Neil McDonald

the Ruy Lopez

move by move



EVERYMAN CHESS

The Ruy Lopez: Move by Move

Neil McDonald

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Contents

Series Foreword

- Introduction

1 White Plays d2-d3

- A plan to get you started with the Ruy Lopez
- White's restrained centre
- The restrained centre versus a Closed Lopez set-up
- The restrained centre versus a ... Bc5 (Møller) set-up
- The restrained centre versus a ... Bb7 (Archangelsk) set-up
- The restrained centre versus the Steinitz Deferred
- The restrained centre versus the Berlin Defence
- A restrained line against the Schliemann Defence

2 White Plays d2-d4

- The Chigorin Variation
- The Breyer Variation
- The Karpov Variation
- The Zaitsev Variation
- The Smyslov Variation
- The Steinitz Deferred and similar centre-holding ideas

3 Black plays ... Bc5

- The Classical (or Cordel) Defence
- The Berlin with ... Bc5
- The Møller Defence
- Bird's Defence

4 White's e5 Pawn Centre

- The Berlin Defence with 4 0-0 Nxe4 5 d4 Be7
- The Berlin Endgame

The Open Variation

5 Gambit Lines

The Schliemann Defence

The Steinitz Deferred: Siesta Variation

The Gajewski Gambit in the Chigorin

The Marshall Attack

The Anti-Marshall with 8 h3

Index of Complete Games

Series Foreword

Move by Move is a series of opening books which uses a question-and-answer format. One of our main aims of the series is to replicate – as much as possible – lessons between chess teachers and students.

All the way through, readers will be challenged to answer searching questions and to complete exercises, to test their skills in chess openings and indeed in other key aspects of the game. It's our firm belief that practising your skills like this is an excellent way to study chess openings, and to study chess in general.

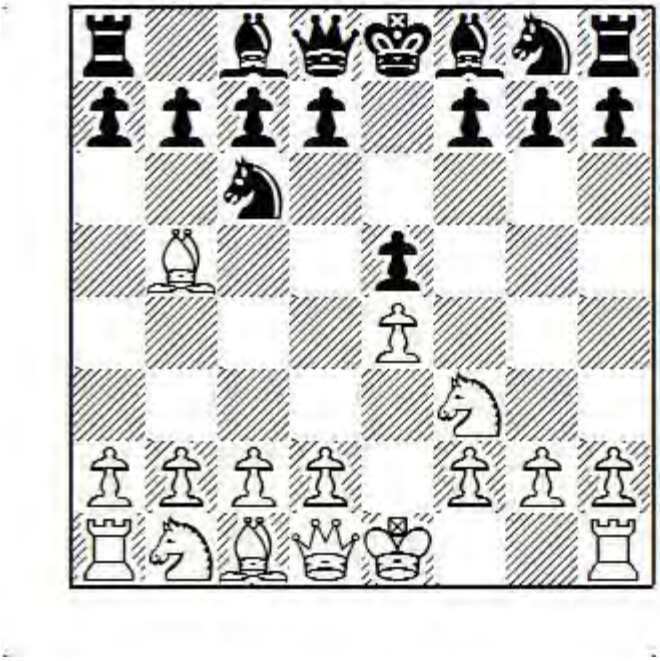
Many thanks go to all those who have been kind enough to offer inspiration, advice and assistance in the creation of *Move by Move*. We're really excited by this series and hope that readers will share our enthusiasm.

John Emms

Everyman Chess

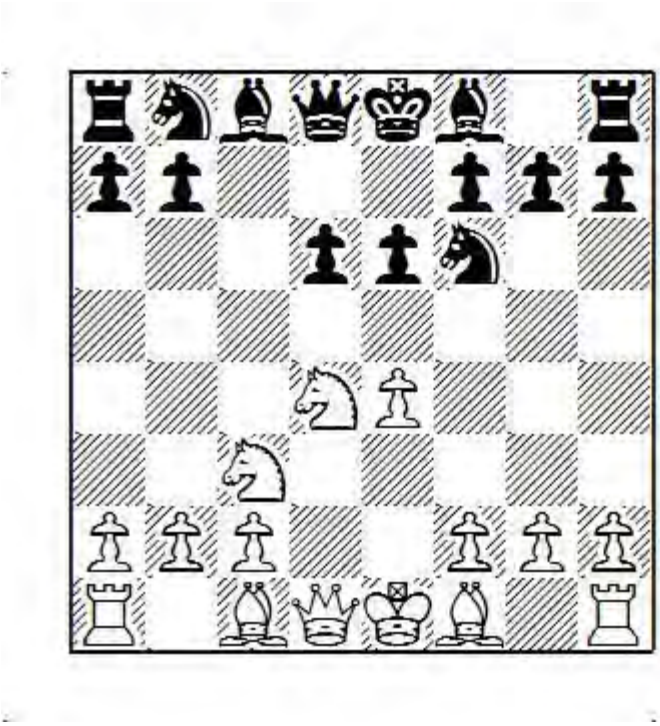
Introduction

In this book we'll examine one of the most famous and popular of openings: the Ruy Lopez. It has been used, or defended against, by virtually all the greatest players in the history of chess. Play begins **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5**.



White starts a positional attack by putting pressure on the knight that defends the e5-pawn. Such a method was recommended by the Spanish Priest Ruy Lopez in 1561, which is why it is called ‘the Spanish Opening’ in many countries.

It is useful to compare the situation here with that in the Sicilian Defence. For example consider the opening moves 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 d6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 e6 (or equally 5 ... g6 or 5 ... a6)

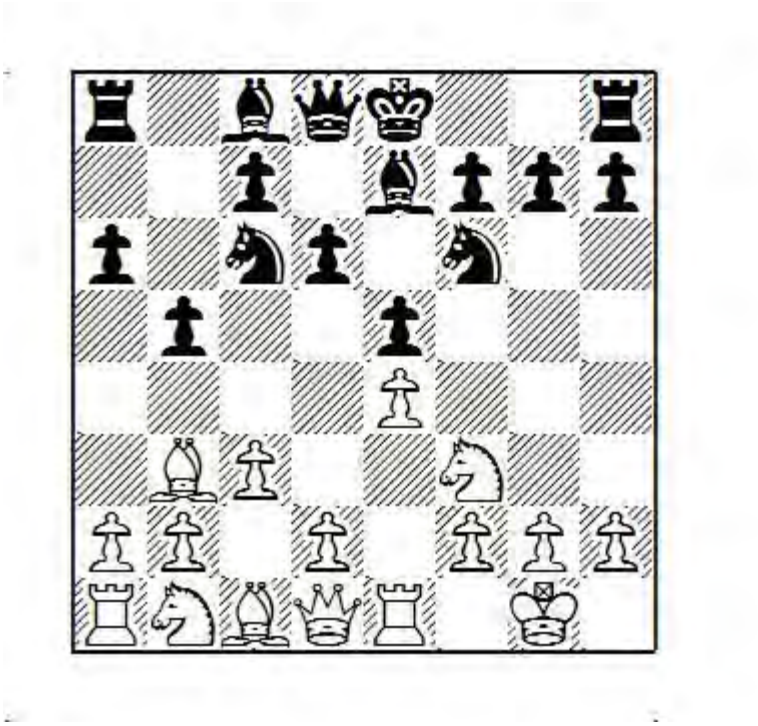


White pieces enjoy control of four ranks, whilst the black pieces have three ranks, with a ‘no man’s land’ on White’s fifth rank between them. White can instruct his lively pieces to prepare an assault on the black king. He can also quite reasonably elect to castle queenside and push his kingside pawns.

Similarly, in the typical French pawn structure, White’s pieces enjoy more space after 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 e5, or equally 3 Nd2 Nf6 4 e5 or 3 Nc3 Bb4 4 e5, though the semi-blocked nature makes it harder for him to start an attack. Still, White has been able to deny the black knight the important f6-square.

Now turning to the Ruy Lopez, let’s look at a standard position after, say, 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5

7 Bb3 d6 8 c3.



Here space is equal – four ranks each, with the pieces operating on their first three ranks, and the pawns taking up positions on the two ranks between them.

So far so good for Black: his pieces are easily developed, his king is difficult to attack, and the white pieces can't do much. But in establishing his pawn on e5, and maintaining it there with the assistance of ... b5, Black has compromised the safety of his pawn structure. In the diagram position, White is ready to attack e5 with d2-d4, and the b5-pawn with a2-a4.

This means that the pawn on e5 is both an asset – it restrains the energy of the white pieces – and a liability as it is a target for attack with d4. Regarding the pawn on b5, if Black manages to develop his pieces efficiently, and White plays with insufficient accuracy or vigour, it might become a virtue – the spearhead of a queenside pawn advance. But certainly for the opening phase, and often long into the middlegame, the pawn on b5 remains fragile.

We might say that the fate of the b5-pawn is one of the most important factors in deciding the outcome of a Ruy Lopez game. As the game develops, with White playing a2-a4, Black often has to tie down one of his big pieces to defend b5, thereby losing energy. For this reason he is often looking for ways to sacrifice the pawn for an advantage elsewhere, or for a 'trick' that will allow its exchange for a healthier white pawn.

Nonetheless, it has to be repeated that the pawns on b5 and e5, though potential targets and a structural liability, are also doing a valuable job. The e5-pawn stops White over running the centre with the advance e4-e5, which would energize the white pieces as a prelude to an attack on the black king. The pawn on b5, whilst statically weak, is guarding the c4-square – as will be seen, this can be a useful post for a white knight in the middlegame. It also blocks an attack by White on the a6-pawn that sits behind it. Thus Black doesn't like having the fragile pawn on b5, but in reply to an attack with a2-a4 he even less desires to remove it with ... bxa4.

Here we have a paradox: the Ruy Lopez is often called a solid opening, but it might well be described as the most 'unsolid' defence to 1 e4! No other mainline opening exposes the black pawns to such long-term attack. Black is buying a safe and full development, and restraining the power of the white pieces, at the cost of a couple of static blemishes in his pawn structure.

Is it a price worth paying? Well, players have argued over this for more than 100 years, and the question still hasn't been settled. At the time of writing players such as Anand, Topalov and Carlsen are playing the Ruy Lopez for both sides, making me recall the quotation attributed to Grandmaster Bogoljubow: 'When I'm White I win because I'm White, when I'm Black I win because I'm Bogoljubow'.

It is hoped that this book will deepen the reader's understanding of positional chess. At various points as you study the games there will be questions and exercises, ranging from the general ('what do you think is the best plan?') to the tactically acute ('what happens if Black grabs the pawn?'). If these seem too easy or too hard, or to have no clear answers, never mind! You are at least learning the right questions you should be asking yourself in a certain type of position, and that is half the battle when it comes to finding good moves.

When opening theory comes to an end, a difficult stage of a game is reached wherein opportunities are either converted into a promising long-term plan or allowed to fade away due to irresolute play. For this reason, most attention has been given to the late opening/early middlegame phase. Where necessary, supplementary games and excerpts have been added to further reinforce the ideas

under discussion.

I hope you enjoy examining the great ideas of great minds in this book.

Neil McDonald

Gravesend

June 2011

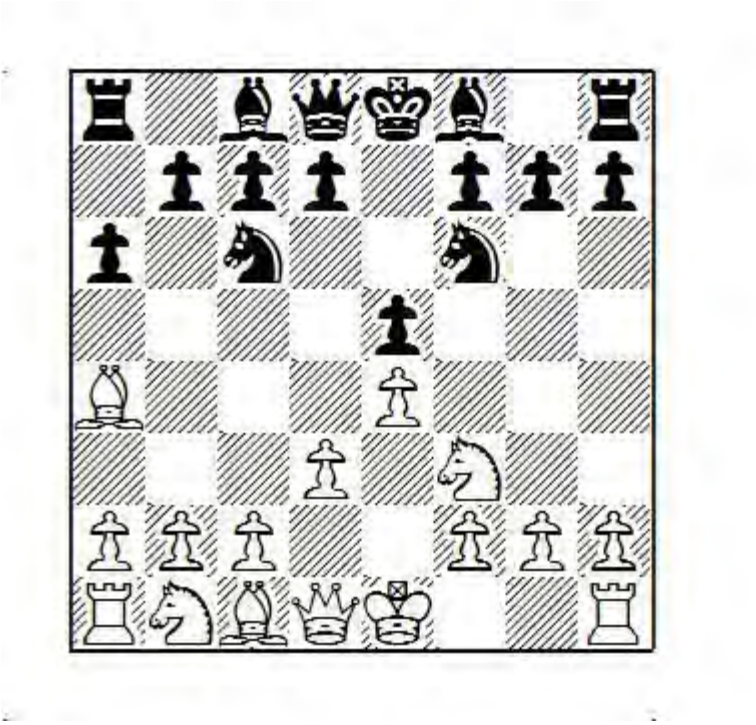
Chapter One

White plays d2-d3

A plan to get you started with the Ruy Lopez

As a first step in mastering the Ruy Lopez, you need a solid, simple repertoire that will allow you to play practice games with your new opening without fearing nasty surprises.

In the first chapter of this book the focus is on the position after 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 d3 (or similarly 3 ... Nf6 4 d3).



This should be by far the most common position you reach after 3 Bb5. Until, that is, you feel ready to branch out from 5 d3 to other, sharper variations. Though Magnus Carlsen plays d2-d3 ideas exclusively in his games at the time of writing, so if you stick with 5 d3 permanently you'll be in good company.

Divergences on move three and four by Black from the above sequence are examined in other parts of the book, but almost none leads to sharp play or complex theory. Therefore once you have studied the basic set-up in this chapter you should be able to meet any of Black's alternative moves with confidence.

The exception to this is the Schliemann Defence: 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 f5!?. It's not very popular, but you need to know something about it as soon as possible. In Chapter Five the Schliemann mainline is examined, but to get you going a perfectly good and popular alternative is outlined at the end of this chapter.

White's restrained centre

The first World Champion Wilhelm Steinitz developed an original way to play as White after 1 e4 e5. He would first of all construct an unbreakable centre with the pawn moves d2-d3 and c2-c3 in order to keep his opponent's pieces at arm's length. Then he would gradually build up a direct attack on the kingside, often by advancing g2-g4 and bringing his knight all the way over from b1 to g3. Incidentally, it was Steinitz who discovered the strength of this famous Ruy Lopez knight manoeuvre.

In recent years the restrained d2-d3 approach to the centre has enjoyed a revival at the highest level. It is rather appealing to cut out a multitude of opening variations and only have to learn how to play the c3/d3/e4 structure. Steinitz's method has been modified in that White is preparing a good moment to seize space with d3-d4 – he doesn't regard the centre structure as a static entity (but then neither did Steinitz really, as we can see from his game with Blackburne game below).

White's modern approach might include pressure on the queenside, the advance d3-d4 and a kingside attack – or perhaps all three in the same game. Steinitz's restrained centre is alive and kicking, and we'll examine a couple of recent games in which Kramnik and Topalov are the victims of White's modest-looking but surprisingly potent system.

Question: When should I play d2-d3?

Answer: Here are some examples of how you might incorporate d2-d3 into your repertoire. If you are entirely new to the Ruy Lopez you can skip this section and go straight to the Carlsen game.

a) After 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 (rather than 3 ... a6) it is possible to avoid the Berlin Endgame with 4 d3.

b) 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 and here 5 d3 sidesteps the Open Variation.

c) 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7. White has shown his willingness to allow the Open Variation with 5 ... Nxe4, but he is less confident versus the Marshall Attack and so cuts it out with 6 d3 or equally with 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 0-0 8 d3.

Remember that the earlier you play d2-d3, the more information you are giving your opponent about the type of pawn centre in the middlegame. He can modify his piece development accordingly. For example consider 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 d3. Black can afford a positionally desirable, but time-consuming, fianchetto on the kingside with 5 ... d6 6 c3 g6 7 0-0 Bg7, because White has removed the possibility of a rapid attack on e5 with d2-d4. If White had waited a move with 5 0-0, and only after 5 ... Be7 played 6 d3, the Bg7 idea would have vanished for Black. But then Black might not play 5 ... Be7 – you could find yourself in the Open Variation after 5 ... Nxe4. You can't have everything!

The restrained centre versus a Closed Lopez set-up

We'll begin by letting the highest-rated player in the world demonstrate the ideas behind White's set-up.

Note that the move order in the following game was actually 5 0-0 Be7 6 d3 b5 7 Bb3, but I've amended it to rule out the possibility of 5 ... Nxe4.

Game 1

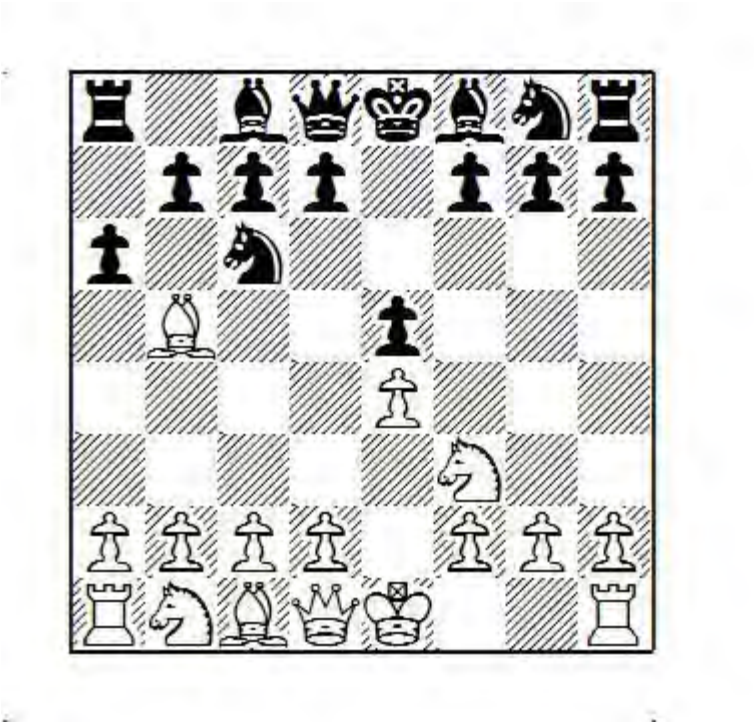
M.Carlsen-V.Topalov

Nanjing 2010

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5!

The beginning of White's attempt to overrun Black's strong point on e5. It's sobering to consider how many great minds have laboured to prove that this is either a strong move or harmless, from the earliest theoreticians of the 1500s to the players of this game.

3 ... a6

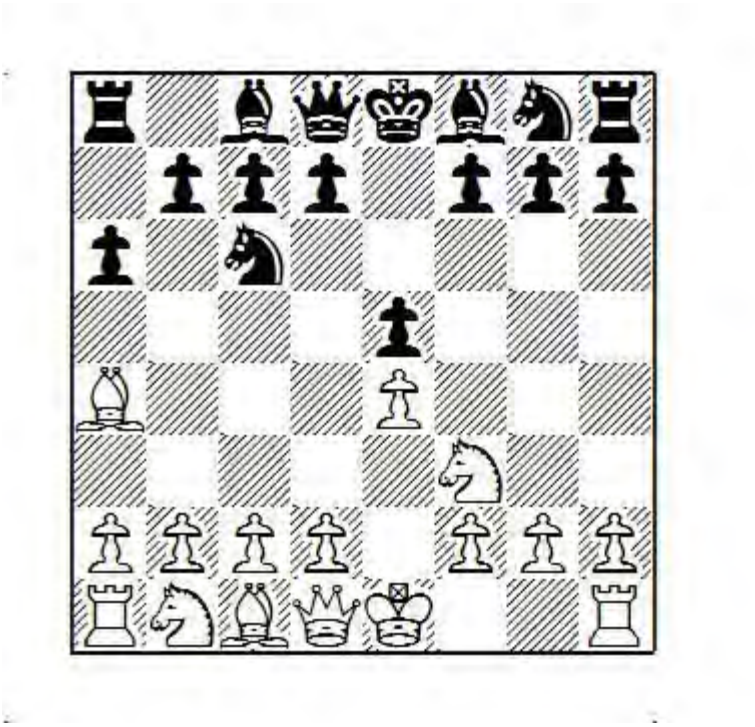


The Morphy Defence to the Ruy Lopez. Steinitz wrote back in 1889 that 'on principle this ought to be disadvantageous as it drives the bishop where it wants to go'. After more than a century in which 3 ... a6 has dominated Black's treatment of the Ruy Lopez, we might feel free to disagree with these words.

Nonetheless, as we shall see from his game with Blackburne, the First World Champion liked his bishop on c2, and in Gashimov-Kramnik below White plays 7 Ba4! unprovoked, so there is some sense in these words. However, there is no doubt that giving himself the option of ... b7-b5 to end the latent threat of Bxc6 followed by Nxe5 eases Black's defence.

4 Ba4

There is as yet no threat to e5 as 4 Bxc6 dxc6 5 Nxe5? allows Black to regain the pawn at once with 5 ... Qd4! when his two bishops give him a good game. However, the Exchange Variation, though not analysed in this book, is a perfectly acceptable alternative for White if followed up by a move like 5 0-0.



4 ... Nf6

Question: Since ... b7-b5 is an important part of Black's opening play in many Ruy Lopez variations, why is he always keen to delay it for as long

as is feasible? Couldn't we hunt down White's good bishop with

4 ... b5 5 Bb3 Na5?

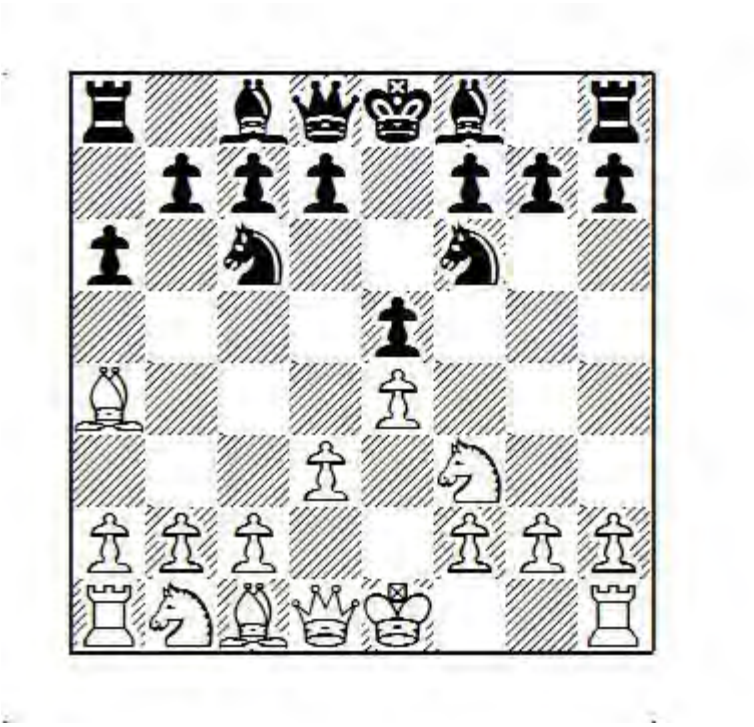
Answer: Playing ... b7-b5 loosens the queenside pawns. However, as we shall see in examples in this book, when these pawns are well supported by the black pieces, they cease to be an important weakness and might actually become an attacking force.

Therefore, it makes sense for Black to delay ... b7-b5, in the meantime bringing out pieces and consolidating his centre standing, so that he is in a better state to protect the pawns once ... b7-b5 is actually played.

If Black played 4 ... b5 5 Bb3 Na5, he would get the chance to eliminate White's important bishop, undoubtedly a good thing. The problem is that it takes a lot of time, for example 6 0-0 d6 7 d4 f6 (holding onto the e5 strong point is a key aim for Black; if instead 7 ... exd4 8 Nxd4 Black can't trap a piece with 8 ... c5 intending 9 ... c4 because of 9 Bd5!) 8 Nc3 Nxb3 9 axb3. Black hasn't a single piece developed, and White can develop an attack by opening lines after 9 ... Bb7 10 Qe2 g6 11 Be3 c6 12 dxe5 fxe5 13 Ng5 Be7 14 f4!, as in M.Pavlovic-S.Agdestein, Gibraltar 2003.

5 d3

Black is prevented from eliminating the e4-pawn, which means that White maintains a compact centre.



Question: It seems rather passive for White – there is no immediate

attack on the e5-pawn looming with d2-d4, so surely Black has

an easier development?

Answer: True, but it isn't White's intention to put Black under immediate pressure or slow down his development. He is content to build an impregnable position from which he can start an attack in the middlegame.

Playing d2-d3 also has enormous practical value in cutting out the opponent's favourite defences, and so forcing him to think for himself.

5 ... b5

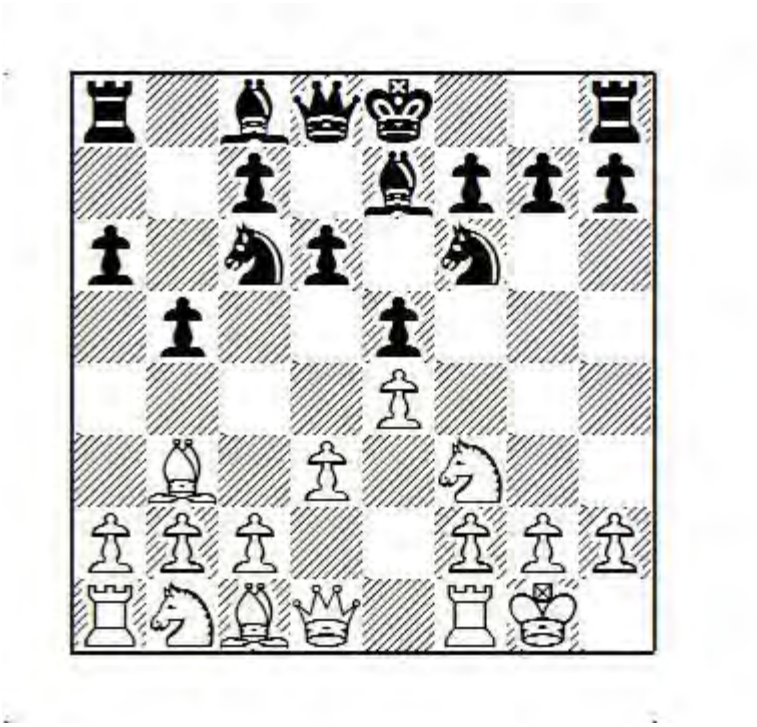
So White's last move wasn't that harmless after all: with e4 defended, Black had to guard against the threat of 6 Bxc6 and 7 Nxe5, winning a pawn. The game move is the obvious way to do it, but now there is the traditional loose black pawn formation on the queenside.

6 Bb3

The bishop hardly objects to being chased to an open diagonal where it is in touch with the d5 centre square and can put pressure on f7.

6 ... Be7 7 0-0 d6

Whenever Black plays ... d7-d6, defending the e5-pawn, top of White's positional checklist should be the question: have I made a provision against ... Na5 and ... Nxb3, with an unfavourable exchange of my light-squared bishop?



Question: So how should White make an escape hatch for his bishop?

Answer: **8 a4!**

Not bad is 8 c3, a move with a dual role – it allows 8 ... Na5 to be answered by 9 Bc2, and is preparatory to a future d3-d4. But the game move is a good way to combine defence with attack. White not only frees a2 for his bishop but at the same time creates the threat of 9 axb5, winning a pawn.

Notice in contrast how inappropriate would be the natural developing move 8 Nc3?. Such a move has value in an open position in which a tense fight is taking place. In such cases all hands need to get on deck as fast as possible or you risk the whole army being overrun by the superior firepower of the opponent's pieces. Positional niceties are of less overt importance – the pieces have to be brought into the game no matter what, even if it is in a haphazard or strategically sub-optimal way.

Here, however, the position after 7 ... d6 is of a closed nature – the pawn position in the centre has yet to be resolved, but there is no great tactical clash taking place there. The two armies are sitting behind their own fortifications, keeping a respectful distance from each other.

In a closed position the emphasis is on *key pieces* and *key positional features*. Here a *key piece* is White's bishop on b3. After 8 Nc3, Black could hunt it down with 8 ... Na5! when the exchange of bishop for knight can't be avoided. Black would thus acquire the bishop pair. Because of the closed nature of the position, Black can carry out this strategically desirable ... Na5 and ... Nxb3 manoeuvre without being punished for the loss of time involved. In contrast, at move four we saw that Black was too undeveloped to safely grab the bishop with 4 ... b5 5 Bb3 Na5, as White was able to open the position by engineering 14 f4!.

Furthermore, a *key positional feature* is White's desire to build a pawn centre with c2-c3 and d3-d4. Playing 8 Nc3 self obstructs this plan, and so reduces White's chance of putting pressure on the centre. Magnus Carlsen breaks this 'rule' in a game with Beliavsky later in the chapter, but as we shall see his heart was with c2-c3.

8 ... Rb8

Supporting the b5-pawn and avoiding the pin on the a-file. The alternative 8 ... b4 is examined in the next game.

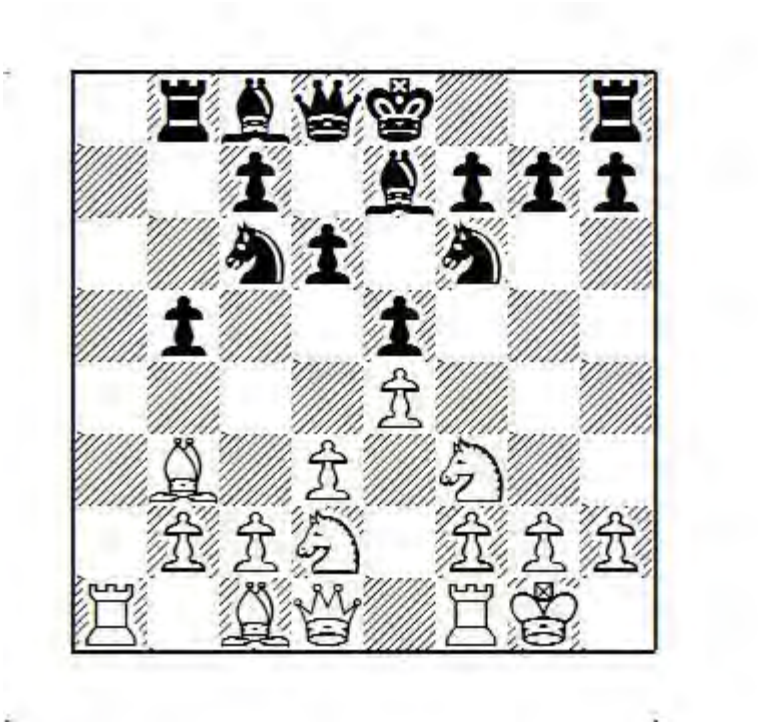
9 axb5

With this exchange White secures the open file for the rook on a1.

9 ... axb5

Forced, as 9 ... Rxb5 would leave a weak pawn on a6 and lose time to 10 Nc3.

10 Nbd2



The knight begins its traditional journey to the kingside, where it can support the centre and introduce attacking threats against the black king.

10 ... 0-0

Black's king is safe, the pawn structure in the centre is symmetrical and the only real target in his position – the pawn on b5 – is well defended. Nonetheless, White's pieces are slightly more active and best of all he has a clear plan to build up his game – namely, the manoeuvre Nf1 and Ng3 and the centre build up with c2-c3 and d3-d4.

11 Re1

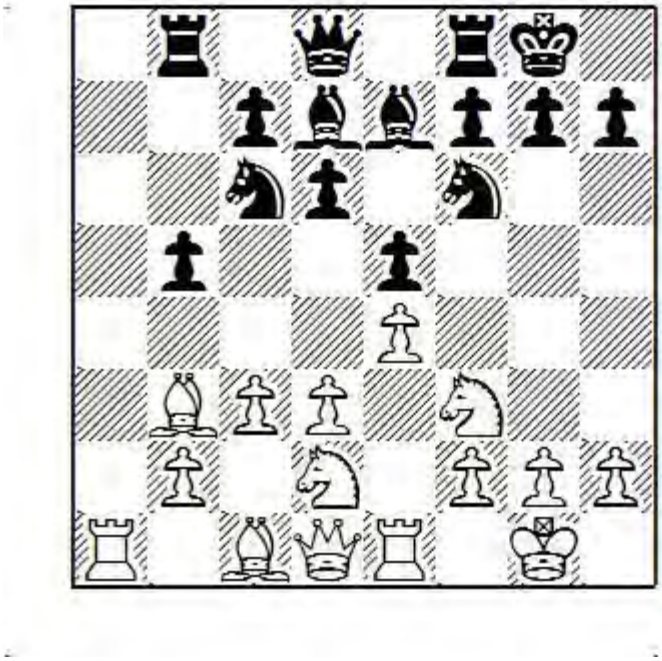
The first step in said plan: the way is cleared for the knight to go to f1.

11 ... Bd7

A little too passive. Topalov seems to have underestimated the danger facing him. It was better to challenge the white bishop by playing 11 ... Be6!, with good chances to equalize.

12 c3

Since the centre pawn structure is symmetrical, you might wonder why White is able to build up with c2-c3 and d3-d4, but Black can't do the same thing with ... c7-c6 and ... d6-d5. Asking ourselves that question might seem a bit stupid, but it makes us realize that White's piece deployment is significantly more efficient than Black's. The knight on c6 blocks the advance of the c7-pawn, whereas with Nbd2 White has kept the way open for c2-c3.

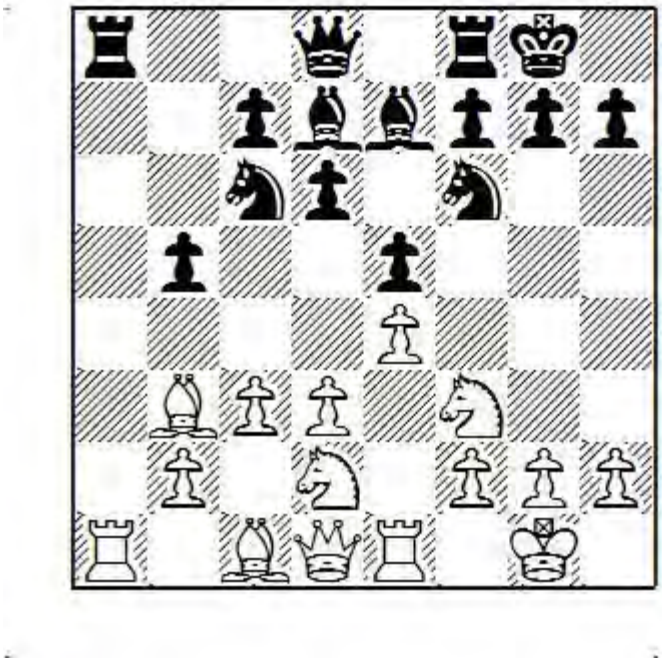


White's Re1 move isn't merely to allow Nf1. It also deters a future ... d6-d5 by Black, as the e5-pawn would come under pressure from the rook, and possibly lost to Nxe5. Here we see that the bishop on e7 isn't doing Black's strategic plan any favours – it gets in the way of ... Re8 to support the e5-pawn. Meanwhile the white bishop on b3 is lending a hand in controlling d5. It also deters ... Re8 because Ng5 might exploit the weakness of f7.

So we see that despite everything looking more or less equal, White has the advantage because he has a plan to improve his position, whereas Black is well developed, but can't unwind his position much further. If you think this is inconsequential – well, Topalov, a 2803-rated player, couldn't stop his game sliding downhill.

12 ... Ra8

If you can't find a plan, and the opponent is probing your position, then exchanging pieces is often the best chance to escape the pressure. It's a pity for Black he didn't recollect this earlier with 11 ... Be6!



13 Rxa8

Wasting no time. In similar situations control of the a-file is relinquished in order to keep the white rook for future action in the centre or on the kingside. This of course presumes that the black pieces can't benefit from queenside action, but such is not the case here, where after 13 Rb1 Na5 14 Bc2 c5 Black has active play.

13 ... Qxa8

In contrast, the black queen can't undertake anything on the a-file and soon returns to the centre.

14 d4

White's advantage begins to take shape with the first gain of space in the centre.

14 ... h6

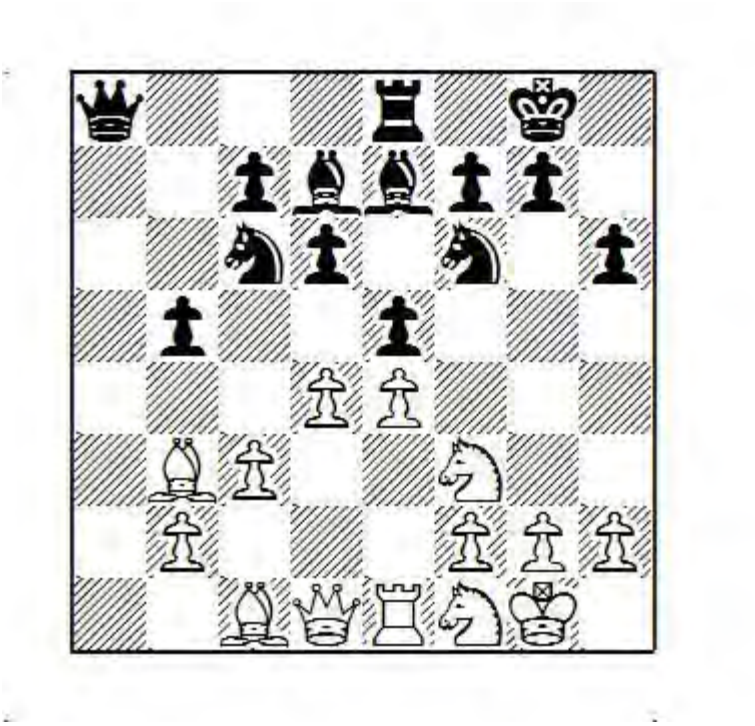
Black doesn't want to weaken his kingside, but he aims to improve the layout of his pieces, and 14 ... Re8 risks being hit by 15 Ng5, when f7 hangs.

15 Nf1

The long awaited knight retreat which completes the second stage of its journey to g3.

15 ... Re8

Topalov plans to bolster the key e5-pawn and secure the retreat square f8 for his bishop.



16 Ng3

Question: Is 16 Ne3 a good alternative?

Answer: In such situations the knight often has to choose between g3 and e3. Both moves get the knight in contact with the important f5-square; going to e3 gives the extra option of Nd5, which can be a very good move on occasion, while going to g3 adds to the defence of e4 (whereas Ne3 blocks the defence of the pawn from the e1-rook).

