent. Nonetheless, 23 Nc3! gxf4 (23...Bc4 25 f5! favours White) 24 Nxd5 fxe3 25 hxe3 would be equal.

23 Bxa7?! Ra8

More active was 23...Rb7!, keeping the option of invading on b2 in what follows.

24 Be3?!

White could still hold on with 24 Bc5 gxf4 25 Nc3.

24..gxf4 25 Bxf4

White's king is battered after 25 gxf4 Rg8+ 26 Kf2 Bh4+ 27 Kf3 Be4+ 28 Ke2 Rg2+, but he might have tried 25 Bf2.

25...Bb6+ 26 Kg2 Bd4 0-1

White might have battled on, assuming he didn't lose on time: for example, 27 Nc3 Ra3! 28 Rab1! (perhaps Illner missed this resource; horrible would be 28 Bd2 Kd7!, preparing 29...Rc8 to increase the pin on c3 when 29 Nxd5 Be4+ loses the white knight) 28...Bxb1 29 Rxb1 Kd7 (ruling out 30 Rb8+) 30 Nxd5 Rxa2+ and the endgame is by no means easy for Black to win.



NOTE: You will notice that Black abided by the rule 'don't castle unless it is necessary' for the entire game!

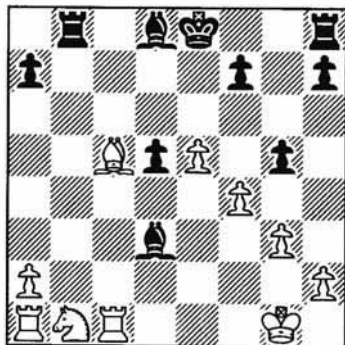


Diagram 17 (W)

Levering open the kingside

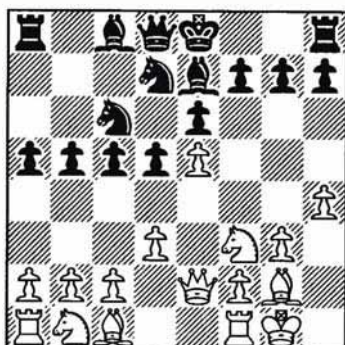


Diagram 18 (W)

Thematic play from both sides

White closes the centre: the same old story

It is possible to avoid the unpleasantness to the white queen we saw above by quickly blocking the centre with 6 e5. On the other hand, in response to Black's plan of delayed castling, players of White have also tried to be more flexible and hold back on the e4-e5 move, keeping the option of opening lines in the centre with exd5. It is therefore a small positional victory for Black to have persuaded his opponent to clarify the centre situation at an early point in the game with 6 e5.

I hope by now you agree with me that playing ...b5 before ...c5 is a great idea. In the next illustrative game, which features 3 Qe2 and 6 e5, it's the same old story as in the games above with 3 Nd2. White's attack doesn't have a ready-made target

to aim at, and as a consequence, Black's slow-moving but ultimately potent queenside pressure wins the day.

Game 53

□ E.Schunk ■ G.Meier

German Championship, Altenkirchen 2005

1 e4 e6 2 d3 d5 3 Qe2 Nf6 4 Nf3 Be7 5 g3 b5 6 e5 Nfd7

This position might also be reached via the move order 2 Qe2 Nf6 3 Nf3 d5 4 e5 Nfd7 5 d3 Be7 6 g3 b5.

7 Bg2 c5 8 h4 Nc6 9 0-0 a5 (Diagram 18) 10 Bf4 b4 11 Nbd2 Ba6

A typical scenario: White is all dressed up for a kingside attack but his opponent is refusing to play ball by putting his king on g8. And so White turns his attention to the queenside:

12 c4 bxc3 13 bxc3

The second wave of the attack on d5 with 14 c4 is looming, when the scope of the bishop on g2 would increase and Black's queenside pawns become more fragile. Therefore Meier takes the bull by the horns:

13...c4!

So that 14 dxc4 Nb6 sees Black regain the pawn.

14 d4

Now we have a central pawn structure that is characteristic of the French main line, but with the difference that Black's c-pawn has pushed on to c4, thus renouncing all pressure against d4. Normally Black would be unhappy with this state of affairs, as the ability to attack d4 is the lifeblood of the French, but here Meier has alternative means for counterplay based on the open b-file and the chance to attack c3, the base of White's pawn chain, which is undefended.

14...a4! (Diagram 19)

A very useful move: the onward march of the a-pawn will eventually be crowned with success. Black also clears the a5-square for his queen to attack c3.

If Black had delayed ...a4 for a move, say in favour of 14...h6, White might have taken the chance to prevent it with 15 a4!?, which not only stops the black pawn in its tracks but also denies the black pieces access to the b5-square: so no ...Qa5, ...Bb5 or ...Nb5 moves as occur in the game. Of course, a move like 15 a4 would be double-edged as the pawn would be a target that could in time be assailed by ...Nb6 and ...Qd7 or even ...Bc6; but the black attack on the queenside would have been slowed down, giving White more time to engineer his own kingside assault.

15 Rac1?

Schunk should have taken his chance to play 15 Ng5!, as then 15...Qa5 16 Qh5 g6

How to Play Against 1 e4

17 Qf3 h6 18 Nh3 gives him a real kingside initiative. The critical line would be 15...h6 16 Nxe6! fxe6 17 Qh5+ Kf8 18 Qg6! Qe8 (sadly for Black he can't defend e6) 19 Qxe6 (**Diagram 20**) 19...Nb6 20 Qf5+ (getting his queen out before it is trapped by 20...Bc8) 20...Kg8 21 Rab1 Bc8 22 Qc2 Bd8 23 Rxb6! (a second sacrifice is necessary before Black can consolidate his grip on d5 with ...Qf7) 24...Bxb6 24 Bxd5+ Be6 25 Bxc4 Bxc4 26 Nxc4 Bc7 27 Qe4 when White has sacrificed a rook for only four pawns, but the point is that three of these pawns form a central juggernaut which is about to roll forwards with 28 d5. It's not clear, but being White looks more fun!

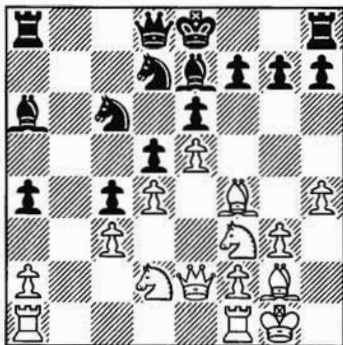


Diagram 19 (W)

Facilitating ...Qa5



Diagram 20 (B)

Decent compensation

So does that mean that Meier should have spurned the game move 14...a4 in favour of 14...h6, playing it safe? Well, there is always a tension in chess between the moves we should play and the moves we want to play. I think Meier could have counted himself very unlucky if his opponent had suddenly started playing like Shirov, finding moves like 16 Nxe6! and 23 Rxb6! – the latter being a positional sacrifice that he would have needed to discover and assess eight moves in advance! Instead if Meier had played the safe 14...h6, there was a real chance that his opponent would have confounded his queenside strategy with 15 a4.

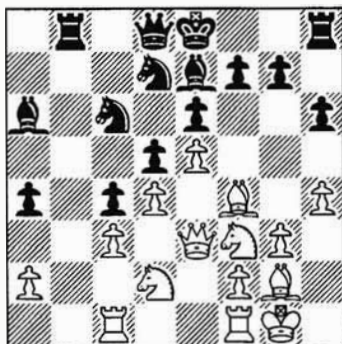
15...h6!

All's well that ends well. Meier gets to play this preventive move without having his queenside attack bungled up.

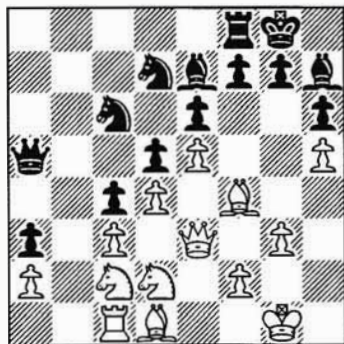
16 Qe3



NOTE: The white pieces naively wait for the black king to go to g8, but there will be no attacking scenarios such as 16...0-0 17 Bxh6 in this game: we have come a long way from Flesch-Kluger at the beginning of the chapter.

16...Rb8 (Diagram 21)**Diagram 21 (W)**

Black is in no hurry to castle...

**Diagram 22 (W)**

...until it's safe to do so

Meier gets on with his business of infiltrating on the queenside. Meanwhile, White can't begin a frontal assault to smash up the centre, even if he were willing to make big sacrifices, as his own pawns are in the way.

17 Rb1

A testament to the folly of his 15th move.

17...Bb5

The next task is to manoeuvre the bishop to c2, when despite being 'bad' it does more work than White's two bishops put together.

18 Bh3 a3 19 h5

Gaining space, but what does it signify? The advance White wants to make is to put a pawn on f5, but his bishop is jammed in the way on f4.

19...Ba4 20 Rxb8 Ncxb8 21 Rb1 Bc2 22 Rc1 Bd3 23 Ne1 Bh7

Just perfect: the bishop has found a safe haven on the longest open diagonal on the board, where it has influence over a key square on the only open file on the board.

24 Nc2 Nc6 25 Bg4 Qa5 26 Bd1 0-0! (Diagram 22)

As in the games above, Meier has long tarried with his king in the centre, but if he is going to win the game on the queenside he needs the help of his rook. He therefore chooses a moment to castle when most of the white minor pieces have taken up defensive positions on the queenside and so cannot do his king much harm. His kingside defences are also bolstered by the arrival of the bishop on h7.

How to Play Against 1 e4

27 Rb1 Nb6 28 Rc1

Whether pawns can be described as the soul of chess is disputable, but White's floundering shows what happens in a blocked position when there are no outlets created by the foot soldiers for the big pieces. Schunk can only shuffle his pieces around, until eventually he hits on the plan of using the g-pawn to break open lines on the kingside, but it proves too late.

28...Rb8 29 Ne1 Nd7 30 g4 Rb2

Meier's winning plan takes shape: the rook goes to the seventh rank to tie down its opposite number to the defence of a2, then the c3-pawn will be assailed with ...Na7 and ...Nb5, after which something's got to give.

31 Ra1 Na7 32 Ndf3 Nb5 (Diagram 23)

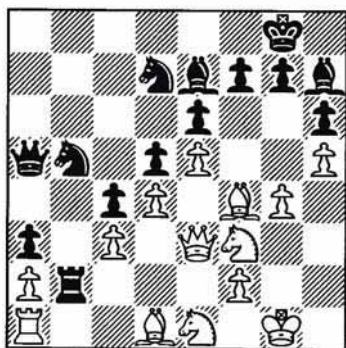


Diagram 23 (W)
Something must give

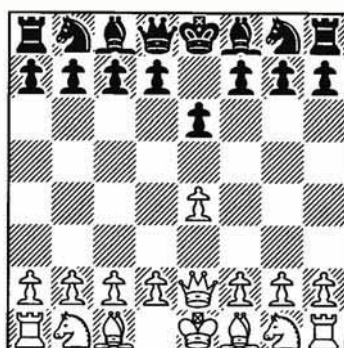


Diagram 24 (B)
The Chigorin Variation

Giving White the gruesome choice between giving up the a-pawn or the c-pawn.

33 Rc1

What a miserable career this rook has had, pacing in a tiny dungeon consisting of the a1-, b1- and c1-squares.

33...Rxa2 34 g5

At last White has some activity, but the passed a-pawn is much too strong.

34...Rb2 35 gxh6 a2 36 Bg5 Ba3

Here 36...Rb1 also does the trick.