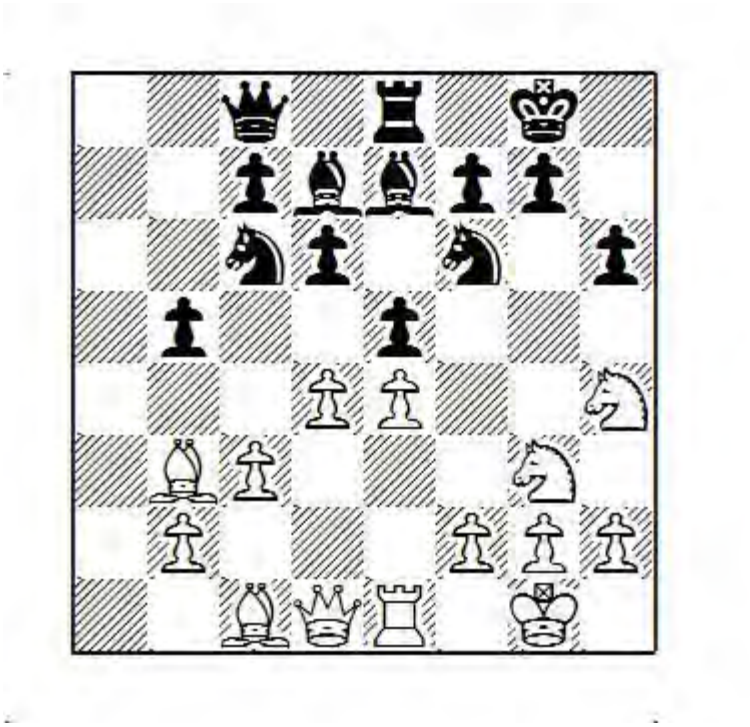
Looking at this specific case, after 16 Ne3 Nxe4 we see the power of the 17 Nd5! move – the black knight is hanging, and there is also the threat of 18 Nxc7, forking the queen and rook. But looking a bit more deeply, we see that after 16 Ne3 exd4! 17 cxd4 Nxe4 18 Nd5 Bd8, both e4 and c7 are defended. It is possible that White can find a tactical method to justify playing like this, for example 16 Ne3 exd4 17 Nd5!?. But it makes no sense to complicate matters when White has a good game with the simple 16 Ng3. Entering a tactical battle would be very welcome to Topalov, who excels in double-edged positions, even those that are objectively bad for him. Instead Carlsen keeps the black pieces under lock and key and leaves his opponent to glare with frustration behind his defensive lines.

16 ... Qc8

The queen gets involved in the fight for the key f5-square, as if now 17 Nf5 Black can reply 17 ... Bxf5 18 exf5 Qxf5.

17 Nh4!

Carlsen is focusing on the f5-square – or so Topalov thinks. Actually, the Norwegian maestro has another, more subtle idea in mind.



Exercise: Try to spot Carlsen's idea (Clue: there is an old saying that the worst bishop is better than the best knight!)

17 ... Bf8

Topalov seems to have been off form in this game. Better was 17 ... Na5. If then 18 Bc2 the possibility that occurs in the game is no longer available to White. Likewise 18 Ba2 Nc4 block's White's next move, though 19 Nhf5 Bf8 20 Qf3, threatening 21 Nxh6+, maintains White's initiative.

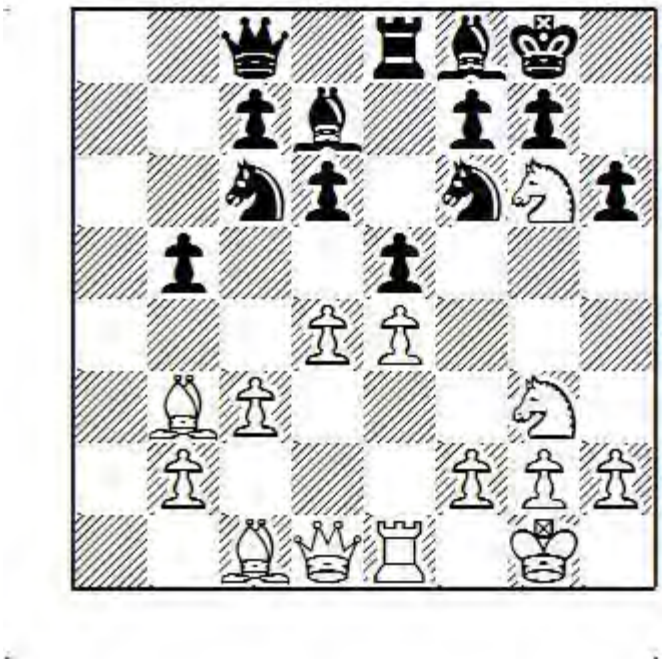
Instead the bishop retreats so that the black centre is well fortified to meet 18 Nhf5, with counterplay involving ... e5xd4 in the offing. Instead there came a surprise move:

Answer: **18 Ng6!!**

Did you see this move? Carlsen might have borrowed the idea from his erstwhile trainer Gary Kasparov. In his 1993 match with Nigel Short, the World Champion had played as White 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 0-0 8 a4 Bb7 9 d3 Re8 10 Nbd2 Bf8 11 c3 h6 12 Ba2 d6 13 Nh4 Qd7 14 Ng6 Ne7 15 Nxf8 Kxf8. Short's plight here isn't as sad as Topalov's, but nonetheless after 16 f3! solidifying the e4-square, Kasparov was able to build up towards an eventual d3-d4. Black's dark-squared bishop was sorely missed.

It is well known that in certain openings the dark-squared bishop is key – notably in defences like the King's Indian and Grünfeld. Black is keen to avoid the gratuitous exchange of this important piece for a white knight, as it is the cornerstone of his opening strategy.

We might seem to be a long way from the Indian Defences here, but don't forget that the way for Black to unwind his game in such situations is with ... g7-g6 and ... Bg7. We shall discuss this further in the note to Black's 19th move, below.



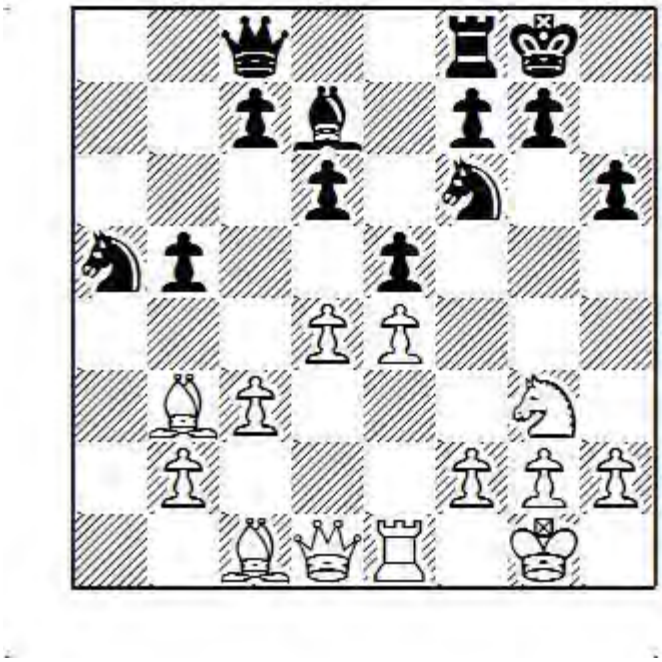
18 ... Na5

As Tartakower lamented ‘chess is the tragedy of one tempo’. Here the knight goes to a5 one move too late.

19 Nxf8!

Now Black loses a piece after 19 ... Nxb3 20 Nxd7 Nxc1 21 Nxf6+ gxf6 22 Qxc1.

19 ... Rxf8



Question: Is White’s advantage small, large or decisive?

Answer: Let’s take stock of the kingside situation. When Black plays ... Bf8 in the Closed Lopez, he intends ... g7-g6 to keep a white knight out of the f5-square, followed by ... Bg7, putting the body of his bishop in front of his king. Then he might think about counterplay

with ... e5xd4. In the absence of the bishop, and the continuing presence of White's dark-squared bishop, ... g7-g6 is too weakening – here 20 ... g6? next move allows 21 Bxh6. Nor does Black have a bishop to place on g7 to shelter his king. And, due to the decreased pressure on the white centre, Black can't get meaningful counterplay by ... e5xd4 – conceding the centre just opens the way for the horde of white pieces after e4-e5.

For this reason, I would say that Black is positionally lost.

It shows the sophistication of the Ruy Lopez that despite having a sound-looking centre, every piece more or less centralized, and a king facing no immediate threats, such a gloomy assessment of Black's chances can be made. But as we shall see, Black has no good answer to White's gradual increase of pressure in the centre that will culminate in a direct attack. Of course, having the flair and technical excellence of Carlsen makes White's task a lot easier!

Question: White doesn't want to allow 20 ... Nxb3, so which

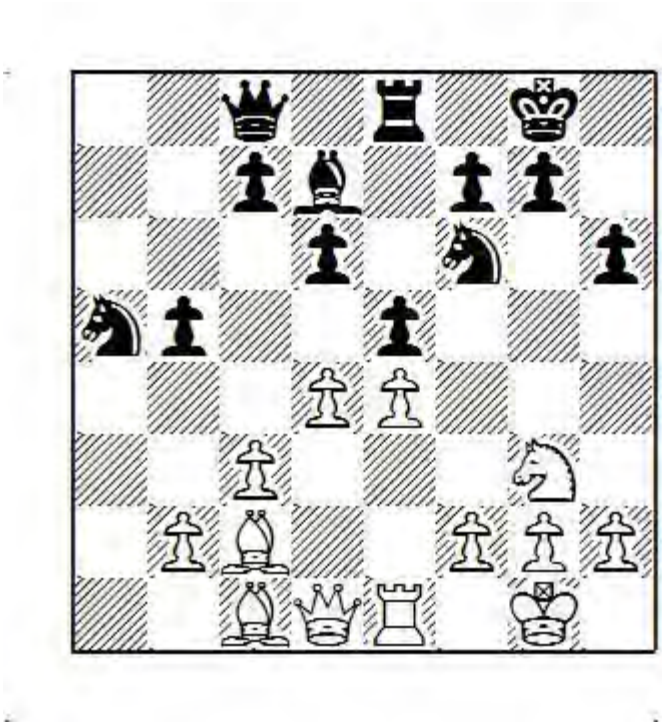
square should he retreat his bishop to – a2 or c2?

20 Bc2

Answer: More natural-looking was 20 Ba2, but then 20 ... Nc4 shuts in the bishop. It might look strange for the bishop to retreat to a blocked diagonal, but Carlsen's has realized that he will be able to combine his bishop and queen as an attacking force against the black king. Getting the pieces working together is a great chess skill; seeing the opportunity a few moves in advance is world-class thinking!

20 ... Re8

There is no way to escape his strategical predicament, so he might as well return the rook to the defence of e5.



Question: Now how can White begin to open lines of attack?

Answer: **21 f4!**

Of course. Are you beginning to see why the unfavourable exchange of Black's dark-squared bishop is enough to cost him the game? The f-file is going to be broken open, and there is no ... g7-g6 and ... Bg7 solidity to oppose the white pieces.

21 ... Bg4

Evidently Black wants to stop Qf3, but the white queen is driven to another potent attacking square.

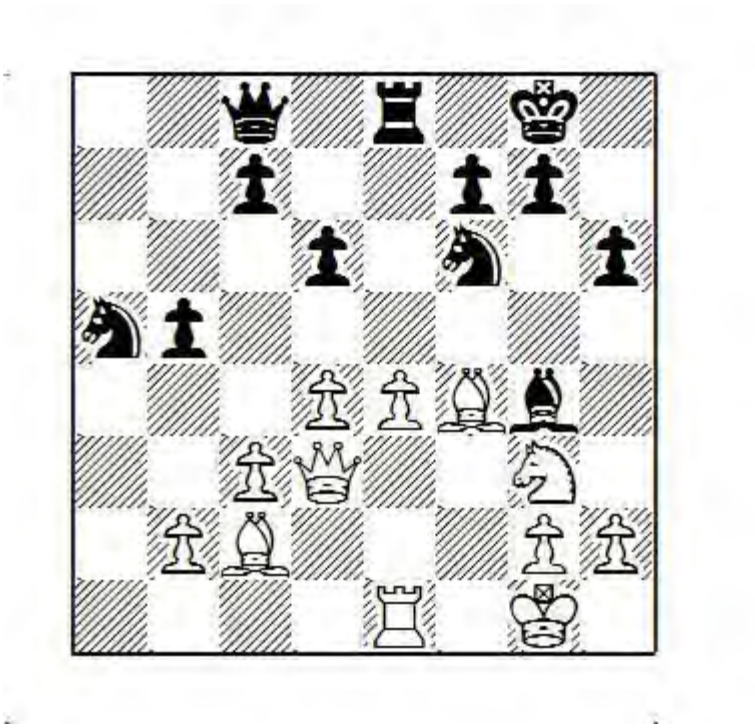
22 Qd3

So here we are: the white queen and bishop are in an attacking formation as predicted at move 20.

22 ... exf4

In positions of this type, the black e5-pawn has to be maintained as a strong point in the centre. Here, however, this is impossible: Black has too many threats to deal with. If 22 ... Nd7, to strengthen e5, the simple 23 Qxb5 is good enough to win, or better still 23 fxe5 dxe5?! 24 h3 Be6 25 d5, trapping the bishop. A convenient tactic for White, but in any case if Black's bishop had stayed safely on d7 rather than venturing to g4, he wouldn't have any good response to White's plan of f4xe5 followed by utilizing the f-file with Qf3 or Rf1.

23 Bxf4



With the terrible threat of 24 e5 when the white queen eyes the h7-square.

23 ... Nc4

Topalov belatedly tries to get counterplay on the queenside.

24 Bc1!

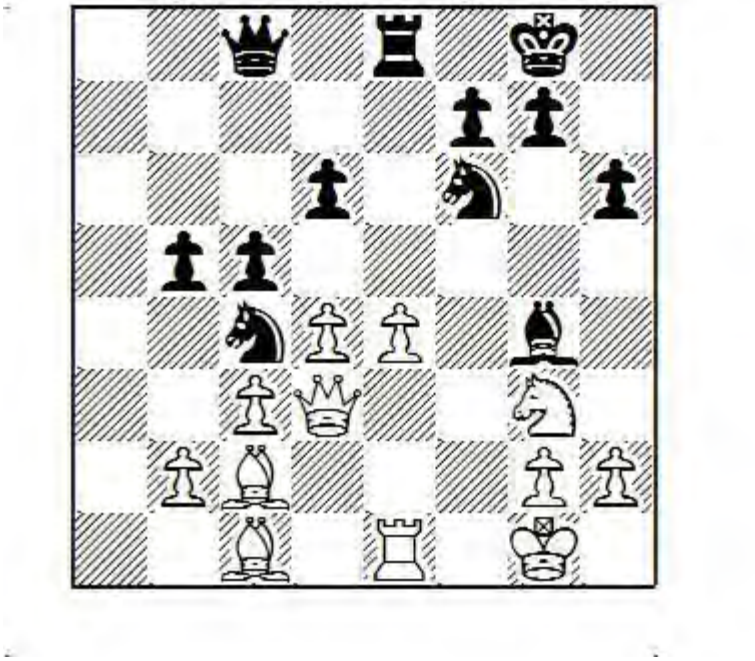
A simple and good decision. The white bishop defends b2 and remains aiming at the h6-square after this retreat.

Question: What is White's main threat?

Answer: Note how the traditional weakness of the b5-pawn haunts Black here, as it does in so many other Ruy Lopez variations. Besides worrying about his king safety, Topalov has to meet the prosaic threat of 25 b3 Nb6 26 Qxb5. He would rather face a big attack, in which White might conceivably mess up, however unlikely that might be, rather than be a pawn down for nothing when the win is a mere technical exercise for a strong opponent, especially one rated 2826!

24 ... c5

An attempt to confuse matters.



Exercise: Can you see Topalov's idea after 25 b3 Nb6 26 Qxb5?

Answer: Black could reply 26 ... cxd4!. If 27 Qxb6, then 27 ... Qxc3 hits both c2 and e1, when White's problem is suddenly how to save himself.

25 Rf1!

Now Black has to reckon with ideas such as 26 b3 Nb6 27 Bxh6, or 27 e5 followed by 28 Rxf6 to clear the way for a queen check on h7.

A little experiment – move the black pawn from g7 to g6, then take the black bishop from g4 and put it on g7. Since we cheated, let's imagine it is White's move.

What a difference! There are no ideas based on Qh7+, Rxf6 is harmless after ... Bxf6, the white knight is denied the f5-square, and although 1 Bxh6 might still win a pawn, after 1 ... Bxh6 2 Rxf6 Bg7 Black has pressure against d4 which would make it hard for White to exploit the extra material.

Alas this is only a happy fantasy for Black. Place the pawn back on g7 and the bishop back on g4, and let's see how the nightmare continues for Topalov:

25 ... cxd4

Perhaps some counterplay will appear against the d2-square?

26 cxd4!

Carlsen refuses to be hurried into anything. Black is busted and shouldn't be allowed the luxury of any complications, no matter how attractive for White.

26 ... Qd8

The queen adds her defence to f6 and prepares for a queenside sortie.

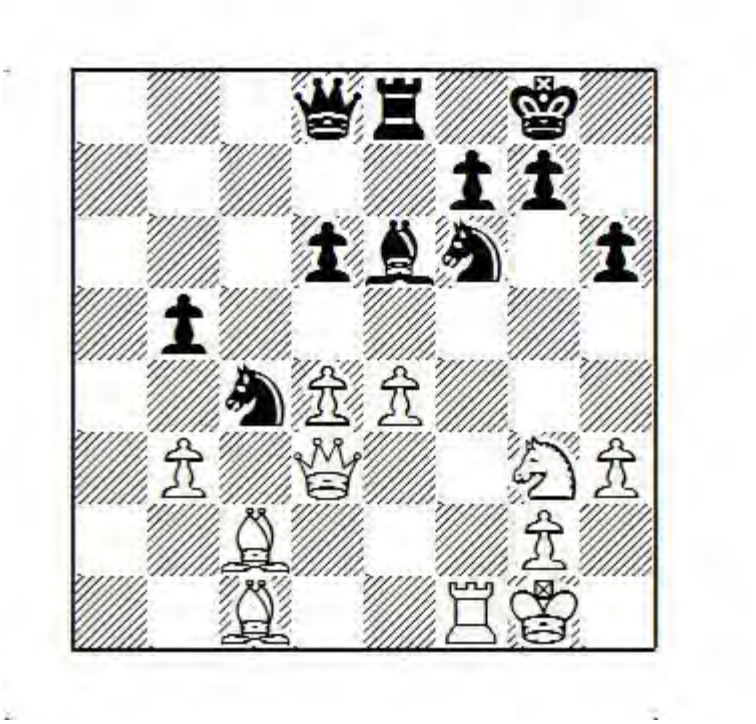
27 h3!

Carlsen continues to show great patience. He is playing a hugely resourceful opponent and wants to keep everything under control. Therefore he creates a hideaway for his king on h2.

27 ... Be6

The bishop retreats here to support one last attempt at stirring up counterplay.

28 b3!



Exercise: If now 28 ... Nb6, 29 Qxb5 is a sound pawn up, but can you

make the sacrificial 29 e5 dxe5 30 Rxf6 work for White?

Answer: You sure can, if you see after 30 ... Qxf6 or 30 ... gxf6 White has 31 Qh7+ Kf8 32 Ba3+!. As Bobby Fischer said in his Puzzle book, 'look at the whole board!' The bishop check will force a mate with Qh8 by blocking the escape route via e7. Incidentally, if Black avoids this with 30 ... Qxd4+ the endgame a piece down is hopeless after 31 Qxd4 etc.

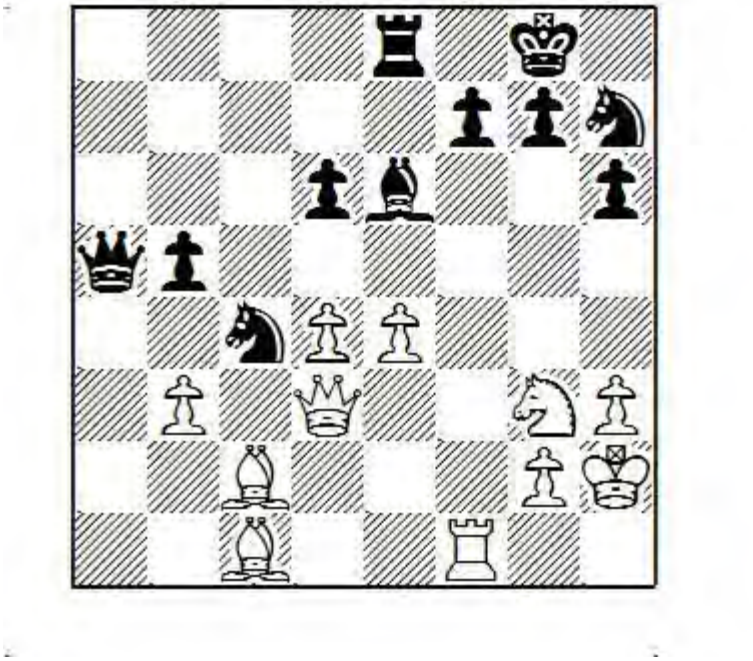
28 ... Qa5

Hoping for 29 bxc4 Bxc4 and 30 ... Bxf1, when Black can fight on. However, White can exploit the absence of the black queen from the defence of the centre and kingside.

29 Kh2!

But one more preparatory move please! White wants to play 30 Rxf6 gxf6 31 Nh5 which would be decisive in view of the threats of 32 Qg3+ or 32 Nxf6+, to say nothing of 32 bxc4. The king move avoids an embarrassing check by the black queen on e1.

29 ... Nh7



The knight runs away from the aforementioned 30 Rxf6 gxf6 31 Nh5.

30 e5!

This breakthrough has gained all the more power through being delayed. It now comes with a direct threat to the black knight.

30 ... g6

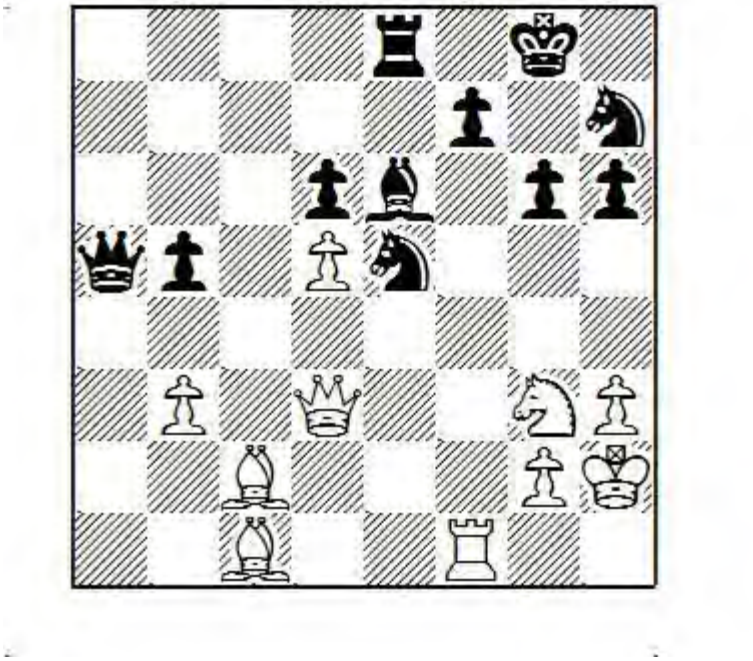
This barricade is going to be swept way by the white centre.

31 d5!

More incisive than 31 Bxh6. If the bishop retreats then White has the happy choice between the kindergarten 32 bxc4 and 32 e6.

31 ... Nxe5

Attacking the queen.



Exercise: Find the move that made Black resign.

Answer: **32 dxe6! 1-0**

After 32 ... Nxd3 33 exf7+ Kf8 (or White takes on e8 with a new queen) 34 Bxh6+ Ke7 35 fxe8Q+ Kxe8 36 Bxd3 and White will soon win the knight on h7 with 37 Bxg6+ when he has a colossal material advantage.

A remarkably straightforward victory against one of the best players of the modern age.

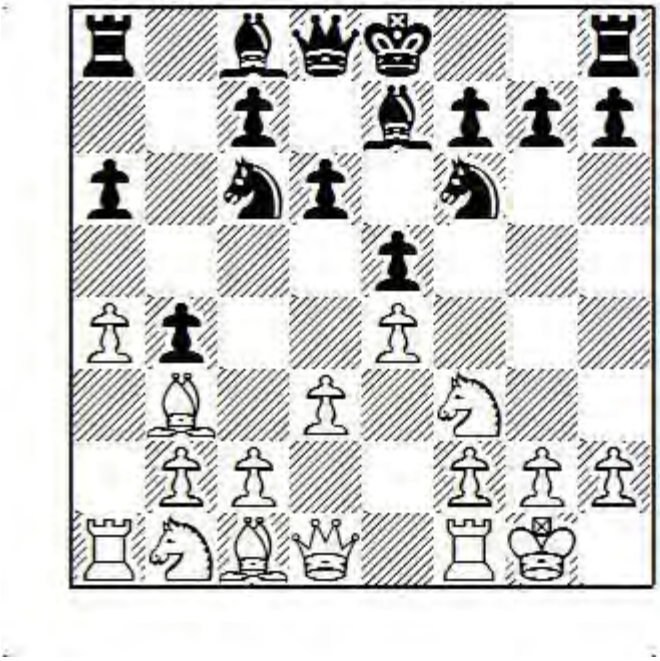
I don't claim the following game is particularly good, but it was played while I was writing this book. I have tried to recall my 'real game' thoughts and fears and reflect them in the questions and answers.

Game 2

N.McDonald-B.Savage

British League (4NCL) 2011

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 d3 b5 6 Bb3 Be7 7 0-0 d6 8 a4 b4

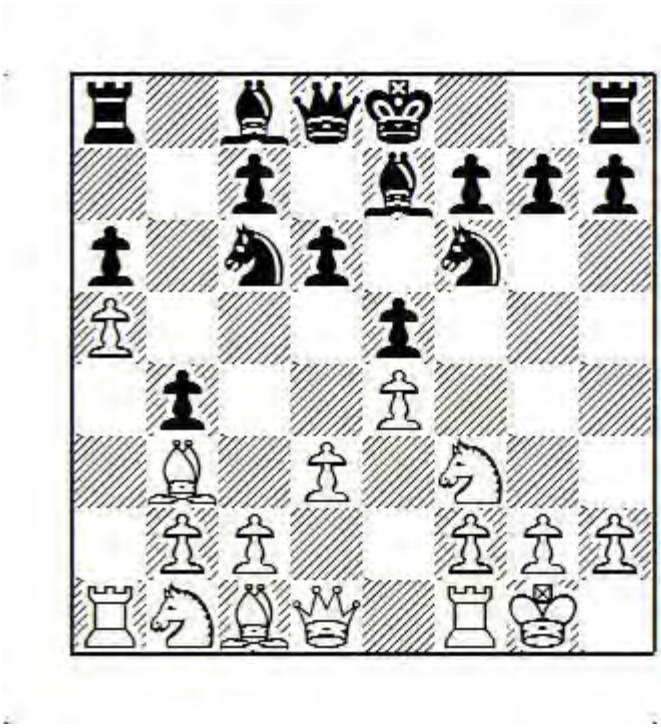


Exercise: In the previous game Topalov played 8 ... Rb8.

Describe some of the good points of Black's pawn move.

Answer: Obviously the threat of 9 axb5 has been met. The game move aims to do so whilst keeping the queenside semi-blocked. Thus Black doesn't hand over the a-file as is the case after 8 ... Rb8 9 axb5 axb5 – see the Carlsen-Topalov game. Furthermore, the pawn on b4 takes away the c3-square from the white knight. After a subsequent ... Rb8, White's natural build up with c2-c3, angling for d3-d4, can be met by ... b4xc3 when after b2xc3 in reply, the black rook has the open b-file and the basis for possible tactical operations against the bishop on b3.

9 a5!?



Exercise: Instead of developing his pieces White moves his a-pawn a

second time. Can you see the ideas behind this move? Any disadvantages?

Answer: There are several interrelated ideas behind the pawn move:

1. The pawn on a6 is fixed as a target.

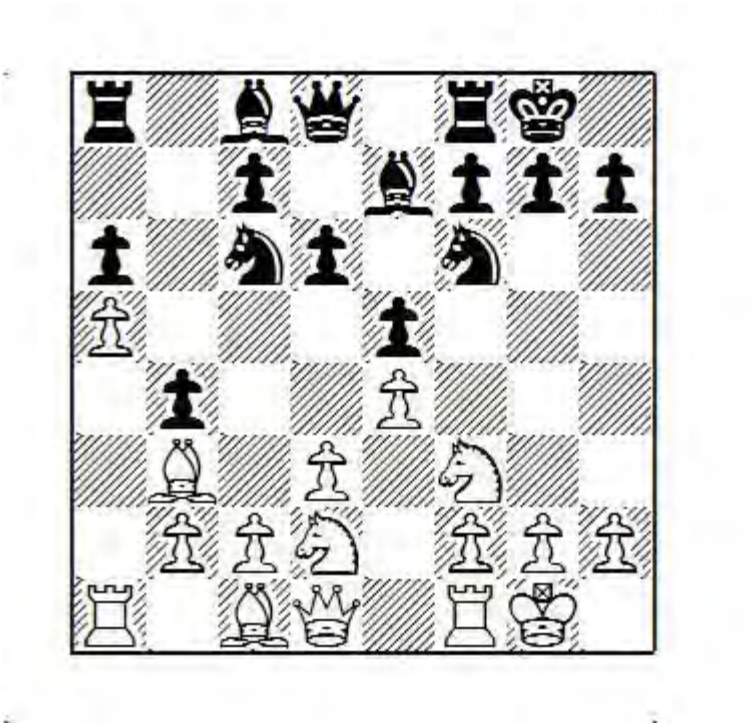
2. The b4-pawn can't be supported with ... a6-a5, leaving the black queenside disjointed.

3. Black is also prevented from expanding his pawn centre with ... Na5 and ... c7-c5.

4. White's bishop can once again harass the knight that defends e5, with Ba4.

A possible drawback to White's idea is that by delaying his development he might give Black the chance to arrange the freeing move ... d6-d5. Also the pawn on a5 looks at first glance more vulnerable than the pawn it is blocking on a6 – it is already attacked by the black knight, whereas the a6-pawn is defended twice and not even attacked once. But as we shall see, neither the black rook on a8 nor the bishop on c8 wants to play nursemaid to the a6-pawn – they have other tasks to perform. As the game unfolds, the a6-pawn loses its allies. If the a6-pawn is lost, then the white pawn on a5 is transformed into a far advanced passed pawn.

9 ... 0-0 10 Nbd2



Question: Now what happens if Black tries 10 ... Bg4,

aiming for 11 ... Nd4 to put pressure on f3 and threaten ... Nxb3?

Isn't the pin annoying for White?

10 ... Be6

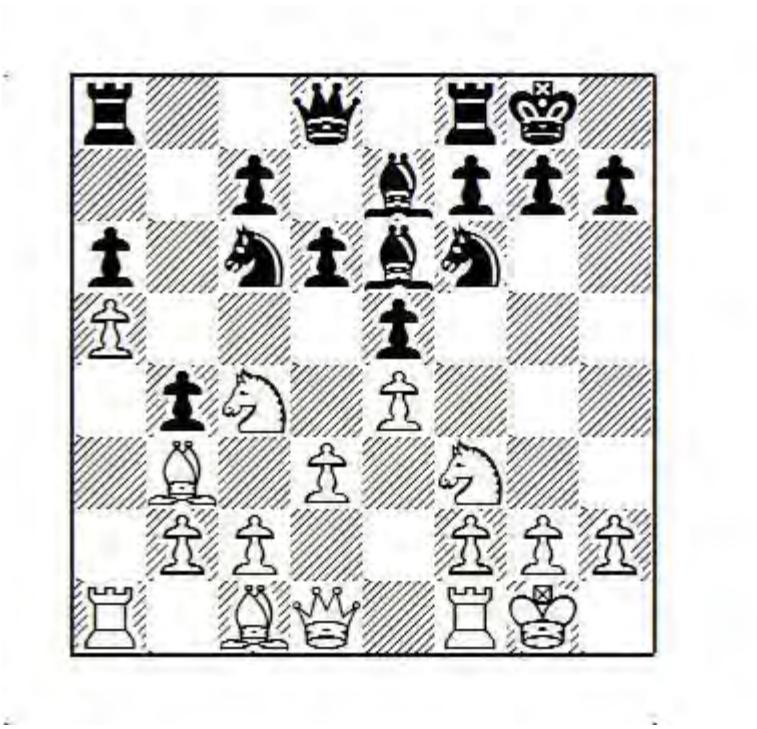
Answer: After 10 ... Bg4, the first move to consider is 11 c3. This has the good point that it rules out ... Nd4. However, it can be answered by 11 ... d5!? or simply 11 ... Rb8, intending upon 12 Bc4 to defend a6 with 12 ... .Qc8. The black pieces remain coordinated.

The better plan for White would be to use his kingside pawns to isolate Black's bishop. This can be done with 11 h3 Bh5 (there is still the option of 11 ... Be6, though that means that compared to the game move 10 ... Be6 Black has given White the useful h2-h3 for free) 12 g4! Bg6 13 Nc4. Then White's plans include Ba4 to disrupt the knight on c6, and Ne3 followed either by Nf5 or, if Black plays ... Nd7, then Nd5. Black's bishop on g6 is a positional liability.

I know that pushing pawns in front of your own king can feel distasteful, but Black lacks the dynamism to break the white pawn chain on the kingside. On the contrary, it is likely to smother him if he tries to attack it, for example 13 ... h5 14 Ba4! Nd4 (Black is the exchange down after 14 ... hxg4 15 Bxc6 gxf3 16 Bxa8 Qxa8 17 Qxf3; the lesser evil is 14 ... Na7, but 15 Nh4 with ideas of Nf5 or seizing the bishop pair with Nxg6 is strong for White) 15 Nxd4 exd4 16 g5 Nd7 17 f4 and the pawns are marching.

11 Nc4

The knight chooses c4.



Question: Why is it a good idea to post it here rather than carry

out the manoeuvre (after Nbd2) of Re1, Nf1 and Ng3

which we saw in Carlsen-Topalov?

Answer: On c4, the knight restrains the freeing move ... d6-d5, at least for the time being, as e5 would be left hanging. It also adds a guard to the a5-pawn, deterring an attempt to attack it with 11 ... Rb8 and 12 ... Rb5. It blocks the exchange of bishops, enabling White to maintain more centre tension and, as we shall see, outflank the bishop on e6 both in a key variation at move 13 and in the game itself with Ba4! attacking the knight on c6. Besides, if White wants to use his knight on the kingside this can be achieved just as efficiently with Nc4 and Ne3, aiming at f5, as with Nf1 and Ne3.

Actually, there was an alternative plan available to White in 11 Bc4, followed by 12 b3, 13 Bb2 and a well timed d3-d4 advance in the centre. If Black exchanges with 11 ... Bxc4, then 12 Nxc4 brings the knight to a good square. Whereas if 11 ... d5, then 12 exd5 Nxd5 12 Re1 leaves the e5-pawn weak.

11 ... Rb8 12 Re1

A natural move that further hinders the freeing ... d6-d5 advance as after e4xd5 the e5-pawn would be attacked by the rook as well as the white knights. Nonetheless, Black can be equally obstructive with the little plan of ... Nd7, ... Bf6 and ... Nd4 which prevents White from expanding with d3-d4.

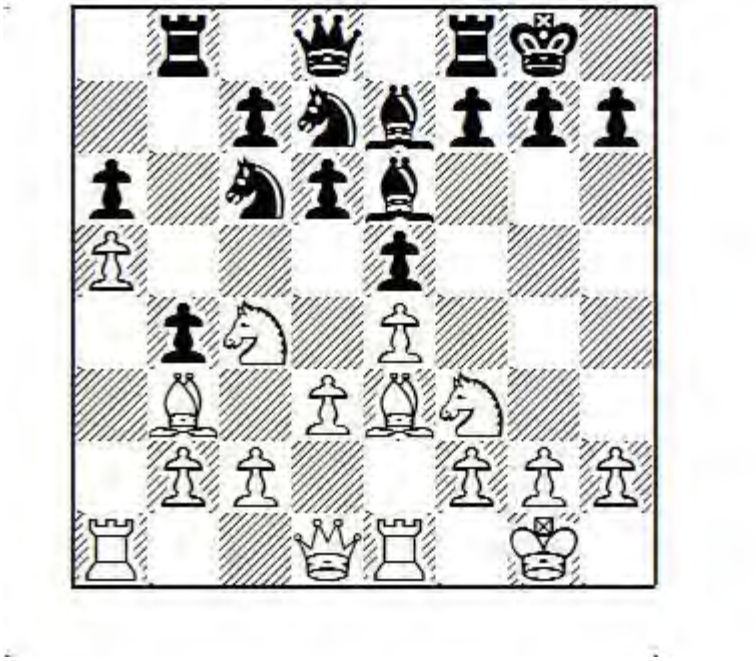
Therefore 12 Be3!? at once might be more accurate, intending 13 h3, 14 Qe2, 15 Rfd1 etc., limbering up for d3-d4. The point is that Black can't make the first step in his 'anti d3-d4' plan with 12 ... Nd7? as 13 Ba4! would be very embarrassing for the knight on c6.

12 ... Nd7

In contrast to the 12 Be3!? variation given in the note above, 13 Ba4 Nd4 is safe for Black.

13 Be3

Stopping 13 ... Nc5, which would now cost Black the e5-pawn after an exchange on c5.



Exercise: A young Magnus Carlsen played the ambitious 13 ... d5 here and upon 14 exd5 Bxd5 won following some adventures in N.De Firmian-M.Carlsen, Copenhagen 2004. Can you see anything better for White?

Answer: White could use the a4-square with 14 Ba4!. For example 14 ... dxc4 15 Bxc6 cxd3 16 Qxd3 and the a6-pawn is hanging. Black has a difficult game.

13 ... Bf6 14 Ba4?!

White encourages Black to play a good move! (Fortunately your author doesn't have any pretensions to being one of the best players in the world.)

Instead after 14 c3 – beginning the process of expansion in the centre – 14 ... bxc3 15 bxc3 Rb7 16 Qc2 Na7 17 d4 Qb8 18 d5 (notice how White gradually removes the enemy light-squared bishop from any influence in the centre/queenside struggle) 18 ... Bg4 19 Nfd2 h6 20 h3 Bh5 21 Ba4! (only now) 21 ... Nb5 22 Na3 Nc5 23 Bxc5 dxc5 24 Reb1 Black was under pressure on the queenside in N.De Firmian-A.Beliavsky, Copenhagen 2004.