37 Bf6 gxf6 38 exf6 Bf8 39 Qg5+ Kh8 40 Qg3 Qc7 41 Qg5 Qd8 42 Bc2 Qxf6 43 Bxh7 Kxh7 0-1

The Immediate 2 Qe2

Finally, a mention of **1 e4 e6 2 Qe2 (Diagram 24)**, which should transpose to the d3/e4 versus e6/d5 pawn structure we have examined in this chapter, but might lead to something entirely different. The good news for Black is that the move Qe2 fits in poorly in these alternative set-ups.

A decent reply is 2...d5 when 3 d3 Nf6 leads to familiar territory, and 3 exd5 Qxd5 4 Nc3 Qa5 or simply 4...Qd8 are solid enough for Black. In that case we would have a type of Scandinavian Defence in which White's Qe2 move is of less value than Black's ...e6.

However, I want to recommend the interesting response is 2...Nf6!?, which has been the choice of several strong players. Most likely White will respond with something like 3 Nf3 when 3...d5 4 e5 Nfd7 5 d3 transposes to the King's Indian Attack with 2 d3.

Instead after 3 e5 Nd5 (**Diagram 25**) we have an unusual Alekhine's Defence (normally 1 e4 Nf6 2 e5 Nd5) in which White has put his queen on e2, shutting in his bishop on f1: on the face of it a bad way to spend a tempo. Indeed, in a recent game White quickly got into trouble after 4 Nf3 d6 5 d4 c5! (with his queen no longer guarding d4 and his kingside development blocked, White can't cope with this attack on his centre) 6 c4 Nb4 7 exd6 cxd4 8 Nxd4 Bxd6 9 Nf5 0-0 10 Nxd6 Qxd6 and White was dangerously behind in development in Z.Wieczorek-J.Gdanski, Ustron 2006.

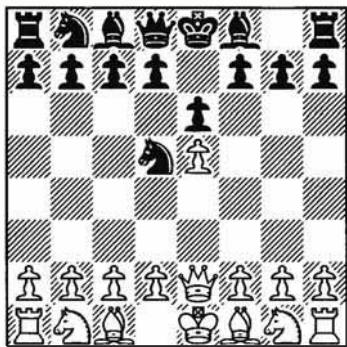


Diagram 25 (W)
Alekhine-like

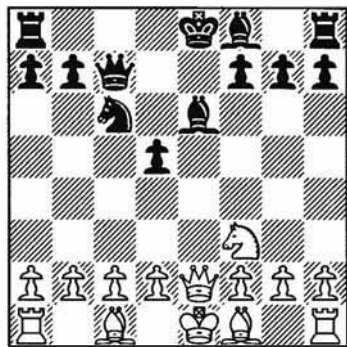


Diagram 26 (W)
Good compensation

Returning to the position after 3...Nd5, White's best chance to justify his play is

How to Play Against 1 e4

with 4 Nc3 and then:

a) 4...Nxc3 5 dxc3 followed by Bf4 and 0-0-0 gives White an attacking set-up, albeit not a particularly impressive one. There is nothing wrong with the black position here; but we don't want to give White more than he deserves.

b) Therefore I suggest you play sharply with 4...Nc6!? 5 Nf3 (after 5 Nxd5 exd5 Black can free himself with 6...Be7 and ...d6 as appropriate) and here 5...Be7 looks at least OK for Black, as the white centre is flimsy after, say, 6 d4 d6 7 Ne4 0-0 8 c4 Nb6, while 5...d6!? is a very interesting pawn sacrifice that gives Black a substantial initiative after 6 Nxd5 exd5 7 exd6+ Be6 8 dxc7 Qxc7 (**Diagram 26**).

Chapter Eight

Odds and Ends

- Introduction
- The Two Knights Variation
- White Plays 2 Nf3 d5 3 e5
- Rare 2nd Moves
- Rare 3rd Moves

Introduction

Some opening variations generate positions that remain double-edged and dynamic even after 12 or more moves have been played. These have been analysed by the greatest chess minds for tens of thousands of hours, without any definite conclusion being reached. White hasn't proved he has a substantial advantage, but neither has Black proved that he is equal. The arms race continues with both sides forever finding fresh ideas, but without any final verdict ever being given. Such a sequence of moves is described as a main line. For all our grumblings about a surfeit of opening theory, chess would be a much poorer game without these tried and tested (albeit perhaps over-tested) methods of reaching a lively middlegame position. In contrast, other opening ideas lead to a quick sterility which is unacceptable for White, or are too obviously inferior for Black (or indeed for White). These moves are never analysed deeply, and are at best described as sidelines.

The odds and ends discussed in this chapter are examples of opening lines that, at the time of writing, are regarded as offering White too little. Some of them are tricky, and will catch out an unprepared opponent, but they shouldn't give you any sleepless nights either.

The Two Knights Variation

Here we examine what happens if White brings out his knights before playing d2-d4.

Game 54

□ **S.Vega Gutierrez** ■ **A.Strikovic**

Benidorm 2007

1 e4 e6 2 Nf3

Instead after 2 Nc3 d5 we might have the main line again with 3 d4, while 3 exd5 exd5 4 d4 was covered towards the end of the French Exchange chapter. However, most likely White would choose 3 Nf3, transposing to this game.

2...d5 3 Nc3 (Diagram 1)

Here 3 exd5 exd5 4 d4 is the standard French Exchange line, while it's a good idea to know something about the alternative 3 e5 – for which see the next section.

3...Nf6

Straightforward. Black can also speculate with 3...d4 4 Nce2 c5.

4 e5

The only way to set Black problems is by seizing space.

4...Nfd7 5 d4 c5

Now White has little choice but to agree to a liquidation.

6 dxc5 Bxc5 7 Bd3 Nc6 8 Bf4



NOTE: This position can also arise via a Classical 4 e5 move order with 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5 Nfd7 5 Nf3 c5 6 dxc5 Nc6 7 Bf4 Bxc5 8 Bd3.

8...f6 (Diagram 2)

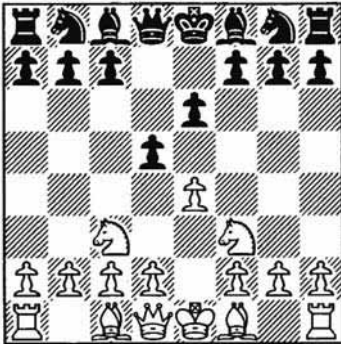


Diagram 1 (B)

The Two Knights Variation

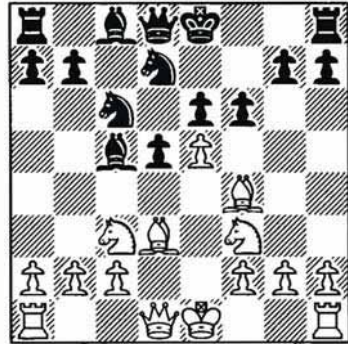


Diagram 2 (W)

Thematically undermining White's centre

Black plays his second standard pawn stab to dispose of the e5-pawn.

9 exf6

White has been unable to maintain his pawn centre. On the other hand, he hopes to be able to exploit the hole in Black's position that has been left on e5, and perhaps also lay siege to the e6-pawn. The normal recapture is 9...Nxf6, but Strikovic plays something more enterprising:

9...Qxf6!?

A double-edged move as the queen might become a target and the bishop remains shut in on c8. On the other hand, Black brings his most powerful piece into action on the kingside with gain of time by hitting the white bishop on f4. In the game she finds a strong post on h6 where she is both a constant threat to the white king and a staunch defender of the e6-pawn. In addition to all this, Black's rook on f8 enjoys an open file.

10 Bg3

Black also built up an attractively active position after 10 Bg5 Qf7 11 0-0 0-0 12 Bh4 Qh5 13 Bg3 Nf6 14 a3?! (more to the point was 14 Qd2) 14...a6 15 Qd2 Bd7 in H.Gargatagli-P.Carlsson, Illes Medes 2007.

10...0-0 11 0-0 a6! (Diagram 3)

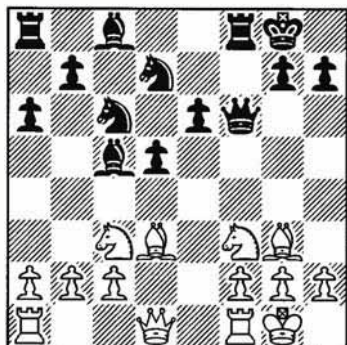


Diagram 3 (W)

Good prophylaxis from Black

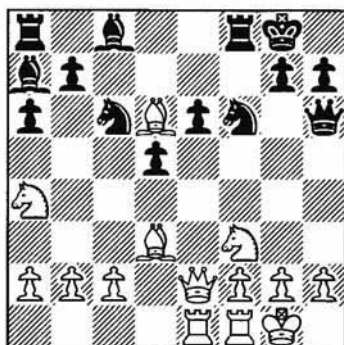


Diagram 4 (B)

Both sides have their trumps



NOTE: This is a very useful preventive move. It creates a retreat square on a7 for the bishop, and rules out any idea of Bb5 and Bxc6, giving up the good bishop to increase White's grip on the e5-square.

Moreover, the knight invasion after 11...Qh6 12 Nb5! would be a real nuisance for Black as 13 Nc7 would harass his rook and attack the vulnerable e6-pawn.

12 Qe2 Qh6

All as planned. Now Black is able to bring his knight to f6 to create counterplay and also clear the way for development with ...Bd7 and ...Rae8.

13 Rae1 Nf6 14 Na4

If White does nothing fast with, say, 14 a3?! then 14...Nh5! intends to exchange off the dark-squared bishop on g3 for the knight. If allowed, and it is certainly awkward for White to prevent it, then after 15...Nxc3 and the recapture 16 hxc3 the f2-square is left gravely weak. For example, Black might double up rooks along the f-file and then play ...g5! and ...g4, to drive away the knight from f3. White would have little in the way of counterplay, because the disappearance of his bishop means that he has lost any hope of achieving the dark-square supremacy which was the aim of his opening.



TIP: In this type of pawn structure the exchange of White's dark-squared bishop for a knight isn't merely good for Black – it is a massive positional victory.

14...Ba7 15 Bd6 (Diagram 4)

White evacuates his bishop from the danger square, drives the black rook from the open file and then takes possession of e5 with his knight.

15...Re8 16 Ne5 Nxe5 17 Qxe5?

A safer recapture was 17 Bxe5, though Black could return his rook to the open file with 17...Bd7 18 Nc3 Rf8, or if he were feeling ambitious take on all the joys and dangers of a pawn centre with 17...Nd7 18 Bg3 e5. Then 19 c4 b5!? is an intriguing sacrifice, intending 20 cxb5 e4 21 bxa6 Nf6 22 Bb5 Bg4 with good compensation.

17...Bd7 18 Nc5 Bc6 19 Nxe6?

Capturing the e6-pawn is the logical culmination of White's pressure on the centre, but it seems too risky. Instead after 19 b4, strengthening the knight on c5, 19...Rad8! contains the terrible threat of 20...Rxd6! 21 Qxd6 Bb8 when the white queen has no safe square to fly to – and even if she did, it would be mate on h2. Thus 20 Bc7 looks best, but after 20...Rc8 again there is a threat of 21...Rxc7!. Thus Black would have the luxury of playing to win or agreeing to a 'perpetual check' on the bishop with 21 Bd6 Rcd8 22 Bc7 Rdc8.

19...Ne4! 20 Rxe4!

The only move as otherwise e6 drops. Now Black has to be very careful.

20...dxe4 21 Bc4 (Diagram 5)

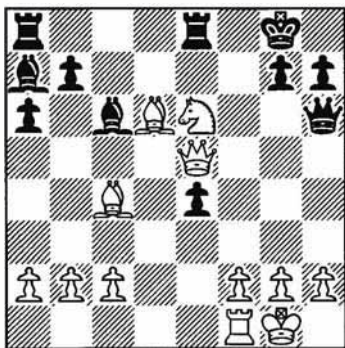


Diagram 5 (B)

Which piece to b5?