Question: So how should Black take advantage of White's inaccuracy?

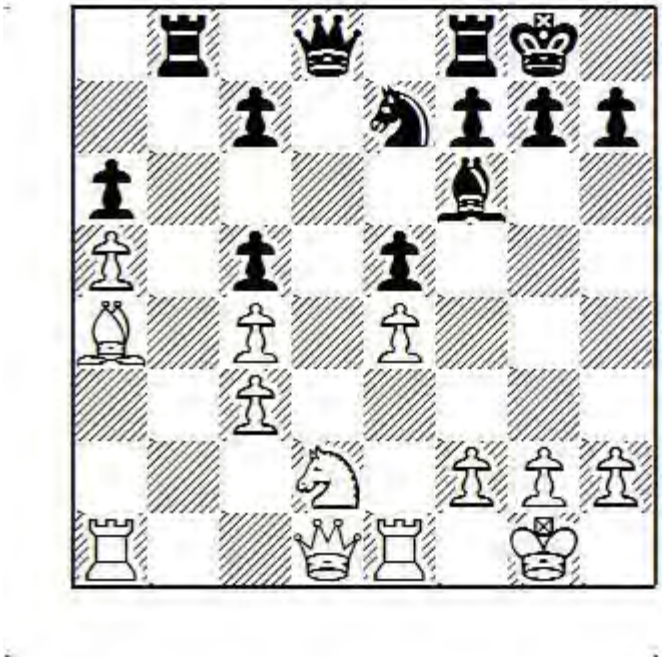
14 ... Ne7?

Answer: Not like this! Black should have taken the chance to simplify with 14 ... Nd4!. For example 15 c3 bxc3 16 bxc3 Nxf3+ 17 Qxf3 Bg5! with good chances of equality.

15 c3 bxc3 16 bxc3 Bxc4

Savage seeks to escape by exchanges, but White emerges with small but permanent positional advantages.

17 dxc4 Nc5 18 Bxc5 dxc5 19 Nd2



Question: Why is White better here?

Answer: The a6-pawn is vulnerable to attack by White's light-squared bishop. If it falls then the passed a-pawn will decide the game. Allied with this is the latent threat of Nb3 and Nxc5, when the knight assails the a6-pawn. Meanwhile Black's dark-squared bishop has no role beyond defending c5.

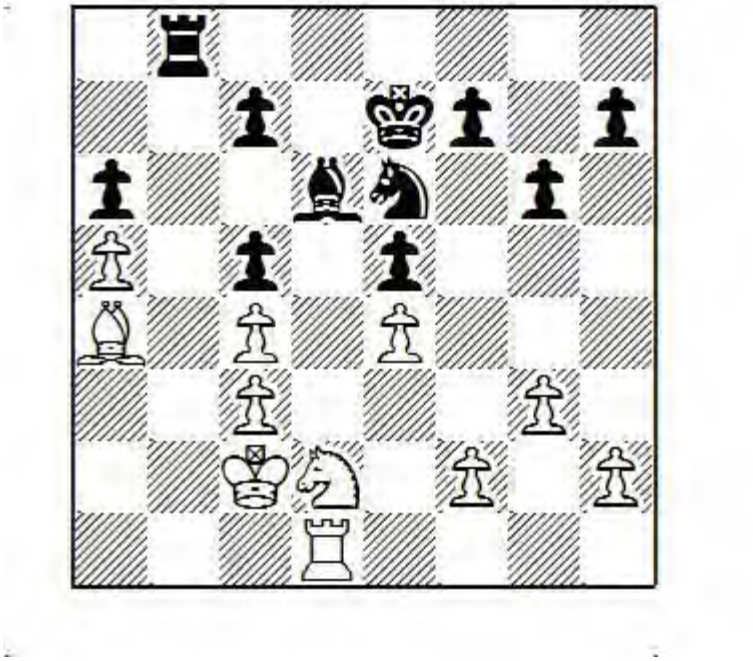
19 ... Qd3 20 Re3 Qd6 21 Nb3 Rfd8 22 Re1 Ng6 23 Qg4 Be7 24 Red1 Qf6 25 g3 Nf8 26 Kg2 g6 27 Qf3

White is happy to exchange queens as this allows him to activate his king.

27 ... Qxf3+ 28 Kxf3 Rxd1 29 Rxd1 Bd6 30 Ke2

The king heads to c2 to neutralize any possibility of Black's rook exploiting the b-file. This frees his knight for action in the centre.

30 ... Ne6 31 Kd3 Kf8 32 Kc2 Ke7 33 Nd2



Heading for d5 via f1 and e3. Black has to worry about ideas such as an exchange of rooks initiated with Rb1 followed by Bc6 and Bb7, winning the a6-pawn. He tries to gain counterplay on the kingside, but it leads him into trouble.

33 ... f5 34 exf5 gxf5 35 Nf1 f4

Stopping 36 Ne3, but conceding the e4-square proves even worse.

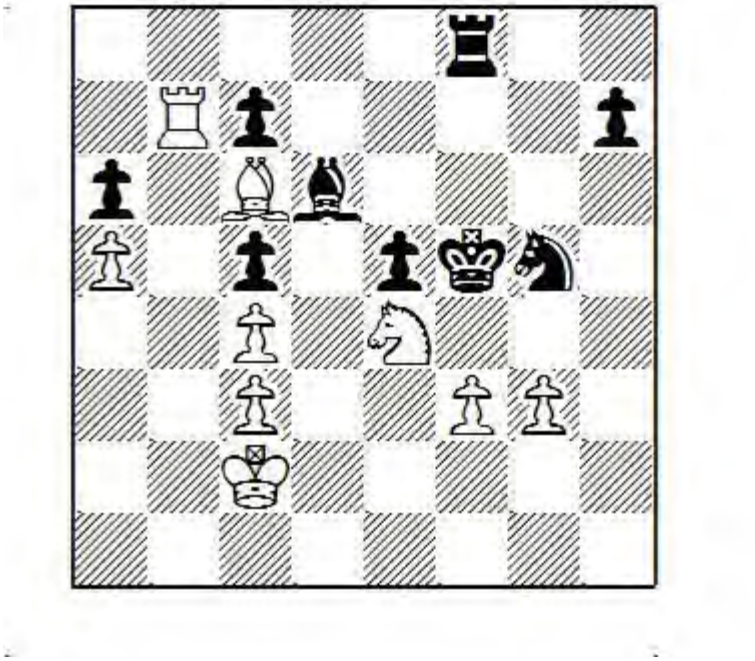
36 Nd2

Back again now that a wonderful blockade square has appeared for the knight in front of the e5-pawn.

36 ... .Rf8 37 Ne4 Nd8 38 Rb1

Now the a6-pawn will drop sooner and later, without Black gaining enough counterplay.

38 ... Ke6 39 Rb8 Nf7 40 Rb7 Kf5 41 f3 fxg3 42 hxg3 Ng5 43 Bc6



43 ... Kg6

Black loses a piece after 43 ... Nxf3 44 Nxd6+.

44 Nxg5 Kxg5 45 Ra7 e4 46 Bxe4 Bxg3 47 Rxa6 h5 48 Rg6+ Kf4 49 a6 c6 50 a7 Ra8 51 Rg7 h4 52 Bxc6 Rxa7 53 Rxa7 h3 54 Rf7+ Ke3 55 f4 1-0

The restrained centre versus a ... Bc5 (Møller) set-up

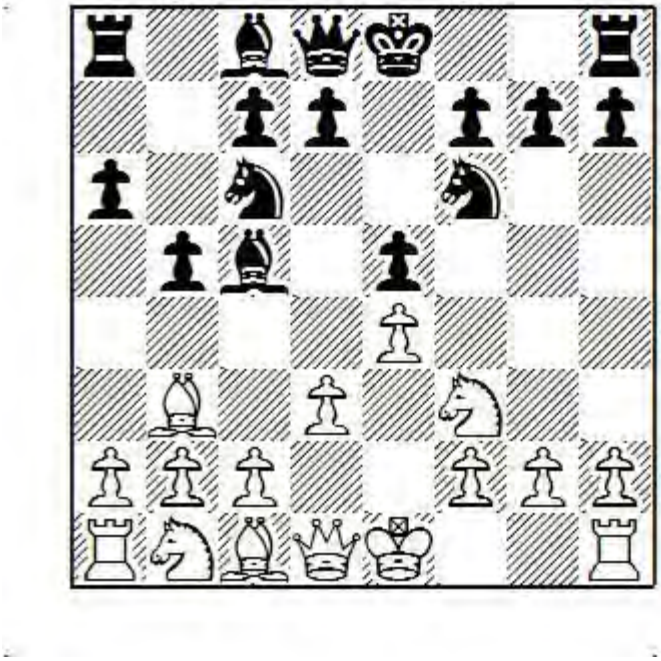
In the games above Black chose the modest development of his bishop to e7. Now we'll look at the more ambitious ... Bc5, which is in the style of the Møller Defence: 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 b5 6 Bb3 Bc5 – see Chapter Three for more details. In the Møller proper, White often leaves his pawn on e4 undefended against ... Nxe4 for *eight* moves, whereas our no-nonsense approach here defends it at once with 5 d3.

Game 3

E.Berg-J.Rudd

Liverpool 2007

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 d3 b5 6 Bb3 Bc5



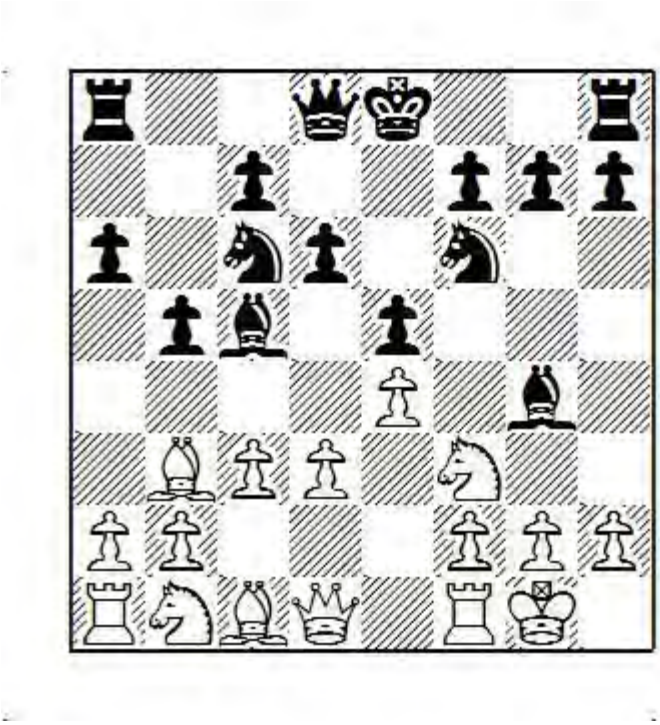
An aggressive response by Black, and eminently logical. White has avoided putting pressure on the e5-pawn by organizing a quick d2-d4, so why not develop the bishop *outside* the pawn chain before playing ... d7-d6? The related 7 ... Bb7 is considered in the next game.

7 0-0 d6 8 c3

Our good friend the restrained centre once again greets us. Instead 8 a4 Bb7?! 9 Nc3 would transpose to the magnificent game Carlsen-Beliavsky – see below. However, I don't recommend you play like that as due to the move order Black has an active way of meeting 8 a4 with 8 ... Bg4!?.

8 ... Bg4?!

Black has put both bishops on dynamic (exposed?) squares. The white knight is pinned, making the d3-d4 advance even harder to achieve.



Question: But d3-d4 didn't figure in White's immediate plans. And besides I don't understand why in the note to the previous move

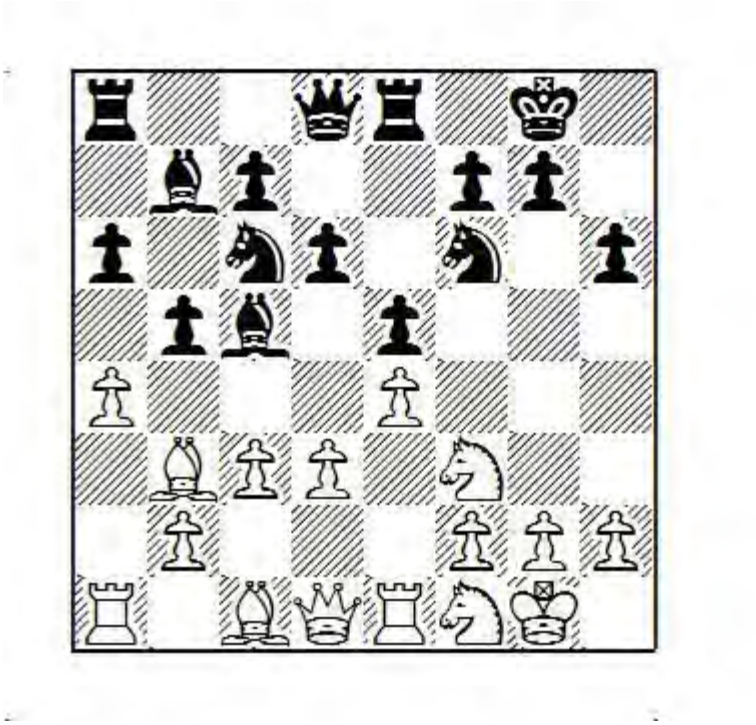
after 8 a4 you suggest 8 ... Bg4, but here the same move is given a dubious sign.

Answer: Yes, you could say that Black is fighting the wrong war in playing 8 ... .Bg4. In order to prevent a move (d3-d4) that White has no intention of playing he puts his bishop on a square where it inadvertently helps his opponent carry out his real plan!

After 8 a4 the move 8 ... Bg4 makes a lot more sense for Black and not only because it stops the threat of 9 axb5. With 8 a4 White has committed himself to an opening of lines on the queenside. After White plays 9 c3 Black can already think about gaining counterplay along the b-file with moves like 9 ... Rb8 followed by a subsequent ... b5-b4 and ... Na5.

Notice that in the main game after 8 c3 Bg4, Berg focuses entirely on the build up of his kingside attack. He is careful not to give Black any counterplay with a2-a4. Therefore after 8 ... Bg4 Black's bishop ends up becoming a strategic liability.

Instead of the game move 8 ... Bg4, it was better for Black to simply castle and keep all options open. After 8...0-0 9 Nbd2 Bb7 (even here it might be too early to commit this bishop; 9 ... Bb6, taking the sting out of d3-d4 in preparation for ... Ne7-g6, is a more solid option) 10 Re1 h6 11 Nf1 Re8 12 a4 we see the familiar facets of White's strategy: pressure on b5, the overprotection of the key e4 point, and the manoeuvre of the knight from b1 via d2 to f1, whence it can go to g3 and aim at the undefended f5-square. White has an edge here.



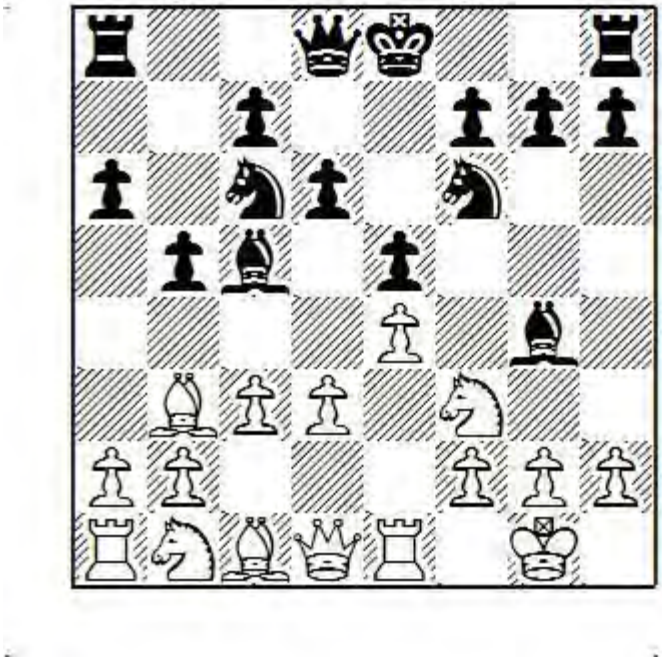
Exercise: Continuing this analysis variation, Black can try to free himself with 12 ... d5. How would you assess this move – good, okay or bad?

Answer: It's a serious mistake. After 13 exd5 Nxd5 (instead 13 ... Na5 doesn't help as after 14 Bc2 Black has to reckon with 15 b4 winning a piece) 14 d4! Black can't play 14 ... exd4? without dropping a piece to 15 Rxe8+ and 16 Bxd5. The game A.Aldama-J.Vega, Merida 2002, continued 14 ... Bb6 15 dxe5 Na5 16 Bc2 and White had an extra pawn.

The moral is that all moves have to be checked, no matter how tempting or 'natural' they are. Positionally speaking 12 ... d5 is exactly the move Black wants to play; calculation reveals it to be a deadly false path.

9 Re1

The rook is developed to a blocked file, and leaves the f2-square a shade vulnerable.

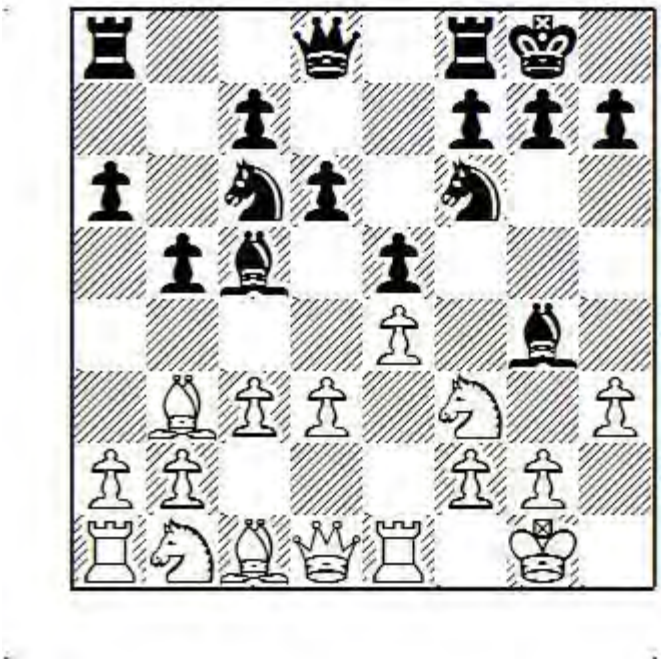


Exercise: Can you think of some reasons why this is a good move?

Answer: It vacates f1 for the knight's familiar manoeuvre, overprotects the e4 point and at the same time helps to deter the freeing move ... d6-d5, as the e5-pawn could become exposed to attack after e4xd5. It is also a useful waiting move. As we shall see, White intends Bg5; and a maxim says that it is better to pin the opponent's knight on f6 *after* he has castled, not before. Here 9 Bg5 would allow Black to generate counterplay by 9 ... h6 10 Bh4 g5 11 Bg3 h5!? etc. If Black had already castled it would be much riskier for him to push all these pawns in front of his king.

9 ... 0-0 10 h3!

Making the bishop choose between two diagonals.



Question: So where should it go?

10 ... Bh5

Answer: 10 ... Bd7 looks rather passive. White could carry on according to his set plan with 11 Nbd2, 12 Nf1 and 13 Ng3, when he begins to exert pressure on the f5-square. He also has Bg5 in reserve, or d3-d4 in some cases, while the standard wing thrust a2-a4 has its usual merit.

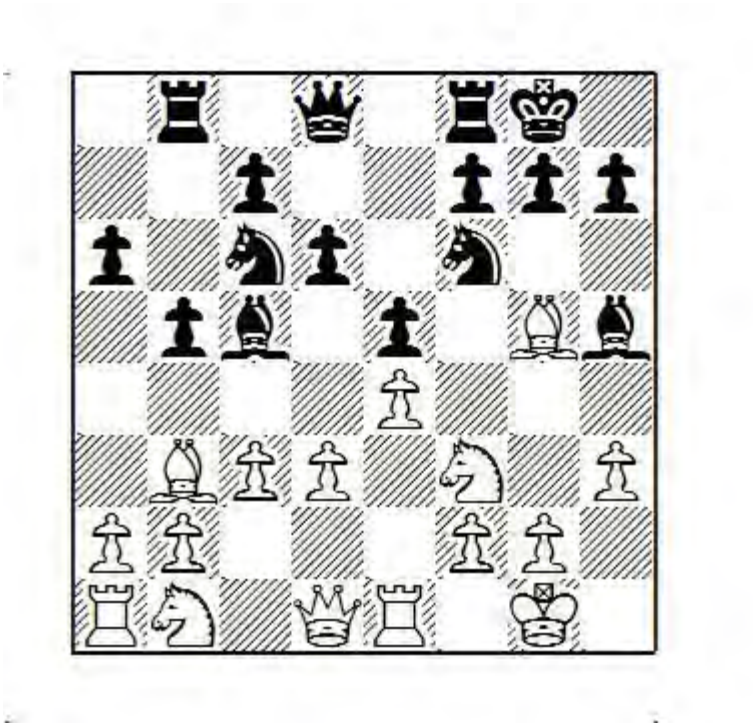
More challenging is 10 ... Be6, as White has no wish to exchange bishops, even though 11 d4 Bxb3 12 axb3 looks somewhat better for him. Perhaps 11 Bc2!? is the best reply. It looks paradoxical to bury the bishop on c2 and leave its black counterpart in control of the open diagonal. However, White is preserving energy for a future positional build-up by retaining the bishop. The enemy bishop can't do anything on e6 and Black is already in danger of losing a piece to a fork after 12 d4.

Nonetheless Black should try one of the above moves, as the bishop proves misplaced on the kingside after the game move.

11 Bg5!

The pin is awkward as after 11 ... h6 12 Bxf6 Black must concede broken pawns with 12 ... gxf6 as 12 ... Qxf6 13 Bd5! unexpectedly wins the exchange.

11 ... Rb8

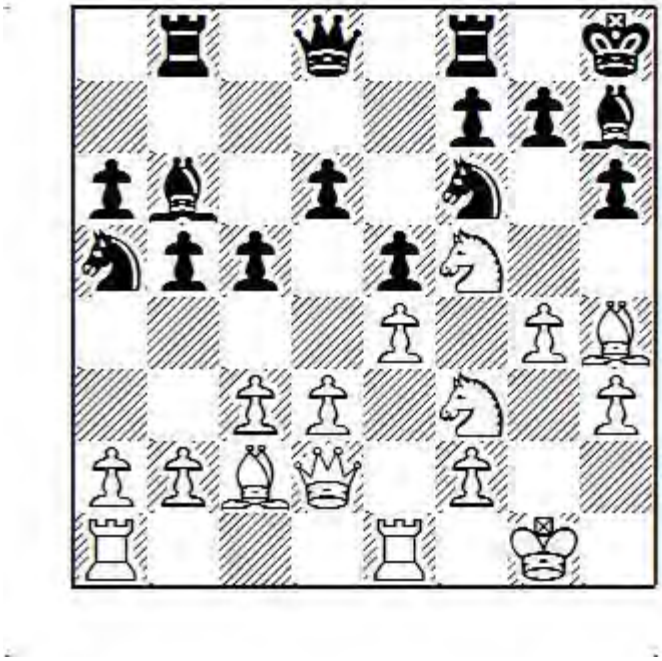


Question: Now how can White increase the kingside pressure?

Answer: **12 g4!**

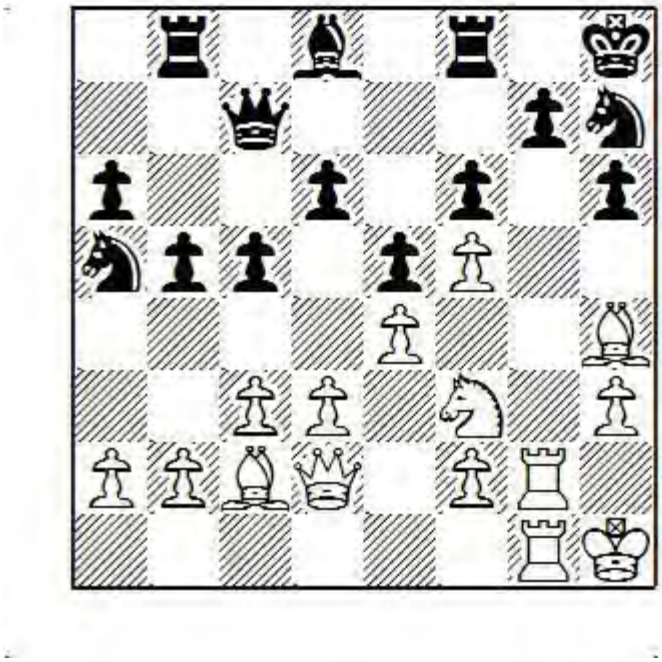
White gains time to create a solid platform for his knight on f5. Which knight? Steinitz taught us it should be the one on b1, even though it is currently four moves away from f5. It is worth reminding ourselves that slow manoeuvres of this type are only effective because of White's solid centre. To play a move like g2-g4 in front of your own king for the benefit of a knight on the other side of the board is rarely permissible in a Sicilian Defence or indeed in a Ruy Lopez with a more fluid centre.

12 ... Bg6 13 Nbd2 Bb6 14 Nf1 Na5 15 Bc2 h6 16 Bh4 Bh7 17 Qd2 c5 18 Ng3 Kh8 19 Nf5



Completing his manoeuvre. If Black just ‘passes’ then 20 Kh1, 21 Rg1 and 22 g5 will give White a winning attack. So Rudd takes on f5, but the open g-file soon proves his ruin.

19 ... Bxf5 20 gxf5 Qe7 21 Kh1 Bd8 22 Rg1 Qc7 23 Rg2 Nh7 24 Rag1 f6



Exercise: All the white pieces save one are poised for action

on the kingside. How did Berg bring it into the attack?

Answer: This is revealed at move 28:

25 b4! cxb4 26 cxb4 Nc6 27 Rg6

Not allowing the rook to be shut out of the attack on g7 by 27 ... Ng5.

27 ... Ng5 28 Bb3!

The bishop seizes the long diagonal so that if 28 ... Nxf3 29 Rxh6+ leads to mate in three moves.

28 ... Ne7 29 Bxg5 fxg5

There's no hope in 29 ... Nxg6 30 Bxh6 Nf4 31 Bxf4 exf4 32 Qxf4 threatening mate.

30 Rxg7! 1-0

Black is soon mated after 30 ... Kxg7 31 Nxg5.

The restrained centre proved the perfect base on which Berg could build his strategy. The White attack ran like clockwork once he gained a kingside bind: the knight went to f5, then the rooks seized the open g-file and, after a little preparation (25 b4! and 28 Bb3), a decisive sacrifice appeared.

The restrained centre versus a ... Bb7 (Archangelsk) set-up

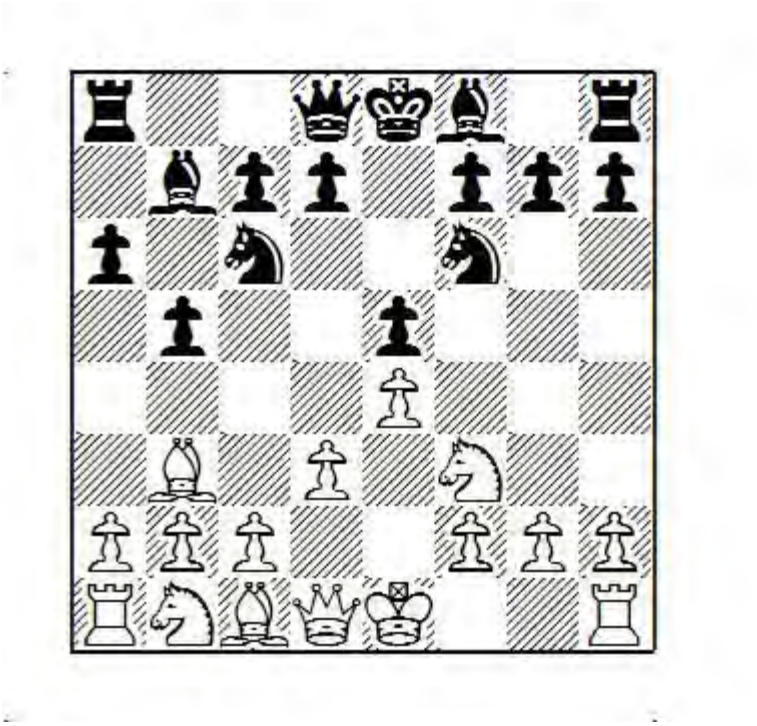
Now it's time to look at Black's early ... Bb7, which is almost always followed by ... Bc5 or ... Be7.

Game 4

M.Carlsen-A.Beliavsky

Wijk aan Zee 2006

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 d3 b5 6 Bb3 Bb7



If there is an opening line unlikely to thrive against d2-d3, it is the Archangelsk. Black develops his bishop to a diagonal which is already blocked off by White's strong point on e4.

However, to be fair to Beliavsky I should mention that I amended the move order to allow for 5 d3. The game actually began 5 0-0 b5 6 Bb3 Bb7, a more logical sequence for Black, and only then did Carlsen shut in the black bishop with 7 d3!. Black can therefore claim that his 6 ... Bb7 move dissuaded White from a more aggressive posture in the centre with a quick d2-d4.

For this reason, if you branch out from 5 d3 with 5 0-0, not fearing 5 ... Nxe4, you are far more likely to encounter the Archangelsk.

7 0-0

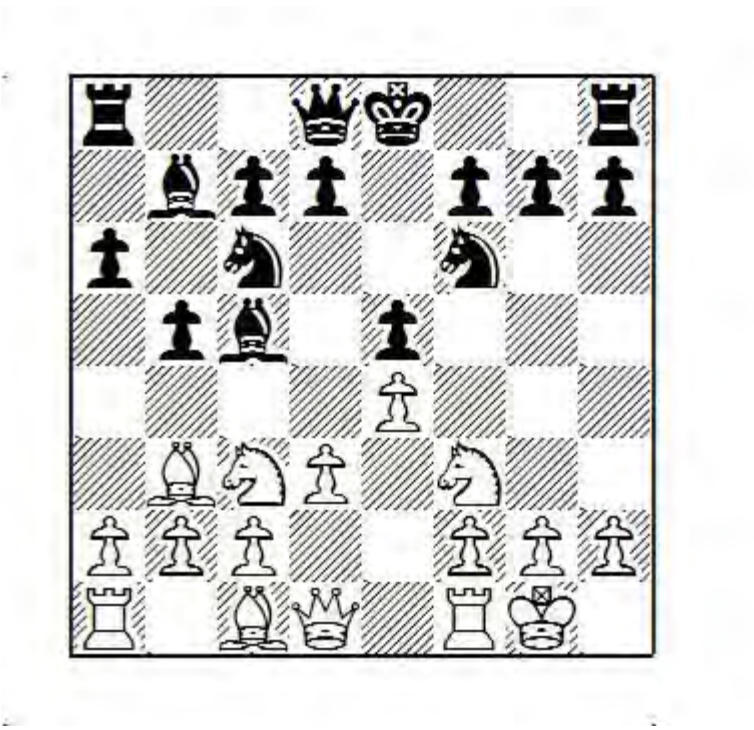
Question: Can't White play 7 Ng5 to take advantage of Black's move order?

Answer: He can certainly try it, but then 7 ... d5 8 exd5 Nd4! gives Black a lot of counterplay.

7 ... Bc5

After 7 ... Be7 White can play all the normal moves – a2-a4, a gradual centre expansion, and a knight manoeuvre to g3, when he emerges with a pleasant game after 8 a4 0-0 9 Re1 d6 10 c3 h6 11 Nbd2 Re8 12 Nf1 Bf8 13 Ng3 Qd7 14 d4, as in M.Kobalija-T.Hansen, Tromsø 2010.

8 Nc3



Question: I don't understand the purpose of this move. I thought White played c2-c3 and developed the knight with Nbd2 in this opening set-up?

Answer: Don't worry; Carlsen is alive to the virtues of the restrained centre. But first of all he wants to get his knight over to g3. This manoeuvre is particularly attractive as Black has weakened his hold on the f5-square by putting his bishop on b7. The usual way to carry it out is with Nbd2, Re1, Nf1 and Ng3. But here Carlsen decides to take the route Nc3, Ne2 and Ng3. He saves a move by omitting Re1.

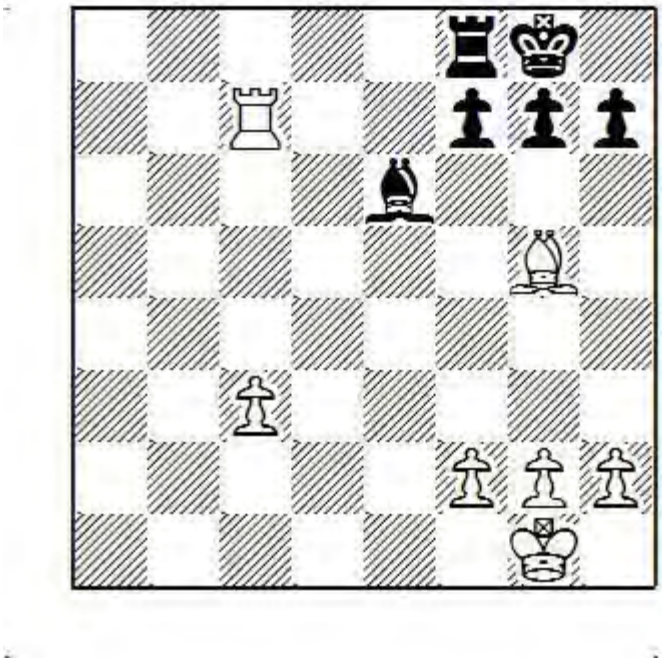
8 ... d6

A key alternative for Black is 8 ... 0-0 9 a4 Na5, which leads to a long forcing variation: 10 axb5 (White wins material to compensate for the exchange of his important bishop) 10 ... Nxb3 11 cxb3 axb5 12 Rxa8 Bxa8 13 Nxe5 d5!. Black has a lot of play for the pawn. White therefore simplifies the position with 14 Bg5! dxe4 15 dxe4 Qxd1 16 Rxd1 b4 (if Black takes twice on e4 he falls for a Nd7 fork of his rook and bishop on c5) and now you have a choice of endgames as White:

Scenario One: An opposite-coloured bishop endgame a pawn up:

17 Nd3 bxc3 (White mustn't be allowed any time to consolidate his extra material) 18 Nxc5 Nxe4 19 Nxe4 Bxe4 20 bxc3 Bc2 21 Rd7

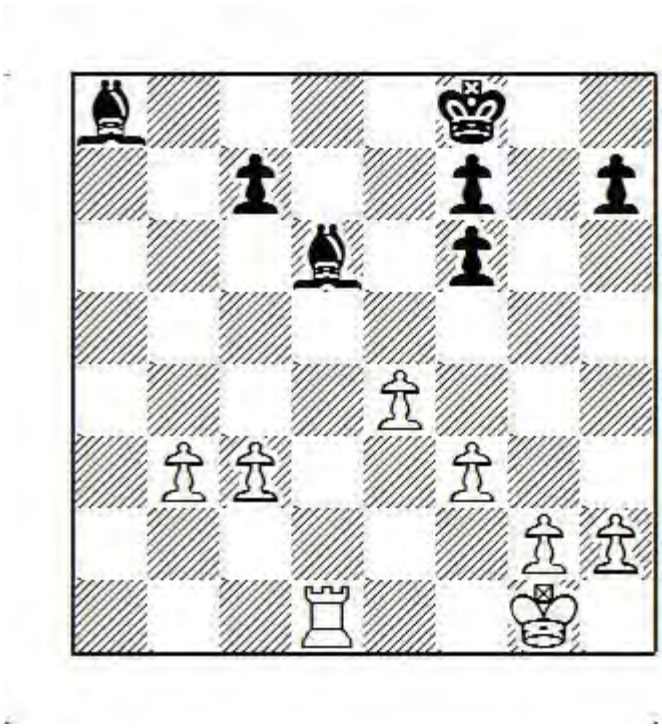
Bxb3 22 Rxc7 Be6 as in I.Morovic Fernandez-A.Onischuk, Kansas 2003.



White is a pawn up, but the opposite coloured bishops give Black very good drawing chances.

Scenario Two: A rook and two pawns versus two bishops:

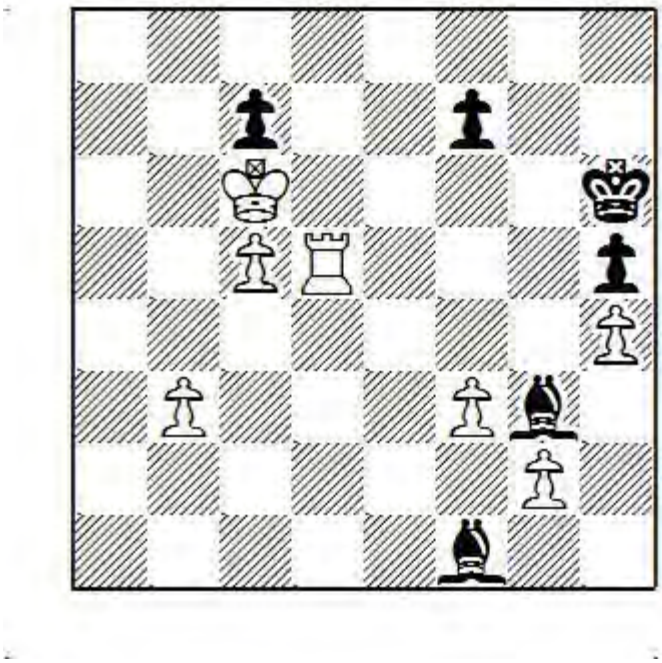
17 Bxf6 (not letting the e4-pawn drop) 17 ... bxc3 (after 17 ... gxf6 18 Na4!? looks good for White) 18 bxc3 gxf6 19 Nd7 Bd6 (not 19 ... Rd8 20 Nxf6+ and White wins) 20 Nxf8 Kxf8 21 f3.



The diagram position was successfully defended as Black by Kramnik against Kasparov in their 2000 World Championship match. White is certainly the one playing to win, though it won't be easy. Still, White has scored two wins and three draws in the games on my database from this position. As a rule the better player draws as Black and wins as White.