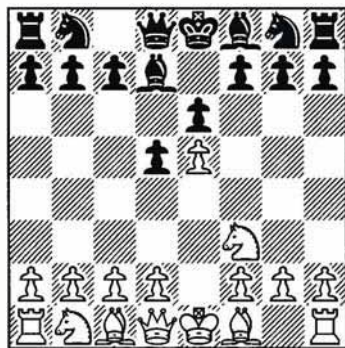


Diagram 6 (W)

Black holds back ...c5

21...Bb5??

Black has winning chances after 21...b5! 22 Bb3 Qf6! 23 Ng5+ Kh8 24 Nf7+ Qxf7 25 Bxf7 Rxe5 26 Bxe5 Rf8 27 Bb3 e3! (for the moment White is a pawn up, but the passed pawn that this move creates is a terror for him) 28 Bg3 e2 29 Re1 Rd8! (exploiting back rank ideas) 30 c3 (so that the bishop guards d1) 30...Rd2 and Black regains the pawn with a dominant position after 31...Rxb2.

22 Bb3??

White could win at once with 22 Nd8+!, cutting off the rook on a8 from the defence of e8. If 22...Kh8 there is a trivial win of the queen with 23 Nf7+ Kg8 24 Nxb6+, while 22...Bxc4 23 Qxe8 is mate! It is of course hard to see that the apparently well-guarded rook on e8 is going to lose both its defenders in two moves!

The bishop on b5 was overloaded due to the need both to defend e8 and capture on c4 after the discovered check, but no such problem would have arisen if Black had played the correct 21...b5!.

22...Kh8

Despite (or perhaps we should say thanks to!) his blunder Black is now winning again, as the rook on f1 is hanging and he is already the exchange up. The remaining moves were **23 Ng5 Qf6 24 Qd5 h6 25 Nf7+ Kh7 26 Ne5 Bxf1 27 Qxe4+ g6 28 Ng4 Qxd6 29 Qxb7+ Qe7 30 Nf6+ Kh8 0-1**

White plays 2 Nf3 d5 3 e5

After **1 e4 e6 2 Nf3 d5 3 e5** the obvious move is 3...c5, but then White gets to indulge in a wing gambit with 4 b4 cxb4 5 a3 or 5 d4. It's probably not that great for him, but there is a fair amount of theory attached and besides anyone who plays like this against you might well have some home-brewed ideas. So let's avoid it all with **3...Bd7! (Diagram 6)**.

White can try waiting for ...c5 with 4 Be2, but then I like Black's position after 4...c5 5 b4 c4!? (**Diagram 7**), declining the pawn offer, after which 6 c3 a5! 7 bxa5 Rxa5 was seen in A.Vaclavik-P.Slovak, Frydek Mistek 2007. White's subsequent refusal to compromise his principles by playing d3-d4 was almost comical: 8 d3 Qc7 9 0-0 Nc6 10 Bf4 (after 10 dxc4 Nxe5 11 cxd5 Rxd5 Black is doing well due to the removal of the proud e5-pawn and his more compact pawn structure) 10...b5! (solidifying his grip on the queenside and centre) 11 Re1 Nge7 12 Bf1 Ng6 13 Bg3 Qa7 14 Qe2 Bc5 15 h4 Nge7 16 Nbd2 Nf5 17 Bf4? cxd3 18 Qxd3 Bxf2+ 0-1.

Instead 4 d4 c5 5 c3 Qb6 leads us into our second line versus the Advance Variation. White might circumvent this with 5 dxc5, but Black is solid enough: 5...Bxc5 6 Bd3 Nc6 7 c3 (if 7 0-0 Black has 7...f6; hence White plans to discomfort the black pieces by advancing his b-pawn) 7...Nge7 8 b4 (in an earlier game between the same grandmasters Black got a very good position after 8 0-0 Ng6 9 Re1 Qc7 10

Bxg6 fxg6! 11 Bf4 0-0 12 Bg3 Ne7 13 Nbd2 Nf5 in E.Sveshnikov-Y.Balashov, Moscow 1976) 8...Bb6 9 b5 Na5 (the knight is pushed to the edge, but White's knight on b1 is at least as worse off as it needs to stay at home defending c3) 10 0-0 Rc8 11 a4 Ng6 (**Diagram 8**) 12 Ba3 Bc5 13 Bxc5 Rxc5 14 g3 Qc7 15 Re1 Nc4 16 Qe2 0-0 (note the delay in castling which prevents White starting a big attack until Black has all his pieces active) 17 h4 f6 and with the white knight on b1 not taking part in the struggle, Black was fine in E.Sveshnikov-Y.Balashov, Lvov 1978.

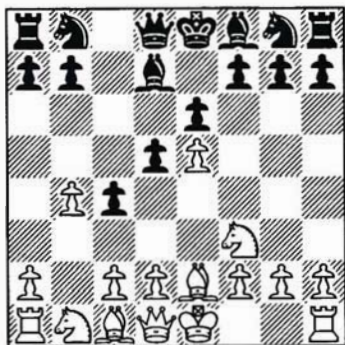


Diagram 7 (W)

Declining the pawn



Diagram 8 (W)

Black's knights stand well

Rare Second Moves

After **1 e4 e6** White has a few unusual ideas:

a) 2 c4 d5 3 exd5 exd5 4 d4 was discussed at the end of Chapter Two. White can diverge from this with 4...Qxd5? which loses time after 5 Nc3, he should get a comfortable game: 4...Nf6! 5 Bb5+ (to disrupt Black, as 5 Nc3 Nxd5 is too easy for him) 5...Nbd7 (**Diagram 9**) 6 Nc3 a6!/? (so that Black seizes the initiative after 7 Ba4 b5 8 Bc2 Bb7 or 8 Bb3 Nc5, while 7 Be2 Nb6 quickly regains the pawn with a good game) 7 Bxd7+ Qxd7 8 Nf3 Nxd5 9 0-0 (or 9 Ne5 Nxc3! 10 bxc3 Qd5 11 0-0 Bd6) 7...Be7 10 Re1 Nxc3 11 bxc3 0-0 gave Black the two bishops and no worries in G.Jones-E.Lund, Copenhagen 2005.

b) 2 f4 is a move that was popular in the good old days when the King's Gambit was in vogue. Of course here there is no pawn on e5 to attack, so it's no surprise that this plan misses the mark. Black can proceed in typical French style with 2...d5 3 e5 c5, taking advantage of the fact that White has omitted d2-d4.

How to Play Against 1 e4

c) The very direct 2 e5 was played with success by Steinitz, but this move looks decidedly premature to modern eyes. The pawn could be eliminated at once with 2...d6, or else if we are more ambitious we might try to keep it on the board as a target, say with 2...c5, cutting out a defence with d2-d4, and 3...Nc6. It would then be awkward for the white pieces to have to defend e5.

d) The idea of 2 b3 d5 3 Bb2 (**Diagram 10**) deserves more attention. White leaves the e4-pawn en prise, intending to regain it after 3...dxe4 5 Nc3 Nf6 6 Qe2 with an attacking position of sorts based on queenside castling. As usual, we are going to prefer a no-nonsense reply rather than letting our opponent play his or her favourite variation. Thus 3...Nf6! is recommended:

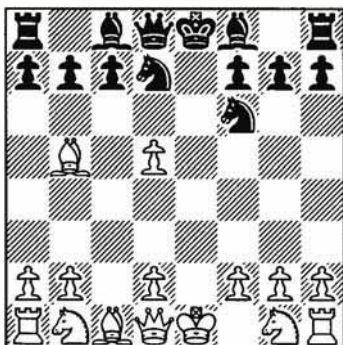


Diagram 9 (W)

White cannot hang on to d5

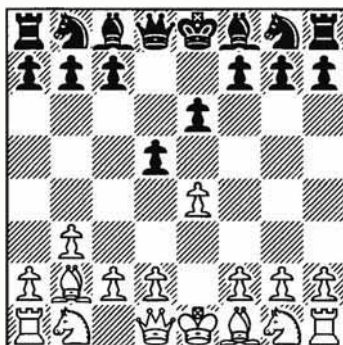


Diagram 10 (B)

The bishop enjoys an open diagonal.

d1) Now 4 e5?! Nfd7 is inferior for White who has shut in his bishop and can't support the centre adequately after 5 d4 c5 etc.

d2) The critical variation is therefore 4 exd5 exd5 5 Qe2+. Then 5...Qe7 6 Bxf6 gxf6 would leave Black with doubled pawns, so 5...Be6! is best, with a final divide:

d21) White can go pawn hunting on the queenside, but Black gets a big lead in development: for example, 6 Qb5+ Nbd7 7 Qxb7 Rb8 8 Qxa7 Bc5 9 Qa6 0-0. Here the f2-pawn is a target, and simple development is no good for White: 10 Nf3 Re8 11 Be2 Bf5 and the white king can't escape the centre as 12 0-0? Rb6 13 Qa5 Rxe2 wins the bishop.

d22) Another approach for White is to target e6 which can be done with 6 Nf3 Bc5 7 Ng5 or similarly 6 Nh3 Bc5 7 Ng5, but Black can fearlessly castle: 7...0-0! (**Diagram 11**) 8 Nxe6 fxe6. Now 9 Qxe6+? Kh8 would be far too risky for White in view of the weakness on f2 and the threat of 10...Re8. However, 9 Nc3 e5! is pleasant for

Black, as is 9 d4 (to restrain ...e5) 9...Bb4+! (making White weaken the queenside and lessen his control of e5 by shutting in further the bishop on b2) 10 c3 Bd6. The clumsy position of the white pieces and the loss of time involved with 2 b3 and 3 Bb2 far outweigh the bishop-pair.

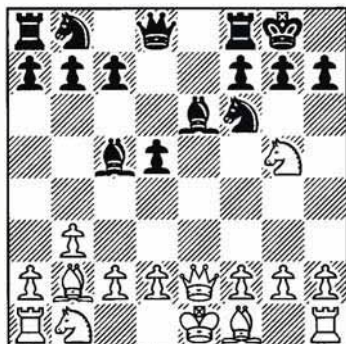


Diagram 11 (W)

Black develops rapidly

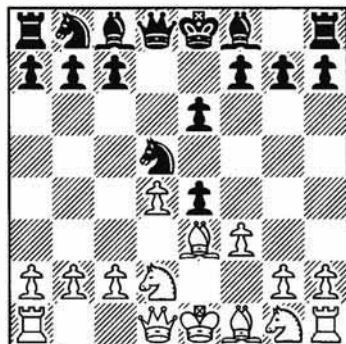


Diagram 12 (W)

Not a good gambit

Rare 3rd Moves

After 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 White has tried gambiting the e4-pawn with 3 Be3?! dxe4 4 Nd2 Nf6. Unfortunately for him, after 5 f3, hoping for a rapid development followed by an attack down the f-file after 5...exf3 6 Ngxf3, Black has the strong riposte 5...Nd5! (**Diagram 12**) which eliminates White's important dark-squared bishop. After 6 Qe2 c5! 7 dxc5 Nxe3 8 Qxe3 Qa5 9 c3 Bxc5 10 Qxe4 Be7 Black was clearly better in B.Go- J.Deleamarre, Vlissingen 2007. Instead 5 c3 is more solid for White, but Black can at least get a solid position in the style of the Fort Knox with 5...Bd7: for example, 6 g3 Be7 7 Bg2 Bc6 8 Qc2 Nbd7 9 Ne2 with an immediate draw in G.Neuberger-R.Appel, Manderscheid 1989.