Here's an example of White's general winning strategy. Grandmaster Van den Doel tries to force through a passed pawn on the queenside without allowing Black to break things up on the kingside. For this purpose the white rook defends g2 whilst the white king heads up the board to c6. Stefanova was already losing when she allowed 52 Rd6:

21 ... Bc6 22 Kf2 h5 23 h4 Kg7 24 c4 Kg6 25 Ra1 Bd7 26 Ra6 Bc8 27 Ra8 Be6 28 Ra5 Bb4 29 Ra8 Bd6 30 Ke3 f5 31 exf5+ Bxf5 32 Kd4 Kf6 33 Rh8 Bg6 34 Kd5 Kg7 35 Re8 Bg3 36 Kc6 Bd3 37 Rd8 Bf1 38 Rd1 Be2 39 Rd5 Kh6 40 c5 Bf1



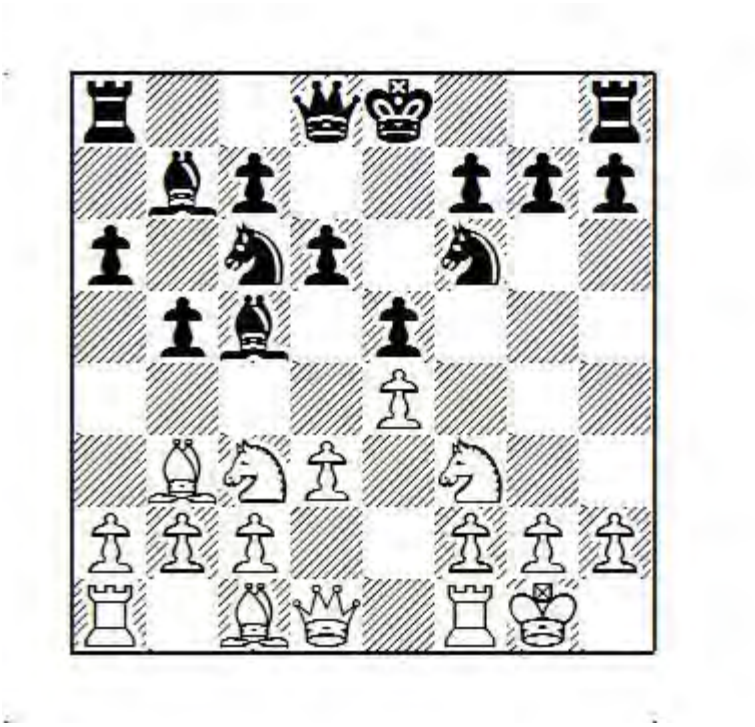
41 Rd2 Kg6 42 b4 Kf5 43 Rb2 Be5 44 Rf2 Bc4 45 Rc2 Bb3 46 Re2 Bg3 47 b5 Bc4 48 Rd2 Bf1 49 b6 cxb6 50 cxb6 Bxh4 51 b7 Bg3 52 Rd6 Bxg2 53 b8Q Bxf3+ 54 Kc5 Bxd6+ 55 Qxd6 and 1-0 in E.Van den Doel-A.Stefanova, Tel Aviv 2001.

Question: So which endgame should White choose to play?

Answer: I would prefer to play the second one, with the rook and two pawns versus two bishops. The winning chances are much better in that scenario, though there's some risk. But scenario one, a pawn up with tiny winning chances, but almost no chance to lose, is also somewhat attractive. I'll leave the choice to you!

If I may digress slightly, I can't help wondering why a player as Black would learn so much theory just for the 'pleasure' of defending a slightly worse endgame with little or no winning chances? It might make sense if you are a professional player and a draw helps you towards a sporting aim – for example in Kramnik's case a willingness to defend slightly worse, but reassuringly dull, positions against Kasparov proved vital in his campaign to become World Champion. But for ordinary players in ordinary tournaments it makes no sense.

Returning to the main game after 8 ... d6:



Exercise: I hope you are familiar by now with Black's positional threat!

How should White deal with it?

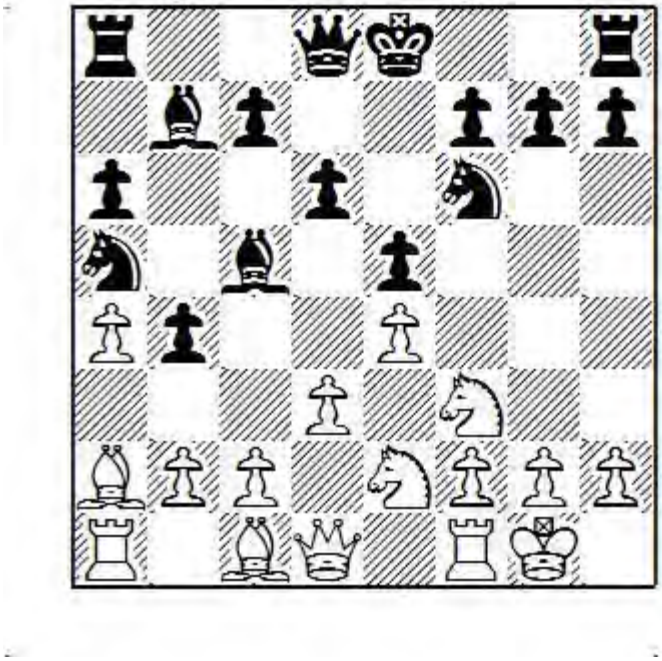
Answer: **9 a4!**

Stopping Black from gobbling up the prized bishop with 9 ... Na5 and 10 ... Nxb3, as it can now go back to a2. With his knight on c3, White didn't have available the usual method of c2-c3, creating a retreat square for the bishop on c2.

9 ... Na5 10 Ba2 b4

The need to hold onto the b-pawn is a real nuisance for Black when he has played ... Bb7, as he can't defend the pawn with ... Rb8. Here in order to keep his queenside intact Beliavsky feels impelled to advance the pawn to b4 – pushing the white knight where it wants to go.

11 Ne2



11 ... Bc8

The fact that the bishop feels obliged to returns to c8 to counter the plan of Ng3 and Nf5 suggests there is disharmony among the black pieces. However 11 ... 0-0 was safer.

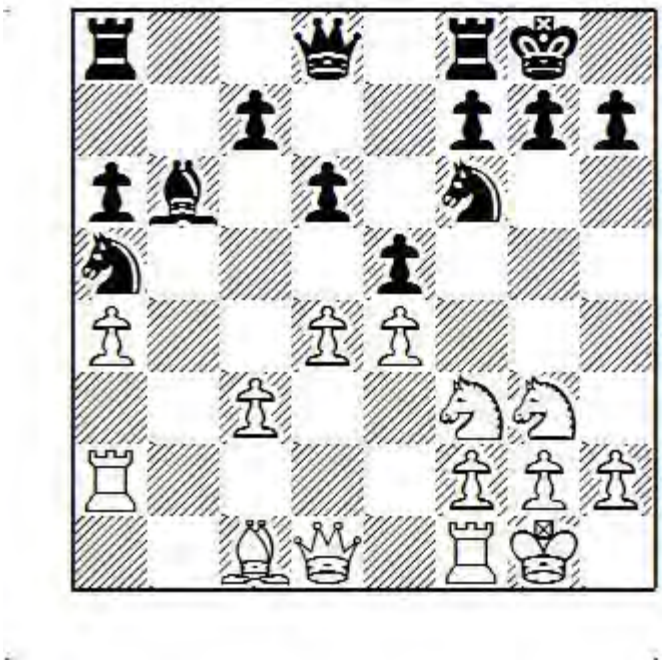
12 c3!

At last Carlsen sets up the restrained centre, though it is with rapid expansion rather than security in mind.

12 ... bxc3 13 bxc3 Bb6

The bishop retreats as otherwise 14 d4 will force him to concede the centre with 14 ... exd4 to avoid losing a pawn.

14 Ng3 Be6 15 d4 Bxa2 16 Rxa2 0-0



Exercise: Try to assess the position. It is a shade better for White,

much better for him or winning? Can you guess White's next move?

Answer: In general, the exchange of light-squared bishops is an undoubted achievement for Black. However, it hasn't helped him much here. He has two pieces, the knight on a5 and bishop on b6, a long way from the kingside. In contrast, all White's minor pieces are poised for an attack on the under-defended black king.

I would assess the position as perhaps defensible by a computer against a human player, but lost for Black if he is made of carbon.

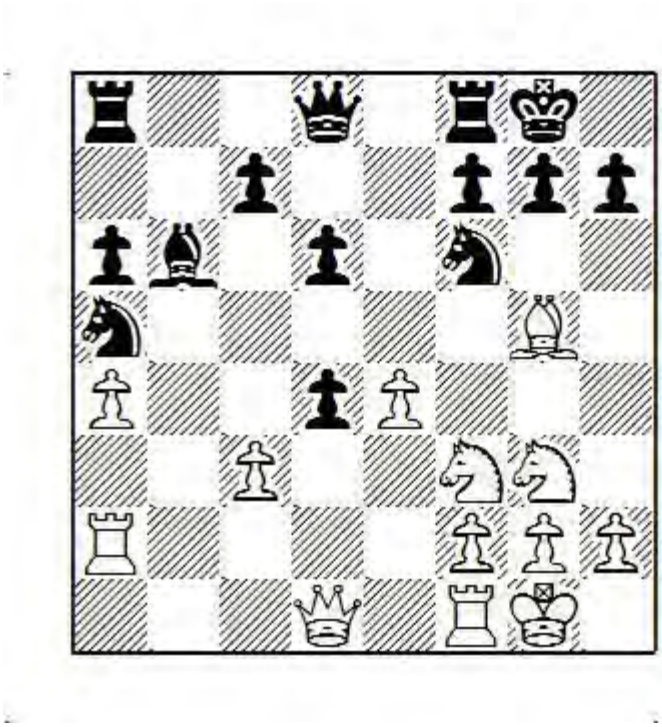
17 Bg5!

A powerful move. Did you see it? Carlsen isn't interested in gaining a mere pawn with 17 dxe5.

17 ... exd4

Question: How should White reply to 17 ... h6?

Answer: After 17 ... h6 18 Bh4 g5, the reply 19 Nxg5! hxg5 20 Bxg5 leaves Black helpless against the strengthening of the pin on f6 with 21 Nh5 and/or 22 Qf3. This type of sacrifice is well worth knowing, as the possibility can easily arise in the Møller or Archangelsk where Black has played ... Bc5 and ... d7-d6, cutting off his bishop from the kingside, and then chased back the bishop from g5 with ... h7-h6 and ... g7-g5. In this specific example it is forced win, but whether the sacrifice works for White in a more complex situation can be a question of very fine judgment as well as calculation.



Question: Returning to 17 ... exd4, how does White carry out

the attack on the black king?

Answer: **18 Nh5!**

Carlsen is willing to sacrifice two pawns to conclude the kingside attack. Such decisions should only be made when a player is completely certain of the outcome to a game, as a failure to land a decisive blow means defeat. Of course the Norwegian Super-Grandmaster was well up to working out all the variations, even at the age of 15!

18 ... dxc3 19 Nh4 Kh8 20 Nf5 1-0

An aesthetically pleasing final position. The black king's defences will be dismembered by 21 Nfxg7 and 22 Bxf6, whether or not Black plays 20 ... Rg8.

The restrained centre versus the Steinitz Deferred: Black plays 5 ... d6

In the Steinitz Defence Black avoids the loosening move ... b7-b5 in favour of defending e5 with a quick ... d7-d6. He therefore tolerates the white bishop's pressure on c6, though he normally kicks it back to a4 with 3 ... a6, to keep the option of ... b7-b5 if needed.

We'll look at two games, in the first of which Mr Steinitz himself demolishes Black in fine style, while in the second we get to examine the modern state of theory.

Game 5

W.Steinitz-J.Blackburne

London 1876

1 e4

For Steinitz this was less an attacking move than the first stage in the construction of a defensive fortress in the centre, with the pawn on e4 a so-called 'strong point'. As soon as Black attacks e4, he will defend the pawn with d2-d3.

1 ... e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6

Alternatives such as 3 ... d6, the 'Old' Steinitz, are examined in the relevant section of Chapter Two. Suffice to say that if Black plays like that then White should eschew the d2-d3 plan in favour of the bold 4 d4! as Black can't maintain the pawn on e5.

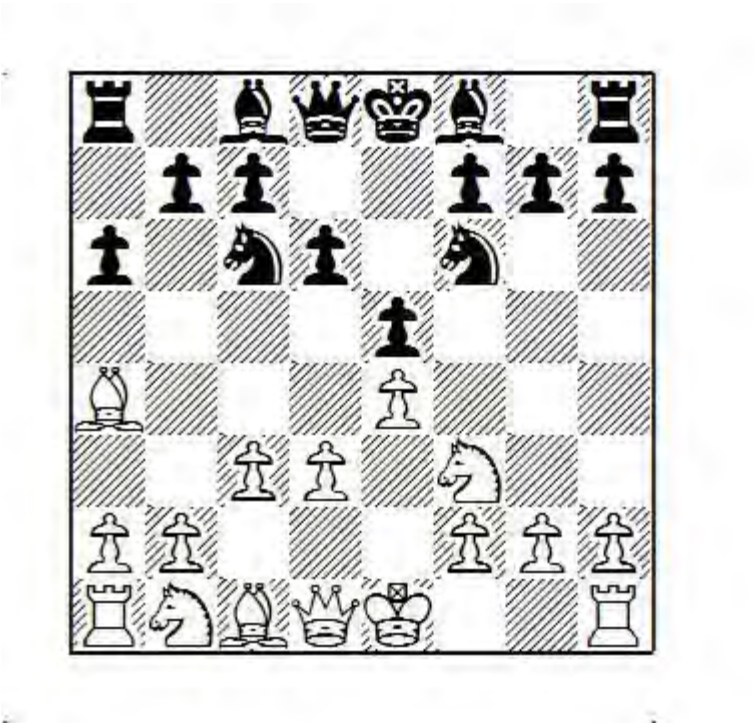
4 Ba4 Nf6 5 d3!

Exactly. Back in 1876 such a method of play was revolutionary. According to the 'Morphy' model White was meant to develop his pieces and push forwards in the centre as fast as possible to strike a knockout blow against the black king. The concept of building an unassailable centre and then launching an attack on a designated wing was one of Steinitz's contributions to the science of positional chess.

5 ... d6

Wilhelm Steinitz has to play against the Steinitz Defence. A discussion of the merits of this move follows in the next game. For now we'll enjoy Steinitz's pioneering strategy against some admittedly weak defence.

6 c3!



Completing his barricade: the white pawns on c3, d3 and e4 can withstand anything that Black can throw at them. With the centre stabilized, Steinitz can start expanding on the kingside.

6 ... Be7?!

A natural move for 1876, but 6 ... g6! planning a kingside fianchetto was much more promising. White could then hardly hope to carry out a kingside attack in the style of the present game. You can see White's best response to 6 ... g6 in the Areshchenko-Matta game below.

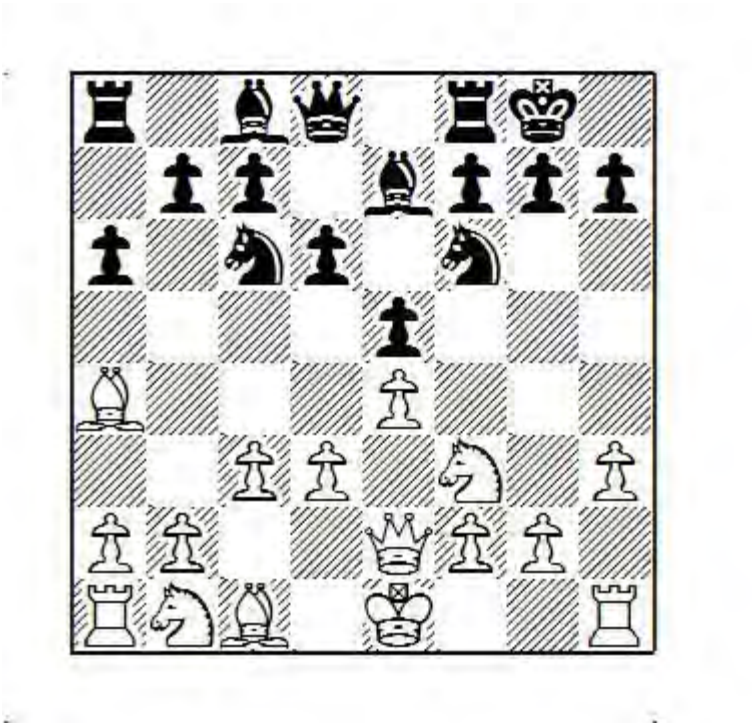
7 h3?!

This is no mere defensive move, aiming to prevent ... Bg4: on the contrary, it is the first step in a plan to checkmate the black king.

Nonetheless, much as I admire Steinitz, I have to point out that modern chess players would regard his approach in the game as far too direct. They like to copy the pawn centre he pioneered, but not the plan of a kingside attack he associated with it.

It is better to try for a small plus by advancing d3-d4 at the appropriate moment, for example 7 Nbd2 0-0 8 0-0 b5 9 Bc2 Re8 10 d4 Bf8 11 h3 as in V.Akopian-A.Kharlov, Moscow 2005.

7 ... 0-0 8 Qe2



Another precaution against any attempt to overthrow the e4-pawn. White is also clearing the way for queenside castling. Once again it should be pointed out that modern play would prefer 8 0-0 or 8 Nbd2, with action to follow in the centre, though this would mean that 7 h3 would amount to a rather needless precaution against ... Bg4.

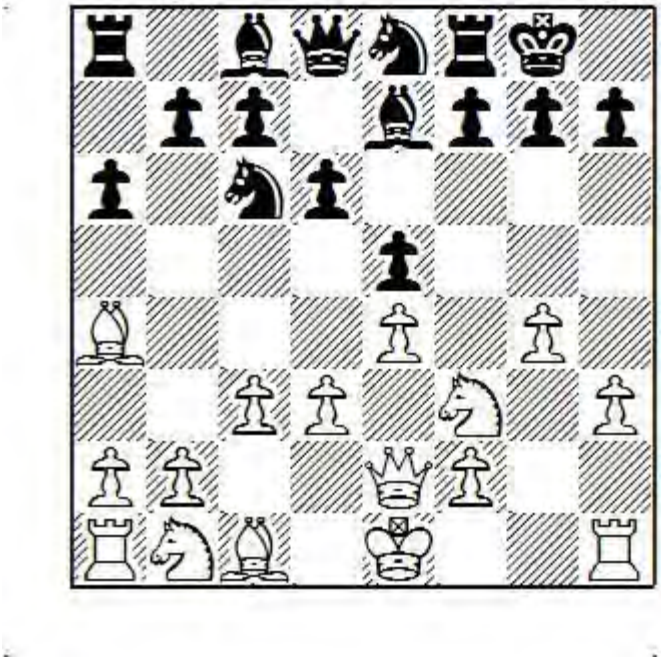
8 ... Ne8?

Poor old Blackburne knows how to make combinations, handle the initiative and counterattack, but he has no idea what to do against White's slow strategic build-up. He might for example have played 8 ... Nd7, so that if 9 g4?! then 9 ... Nc5 10 Bc2 Ne6 puts the knight in contact with the hole on f4.

If I may digress, Blackburne's confusion shows it wouldn't have been at all easy for Paul Morphy to have beaten Steinitz in a match, if the former hadn't retired from chess (remember that Steinitz was actually about a year *older* than Morphy).

The American would have thrived with the white pieces as Steinitz had a penchant for taking huge risks by grabbing hot pawns, but with Black he would often have found himself forced into unfamiliar closed positions. Such a match would have been an extraordinary clash of styles and chess methodologies – a far greater loss for the chess world than the possible Alekhine-Botvinnik match of 1946 or Fischer-Karpov match of 1975.

9 g4!



Exercise: What is the purpose of this move? (I can think of

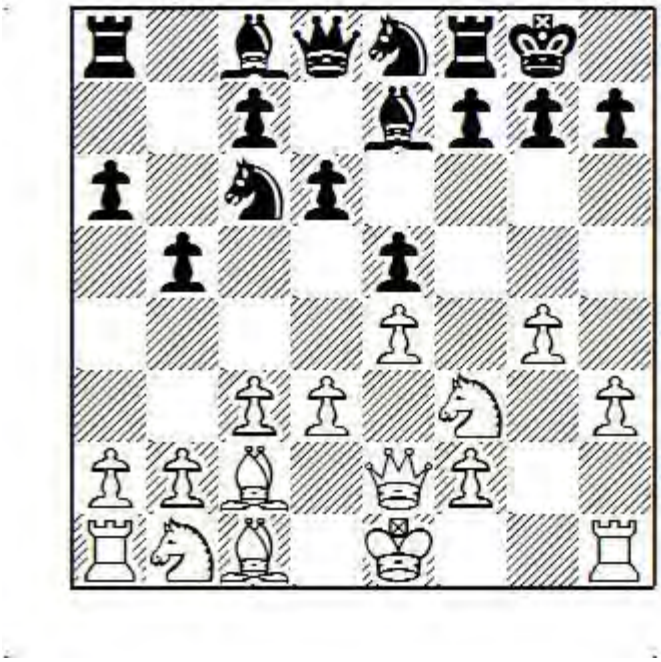
three reasons, but you can be pleased if you find two).

Answer: Firstly, the g4-pawn is a potential battering ram against the black king (we'll see it in that role in the next game). But there are two more subtle reasons behind 9 g4.

Defensively speaking, White prevents the freeing move 9 ... f5 which Black was evidently planning with his previous move. Remember that keeping the e4-pawn inviolable from assault is one of White's positional aims.

And finally, the e4- and g4-pawns now have a pincer-like grip on f5, which makes it a strong base for a white knight. Agreed, there is no white knight anywhere near the square at the moment, but remember that the whole point in building the invincible c3, d3 and e4 centre is to allow time-consuming manoeuvres with the pieces.

9 ... b5 10 Bc2

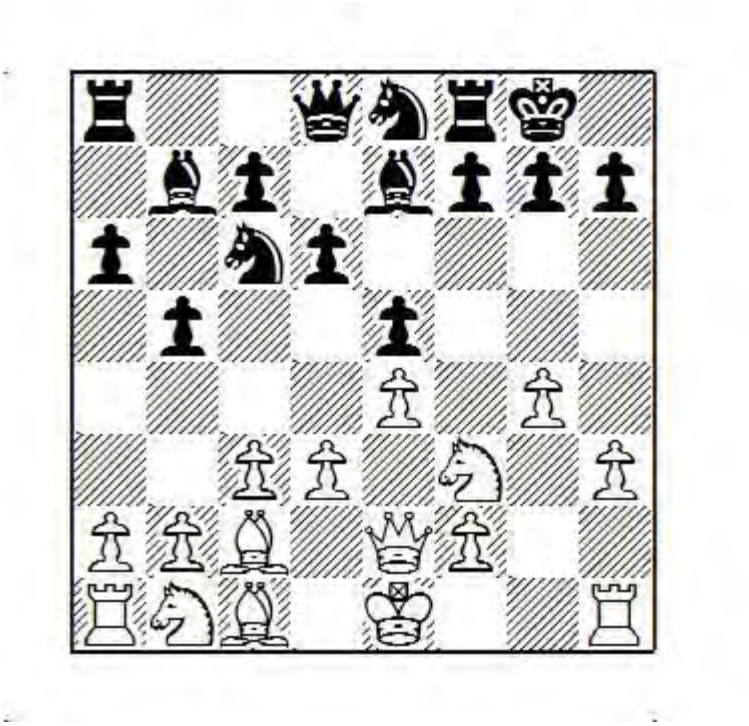


Question: Why retreat here rather than b3, when the bishop has

an open diagonal and aims at f7?

Answer: After 10 Bb3 Black has 10 ... Na5!. The Ruy Lopez is one of those openings in which allowing the exchange of one of your bishops for an enemy knight is normally a poor deal. That general principle applies to both players and all four bishops, but the 'loss' of White's light-squared bishop for a knight is often particularly galling for him. That is why, after 10 Bb3 Na5, 11 Bc2 would be an automatic choice in response to the positional threat of 11 ... Nxb3. Then White has spent two moves rather than one getting his bishop to c2. But still you might ask 'is that such a bad thing, as the black knight has been enticed to the useless a5-square, and will have to return to c6 at some point?' True, but Black has been handed a valuable tempo to get his knight out of the way so that he can expand on the queenside with 11 ... c5!. Then the white centre could be undermined with ... c5-c4 – the very thing Steinitz is trying to avoid.

10 ... Bb7



Exercise: Can you see a four-move manoeuvre to bring

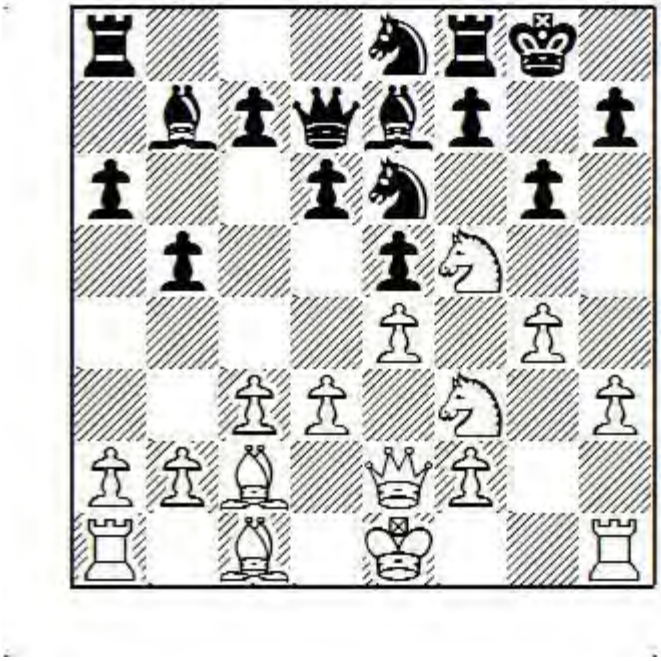
the knight on b1 onto an attacking square?

Certainly 10 ... Bb7 is a natural-looking move, but Black has to be wary of a thoughtless ... Bb7 in the Ruy Lopez. Here the bishop is 'developed' to a diagonal that ends with a brick wall on e4, and at the same time it is withdrawn from the fight along the c8-h3 diagonal.

11 Nbd2!

Answer: On consecutive moves the knight goes to d2, f1, e3 (slightly more active than g3) and then f5. Steinitz invented the standard Ruy Lopez deployment of the queen's knight to the kingside. Notice that Black's 10 ... Bb7, removing a defender of the f5-square, makes this manoeuvre even more attractive.

11 ... Qd7 12 Nf1 Nd8 13 Ne3 Ne6 14 Nf5 g6



Blackburne evicts the knight, but he leaves himself weak on the dark squares. We also saw the unfortunate consequences for Black of 'losing' his dark-squared bishop in exchange for a knight in Carlsen-Topalov.

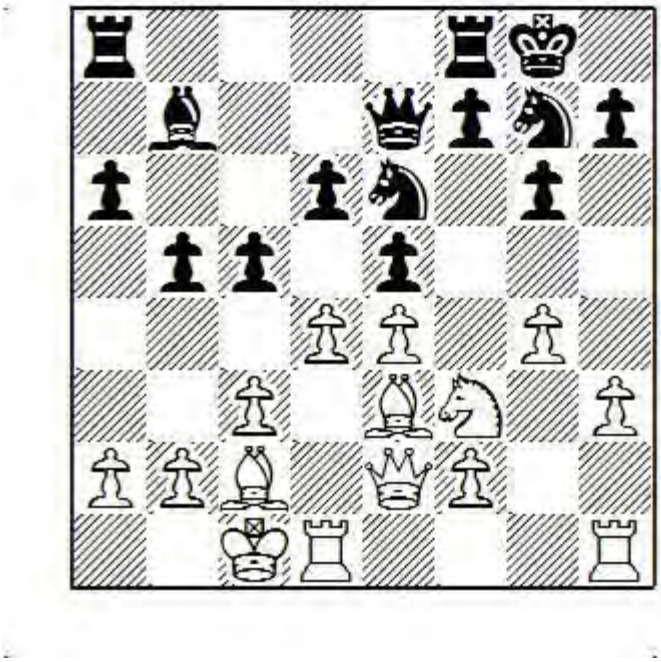
15 Nxe7+

Notice that it took five moves (Nd2, Nf1, Ne3, Nf5 and Nxe7) for White to exchange a knight for a bishop that has only moved once. Such a loss of tempo would be unacceptable in an open game. However, because Steinitz has kept the position closed by setting up his little wall of pawns in the centre, the tempo loss doesn't hurt White whereas the disappearance of the strategically important bishop proves grievous for Black.

15 ... Qxe7 16 Be3 N8g7

Having a knight on this square is a very poor substitute for a bishop, as there is no natural defender of the holes on f6, g7 and h6.

17 0-0-0 c5 18 d4



Question: So what is all this? I thought the idea was to leave

the centre intact and attack on the kingside!

Answer: One of the First World Champion's positional tenets was that when the balance ('equilibrium') of the position has been upset, giving one player an appreciable advantage, it is necessary for him or her to attack – no half measures are acceptable. Here the balance has been upset by the disappearance of Black's dark-squared bishop which has severely weakened his kingside.

Steinitz hasn't given up on a kingside attack with his pawns. However, he sees that it is necessary to become active in the centre to gain maximum benefit from his advantage. The result is that he gets his own dark-squared bishop aiming at the holes in the black kingside.

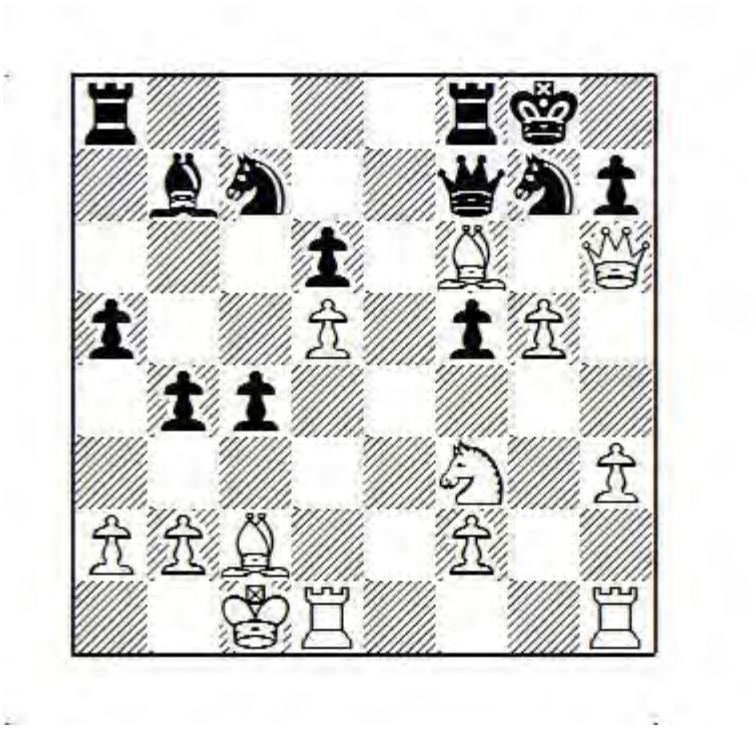
18 ... exd4 19 cxd4 c4 20 d5 Nc7 21 Qd2 a5 22 Bd4 f6 23 Qh6 b4

If he tries to stop White's next move with 23 ... g5 then 24 e5!, threatening mate in two by uncovering an attack on h7, is lethal.

24 g5 f5 25 Bf6

Black misses the dark-squared bishop terribly.

25 ... Qf7 26 exf5 gxf5



Exercise: White to play and win!

Answer: **27 g6! Qxg6**

If 27 ... hxg6 28 Ng5 and Black has to give up the queen to stop mate on h7.

28 Bxg7 Qxh6+

Black has to stay a piece down, as if 28 ... Qxg7 then 29 Rhg1 wins the queen.

29 Bxh6 Rf6 30 Rhg1+ Rg6 31 Bxf5 Kf7 32 Bxg6+ hxg6 33 Ng5+ Kg8 34 Rge1 1-0

Great play by Steinitz, the father of positional chess. Now it's time to look at how modern theory has refined the ideas available to both players.

Game 6

A.Areshchenko-V.Matta

Gurgon 2009

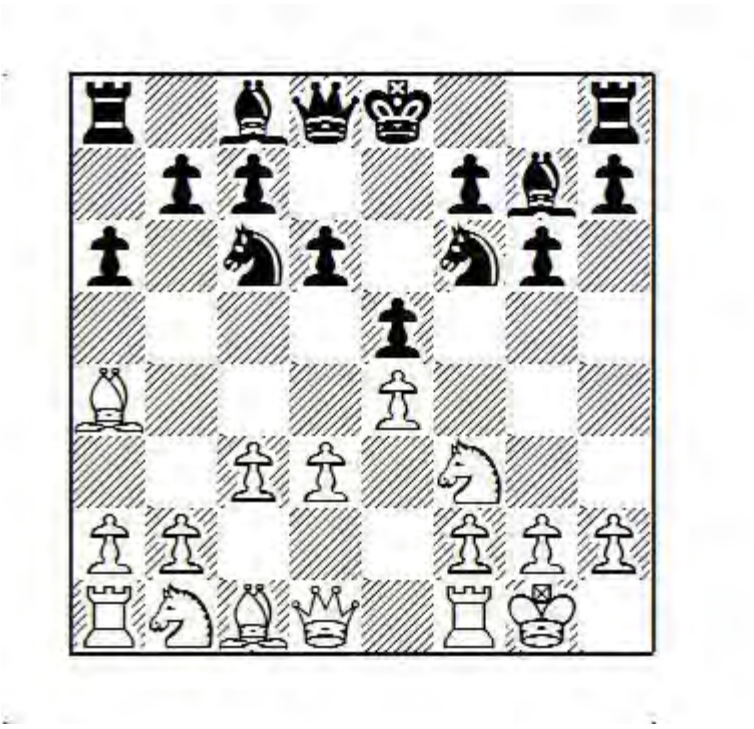
1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 d3 d6

The Steinitz Defence Deferred is an important alternative for Black against d2-d3 systems. Rather than loosen himself on the queenside by pushing away the white bishop with ... b7-b5, he defends the e5-pawn in direct style. There arises a symmetrical pawn structure in the centre – both players now have the 'Steinitz' pawn centre discussed above, but White's is more flexible as he can play c2-c3, whereas ... c7-c6 is difficult to arrange. This might not seem much of a difference, but it allows White to prepare the space gaining d3-d4, or at least guard the d4-square against the black knights. In contrast, the d5-square is harder for Black to cover with ... c7-c6, giving White the possibility of using it as a base for his knights. Nonetheless, there are good points to Black's system, an important one being revealed on his next move.

6 c3 g6!

Much more dynamic than Blackburne's 6 ... Be7.

7 0-0 Bg7



The kingside fianchetto safeguards the f5-square against an invasion by a white knight, and so lessens the power of White's standard manoeuvre Nb1-d2-f1-g3. Besides, the bishop is more actively placed on g7 than on e7, and safer than it would be on c5. Black can even try a 'King's Indian' approach with ... f7-f5 to gain counterplay. Let's see how play unfolds:

8 Re1 0-0 9 Nbd2 Nd7

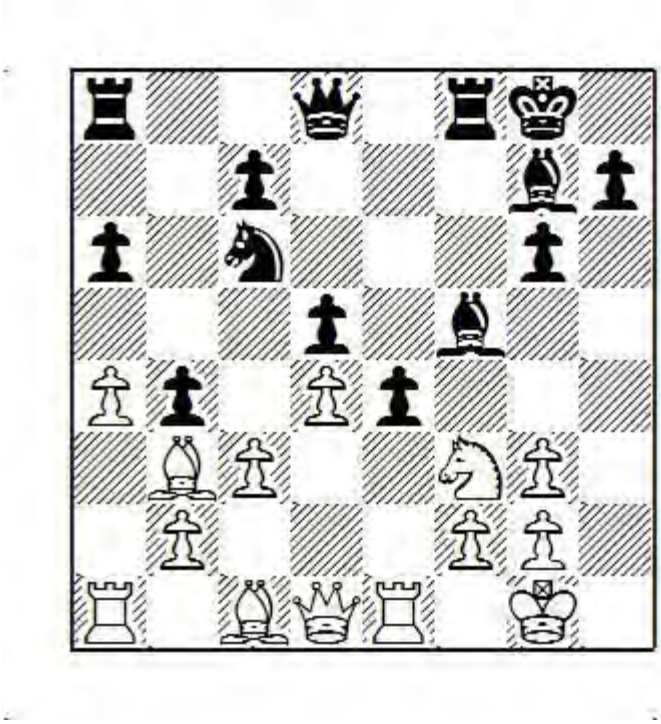
If Black plays for ... d6-d5 then White can strongpoint e4 and put pressure on the black queenside/centre. For example 9 ... h6 10 Nf1 b5 11 Bc2 d5 12 Bd2 Be6 13 a4 Qd6 14 b4 Nd7 15 Bb3 and Black was being probed in I.Nepomniachtchi-V.Akopian, Rijeka.2010.

Question: Okay, but what happens if Black tries to attack

with 9 ... Nh5 and 10 ... f5, like in a King's Indian?

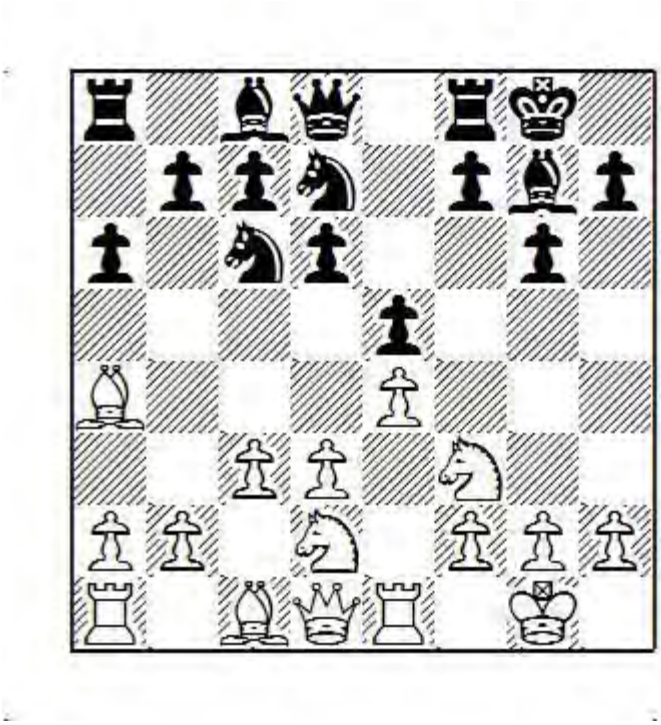
Answer: This aggressive strategy has been used by Shirov, and we shouldn't underestimate it. I recommend the following line for

White: 9 ... Nh5 10 Nf1 f5 11 exf5 Bxf5 12 Ng3 Nxg3 13 hxg3 b5 14 Bb3+ d5 15 a4 b4 16 d4 e4.



Here 17 Nd2 was played in K.Miton-A.Shirov, Warsaw (rapid) 2009, with Black gaining the initiative after 17 ... Kh8 18 Nf1 Rb8 19 Ne3 Be6 etc. Instead 17 Nh4! looks more active for White, when 17 ... Be6? is a bad blunder because of the sudden attack 18 Rxe4! dxe4 19 Bxe6+ Kh8 20 Nxg6+ hxg6 21 Qg4 and Black has no good way to stop a lethal check on h3. So Black should prefer 17 ... Qd7, whereupon 18 Nxf5 Qxf5 19 Be3!? looks like some advantage for White: f2 is secure and he can try to undermine Black in the centre and along the c-file after a well timed c3-c4.

Earlier in this line, the recapture 11 ... gxf5 (instead of Shirov's 11 ... Bxf5) fails tactically after 12 Bb3+ when 12 ... Kh8 13 Ng5! Nf6 (or 13 ... Qe8? 14 Bf7! Rxf7 15 Qxh5 hitting both f7 and h7) 14 Nf7+ wins the exchange, while 12 ... d5 13 Nxe5 Nxe5 14 Qxh5 wins a pawn as d5 drops after 14 ... Nxd3? 15 Rd1.



Question: Returning to our main game, what is the purpose of 9 ... Nd7?

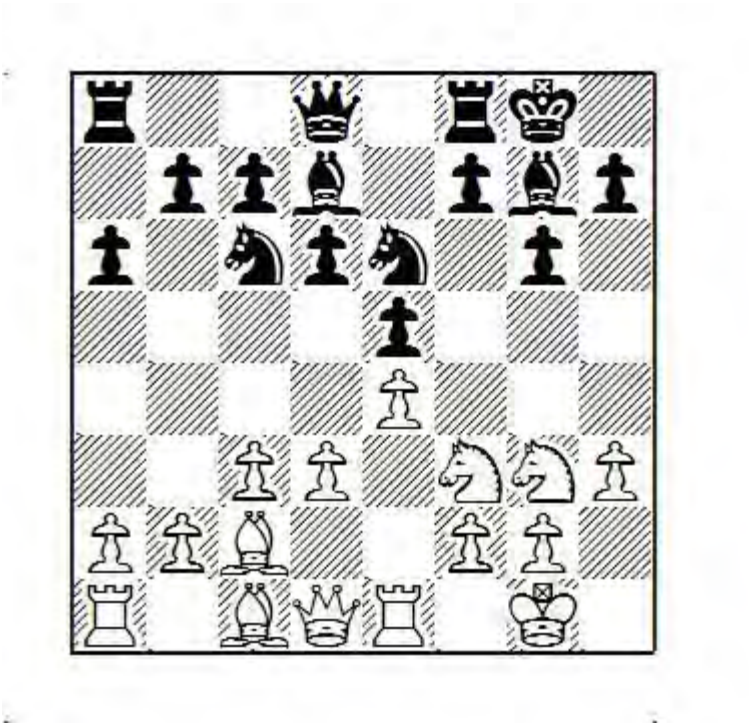
Answer: Black has come up with a knight manoeuvre to rival White's famous one: the horse heads via d7 and c5 to the e6-square, where in cooperation with the knight on c6, pawn on e5 and bishop on g7 – and possibly the queen on f6! – it will restrain White's d3-d4 advance. At the same time the way is cleared for a possible attack with ... f7-f5.

10 Nf1 Nc5 11 Bc2 Ne6

If now 12 Be3 Black can choose between directly restraining the d3-d4 advance with 12 ... Qf6, or more energetically with 12 ... f5!? when 13 d4? fails to 13 ... f4, winning a pawn.

12 Ng3 Bd7 13 h3!?

A useful move that cuts out any future ... Bg4 pin and gives the knight on f3 a manoeuvring/retreat square on h2.



13 ... Kh8

Question: Why doesn't Black play 13 ... f5 or

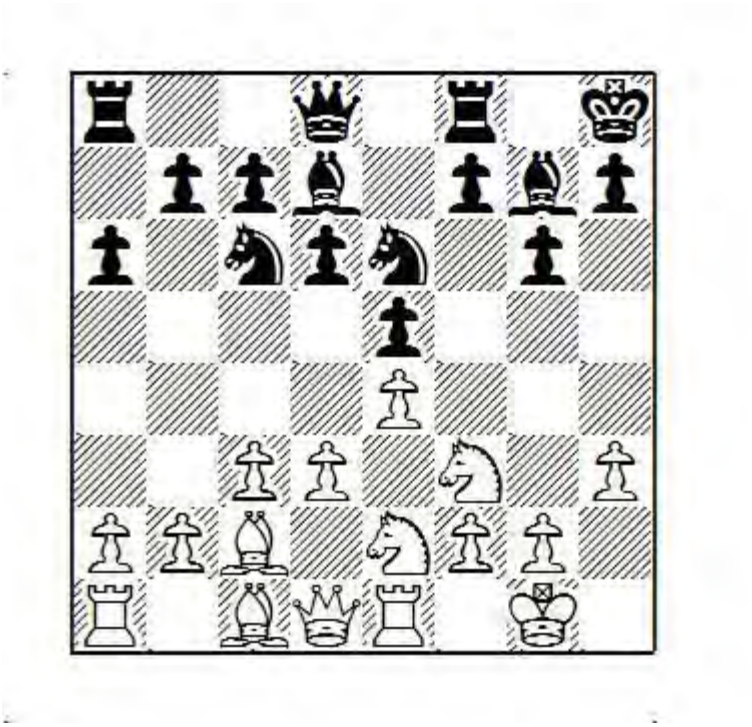
13 ... Qf6 in accordance with his plan?

Answer: Black's problem is that the ... f7-f5 advance is a bit too loosening, whilst ... Qf6 is rather static: he has to wait for White to build up for d3-d4.

Thus 13 ... f5? works out badly for him after 14 exf5 gxf5 15 d4 e4? (but if 15 ... exd4 there follows 16 Bb3! with a painful pin on e6) 16 d5 when White has a passed pawn upon 16 ... exf3 17 dxe6, and besides the f5 point is dropping. Alternatively after 13 ... Qf6 14 Be3 Nf4 15 d4 we see the value of 13 h3 in preventing ... Bg4, with an awkward pin.

14 Ne2!

A top-class positional move. Notice the path the knight has taken since leaving home: d2, f1, g3 and now e2. It is ready to support the d3-d4 centre advance and also deters ... Nf4 by Black.



14 ... Ne7

An admission that his opponent's skillful manoeuvring has defeated his plan of restraining d3-d4. After 14 ... Qf6 White could play 15 Be3 followed by the immediate 16 d4, or perhaps a further build up with 16 Qd2 and 17 Rad1, and only then 18 d4 – why hurry? An alternative treatment would be (14 ... .Qf6) 15 Nh2, intending 16 Rf1 and 17 f4, combined with Ng4, to start an attack along the f-file.

Meanwhile 14 ... f5 is well answered by 15 d4! when 15 ... fxe4 16 Bxe4 exd4 17 cxd4 leaves the black pieces clumsily played in the centre and facing the threat of 18 d5.

15 d4

Of course the struggle is far from over, but White has won the first skirmish in advancing his pawn to d4.

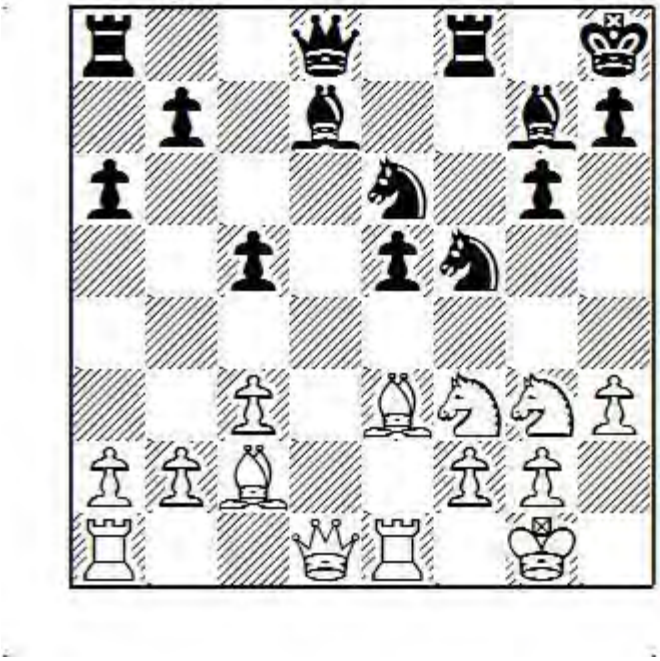
15 ... c5!?

Black complicates the game. His centre pawns become vulnerable to attack, but they also generate a lot of dynamic play.

16 Be3 f5 17 dxe5 dxe5 18 exf5 Nxf5

After 18 ... gxf5 White can probe with a move like 19 Qd6 or 19 Bb3, but it wouldn't be easy to prove he had an advantage.

19 Ng3



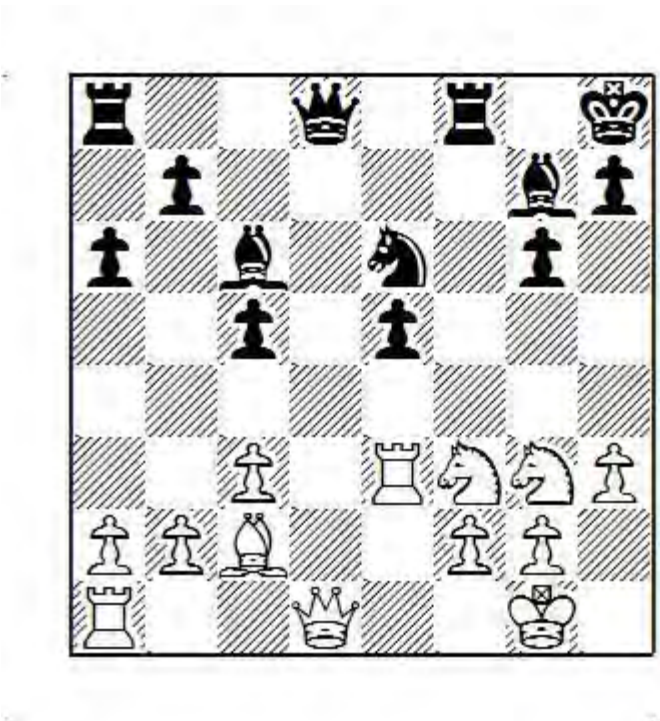
19 ... Nxe3

Question: What do you think of this move?

Answer: With one stereotyped decision Matta lets all the energy drain from his position. Normally it is an achievement for Black to exchange a knight for the dark-squared bishop. But here the bishop couldn't attack much whereas the knight is well placed and generating counterplay. Furthermore, the exchange allows White to attack the e5-pawn and consolidate his grip on the e4-square.

Instead after 19 ... Qc7! Black pieces are so well placed that it is difficult for White to exploit the light-square holes in his centre or attack the e5-pawn.

20 Rxe3 Bc6



Exercise: What should be White's next move?

Black should have still tried 20 ... Qc7. The game move positively invites a second exchange which is favourable for White.

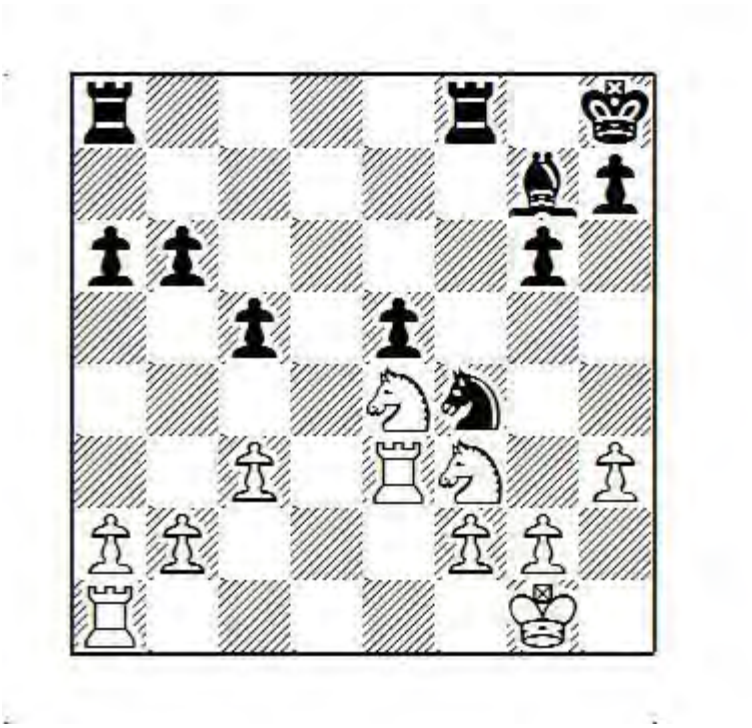
Answer: **21 Be4!**

The exchange of bishops leaves White with an even firmer grip on the light squares.

21 ... Qc7 22 Qc2 Nf4 23 Bxc6 Qxc6 24 Qe4 Qxe4?

And now a third unwise exchange completes Black's positional demise. At the risk of repeating myself, Black should play 24 ... Qc7! to maintain some dynamism. If then 25 Nxe5? Rae8 wins a piece.

25 Nxe4 b6



Exercise: If now 26 Rad1, Black replies 26 ... Rad8. How instead can we get the rook on e3 involved in the fight for the open d-file?

Answer: **26 g3! Nd5**

Of course if 26 ... Nxh3+ then 27 Kg2 traps the knight.

27 Rd3 Nf6 28 Nfg5!

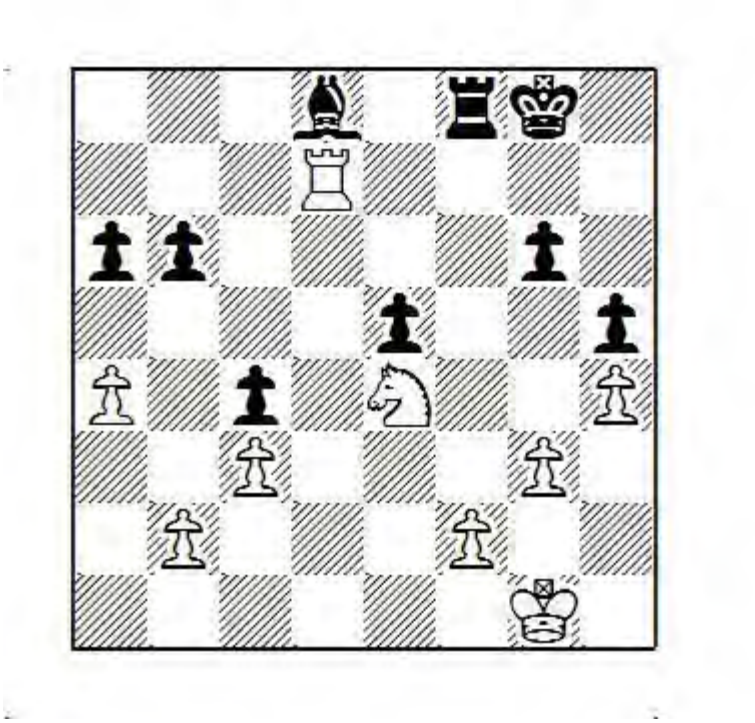
White wants to keep a knight on the e4-square where it dominates the centre, is in no danger of attack by a pawn and keeps the bishop shut in on g7.

28 ... h6 29 Nxf6 Bxf6 30 Ne4 Rad8 31 Rxd8!

The correct moment to exchange as Black can't recapture with the rook and so has to cede control of the d-file.

31 ... Bxd8 32 Rd1 Kg8 33 Rd7 h5 34 h4 c4 35 a4 1-0

Black is entirely lost. His bishop is no match for the brilliant white knight. White can pick the c4-pawn off at his leisure with Nd6 and Nxc4.



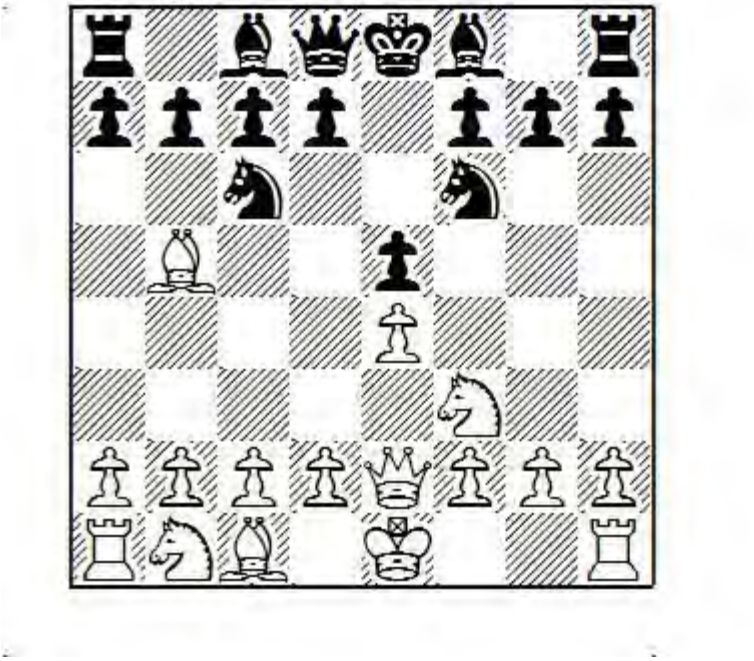
The restrained centre versus the Berlin Defence

Game 7

V.Gashimov-V.Kramnik

Monaco (rapid) 2011

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 Qe2!?



Gashimov rules out Kramnik's beloved Berlin Defence (4 0-0 Nxe4) which helped the Russian Grandmaster become World Champion.

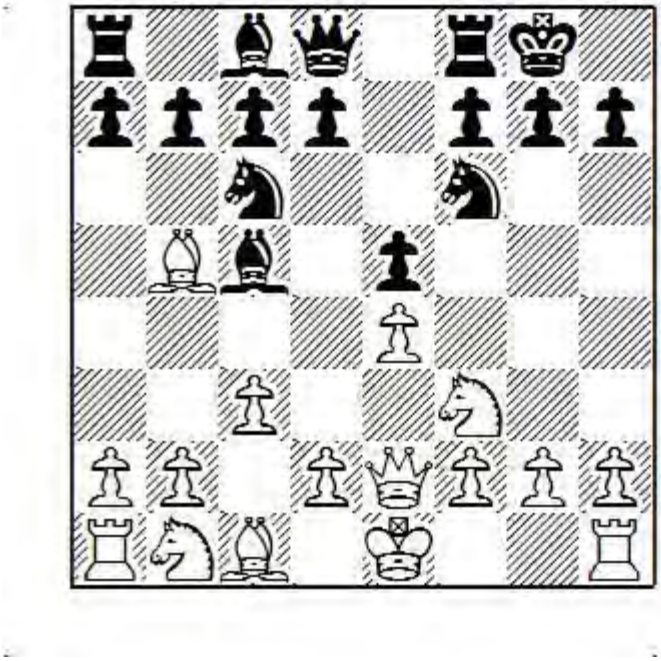
For our purposes the 'normal' move would be 4 d3, though it has somewhat less bite compared to the 3 ... a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 d3 line. For example 4 ... d6 is a solid reply as Black can play a Steinitz Defence set-up without worrying about being hit by d2-d4 'in one go'. Still, our usual build-up remains promising for White here: 4 d3 d6 5 0-0 Be7 6 c3 Bd7 7 Re1 0-0 8 Nbd2 Re8 9 Ba4 Bf8 10 Nf1 h6 11 Ng3 Ne7 12 Bc2! (keeping the bishop for future action: besides, every exchange helps Black because he has less room to manoeuvre) 12 ... Ng6 13 d4 c5 14 h3 and White enjoyed a typical small edge in R.Felgaer-E.Karavade, Caleta 2011.

Also worth attention after 4 d3 is 4 ... .Bc5!? 5 c3 (definitely not 5 Bxc6 dxc6 6 Nxe5? Qd4 and the threat to f2 and e5 is disastrous for White) 5 ... 0-0 6 0-0 d6 when Black has achieved a Møller-style set-up without having to weaken his queenside pawns with ... a7-a6 and ... b7-b5. Play might go 7 Nbd2 a6 8 Ba4 Ba7 9 h3 Ne7 10 Re1 Ng6 11 Nf1 b5 12 Bb3 Re8 13 a4 as in P.Leko-V.Kramnik Moscow (blitz) 2007, with some chances for White though Black is very solid.

In summary, it might be worth learning 4 0-0 against 3 ... Nf6 to make things a little harder for Black, though that means you have to be prepared for 4 ... Nxe4, the Berlin Endgame.

Alternatively, you can follow the Gashimov recipe in the present game. One of the interesting things about 4 Qe2 is that 4 ... d6 can be met by the space gaining 5 d4!?. Kramnik therefore chooses the ... Bc5 option.

4 ... Bc5 5 c3 0-0



6 d3

Consistent with his opening strategy. White wants to restrain the black pieces, and so he avoids grabbing a pawn with 6 Bxc6 bxc6!? 7 Nxe5, which allows Black a strong initiative after 7 ... d6, for example 8 Nxc6 Qd7 9 Na5 Nxe4 and the black knight of course can't be captured.

6 ... Re8

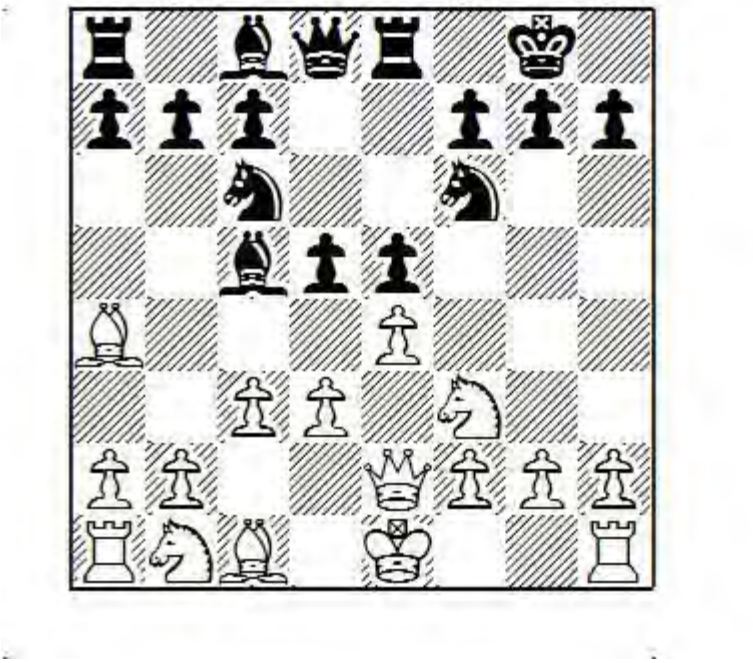
More careful was 6 ... .d6, followed in some cases by 7 ... Bb6, to get the bishop out of the way of a possible d3-d4.

7 Ba4!

A far sighted move. As we shall see in the game, Black plans ... d7-d5 and ... Bd7. This would make the white bishop on b5 uncomfortable – it might for example be forced into an unwelcome exchange with a move like ... Nb8. And so the white bishop immediately retreats into friendly territory.

Now 7 ... a6 intending 8 ... b5 looks like the way for Black to generate counterplay. It would dissuade White from contemplating queenside castling, and make him settle for a positional edge with 0-0 at an appropriate moment.

7 ... d5?



Classically speaking, Black's play has been impeccable: every move has either developed a piece or seized space in the centre. He has a lead in development, with three minor pieces on centre squares, his king castled and the rook centralized on e8. He also has a space advantage: a pawn on d5 versus a pawn on d3.

Question: So why isn't the position good for Black?

Answer: The key thing is to ask ourselves 'what can Black *do* in this position?' Then doubts about the supposed advantages of his set-up begin to appear.

After all, a *space advantage* is only of value if a breakthrough is possible. Here Black has pawns on d5 and e5, but he can't breach the white defences – the c3-, d3- and e4-pawns hold firm. The black pawns look pretty on d5 and e5, but they don't do anything. The idea of ramming the d3-pawn with the black c-pawn is a pipe dream – how can he possibly arrange ... c7-c5-c4?

Furthermore, a *lead in development* is only of value if there are open lines that the pieces can exploit. The move 6 ... Re8 looks natural and good, but what can the rook do on e8? If the white pawn on e4 could be removed it would be different – but it won't budge, not even if the bait is a pawn – see the note to 6 d3.

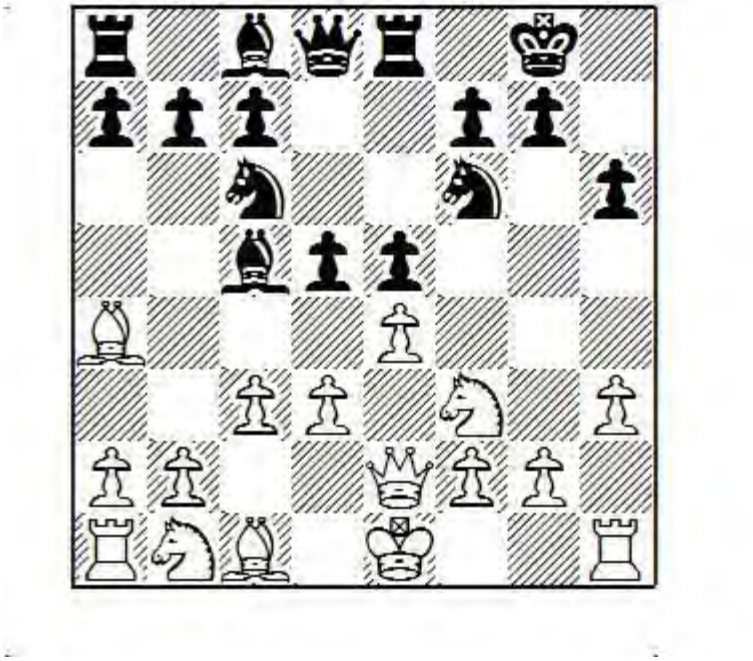
Question: So much for the drawbacks of Black's set-up.

But what can White do to improve his game?

8 h3!

Answer: If you have played through the Blackburne game the idea behind this move will be familiar. In contrast to the inherent passivity of Black's position, White is free to gain space on the kingside with his pawns. They can support an attack – in other words, they are working, whereas the black pawns aren't working.

8 ... h6



This breaks the rule: don't move pawns on the side of the board where your opponent is planning an attack. The h6-pawn is a hook on which White can latch an attack with g4 and g5.

But it would be naive to regard this as a merely thoughtless pawn move. Kramnik went through a World Championship match against Kasparov without losing a single game. You can't accuse him of being the sort of guy who crumbles in the face of an attack!

The idea of 8 ... h6 is to open the h7-square for the knight before it can be harassed by g4-g5. Black hopes that by gaining some control over the g5-square itself he can obstruct White's attack.

9 g4

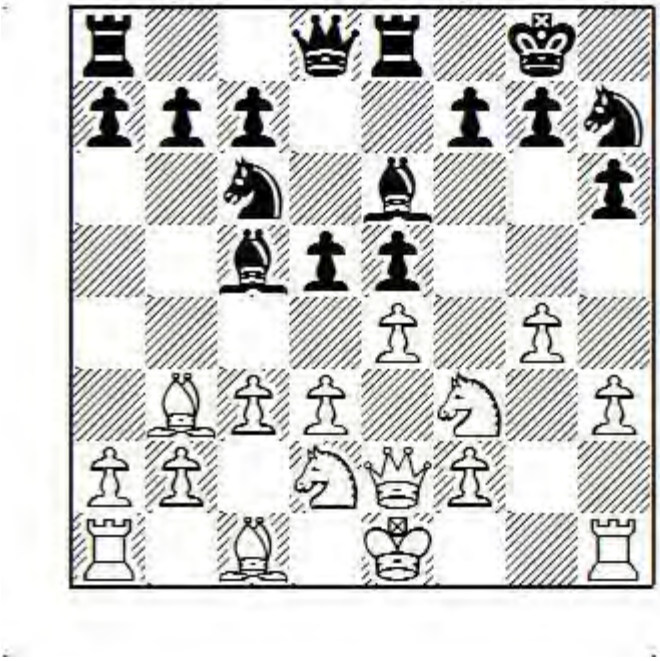
Notice how Gashimov is in no hurry to develop his pieces. His only concern is to have enough power to maintain the equilibrium in the centre, and then spend as long as it takes to put his pieces on their strategically most desirable squares. There is no rushing out pieces just for the sake of it.

Imagine if instead of 7 Ba4 White had played the natural move 7 0-0. In that case the plan of h2-h3 and g2-g4 would have exposed the white king to as much danger as Black's. Instead White has kept the option of castling queenside.

9 ... Nh7

The knight retreats so that it can't be rammed by g4-g5. In its dreams it might be able to carry out the manoeuvre ... Nf8 and ... Ng6, aiming at the hole on f4.

10 Nbd2 Bd7 11 Bb3 Be6



Exercise: The obvious move is now 12 Rg1, when Black might reply

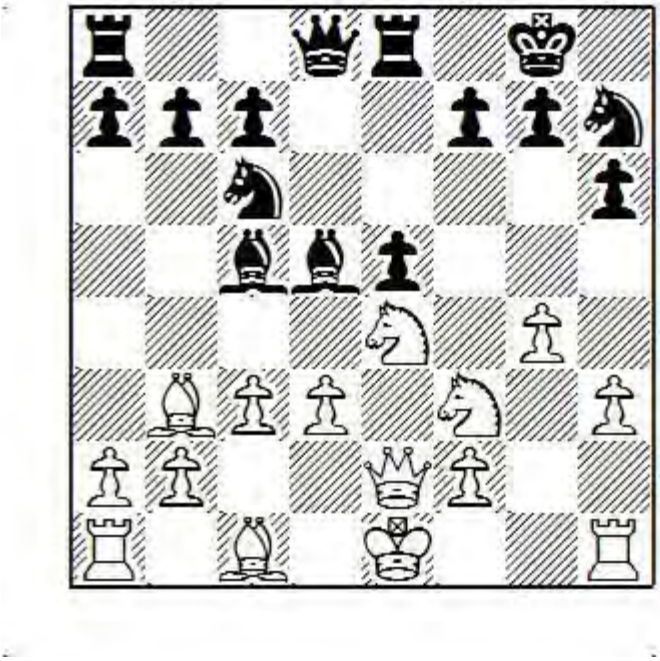
12 ... Be7 to fight against the g4-g5 advance. Since Black has

decentralized his knight on h7, can you find a better approach for White?

Answer: **12 exd5!**

This move looks entirely inconsistent, as White has built the pawn structure c3, d3 and e4 to keep things quiet in the centre. But in fact there is going to be a changing of the guard on e4, not an opening of lines.

12 ... Bxd5 13 Ne4!



The knight replaces the pawn on e4 as blockader of the centre. Note the importance of the g4-pawn in preventing Black from driving it

away with ... f7-f5. The horse also clears the way for the bishop on c1 to enter the game. Along with its brother in arms on f3, it supports the g4-g5 advance. Black can't even remove it with 13 ... Bxe4? as after 14 dxe4 White's light-squared bishop becomes too strong.

Gashimov has been able to take action in the centre because Kramnik retreated his knight to h7. If the horse had remained on f6, Black could reply ... Nxe4 and then ... Bxb3, with equality.

We are permitted – and also required – to adjust our plan (12 exd5!) if it converts one of our opponent's otherwise respectable moves (here 9 ... Nh7) into a positional blunder.

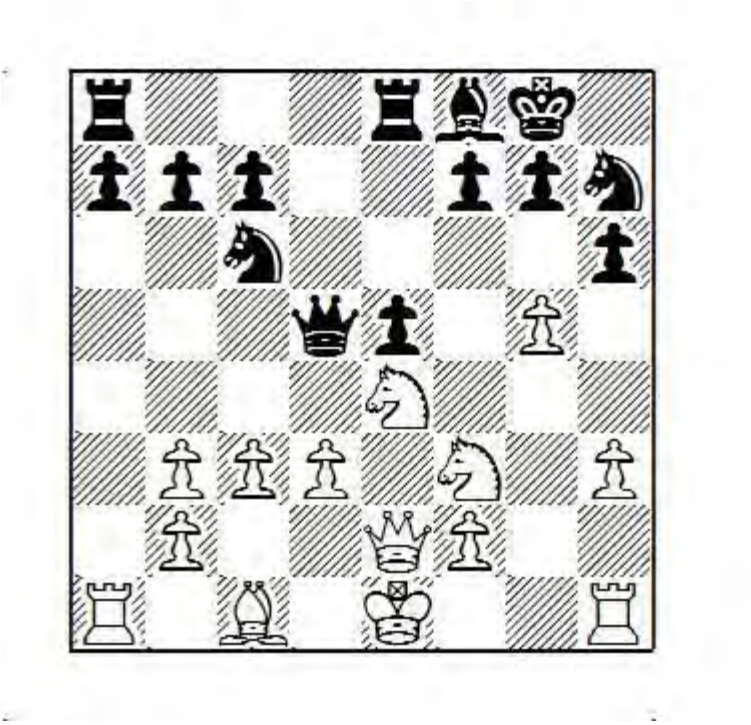
13 ... Bf8

Now Black is ready for 14 ... Nf6, bringing the knight back into the game. Then 12 exd5 assumes the role of positional mistake due to the simplifying ... Nxe4 and ... Bxb3. And so we have to combine necessity with pleasure:

14 g5!

When you have the initiative you must attack – here even a one-move delay would give Black time to consolidate.

14 ... Bxb3 15 axb3 Qd5



16 Rg1!

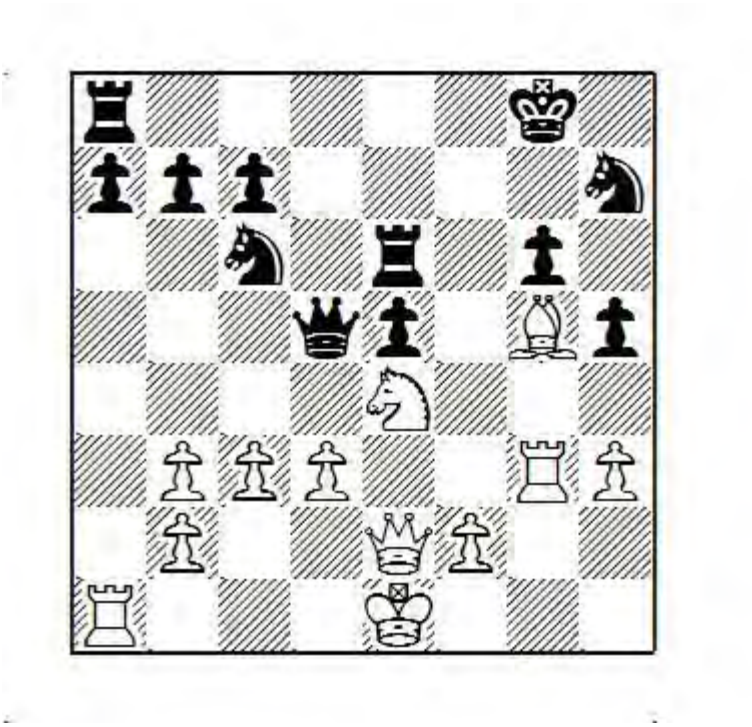
Question: Why not 16 gxh6, to break open the g-file at once?

Answer: Pay attention, you are playing Kramnik! After 16 gxh6, he isn't going to reply 16 ... gxh6 – instead 16 ... f5! will counterattack strongly in the centre. After 17 Ng3 he might even hit you with 17 ... Nd4!?.

16 ... h5 17 g6!

This removes the f7-pawn, so that the white knight on e4 can no longer be challenged by ... f7-f5. It also opens the g-file for the white rook and clears the g5-square for the white minor pieces. Black now has a thankless task trying to hold together his kingside without a semblance of counterplay.

17 ... fxg6 18 Rxg6 Re6 19 Rg3 Be7 20 Nfg5 Bxg5 21 Bxg5 g6



Exercise: White to play and win material.

Answer: **22 c4!**

White is willing to loosen his pawn centre as if now 22 ... Qd4 23 Be3 Qd8 24 Qxh5 and, with g6 hanging, the black kingside is crumbling. Kramnik therefore gives up the exchange, but he isn't able to save himself:

22 ... Qd7 23 Nc5 Qe8 24 Nxe6 Qxe6 25 Be3 Kh8 26 0-0-0 a5 27 Rdg1 Qf5 28 Rf3 Qd7 29 Bd2!

An excellent manoeuvre, as the e5-pawn becomes a key target. Note that 29 ... Nd4? drops e5 straightaway.

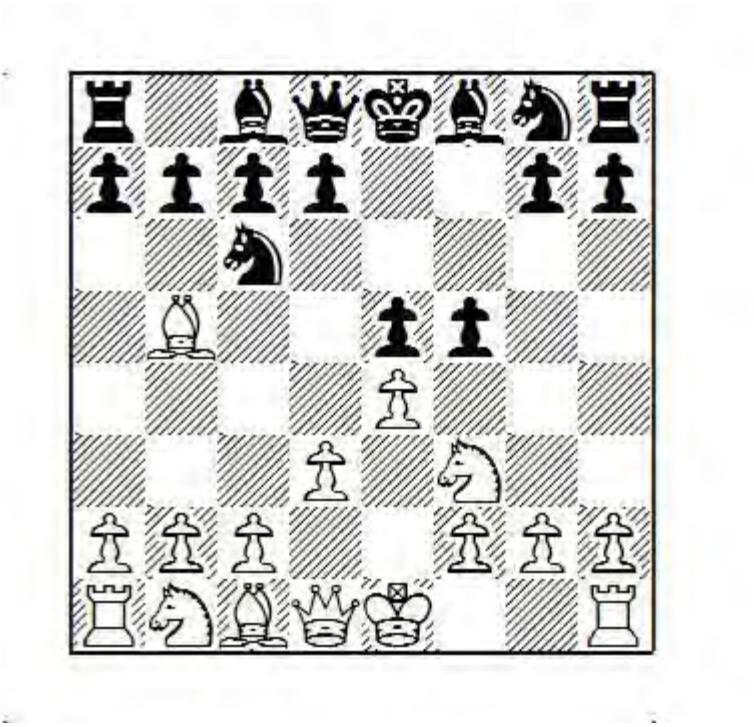
29 ... a4 30 Bc3 Qd6 31 Qe4 a3 32 bxa3 Nd4 33 Bxd4 exd4 34 Kc2 Rxa3 35 Rxg6 Ra2+ 36 Kb1 Ra1+ 37 Kxa1 Qa3+ 38 Kb1 Qxb3+ 39 Kc1 1-0

The white king will evade the checks.