The other bishop move to third rank, 3 Bd3 (**Diagram 13**), is of a completely different nature. White prefers to support e4 with his bishop rather than by putting the knight on d2 or c3, but there is a drawback to the move: a bishop likes to wait until the pawn centre has clarified before committing itself to a post, and here it is forfeiting the chance for a more active deployment to b5. Objectively speaking, the best reply for Black is 3...c5! when after 4 exd5 exd5 an isolated queen's pawn centre is reached, with the white bishop denied the chance to go to b5 without tempo loss as would be the case after 3 Nd2 c5 4 exd5 exd5 5 Ngf3 Nc6 6 Bb5.

How to Play Against 1 e4

But then, do we *want* to play a position with an isolated pawn on d5? An IQP expert such as the Russian GM Evgeny Bareev might be delighted to have a superior version of his beloved Tarrasch 3...c5 line, but I'm not overjoyed. If you share my reservation, you might like to try the alternative approach 3...dxe4 4 Bxe4 Nf6, which will force the bishop to move for a third time, assuming White has no wish to see it exchanged for a knight. Play might continue 5 Bf3 c5 6 Ne2 Nc6! (**Diagram 14**), which refuses to bow to the pressure on b7. Black shouldn't fear suffering an isolated pawn on c6 after this move, as he gets bags of dynamic play: for example, 7 Be3 cxd4 8 Bxc6+ bxc6 9 Qxd4 Qxd4 10 Bxd4 c5 11 Bxf6 gxf6 12 Nbc3 Rg8 13 Ne4 Be7 14 0-0 Bb7 15 f3 0-0-0 left Black very active and he went on to beat a much higher-rated opponent in A.Beogradov-C.Hanley, Essent 2002.

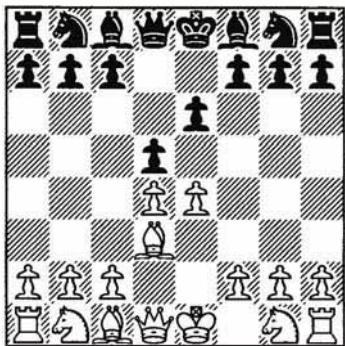


Diagram 13 (B)

A rare way of defending e4

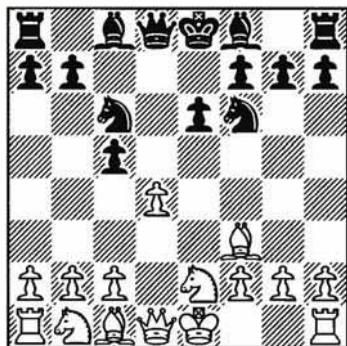


Diagram 14 (W)

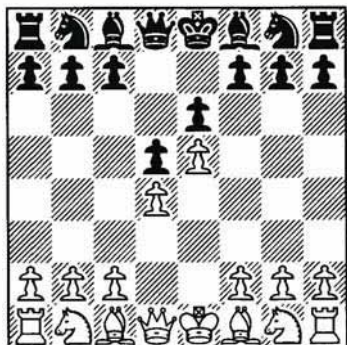
Pressuring d4

Going back, White has also tried 5 Bg5, but after 5...Be7 6 Bf3 c5 7 Ne2 Nc6! White soon ended up in a rotten position following 8 c3 cxd4 9 Bxc6+ bxc6 10 Nxd4 Qd5 11 Nf3 Ba6 12 Qxd5 cxd5 in F.Ravnik-A.Praznik, Bled 2000. In both examples, White moved his bishop far too many times to justify giving it up on c6 for the black knight.

Index of Variations

The Advance Variation

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5 (Diagram)



3...c5

3...b6

4 c3 – 16

4 Bb5+ – 20

4 Nf3 – 26

4 c3

4 Qg4 – 46

4 dxc5 – 46

4 Nf3 – 46

4...Qb6 5 Nf3 Bd7 6 Bd3

6 a3 – 38

How to Play Against 1 e4

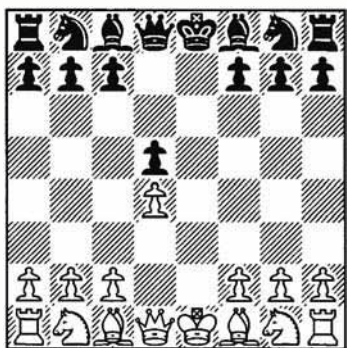
6 Be2 – 40

6...cxd4 7 cxd4 – 32

7 Nxd4 – 36

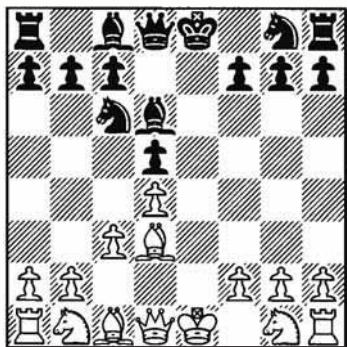
The Exchange Variation

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 exd5 exd5 (Diagram)



4 Nf3

4 Bd3 Nc6 5 c3 Bd6 (Diagram)



6 Qf3 – 63; 6 Ne2 – 68

4 Nc3 – 70

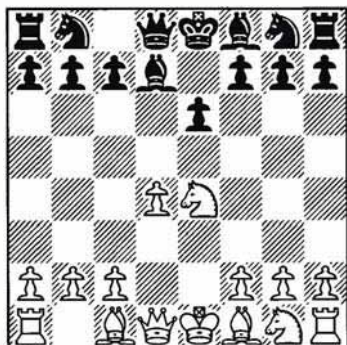
4 c4 – 70

4...Nc6 – 57

4...Be6 – 53; 4...Nf6 – 54

The Fort Knox

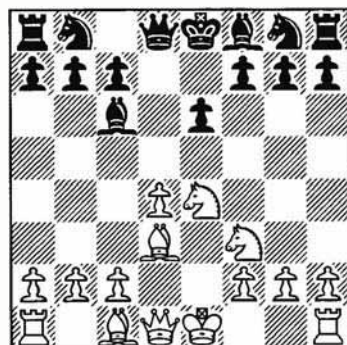
1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2/Nc3 dxe4 4 Nxe4 Bd7 (Diagram)