A restrained line against the Schliemann Defence

After **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5** Black can offer a gambit with **3 ... f5**.

This is probably the scariest thing you have to face if you are new to the Ruy Lopez. In Chapter Five we look at the mainline beginning 4 Nc3 etc., but for now I recommend you be consistent and reply 4 d3! in the style of the restrained centre. Let's see how it works in practice.



Game 8

R.Edouard-A.Susterman

Illes Medes 2007

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 f5 4 d3!

This is a popular move these days. It is a logical way to support the e4-pawn once the light-squared bishop is outside the pawn chain. I don't claim it leads to a huge advantage but it should get you past 3 ... f5 whilst avoiding disasters of the 4 exf5? e4 kind.

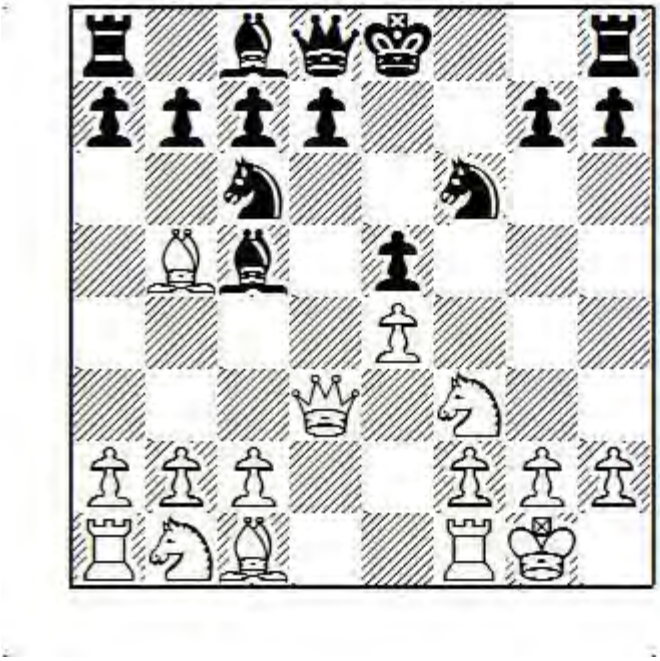
4 ... fxe4

Black has little choice but to take on e4. For example after 4 ... Nf6 5 0-0 Bc5 6 exf5 0-0 7 Be3 Nd4 8 c3! Nxf3+ 9 Qxf3 Black hadn't enough for the pawn in M.Loeffler-S.Legrand, Cannes 2000.

5 dxe4 Nf6 6 0-0 Nxe4?

Black has two main continuations here, 6 ... Bc5 and 6 ... d6. Both aim to complete development by castling kingside, after which Black can claim to have the better of it due to his potential pressure down the f-file. But White's opening play has a specific idea in mind to prevent this.

Thus after 6 ... Bc5 he plays 7 Qd3!.



Question: What happens if Black now castles?

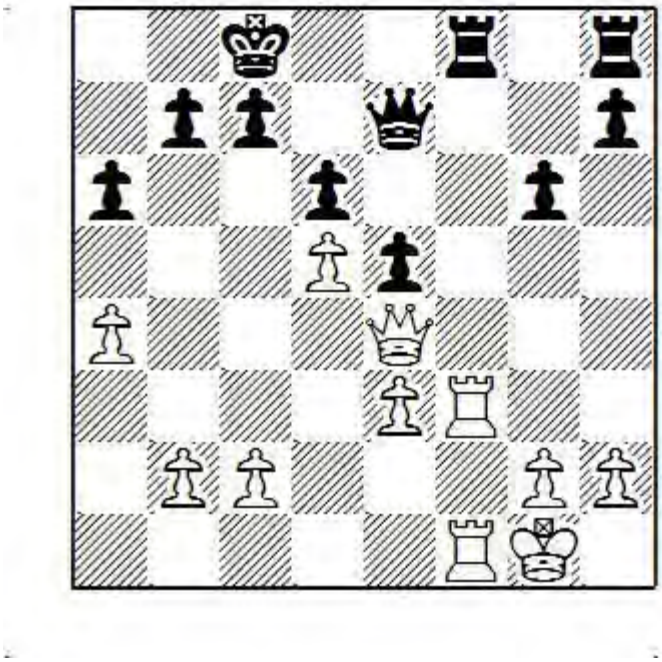
Answer: The whole point of White's play is that after 7 ... 0-0? 8 Qc4+ wins a piece. In M.Carlsen-T.Radjabov, Morelia/Linares 2008, White got some advantage after a long forcing variation: 7 ... d6 8 Qc4 Qe7 9 Nc3 Bd7 (White's next move would be crushing after 9 ... Be6, so he breaks the pin on c6) 10 Nd5 Nxd5 11 exd5 Nd4 12 Nxd4 Bxd4 13 Bxd7+ Qxd7 14 a4.

Question: Once again I should ask, what happens

if Black castles (on either wing)?

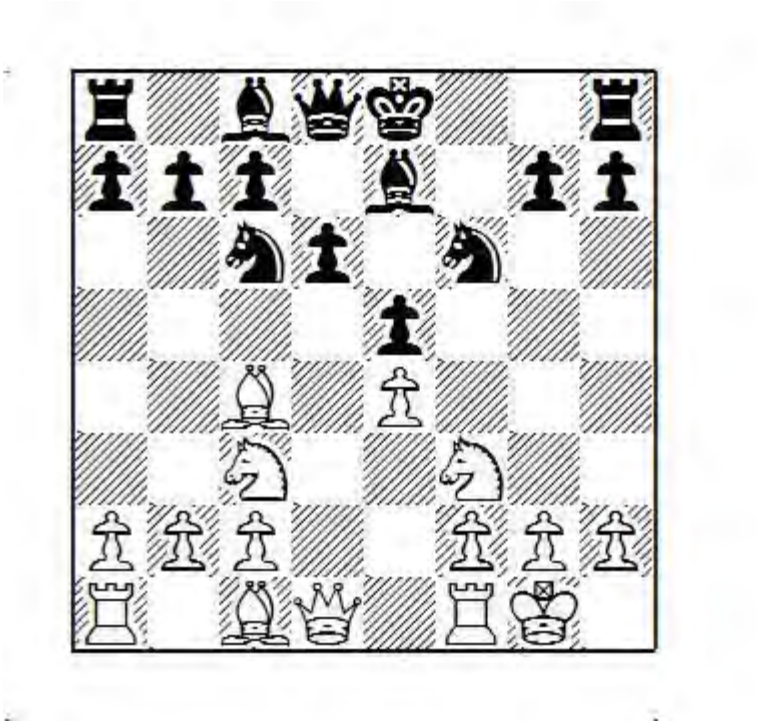
Answer: If 14 ... 0-0 White can trap the bishop with 15 c3 Bc5 16 b4 Bb6 17 a5 – which would be some revenge for all the bishops that White has lost to the Noah's Ark Trap!

So Black should make a haven on a7 for his bishop with 14 ... a6, when White forces open the f-file: 15 Be3 Bxe3 16 fxe3 0-0-0 17 Rf2 Rdf8 18 Raf1 Qe7 19 Qe4 g6 20 Rf3.



Black's pieces are tied down to defence along the f-file, which means that White can gradually advance his pawns on the queenside to increase the pressure. Unless, of course, Black cedes control of the open line, which is what Radjabov did after 20 ... Kb8 21 b3 Rxf3 22 Qxf3, gaining some freedom of action with 22 ... Qg5. Still, it's not much fun for Black, and very far from his dreams of gaining a crushing attack on the white king when he played 3 ... f5.

The other alternative is 6 ... d6. White can be pleased that the bishop on f8 stays shut inside the pawn structure, but Black would still have a pleasant game due to his solid centre and pressure down the f-file – if left in peace. So after 7 Nc3 Be7 we once again have to throw a spanner in the works with 8 Bc4! to stop kingside castling.



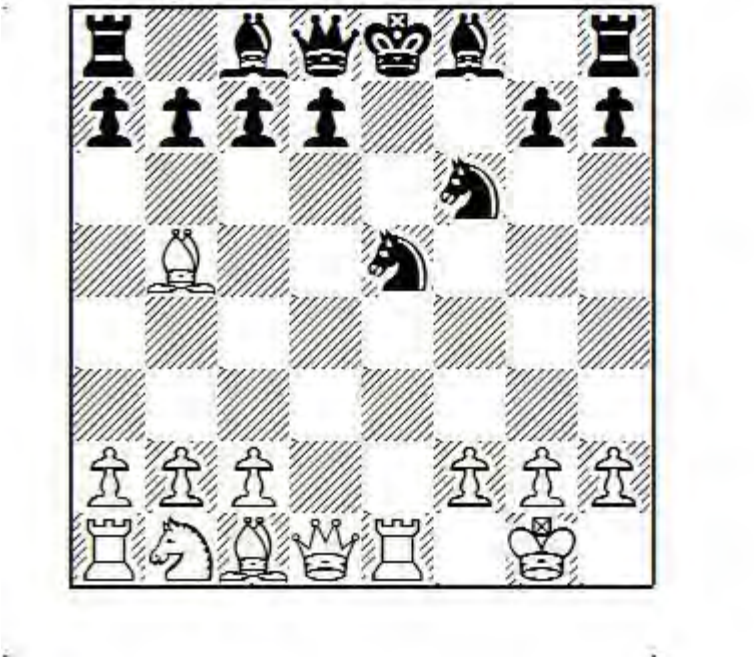
Play might go 8 ... Na5 (on 8 ... Bg4, 9 h3 Bh5 10 g4 Bg6 11 Ng5 looks dangerous for Black) 9 Qd3 Nxc4 10 Qxc4. Black can't drive away the white queen without conceding a structural weakness in the centre. For example: 10 ... c6 11 Bg5 Qd7 12 Bxf6 Bxf6 13 Rad1 and White had a good game with pressure along the d-file in V.Anand-V.Korchnoi, Paris 1991, as Black can't challenge queens with 13 ... Qe6 because the d6-pawn would drop; or 10 ... Qd7 11 Ng5 Rf8 12 Nd5 c6 13 Nxe7 Qxe7 14 Be3, again with a target on d6 in M.Vachier Lagrave-L.Aronian, Moscow 2010.

After all that analysis it's time to see the shock awaiting Susterman after 6 ... .Nxe4?.

7 Nxe5!?

A startling move. It was possible to regain the pawn and keep some initiative with 7 Re1, but Edouard wants to do it in style.

7 ... Nxe5 8 Re1 Nf6?



Exercise: What is the move that adds the most power to White's position?

Black should have curled up in a ball with 8 ... Be7 (if 8 ... .Qh4 then 9 Qd4! guarding f2, looks strong) 9 Rxe4 Nf7 with chances to escape the pressure.

Answer: **9 f4!**

Excellent decision. It is always a good sign if you can get a pawn involved in an attack.

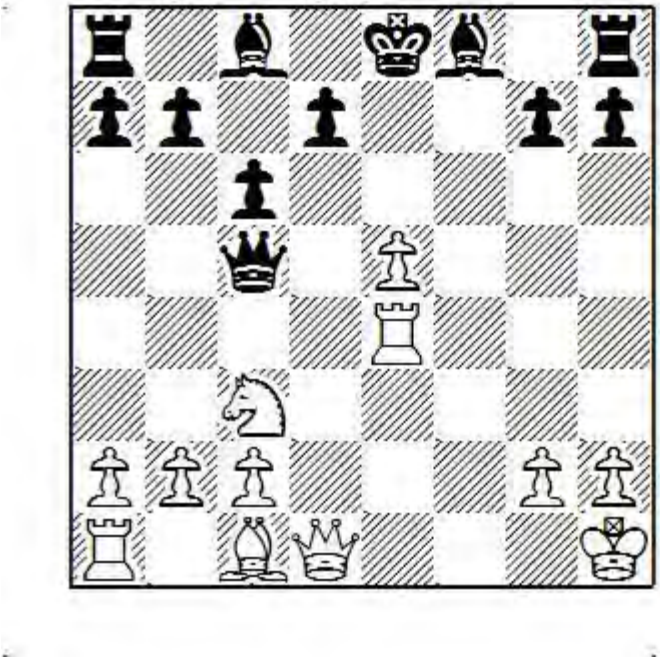
9 ... c6 10 fxe5

The meek pawn on f2 has been transformed into a battering ram on e5.

10 ... Qb6+ 11 Kh1 Ne4

Black hopes that by exchanging pieces in this fashion he'll keep the e-file closed.

12 Rxe4 Qxb5 13 Nc3 Qc5



Exercise: Once again you are invited to try to discover how

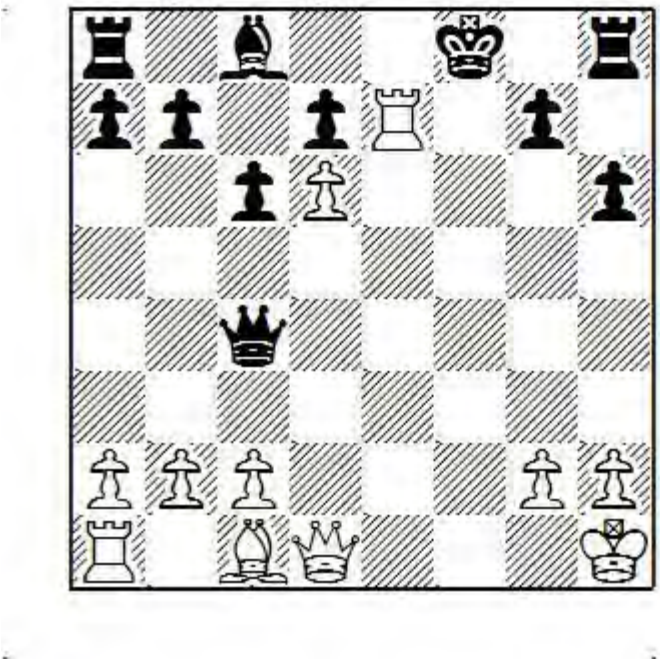
White can add energy to his attack. Remember it isn't

always the most obvious or violent moves that do the trick.

Answer: **14 Re1!**

A beautifully simple move that clears the way for a knight invasion on d6. Black won't be able to keep the centre closed, meaning that his king will be quickly massacred.

14 ... Be7 15 Ne4 Qc4 16 Nd6+ Bxd6 17 exd6+ Kf8 18 Re7 h6



Exercise: It's now a forced checkmate. See if you can find the moves.

Answer: **19 Qf3+ Kg8 20 Re8+ Kh7 21 Qf5+ 1-0**

Mate follows with 21 ... g6 22 Re7+ Kg8 23 Qxg6+ Kf8 24 Qg7.

Chapter Two

White plays d2-d4

Here we shall look at the following variations of the Closed Ruy Lopez:

1. The Chigorin Variation

2. The Breyer Variation

3. The Karpov Variation (9 ... Nd7)

4. The Zaitsev Variation

5. The Smyslov Variation

6. The Steinitz Deferred and other third moves

In Chapter One we built up a solid repertoire for White based on an early d2-d3. Hopefully you feel confident in that pawn structure, and are ready to explore the standard Closed Lopez by preparing d2-d4 'in one leap'.

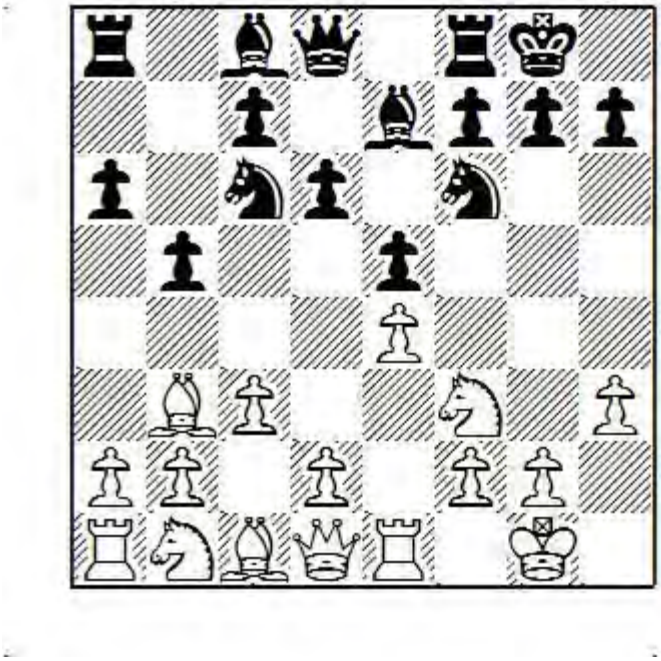
There are many variations and ideas to assimilate, and I would recommend that you keep the option of d2-d3 in case you are confronted with a theoretical line that you haven't studied/don't feel comfortable facing. It should also be remembered that Black can direct play into the Berlin Endgame or Open Variation by capturing with 4 ... Nxe4 or 5 ... Nxe4 the pawn that White has left undefended by omitting d2-d3.

At the end of this chapter, the Steinitz Deferred and some other options for Black are investigated. However, the focus is primarily on the position reached after:

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3

This is the mainline of the Closed Variation of the Ruy Lopez. It is one of the most famous of all opening battlegrounds and has featured in many gigantic struggles between World Champions.

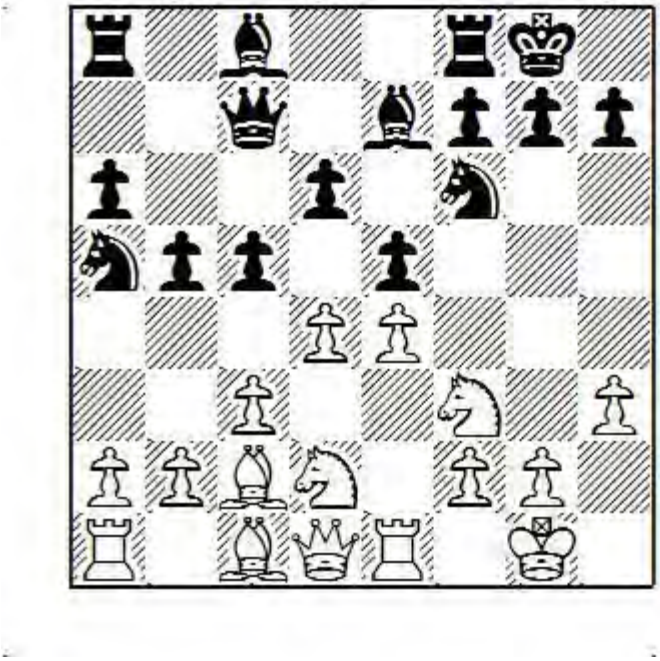
Each of the systems Black can choose after 9 h3 has its own characteristics. In general, Black avoids violent measures, doing his best to protect the e5- and b5-pawns, and tries to mobilize his pieces without losing ground. White is therefore allowed time for quiet manoeuvring of his own, for example in most cases he can adopt the famous knight deployment Nd2, Nf1 and Ng3 which we have already seen in Chapter One. So far everything sounds pretty simple.



Not so: White can literally use all or any of his pawns to increase the positional pressure. Likewise Black has many possible pawn advances. This gives the game a huge strategical complexity.

The Chigorin Variation

The Chigorin Variation is named after the Russian master Mikhail Chigorin (1850-1908), who was one of the best half dozen players in the world and used his defence to beat Duras at Nuremberg in 1906. It occurs after the moves **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 Na5**. Black clears the way for the c7-pawn to join in the centre fight after **10 Bc2 c5** (the gambit 10 ... d5 is examined in Chapter Five). Play then typically continues **11 d4 Qc7 12 Nbd2** after which Black has to make a crucial decision:



Should he open the c-file by exchanging pawns with 12 ... cxd4 or else maintain the tension between the d4- and c5-pawns, which allows White if he wishes to play d4-d5, closing the queenside? We shall look at both options, with the first game below also acting as a general introduction to the Closed Lopez.

Chigorin Scenario One: an open c-file and blocked centre

Game 9

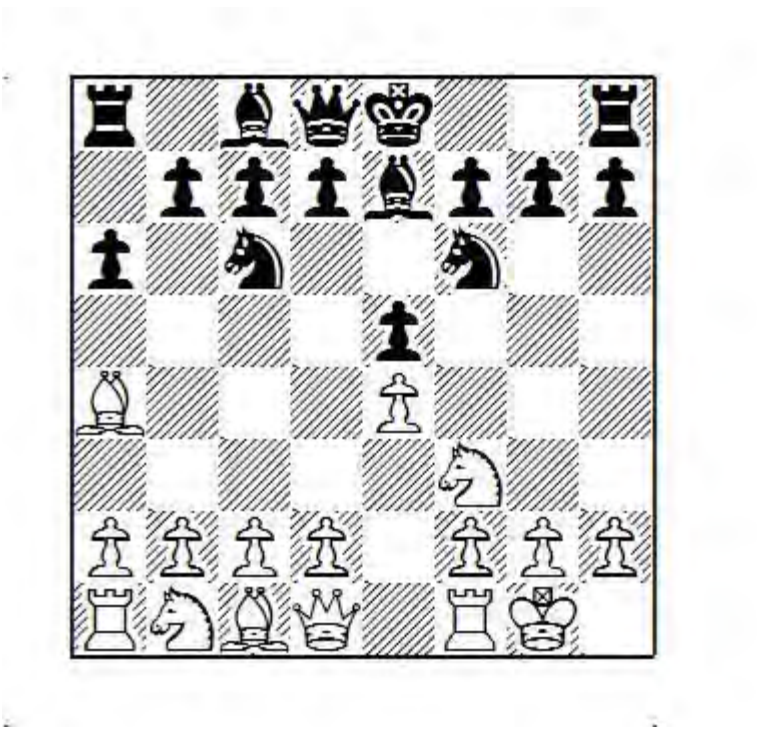
V.Topalov-V.Ivanchuk

Monaco (rapid) 2011

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0

As we saw in Chapter One, 5 d3 would keep the centre solid and lead to a manoeuvring game, with d3-d4 often played at a later point. Instead White is looking to seize space immediately with c2-c3 and d2-d4, and for this purpose it is most economical to castle and then defend the pawn on e4 with Re1.

5 ... Be7



As always in this type of centre, Black delays ... b7-b5 for as long as possible.

Question: But what happens if 6 Bxc6 dxc6 7 Nxe5?

Answer: In such situations it's always worth checking that Black hasn't messed up his opening move order and let you get away with this capture! Here the bishop on e7 blocks the e-file, so that Black can safely regain the pawn with 7 ... Nxe4, not fearing a pin with 8 Re1.

6 Re1 b5

Black has to stop 7 Bxc6 and 8 Nxe5. Note that it has taken four moves, from 3 Bb5 to 6 Re1, to make the threat to the e5-pawn real. It's no wonder that many players in the 19th century didn't appreciate the latent power of 3 Bb5, which must have seemed lacking in energy compared to the Italian Game with 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4, which aims directly at f7, to say nothing of the King's Gambit.

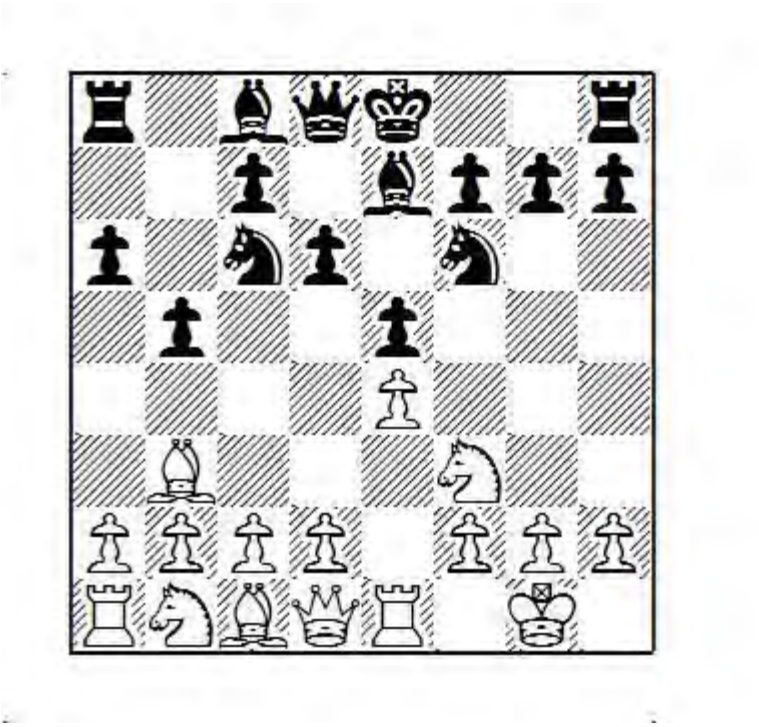
Question: Could Black get by without this move,

say with 6 ... d6, defending e5?

Answer: Yes, but it's not as good for him as against d2-d3 lines. White can conquer space in the centre with 7 Bxc6+ bxc6 8 d4, or expand more slowly with 7 c3 when if 7 ... Bg4, we should revert to 8 d3!. Then, since White hasn't played d2-d4, his centre is secure and bishop on g4 is vulnerable to White's standard knight transfer to the kingside, e.g. 8 ... 0-0 9 Nbd2 Re8 10 Nf1 Bf8 11 h3 Bd7 (after 11 ... Bh5 White has 12 g4!? Bg6 13 Ng3 with kingside pressure) 12 Ng3 g6 13 d4 with advantage to White.

The move ... Be7 doesn't fit in well with a ... d7-d6 or 'Steinitz' approach. Black would do better to adopt the move order 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 d6 5 c3 Bd7, as see in the Stellwagen game at the end of this chapter, so that he keeps the chance to fianchetto after 6 d4 g6 7 0-0 Bg7.

7 Bb3 d6



Black bolsters the pawn on e5 and opens the diagonal for his bishop on c8. It is the standard and best move – unless Black plans the Marshall Attack with 7 ... 0-0 8 c3 d5, for which I refer you to Chapter Five.

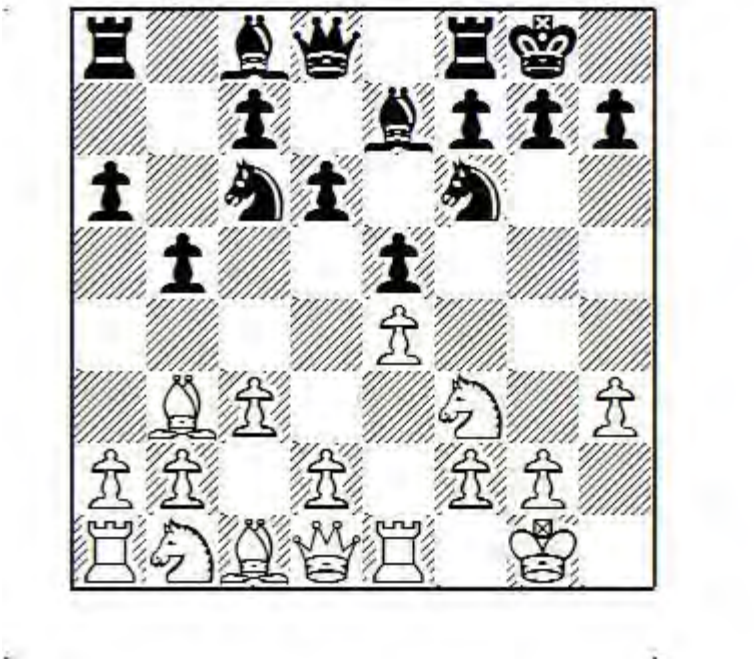
Question: Are there any positional drawbacks to 7 ... d6?

Answer: The drawback is that the bishop on e7 is shut inside its pawn chain. For a long time it will be unable to attack anything.

8 c3

An excellent move. It gives the bishop on b3 an escape square if it is attacked by ... Na5, and at the same time supports d2-d4. In other words, it holds onto something that White already has – a good bishop – and helps him to gain something he wants – a space advantage.

8 ... 0-0 9 h3



Question: Why does White move his h-pawn?

Isn't he neglecting the centre?

Answer: The quiet nature of the position means that White not only can, but must, attend to positional subtleties. He can't pulverize Black in a direct attack, so the only way to hold onto the opening advantage he gained with 1 e4 is through a series of precise moves.

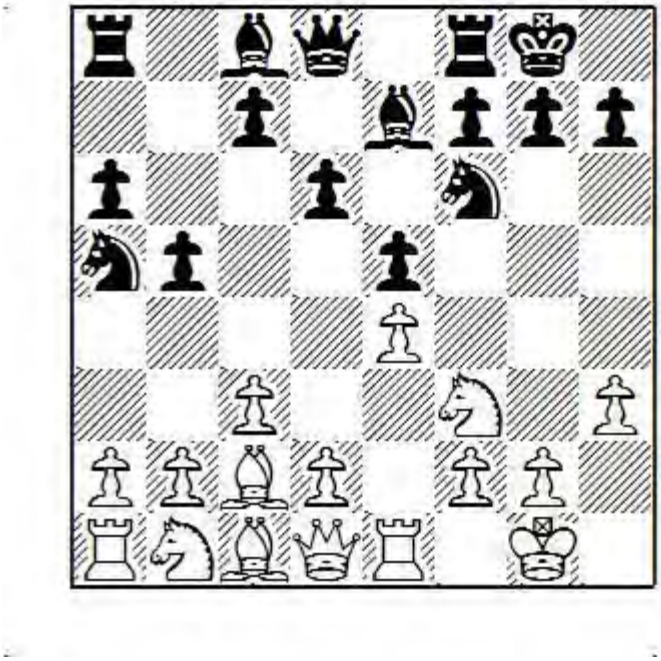
Nimzowitsch once said that chess mastery was revealed by making a pawn move on the wing, while having your mind on the centre. With the prophylactic move 9 h3! White prevents the pin which would otherwise undermine the defence of the d4-pawn after 9 d4 Bg4!. In contrast to lines where White has played d2-d3, the black bishop becomes a team player on g4 rather than a mere target, as White has weakened his d4-square with d2-d4. (However, it should be pointed out that some strong players, for example Shirov and Kamsky, have on occasion tried 9 d4.)

9 ... Na5

Finally we have reached the Chigorin Variation. By threatening to exchange knight for bishop, Black gains time to bring his c-pawn into the fight for the centre.

Another possibility is 9 ... Be6, when after 10 d4 Bxb3 11 axb3 exd4 12 cxd4 Nb4 13 Nc3 c5 14 Bg5 White had some advantage in S.Sjugirov-P.Nikolic, Budva 2009.

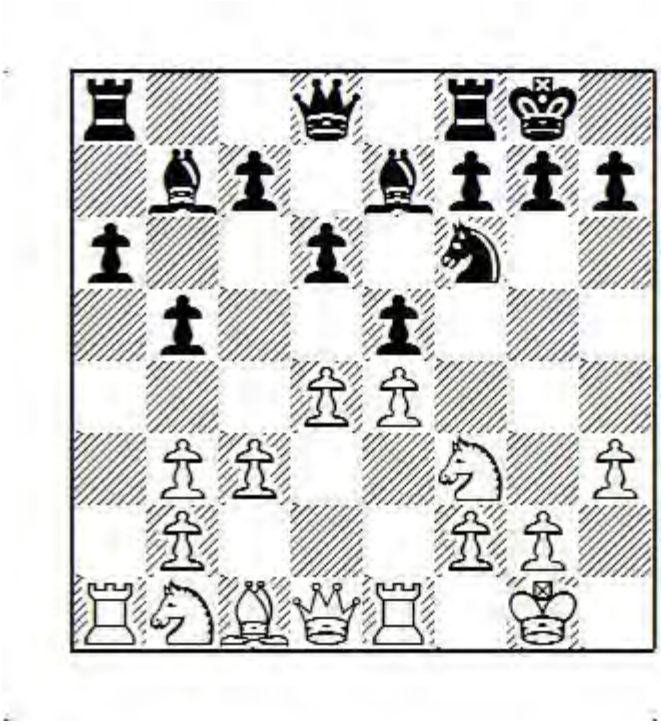
10 Bc2



This reply is virtually automatic in such situations.

Question: But wait! Why is the light-squared bishop so valuable? Sitting on c2 it isn't doing anything – it is blocked in by its own pawn on e4. There doesn't seem to be any way out for the bishop on the queenside either. Surely White should be happy to exchange off his 'bad' bishop?

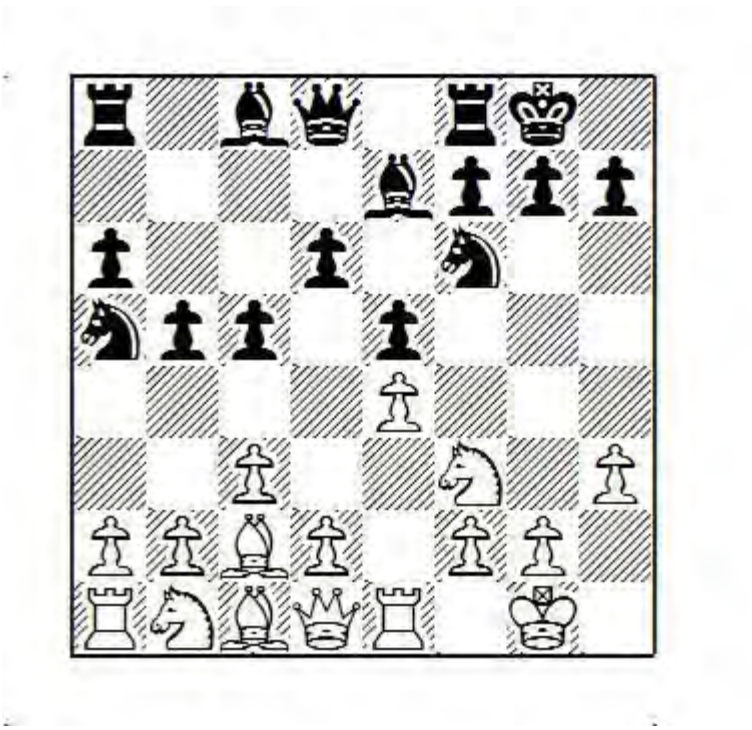
Answer: As was discussed above, in closed positions it is important to maintain key strategic assets. The bishop looks passive on c2, but it gives vital steel to the white centre. Imagine if White had played 10 d4? Then after 10 ... Nxb3 11 axb3 Bb7 White is already missing his bishop.



After 12 dxe5 Nxe4 Black has conquered the e4-square and has pressure along the a8-h1 diagonal. So White would do best to solidify his centre with 12 Qd3, 12 Nbd2 or 12 d5, keeping the black knight out of e4. But this is fighting to maintain equality, not pressing forwards for advantage. This continuation demonstrates the power of the bishop pair. Without a rival, Black's light-squared bishop is the best minor piece on the board.

To summarize: after 10 Bc2, assuming White builds up his game in good style and Black makes a couple of mistakes, White's light-squared bishop might become a strong attacking piece in its own right. But that's not the main point. With the bishop absent after 10 d4 Nxb3, White can't even begin the process of gaining space as it would loosen his centre too much.

10 ... c5



A sceptic: 'I don't think it's a good idea to advance this pawn. It leaves a hole on d5 and removes a defender of the d6-pawn. And if White attacks b5 with a2-a4, Black can no longer defend with ... c7-c6. In fact 10 ... c6 looks much more solid.'

Question: What do you think of this view?

Answer: After 10 ... c6 11 d4 Qc7 (or 11 ... .Nd7) Black is very passive. Furthermore, the black knight on a5 has no good centre square. White can build up pressure on the queenside with 12 a4, or carry out the typical knight manoeuvre 12 Nbd2 intending Nf1 and Ng3. It's fun to play without an opponent!

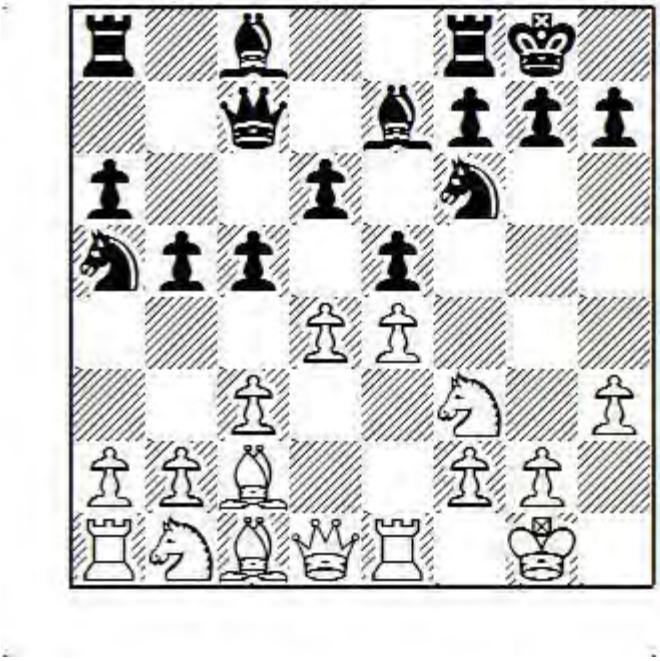
White can't be allowed such a freehand. Positionally speaking, *the only way for Black to gain counterplay in this variation is by attacking the white pawn on d4.* The loosening of his pawn structure is the price he has to pay.

Alternatively, Black might try to change the nature of the struggle with the gambit move 10 ... d5!?. This is considered in Chapter Five.

11 d4

White completes his centre, but the d4-point is already under pressure from two black pawns.

11 ... Qc7

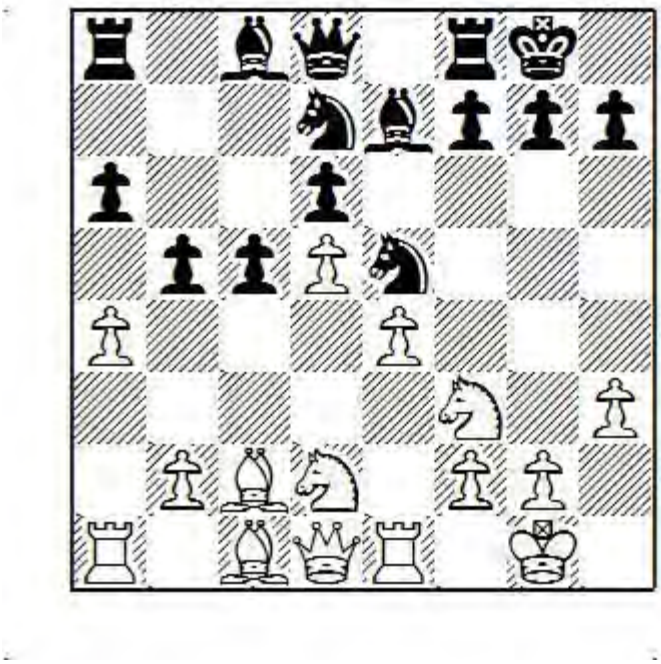


Black's maintains the pawn on e5, which will circumvent any attempt by White to overrun the centre.