**5 Nf3**

5 Ng5 – 87

5...Bc6 6 Bd3 (Diagram)

6 Neg5 – 88



How to Play Against 1 e4

6...Nd7

6...Bxe4 – 80

6...Nf6 – 94

7 Qe2

7 0-0 Ngf6 8 Ng3 – 74, 82

7 Neg5 – 90

7...Ngf6 8 0-0 – 78

8 Bg5 – 76

The Classical 4 e5 Variation

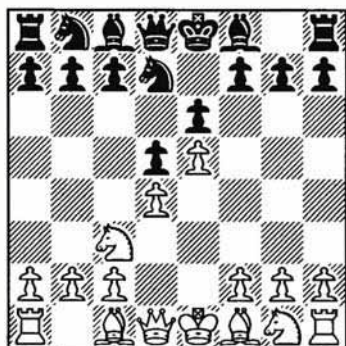
1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 e5

4 exd5 exd5 5 Bg5 Be7

6 Nf3 – 125

6 Qd2 – 127

4...Nfd7 (Diagram)



5 f4

5 Nce2 c5 6 c3 Nc6 7 f4 Be7 8 Nf3 0-0 9 a3 a5

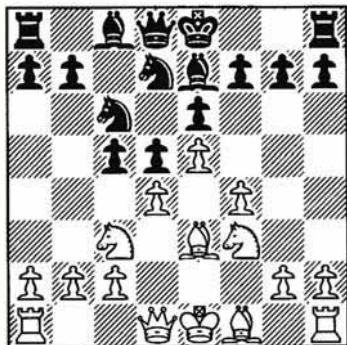
10 g3 – 113

10 Neg1 – 117

10 Ng3 – 120

5 Qh5 – 123

5...c5 6 Nf3 Nc6 7 Be3 Be7 (Diagram)

**8 Qd2**

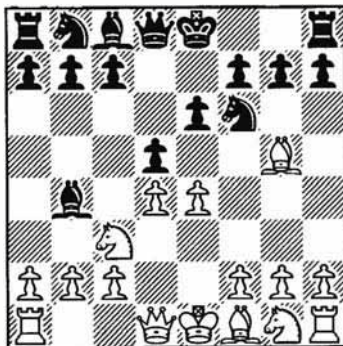
8 dxc5 0-0

9 Qd2 – 103

9 Be2 – 107

8...0-0 9 0-0-0 – 101

9 Be2 – 109

The McCutcheon**1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Bb4 (Diagram)****5 e5**

How to Play Against 1 e4

5 Nge2 – 164

5 exd5 Qxd5 6 Bxf6 Bxc3+ 7 bxc3 gxf6

8 Qg4 – 170

8 Nf3 – 169

5...h6 6 Bd2

6 Bxf6 – 134

6 Bh4 – 136

6 exf6 – 138

6 Be3 – 153

6 Bc1 – 159

6...Bxc3 7 bxc3

7 Bxc3 – 141

7...Ne4 8 Qg4

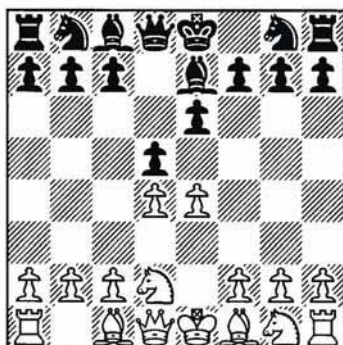
8 Bd3 – 144

8...Kf8 9 Bd3 – 148

9 Qf4 – 146

The Tarrasch 3...Be7

1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nd2 Be7 (Diagram)



4 Bd3

4 Ngf3 Nf6

5 e5 – 184

5 Bd3 – 191

4 e5 – 194

4...c5

4...dxe4 – 182

5 dxc5 Nf6 6 Qe2 0-0 7 Nf3 a5 8 0-0 – 177

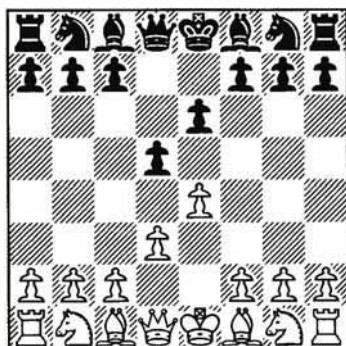
8 e5 – 180

The King's Indian Attack

1 e4 e6 2 d3

2 Qe2 – 217

2...d5 (Diagram)



3 Nd2

3 Qe2 Nf6 4 Nf3 Be7 5 g3 b5

6 Bg2 – 210

6 e5 – 213

3...Nf6 4 Ngf3 Be7 5 g3 b5

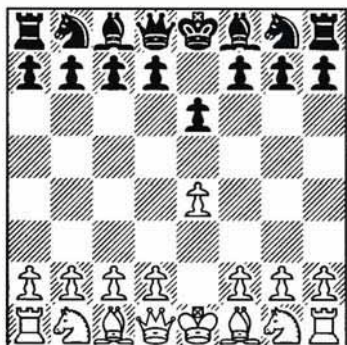
5...0-0 – 200

6 Bg2 c5 7 0-0 Nc6 8 Re1 Bb7 –

8...a5 – 202

Odds and Ends

1 e4 e6 (Diagram)



2 Nf3

2 c4 – 225

2 f4 – 225

2 b3 – 226

2 d4 d5

3 Be3 – 227

3 Bd3 – 227

2...d5 3 Nc3 – 220

3 e5 – 224

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how to play against 1 e4

It's not easy finding a good opening to play against 1 e4, especially if you don't have endless time available to study the latest theoretical developments. If you choose fashionable openings, it's often a necessity to keep pace with modern theory if you want to succeed with Black.

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