Also possible is the Keres Variation with 11 ... Nd7 12 Nbd2 and now:

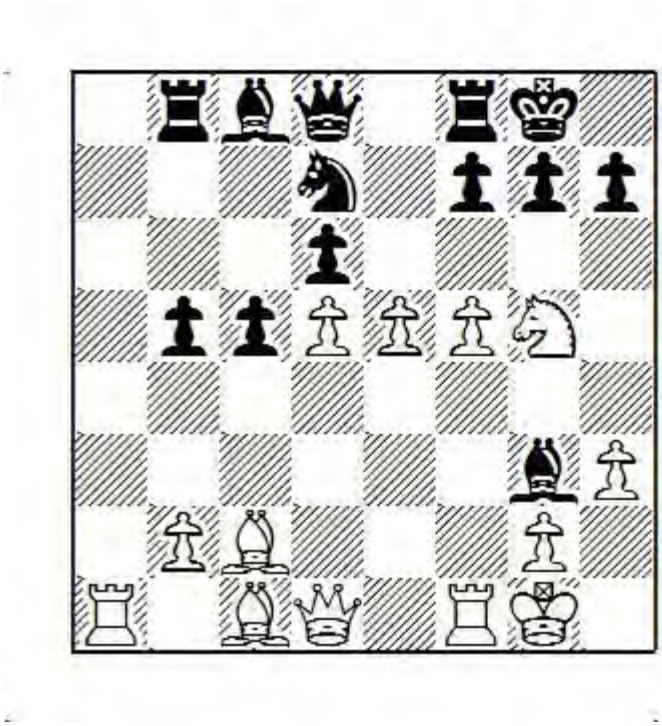
a) 12 ... cxd4 13 cxd4 Nc6 14 Nb3 a5 15 Be3 a4 16 Nbd2 is a similar structure to the game. White can claim the better chances after 16 ... Bf6 17 d5 Nd4 18 Rc1! Bb7 (exchanging on c2 hands White the c-file) 19 Bb1 etc., when the d4 point can be undermined. Alternatively 11 ... Nc6 grants White a typical space advantage after 12 d5 Na5, for example 13 Nbd2 g6 14 b3 (keeping the black knight from being rerouted via c4 to b6) 14 ... Bd7 15 Nf1 etc., when the knight is problematical on a5.

b) With 12 ... exd4 13 cxd4 Nc6 Black concedes the centre in the hope of gaining counterplay by activating the dark-squared bishop and using e5 as a base for his knight. White has to be careful not to over-extend himself. We'll follow the game Y.Solodovnichenko-A.Delchev, Mulhouse 2011: 14 d5 Nce5 15 a4! (the attack on b5 is made as early as possible as 15 Nxe5 Nxe5 16 a4 gives Black the extra option of 16 ... Bd7)



15 ... Rb8 (now White acquires the open a-file which boosts his activity – see for example the 28 Ra7! move given at the end of the

next note) 16 Nxe5 Nxe5 17 axb5 axb5 18 f4 Ng6 19 Nf3 Bh4 (or 19 ... f5 20 exf5 Bxf5 21 Bxf5 Rxf5 22 g4 Rxf4 23 Bxf4 Nxf4 24 Qd2! – White takes measures against Black's attempt to attack on the kingside – 24 ... Bg5 25 Kh2 Nxh3 26 Qd3 Nf4 27 Qf5! h6 and here rather than 28 Nxg5?! as in A.Kosten-E.Postny, Andorra 2007, on Chesspublishing.com Tony Kosten recommends 28 Ra7! with a near winning initiative) 20 Rf1 Bg3 (Delchev's idea is to get control of the centre dark squares, but unfortunately for him he can't quell the energy of the white centre) 21 f5 Ne5 22 Ng5! Nd7 (if 22 ... Bh4 23 f6! or similarly 22 ... h6 23 f6! hxg5 24 Bxg5 g6 25 Ra3 when White regains his piece with a decisive attack) 23 e5!



23 ... Bxe5 24 Nxh7! Nf6 (hopeless is 24 ... Kxh7 25 Qh5+ Kg8 26 f6 g6 27 Bxg6) 25 Nxf8 Kxf8 26 Qf3 Bb7 27 Rd1 Qb6 28 Be3! (Solodovnichenko realizes that he needs to decide the game by attack, rather than the exploitation of his extra exchange) 28 ... Bxb2 29 Rab1 Be5 30 g4! (Black has no good answer to the kingside pawn advance) 30 ... Re8 31 g5 Bd4 32 Bxd4 cxd4 33 gxf6! (nicely calculated: White doesn't fear the discovered check and fork on c2) 33 ... d3+ 34 Kf1 Bxd5 (after 34 ... dxc2 35 Qh5 cxd1Q+ 36 Rxd1 Black is defenceless, for example 36 ... gxf6 37 Qh8+ Ke7 38 Re1+ when e8 drops with a quick mate) 35 Qxd3 Re5 36 Rxb5 1-0.

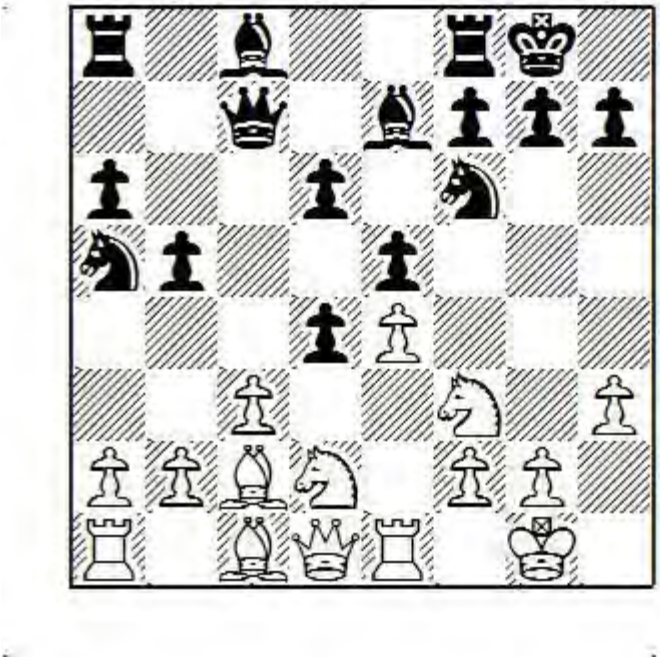
We should return to the Topalov-Ivanchuk game after 11 d4 Qc7:

12 Nbd2

Denied the c3-square, the white knight has to try its luck on d2. It is to be expected that it will be manoeuvred via f1 to e3, where it is in touch with the hole on d5, or to g3, in order to join in operations against the black king.

12 ... cxd4

This exchange is the defining feature of our first Chigorin scenario. In the next game it is delayed for a move with 12 ... Rb8 13 b3 cxd4.

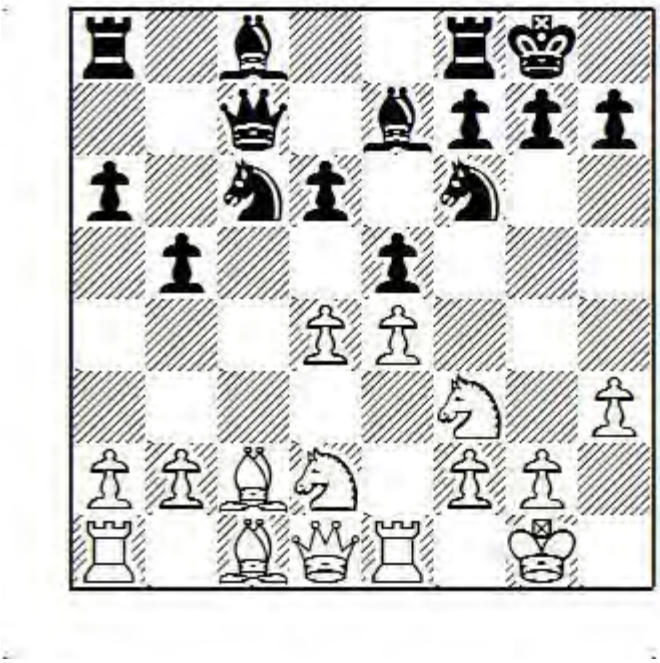


Question: Why does Black exchange pawns on d4, giving White

the chance to prepare Rc1 with pressure down the c-file?

Answer: Black in fact hopes to use the c-file as a source of counterplay or at least as a means to ease his game by exchanging rooks. Also in such cases it's sensible to ask yourself 'what is Black trying to prevent his opponent from doing by exchanging pawns?' Here White is stopped from completely blocking up the centre, as would occur after say 12 ... Rd8 13 b3 Bd7 14 d5 as in the Chigorin Scenario Two below. In that case Black has far less counterplay: in particular the black knight on a5 would be left in the wilderness on a5, whereas here it has a somewhat more active role (jumping ahead, we might say that Ivanchuk's knight will prove too active for his own good).

13 cxd4 Nc6



After 13 ... Bb7 14 d5 Rac8 15 Bd3 Nd7 16 Nf1 the bishop is shut in on b7 unless Black speculates with 16 ... f5 (or similarly 16 ... Nc5 17 b3 f5 18 exf5 Bf6 19 Be4 Qf7 20 Ng3 Nxe4 21 Nxe4 Qxd5 22 Bd2 Nc6 23 Bg5! when the d6-pawn was doomed and Black didn't achieve enough compensation in V.Kramnik-I.Sokolov, Wijk aan Zee 2005), but after 17 Ng3! f4 18 Nf5 Rxf5 19 exf5 the exchange sacrifice

doesn't seem quite sufficient, e.g. 19 ... Nf6 20 Ng5 Bxd5 21 Be4 Bxe4 22 Nxe4 Nxe4 23 Rxe4 Qb7 24 Re1 Rf8 25 Qd3 and White was better in Hou Yifan-M. Perez Candelario, Zafra 2007.

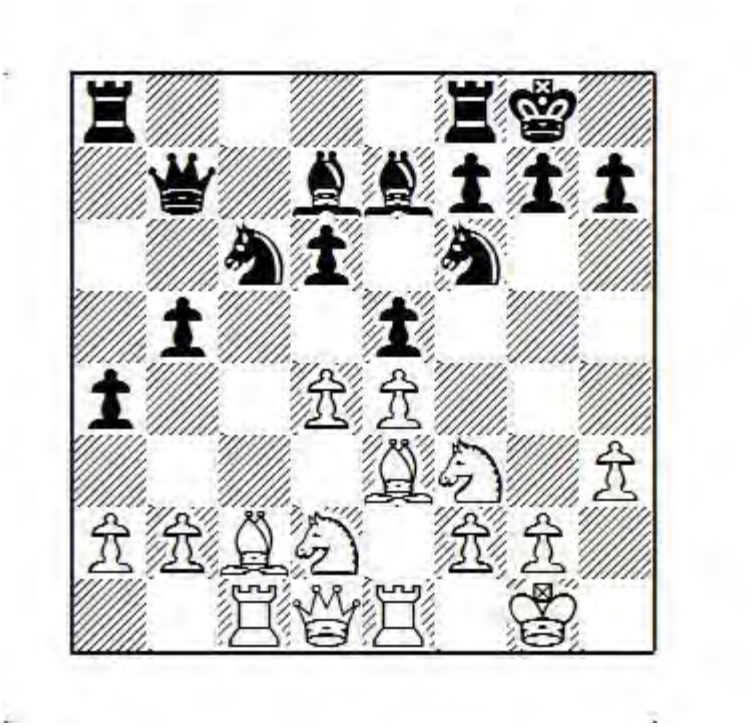
14 Nb3

White sees that his knight will be driven back to d2, but he will have won time for Be3, to support the d4-pawn and complete his queenside development.

14 ... a5

Black continues to besiege the d4-pawn by threatening 15 ... a4. At the same time he gains space with his queenside pawns.

15 Be3 a4 16 Nbd2 Bd7 17 Rc1 Qb7



Exercise: Before reading on, you might like to assess the diagram position. Could you list the good and bad points of Black's chosen set-up?

Answer: It's no surprise that Black's set-up has been favoured by many top players.

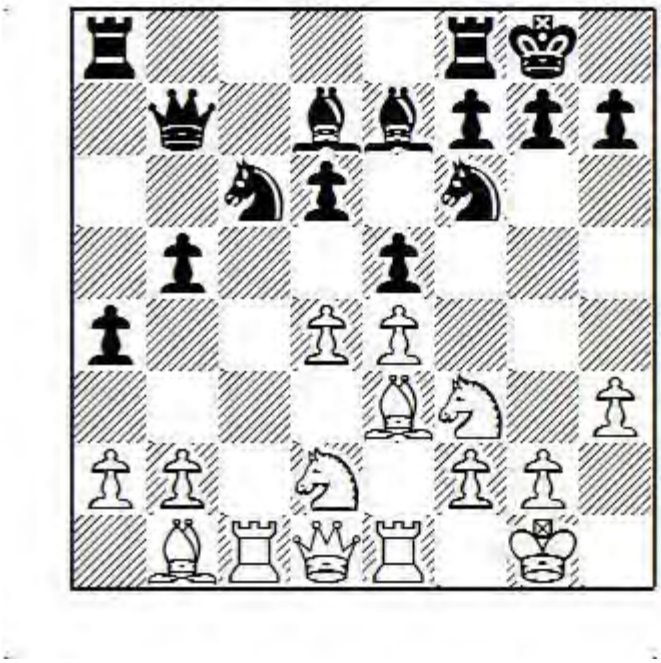
Firstly, Black has maintained his pawn on e5, usually a good sign for him in the Lopez. He has completed his development and his king is free from danger. White's knights aren't well placed to exploit the hole on d5. The black queenside pawns are safe from attack and even contribute to the health of Black's position by denying the white pieces squares. Thus the white bishop on c2 is shut in by its own pawn on e4, and by the black pawn on a4. The white knight, having been driven back to d2, is in a similar plight: it is denied the b3- and c4-squares by the black pawns, and the e4-square by its own pawn. White's bishop on e3 has little scope beyond defending the d4-pawn. The white queen is doing nothing at the moment, the rook on e1 is passive and the rook on c1, whilst sitting on an open file, doesn't appear to have anything to attack.

Nonetheless, Black still hasn't shaken off the advantage White gained with 1 e4. Having pawns on d4 and e4 versus pawns on d6 and e5 is a built-in advantage. White has a bit more room for his minor pieces. The frustration of the white bishops at being blocked in is shared by the black bishops, and even more so. The way forward may be blocked for the knight on d2, but it always has the standard pivot square f1. The black knight on c6 has more acute concerns – it might become a target.

Furthermore, the e4-pawn is more secure than the e5-pawn. White's pawns on the queenside are safer from attack than Black's. It isn't much for White, but it is a tiny advantage that he can try to build upon. Notice how centuries come and go, but the two pillars of White's strategy in the Closed Lopez – namely pressure on the e5- and the b5-pawn – remain unchanging.

18 Bb1

A popular alternative is 18 Qe2, for example 18 ... Rfe8 19 Bd3 Rab8 20 dxe5 Nxe5 21 Nxe5 dxe5 22 Bc5 with a little advantage for White.



Exercise: See if you can work out a strategic plan for White after 18 Bb1.

Answer: This is the plan Topalov chose in the game, which is not necessarily better than the one you devised:

1. Remove the bishop from c2 so that after d4-d5 it can't be hit by ... Nb4.

2. Retreat the knight to f1 to vacate the d2-square for the white queen.

3. Play d4-d5.

4. If then ... Nb4, Qd2! in conjunction with g2-g4 and Ng3, or Ng3 at once, will give White attacking chances on the kingside.

5. If instead ... Na5, to answer Qd2 with ... Nc4, the knight can be shut out of the game with b2-b3.

Generally speaking, White has three possible ways of handling the pawn centre. He can keep the tension between d4 and e5, exchange with d4xe5, or else close things up with d4-d5. Notice that Topalov has kept his options open, not letting his opponent know what type of pawn structure is going to be arrived at in the middlegame. This makes it difficult for Ivanchuk to choose the optimum squares for his pieces – he is a great player but not a mind reader!

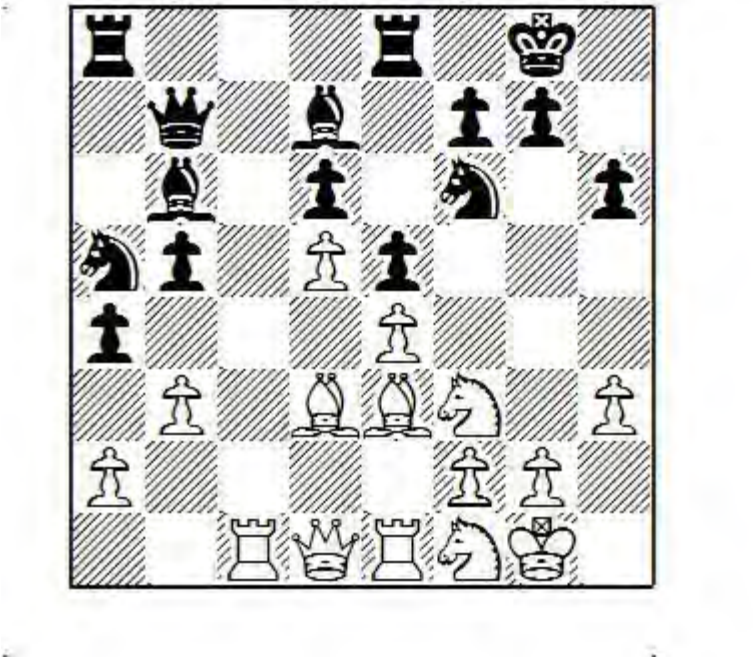
In contrast, if White had committed himself to a blocked centre with 18 d5, after 18 ... Nb4 19 Bb1, it is clear that Black should play 19 ... Rfc8! to challenge White's control of the c-file. He doesn't need to worry any more about White playing d4xe5 and attacking the e5-pawn. But in the game Topalov has kept the tension with 18 Bb1, so how can Black be sure that the rook won't be needed on e8 to help defend the e5-pawn?

Let's see how Topalov's plan worked out in the game:

18 ... h6 19 Nf1 Rfe8 20 d5 Na5 21 b3

The key move, leaving the black knight awkwardly placed on a5.

21 ... Bd8 22 Bd3 Bb6



Exercise: Black completes a manoeuvre of his own to carry out

a strategically desirable exchange of dark-squared bishops.

But can you see a drawback to the move?

23 b4!

Answer: Now Black will be left with an isolated pawn on c4. Evidently he hoped that being a passed pawn it would be a source of counterplay, but Topalov is able to prove that it is a game-losing liability.

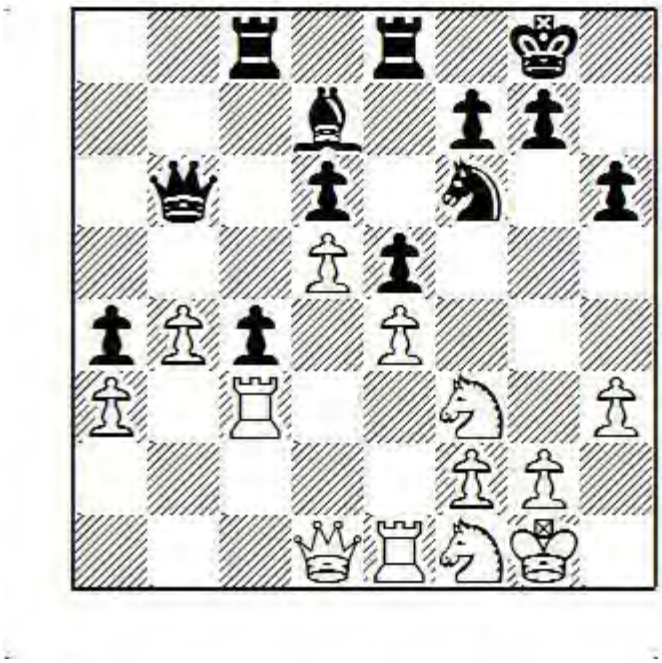
I've seen many games by Ivanchuk, and in most of them he plays like a genius. The fact that he always strives to gain the maximum out of a position has led to a lot of glorious wins. But sometimes, as here, this urge to create something interesting leads him to overpress or underestimate resources for the opponent.

Black should secure the position of his knight with 22 ... axb3 23 axb3 b4, and only then play 24 ... Bb6.

23 ... Nc4 24 Bxc4 bxc4 25 a3!

Not 25 Rxc4 Bb5 26 Rc2 Bxf1 followed by 27 ... Bxe3 and 28 ... .Qxb4, regaining the pawn.

25 ... Rac8 26 Bxb6 Qxb6 27 Rc3

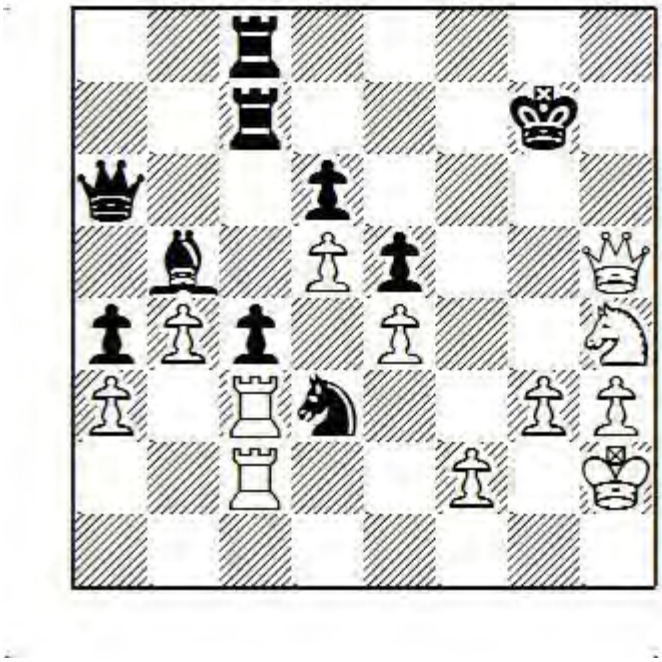


Topalov builds up methodically against the c4-pawn.

27 ... Nh5 28 Ne3 Nf4 29 Qc2 Rc7 30 Rc1 Rec8 31 Qd2 Bb5 32 R1c2 f6 33 Kh2 Nd3 34 Qe2 Qa6 35 g3

Cutting off the retreat of the black knight. Now White intends Nd2 and Ndxc4, winning the pawn. Rather than endure a slow death in an endgame, Ivanchuk does what any good player would do: he accepts the likelihood of a more rapid defeat by putting his king at risk, but thereby gives his opponent more chances to go wrong. Nonetheless, Topalov is a master of a kingside attack and makes no mistake:

35 ... g6 36 Nh4! Kh7 37 Ng4 h5 38 Nxf6+! Kg7 39 Nxh5+ gxh5 40 Qxh5



If the black queen were anywhere near the kingside there would be chances to hold the game, but in her absence the famous knight and queen attacking unit runs rampant.

40 ... Bd7 41 Qg6+ Kh8 42 Qf7 1-0

Black would be left three pawns down with no respite to the attack after 42 ... Rg8 – stopping mate on g6 – 43 Qh5+ Kg7 44 Rxd3! as if 44 ... cxd3 45 Rxc7.

The next game also features the ... c5xd4 exchange, albeit delayed for a move.

Game 10

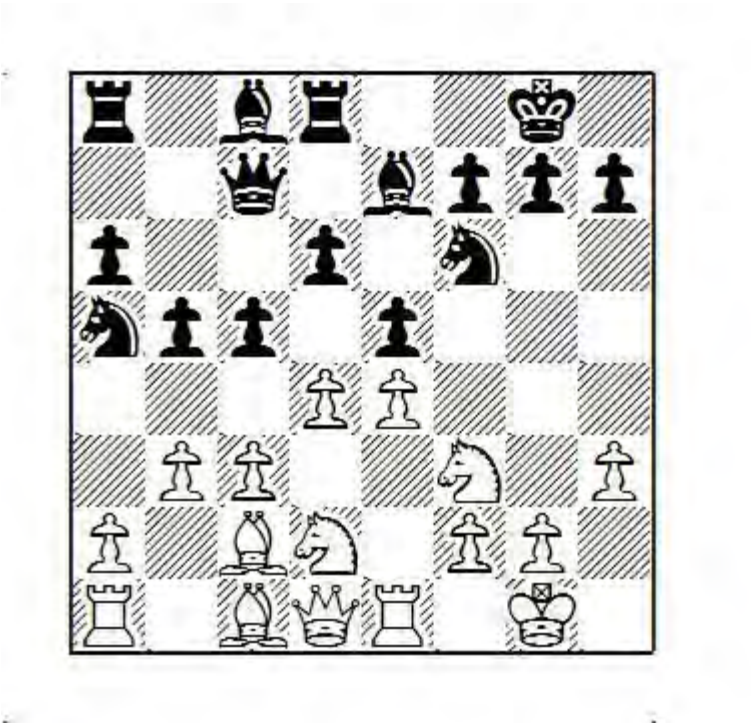
M.Adams-H.Koneru

Merida 2008

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 Na5 10 Bc2 c5 11 d4 Qc7 12 Nbd2 Rd8!?

An attempt to profit from a potential pin on the white queen. Black intends to answer the famous knight retreat 13 Nf1 with 13 ... cxd4 14 cxd4 exd4 15 Nxd4 (other ideas are 15 Bf4 or 15 Ng3) 15 ... d5 16 e5 Ne4 17 f3 Bc5! 18 fxe4 dxe4 with complications that seem to favour Black. Michael Adams prefers not to get involved in this and so leaves his knight on d2 and develops his queenside: a good pragmatic decision.

13 b3



White clears the b2-square for his bishop and also rules out a strategic idea for his opponent. A year earlier Humpy Koneru had faced 13 d5. She solved the problem of the poorly placed knight on a5 with 13 ... c4!? 14 Nf1 Nb7 15 g4 a5 16 Ng3 g6 17 a3 Nc5 18 Bg5 Ne8 19 Qd2 Bxg5 20 Nxg5 f6 21 Nf3 Qe7 22 Nh2 Ng7 and a draw was agreed in T.Gharamian-H.Koneru, Differdange 2007.

Question: What if after the game move 13 b3 Black now plays 13 ... c4?

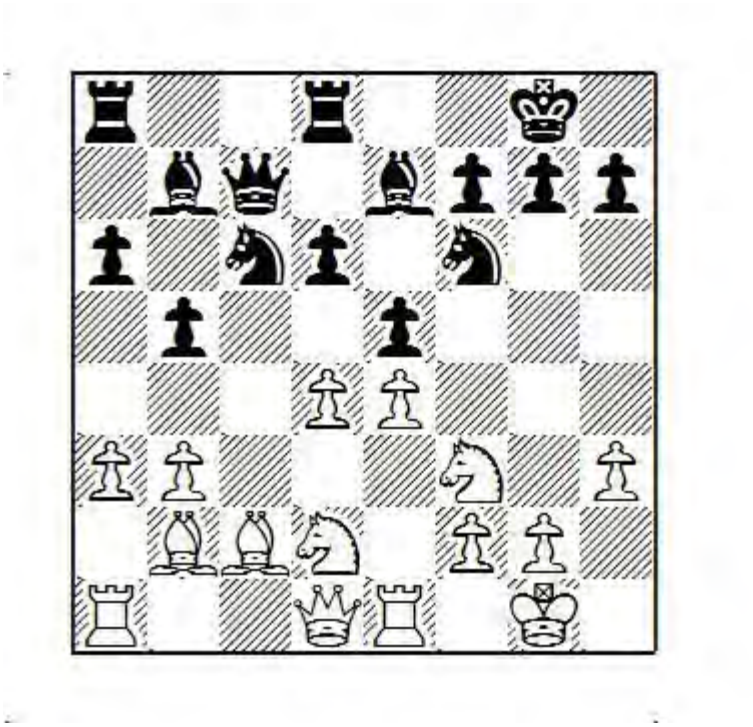
Answer: After 13 ... c4? 14 b4! (there's no en passant capture to worry about!) 14 ... Nc6 15 d5 Nb8 16 a4 Black's queenside pawns are under stress. The situation here would be similar to that reached in the Chigorin Scenario Two below, except that Black has lost time with the knight.

13 ... cxd4

Deterred from playing 13 ... c4, Black exchanges on d4. Note that White can't support the pawn on d4 with Nb3, as Topalov did in the previous game.

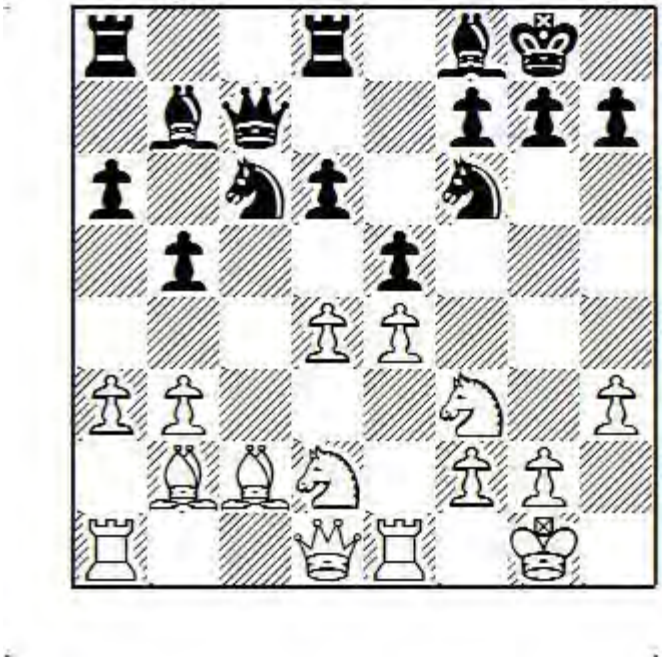
14 cxd4 Nc6 15 Bb2 Bb7 16 a3

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step ... this is a little pawn move with a huge plan behind it. In order to defeat the black army, White must first of all secure control of the b4-square.



16 ... Bf8?

Black's passive play allows Adams to build up a dominating position on both sides of the board. Ivanchuk had the right idea when he manoeuvred this bishop via d8 to b6 in the previous game. A couple of month's later Grandmaster Postny defended Black's position far more stoutly: 16 ... Rac8 (preparing to retreat the knight back to b8 after d4-d5 without shutting in the rook on a8) 17 Rc1 Qb6! (forcing White's hand as after 18 dxe5?! dxe5 19 Nxe5? Nxe5 20 Bxe5 Bxa3 White's pieces are under huge pressure) 18 d5 Nb8 19 b4 Rf8! (a calm and methodical move that clears d8 for the bishop) 20 Nb3 Bd8 21 Na5 (the white knight reaches a5, but here Black is prepared, with the c6-square defended by three of his pieces) 20 ... Qa7 22 a4 Bb6 23 Qd2 bxa4 24 Bxa4 Rxc1 25 Bxc1 Rc8 26 Ba3 Ne8. Black has defended ably and now White agreed to a draw by repetition with 27 Rf1 Nf6 28 Re1 Ne8 29 Rc1 Nf6 30 Re1 ½-½ in A.David-E.Postny, Paleochora 2008. I doubt that Adams would have been so generous to Black – with say 27 Nh4!? he can continue probing. But this was certainly a superior defence to Koneru's in the main game.



17 b4

Question: What is the purpose of this pawn advance?

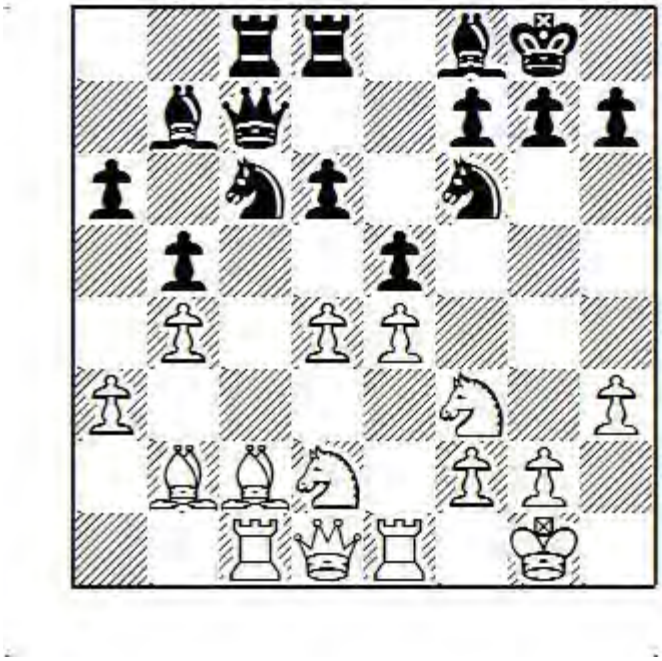
Answer: Well, the clue is in the Postny game of the previous note: White makes the b3-square available for his knight. From this base it will support the d4-pawn and, as we shall see, also have the chance to infiltrate Black's half of the board.

17 ... Rac8

Black completes her development. She wants to retreat the queen to b8 without shutting in the rook.

18 Rc1

White defends the bishop on c2 against a discovered attack with 18 ... Nxb4. It is hardly any inconvenience, as bringing the rook to the open c-file was part of White's plan.



18 ... Qb8

The black queen avoids the danger of being pinned against her knight. At the same time she keeps the e5-pawn defended.

Question: Was this the best use of the queen?

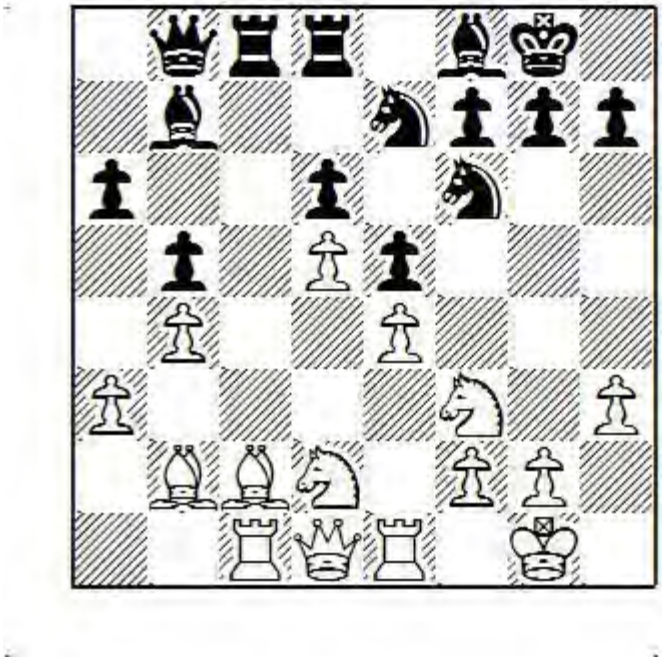
Answer: After 19 d5 next move, the queen has taken away the best retreat square – b8 – from the black knight. From there it could have been redeployed to d7 and then b6. It will be less effective on e7. Furthermore, once White has played 19 d5, the black queen would be more active on b6 than b8. So after 18 ... Qb8 both the black queen and knight end up on inferior squares.

Black could try to cut the Gordian knot with 18 ... Qb6!?. If then 19 d5 Nb8, and Black's pieces are on their best 'd4-d5 structure' squares. Alternatively after 19 dxe5?! dxe5 20 Nxe5 Nxe5 21 Bxe5 Black has plenty of pressure for the pawn after 21 ... a5. I imagine that Adams would have preferred to keep control with 19 d5, though his advantage wouldn't be as great as in the game.

19 d5

Adams' patience in not committing himself to blocking the centre until now means that Black pieces are rather misplaced. If he had arranged d4-d5 at an earlier moment, Koneru wouldn't have had any worries about the defence of her e5-pawn, and so would have put her queen on b6 and retreated the knight to b8.

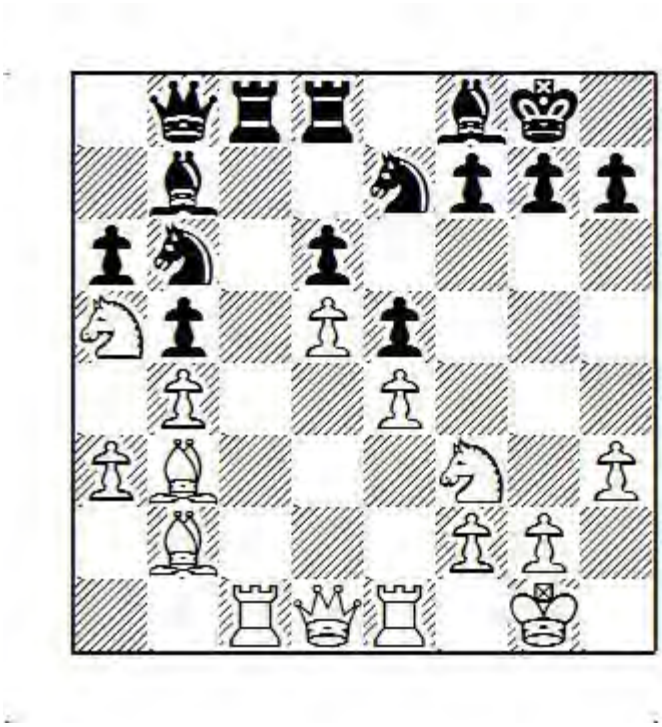
19 ... Ne7



Note how much the white centre pawns box in the black minor pieces. The bishop on b7 stares at a wall on d5, the knight on e7 has no access to c6 or f5, while the knight on f6 is kept out of d5 and e4. The bishop on f8 is also impeded as the centre pawn structure means it only has the e7-square.

Still, the white pieces don't seem that much better off. The bishops are both on blocked diagonals and the knights don't seem to have much scope either. White now carries out the knight manoeuvre from the Postny extract above.

20 Nb3 Nd7 21 Na5 Nb6 22 Bb3!



In this type of pawn centre, White always has to be wary of the pawn advance ... f7-f5. Koneru would like nothing better than to be able to remove the pillar on e4 and so conquer the d5 point, which is under the envious gaze of three of her minor pieces. Therefore Adams has to make sure that any attempt by Black to demolish his centre can either be prevented or else punished by an infiltration of white pieces, which culminates in a decisive attack on the black king. Adams makes it look easy, as he always does in such positions, but there is a lot of calculation behind his natural looking moves. As we shall see, 22 Bb3 is part of his 'anti-f7-f5' measures.

Question: So how should White respond to the freeing attempt 22 ... f5?

Answer: After 22 ... f5, 23 Nc6 Bxc6 24 dxc6+ looks very dangerous for Black, but perhaps 23 Ng5!? is best, with ideas of both 24 Qh5, attacking h7 and threatening to invade on f7, and 24 Nc6, to say nothing of 24 Ne6 to exploit the hole left by 22 ... f5. In any case, we have see enough to prove that 22 ... f5 fails.

22 ... h6 23 Qd3

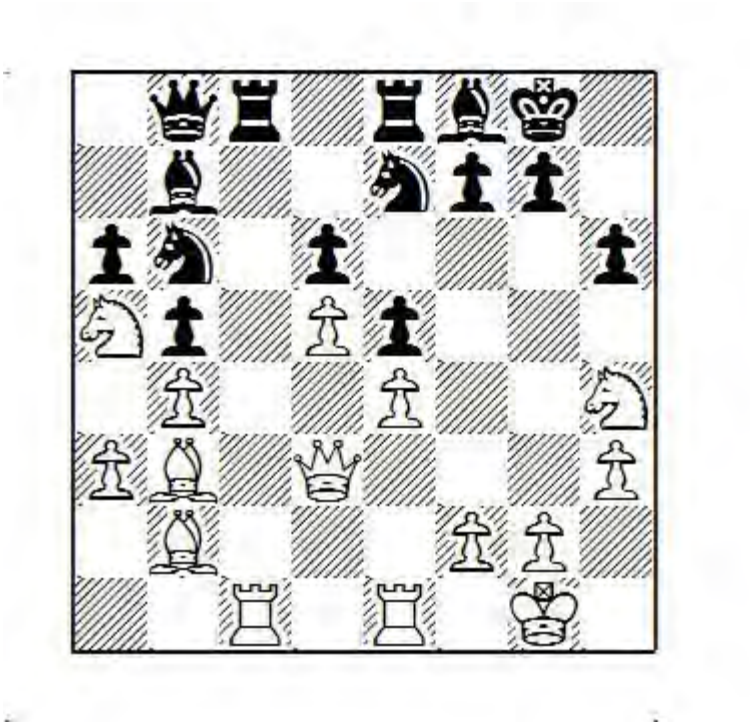
Question: And now what does White have planned in the event of

23 ... f5 24 exf5 Bxd5, when d5 has fallen?

Answer: After 23 ... f5 24 exf5 Bxd5 White has the beautiful move 25 Nc6!! winning at least the exchange (also not bad is 25 Bxd5+ Nbxd5 26 Nc6!).

23 ... Re8 24 Nh4!!

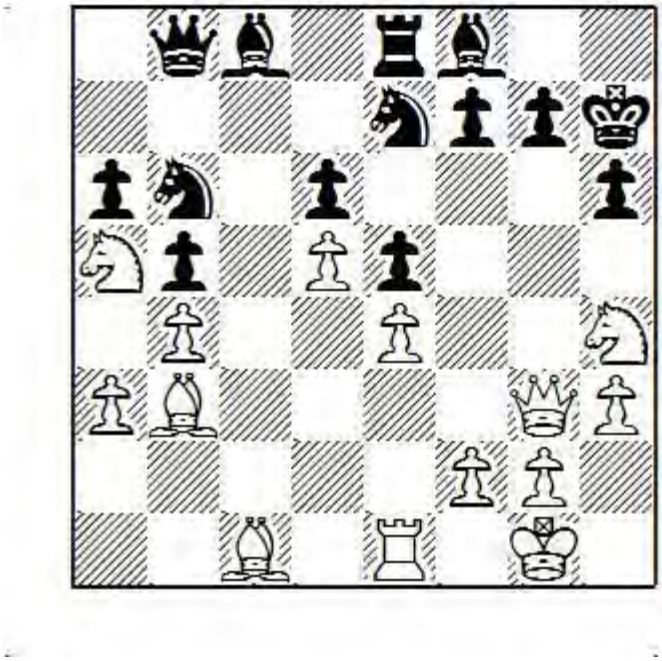
Well that's one way to put a stop to ... f7-f5 ideas. In my opinion this is the best move of the game. Opening a second front to wrong foot the opponent's pieces is an age-old technique, but it remains surprising and effective. All the action has been on the queenside until this point, and now we are startled by the knight move to h4.



Not that Adams is in a hurry to play Nf5. First of all he wants to put pressure on the black knight on e7, which now has to guard both the c6- and f5-squares against invasion by a white horse. The black queen and two minor pieces are lined up on the b-file, a long way off from helping defend their king. A well timed Nc6 by White would more or less force Black into exchanging a couple of times on c6, when Nf5, in combination with the bishop's pressure against f7 and the support of the white queen, would give White an overwhelming attack against the black king.

24 ... Rxc1 25 Bxc1 Bc8 26 Qg3 Kh7

There's still no joy for Black in 26 ... f5? 27 exf5 Bxf5 28 Nc6.



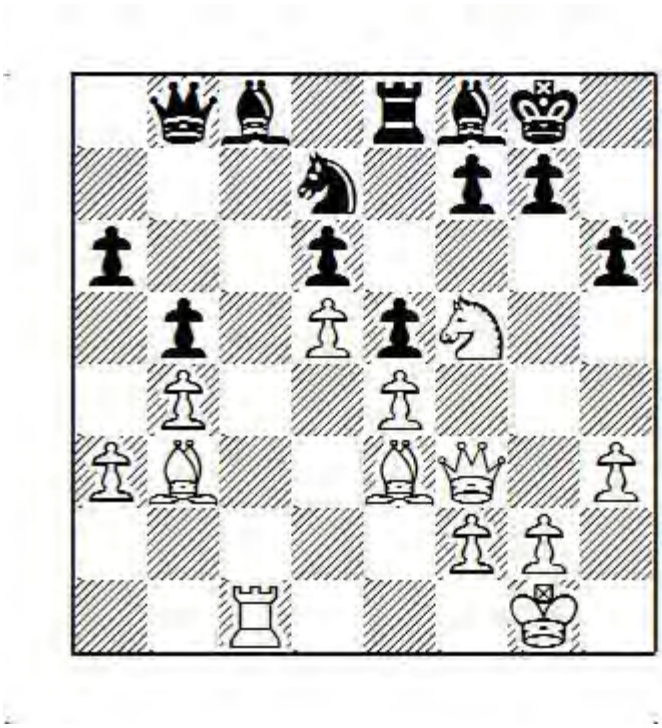
27 Be3 Nd7

And here 27 ... f5 28 Nc6 f4 just loses a piece to 29 Nxb8 fxg3 30 Bxb6 etc.

28 Nc6 Qc7 29 Nxe7 Bxe7 30 Nf5!

Because Black has been prevented from playing the freeing move ... f7-f5, the f5-square itself becomes a great post for a white piece. This recurring feature of positional play was first expounded by Nimzowitsch.

30 ... Bf8 31 Rc1 Qb8 32 Qf3 Kg8



Exercise: How can White increase his piece pressure against the kingside?

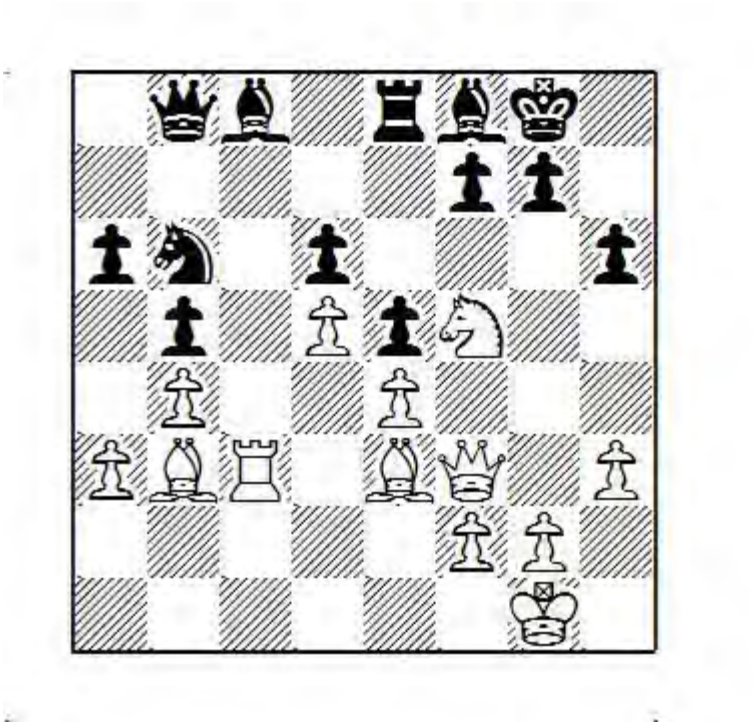
Answer: **33 Rc3!**

The rook prepares to transfer to the g file.

33 ... Nb6

Not 33 ... Nf6 34 Nxh6+ gxh6 35 Qxf6.

Given the chance, Black will escape most of the pressure by forcing exchanges with 34 ... Bxf5 followed by 35 ... Rc8. So White has no time to lose in forcing the issue on the kingside.



Exercise: Can you see and calculate the move which

broke through Black's defences?

Answer: **34 Bxh6! Bxf5**

If 34 ... gxh6 there follows 35 Qg4+ Kh7 36 Rg3 and the threat of mate on g8 is decisive.

35 Qxf5 g6

Still losing at once is 35 ... gxh6 36 Rg3+Bg7 37 Qf6.

36 Qg5 Rc8

Question: How do we stop the c-file falling into Black's hands?

Answer: **37 Rc6!**

Efficient to the end. Black will eventually be forced to capture on c6, not only granting White a passed pawn but also opening up the diagonal of his light-squared bishop.

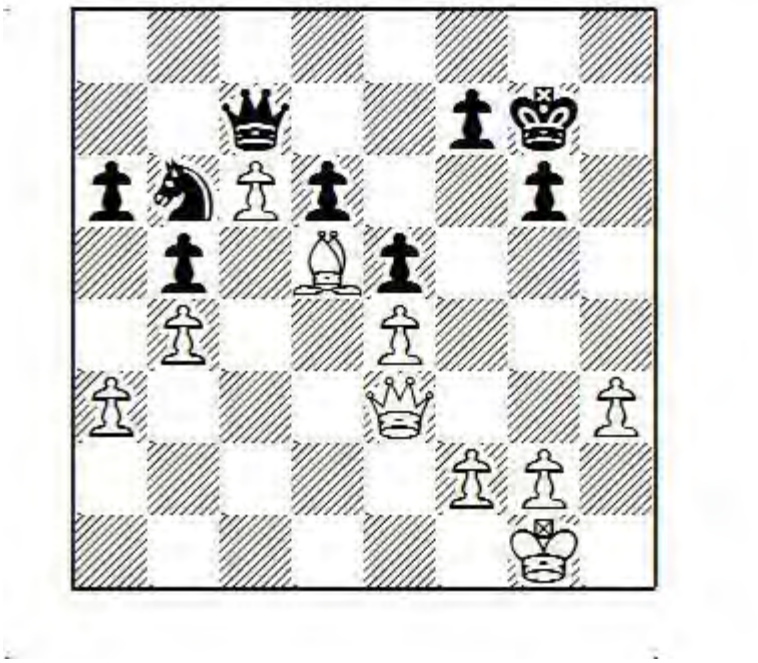
37 ... Bxh6 38 Qxh6 Nc4 39 Qc1!

The beginning of a fine zigzag manoeuvre by the white queen to compel the capture on c6.

39 ... Nb6 40 Qe3 Rxc6

If 40 ... Nc4 41 Qc3! when 41 ... Nb6? 42 Rxb6! wins at once.

41 dxc6 Qc7 42 Bd5 Kg7



Exercise: Okay, the black pieces are tied down by the passed pawn. How does White overwhelm the defence?

Answer: **43 h4!**

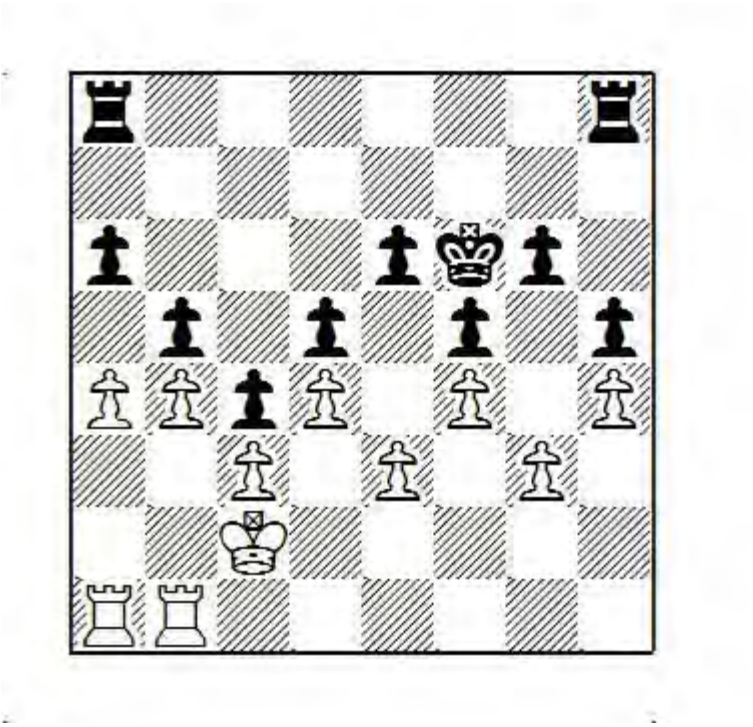
Don't forget your pawns when you are conducting an attack!

43 ... Na8 44 Qg5 1-0

Once the white queen gets to f6 it is all over. For example 44 ... Nb6 45 h5 Na8 46 h6+ Kh7 47 Qf6 Kxh6 and now 48 Bxf7 is the human move as Black has to give up the queen or else g6 drops with a quick mate, whereas 48 Qh8+ is the computer move to force mate in five: 48 ... Kg5 49 g3 Kg4 50 Kg2 Qe7 51 f3+ Kg5 52 Qh4 mate.

Chigorin Scenario Two: fixed queenside pawns and the blocked centre

Before looking at a game, I'd like to show you a puzzle that illustrates a queenside pawn structure that features in the Chigorin, Breyer and Smyslov Variations. In his book *Play Better Chess*, Leonard Barden gives the following diagram position, the task being to decide the best way for White to improve his chances.



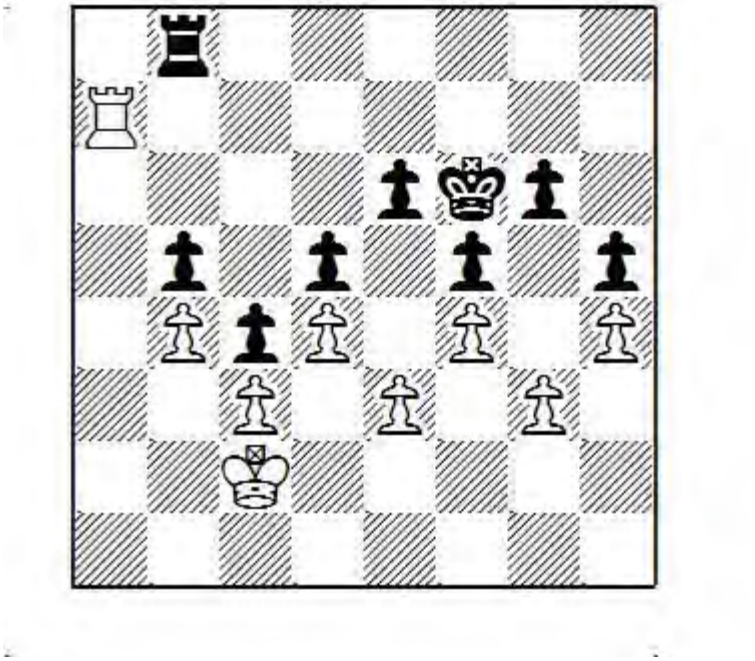
I might add something further:

Question: Is White winning?

Barden says that the late British chess coach Bob Wade (who incidentally once held Fischer to a draw with Black in the Ruy Lopez) had given this exercise to the players at a London Under-10 championship. Apparently none of the players had been able to find the solution, despite being very strong for their age. I guess this demonstrates how strategic planning is harder to master than tactics.

Answer: The solution given involves doubling rooks along the a-file, beginning with 1 Ra3 (or 1 Ra2 or 1 Rb2). For example 1 ... Rhe8! (an important defensive move in order to be able to challenge for control of the second rank) 2 Rba1, threatening to win a pawn with 3 axb5. So Black has to concede the a-file: 2 ... Rab8 3 axb5 axb5 4 Ra7. White has undoubtedly made progress, but can he win? Wade claims that the game can be decided by mating threats against the black king, but it seems drawn to me after say 4 ... Re7 5 Rxe7 Kxe7 6 Ra7+ Kf6 *(see diagram overleaf)*. Black can't be zugzwanged away from the defence of the b5-pawn.

I think two things are interesting about this puzzle. Firstly, the manoeuvre of the type 1 Ra3! needs to be known by all Ruy Lopez players, as it frequently occurs in this type of structure. Secondly, the fact that White can seize the seventh rank, reduce the black rook to passivity, and stalemate the black king, but he still can't win – the black rook can limp backwards and forwards from b6 to b8 (or to b7 if White prevents it from going to one of the other squares) and that is good enough to hold the game.



Going back to the start position of the puzzle, 1 axb5 axb5 2 Ra5 looks a better way to cause Black problems, as 2 ... Rxa5? 3 bxa5 opens up the b4-square for the white king whence it can penetrate in support of the passed a-pawn. So Black should defend stoically with 2 ... Rab8, when 3 Rba1 Rhd8 4 Ra6 Rb7 5 Rc6 Rdb8 6 Raa6 Re8 7 Rab6 (if 7 Rcb6 Ree7) 7 ... Ra7! and the a-file gives Black enough counterplay: White is playing with fire after 8 Rxb5? Ra2+, while if 8 Kb2 Rea8! 9 Rxe6+ Kf7 and White has to force a draw by checking as Black is threatening mate down the a-file.

This type of pawn configuration on the queenside occurs in our next game. It also features in the Topalov-Van der Sterren game in the Breyer, and Deep Blue-Kasparov in the Smyslov. Black has more space but White has the initiative as he can lever open the a-file with a2-a4.

Game 11

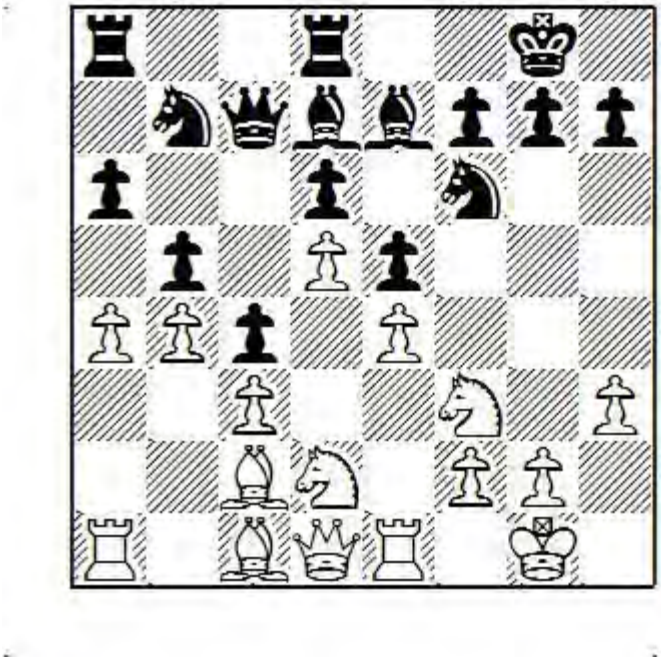
M.Adams-E.Torre

Bled Olympiad 2002

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 Na5 10 Bc2 c5 11 d4 Qc7 12 Nbd2 Rd8 13 b3 Bd7

In the Koneru game above Black exchanged pawns with 13 ... cxd4. Instead Torre quietly develops his bishop, allowing White to block the centre, after which a familiar pawn chain is set up on the queenside:

14 d5 c4 15 b4 Nb7 16 a4

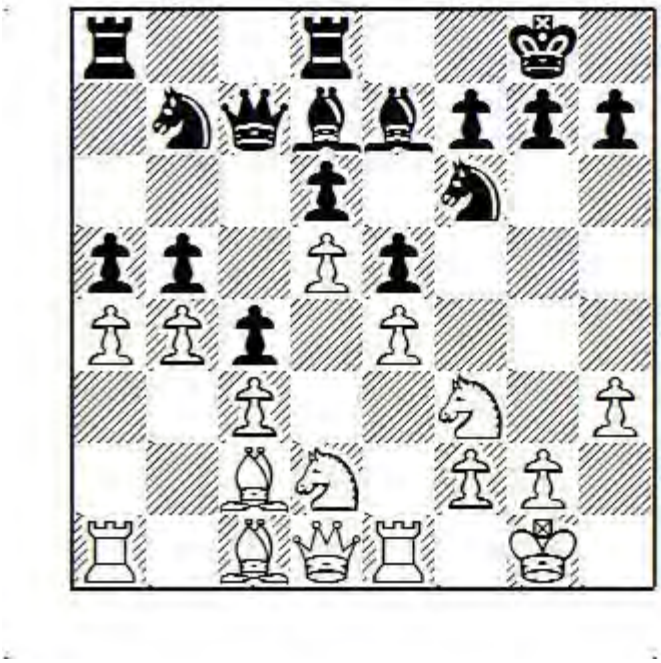


Exercise: Can you see any good positional features

for White? How big is his advantage?

Answer: White's position is attractive. He has a space advantage thanks to his advanced centre pawns. Black is a long way from ever loosening this grip with ... f7-f5. On the queenside White has established a characteristic 'attacking' pawn formation that we saw in the puzzle above. The black knight on b7 is shut in, having not a single safe move. It is therefore easy to conclude that White is better, but by how much? The blocked lines in the centre and on the queenside are also impeding the white pieces. So I would assess the position as 'objectively only slightly better for White, but of the kind that is horrible to defend against a positional maestro like Michael Adams'.

16 ... a5?



Exercise: You are invited to guess White's next move,

and have a little think about the reasons behind it.

It seems that Torre is afraid of being outplayed by his opponent and so tries to free his game straightaway. In reality, this is a disastrous decision. It is against the principle that you shouldn't advance pawns on the side of the board where the opponent has the initiative. More specifically, the long wedge of black queenside pawns now vanishes, leaving Black with a weak pawn on c4.

If you want to play the Ruy Lopez well as Black, the first requirement is a large supply of patience.

Answer: **17 Ba3!**

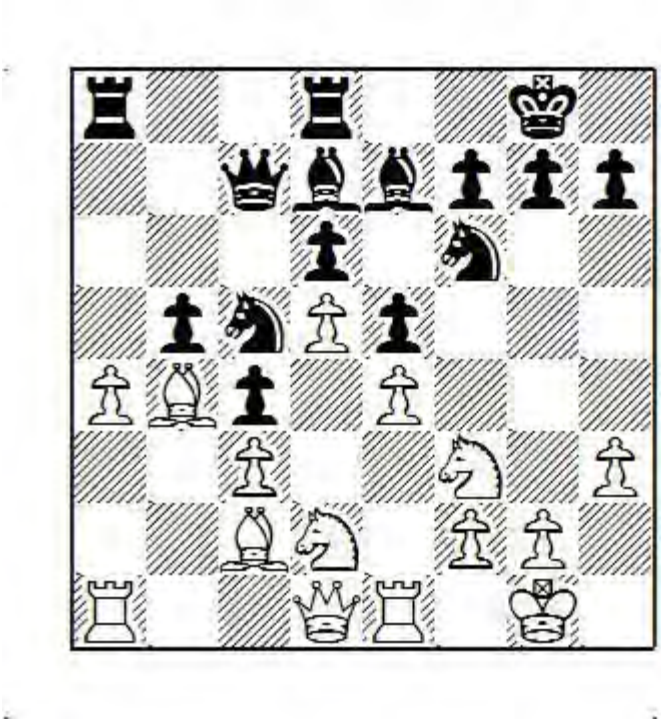
A fine move. It is a lesson in the art of meeting the opponent half way in an exchanging sequence. Putting the bishop on a3 would be useless if Black still had a pawn on a6. But here the hitherto passive bishop has the chance to become active on b4. At the same time, by recapturing on b4 with the bishop, Adams ensures that the c4-pawn remains fixed as a target on c4 – it won't be able to advance to c3 as would be the case if White were obliged to recapture on b4 with c3xb4. And the third good point of this move is revealed in three moves' time.

17 ... axb4 18 Bxb4

Recapturing with the pawn would be a strategic mistake, even if it didn't drop the a4-pawn.

18 ... Nc5

This is why Torre dissolved his pawn chain – he wanted to bring this knight back into action. Now the white a4-pawn is hanging and Black might in some cases infiltrate with the knight to d3.



Exercise: Try to find how Adams quelled any counterplay.

Answer: **19 axb5 Bxb5 20 Bxc5!**

So simple, and yet many of us have an abhorrence of exchanging a bishop for a knight. Adams, however, has no prejudices – he understands that the black knight has to be got rid of to rule out ... Nd3 and clear the way for an attack on the c4-pawn.

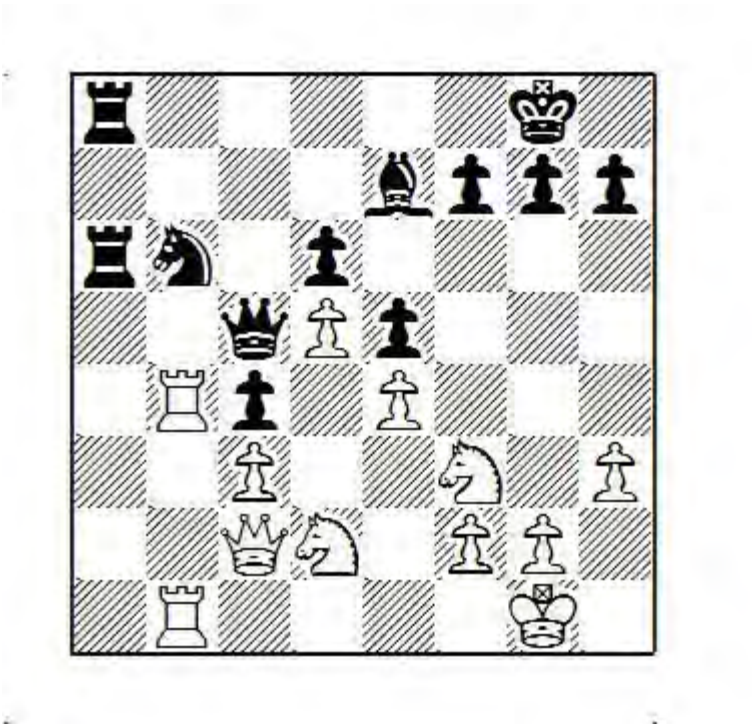
20 ... Qxc5 21 Ba4! Nd7

The exchange of bishops isn't to be avoided, as 21 ... Ba6 22 Bc6 is awkward for Black.

22 Bxb5 Qxb5 23 Rb1

The white rook heads for b4 to increase the pressure on c4.

23 ... Qc5 24 Rb4 Nb6 25 Qc2 Ra6 26 Reb1 Rda8



Exercise: Can you find the positional plan that will win the c4-pawn?

27 g3

Answer: Because Black's bishop is unable to protect c4, if the white knight on f3 is successfully manoeuvred to e3 the pawn will be doomed – assailed three times and only defended twice. However, although the bishop can't directly help the pawn, it can aid it indirectly by defeating a plan such as Nh2, Nhf1 and Ne3 with a quick ... Bg5! covering the e3-square and even threatening to relieve the pressure on c4 with Bxd2.

Therefore Adams sees that he needs to play 27 g3 and then h3-h4, so that his pawns guard the g5-square, after which he can carry out his knight manoeuvre f3-h2-f1-e3 without fearing ... Bg5.

27 ... Bd8

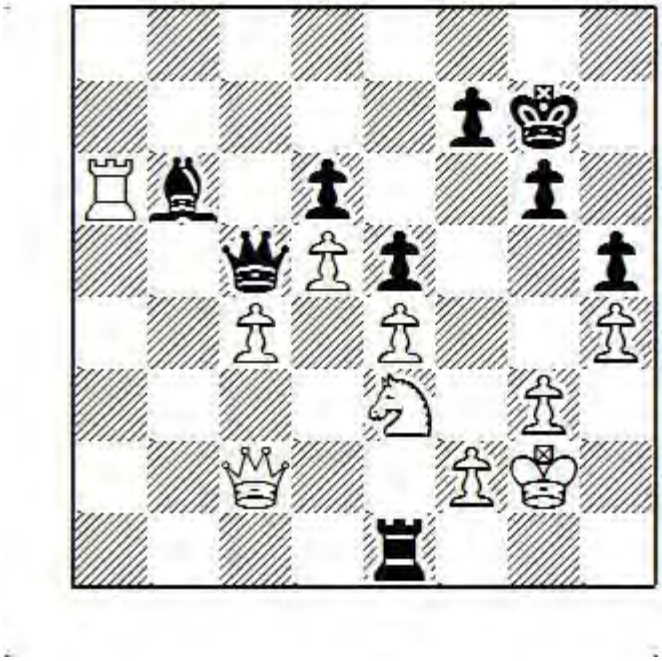
Torre sees that he cannot prevent c4 ultimately falling, and so brings his bishop to the queenside to block the future advance of White's c3-pawn.

28 Kg2 g6 29 R1b2 Kg7 30 h4 h5 31 Nh2

At last the knight heads for e3 to win the c4-pawn.

31 ... Na4 32 Ra2 Nb6 33 Rxa6 Rxa6 34 Nhf1 Ra1 35 Ne3 Re1 36 Ndxc4 Nxc4 37 Rxc4 Qb5 38 Rb4 Qa6 39 Ra4 Qb5 40 Rb4 Qa6 41 Ra4 Qb5 42 c4 Qc5 43 Ra6 Bb6

The c5-square is blockaded by the black queen and bishop, making a breakthrough with c4-c5 almost impossible to engineer. So White can't directly exploit his material advantage by creating a passed pawn. On the other hand, the black pieces are committed to the queenside, and are all a long way from their king.



Exercise: Can you see a sequence of moves by which White can exploit this?

Answer: **44 Qb2!**

First of all the black bishop is forced to concede the c6-square to the white rook.

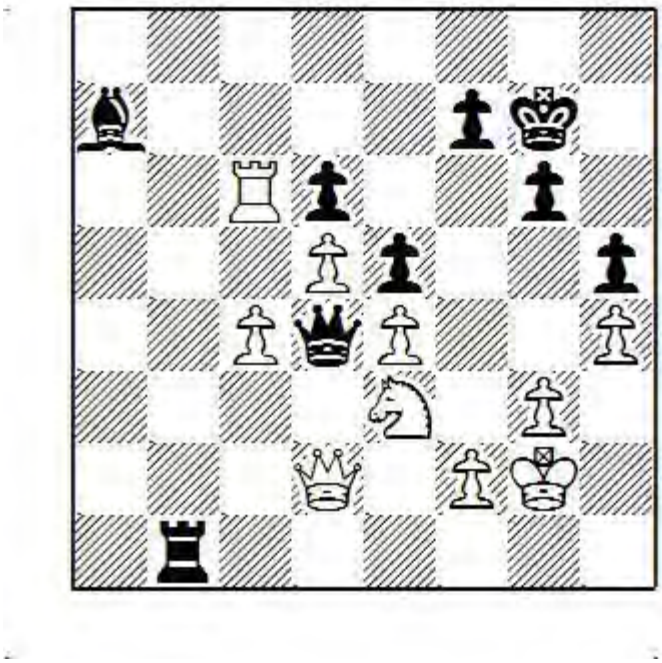
44 ... Ba7 45 Qd2

Secondly White wins time to position his queen on a key square by hitting the black rook.

45 ... Rb1 46 Rc6

Getting in contact with the seventh and eighth ranks with gain of tempo.

46 ... Qd4



Exercise: The moment of truth. Black is attacking e4 and the exchange

47 Qxd4? exd4 gives him a lethal passed pawn. But now comes

a winning combination. Can you work it out?

Answer: **47 Nf5+! gxf5**

If 47 ... Kh7 48 Qh6+, or 48 ... Kg8 49 Rc8+ with mate next move in either case.

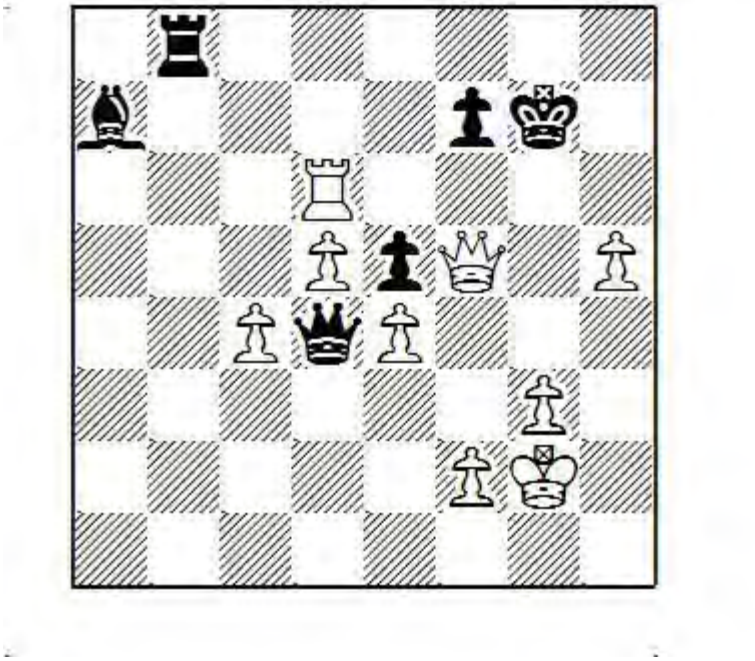
48 Qg5+ Kh7

If the black king ever goes to the first rank, a rook check on c8 decides.

49 Qxh5+ Kg7 50 Qg5+ Kh7 51 Qxf5+ Kg7 52 Rxd6

Threatening 53 Qg5+ and mate to follow.

52 ... Rb8 53 h5! 1-0



The h-pawn decides matters. For example, if 53 ... Bc5 then 54 h6+ Kf8 55 h7 Kg7 56 Qf6+ Kxh7 57 Qxf7+ Kh8 58 Rh6 mate.

I have made liberal use of the games of Michael Adams in this chapter of the book. The English Grandmaster excels in positions of a strategic nature where he can build on small advantages and, having established a bind, is free to 'play without an opponent'. I recommend a study of his games to anyone looking to improve their understanding of the Ruy Lopez, whether as White or Black.

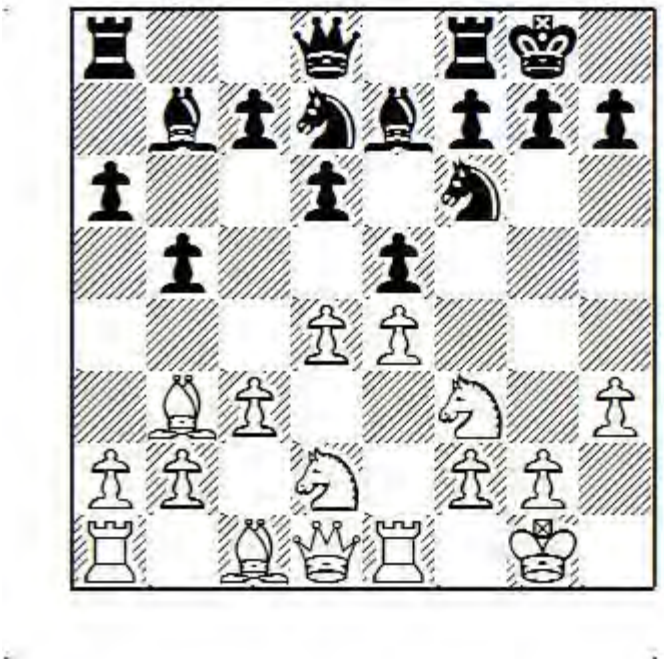
The Breyer Variation

The Breyer Variation begins **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 Nb8**.

It is named after Gyula Breyer (1894-1921), Champion of Hungary in 1912, who, like his close friend Richard Réti, was fascinated by so-called 'Hypermodern' chess ideas. And what bigger slap in the face to Classical ideas of rapid development could there be than to retreat the healthily developed knight back to b8? Despite its undoubted value, the knight retreat didn't receive much attention until the 1960s.

Let's jump ahead a couple of moves to reach a standard position: **10 d4 Nbd7 11 Nbd2 Bb7** *(see diagram overleaf).*

The knight has been redeployed to d7, where it fortifies e5, Black's stronghold in the centre. Black could equally have added to the defence of this key pawn by retreating his other knight to d7 at some point, as often occurs in the Chigorin; but if Black wishes to overprotect e5 it is more logical to do so with the queen's knight, as the king's knight is well placed on f6. After 10 ... Nbd7, the knight is centralized and safe from attack by the white pieces or pawns.



The retreat 9 ... Nb8 has also freed the c7-pawn. The celebrated old French Master Philidor thought that the pieces were the servants of the pawns, so he would be delighted that the knight so respectfully makes way for the c-pawn (though it should be mentioned that it is another pawn break – d6-d5! – that Black would ideally like to make if White gives him the chance).

Whereas in the Chigorin Black feels more or less obliged to play a quick ... c7-c5 in support of his knight on a5, in the Breyer he has more freedom to choose when and how to employ the c7-pawn. He has the option of ... c7-c6, bolstering the b5-pawn, though he would need a very good reason to shut in the bishop on b7.

Finally, and very importantly, with all his pieces centralized, and e5 well defended by the knight on d7 and soon by the rook after ... Re8 and ... Bf8, a counterattacking option is available to Black: ... d6-d5! could easily equalize or more by dissolving the white centre if White is careless/over passive. That is why White will often engineer d4-d5 himself to anticipate this freeing move by Black.

Question: So what are the drawbacks to 9 ... Nb8

compared to other variations?

Answer: White has more of a free hand to probe for advantage. We might also mention that by choosing a set-up with the knight on d7, Black is committing his bishop to the b7-square – there is no option of ... Bd7, or perhaps more importantly, ... Be6 to challenge a white bishop on b3. As we have seen, having the bishop on b7 is a double-edged sword for Black in the Closed Lopez. Forewarned is forearmed, and as White knows the bishop will definitely be on b7, he can tailor his play to make life uncomfortable for the piece, ideally by putting an immovable pawn on d5 to shut it out of the game. Such a pawn, if well supported, would rule out ... d6-d5 by Black.

Nonetheless, if Black does succeed in freeing himself with ... d6-d5! at a good moment he will easily equalize. At the time of writing the Breyer is the most popular variation for Black at world-class level. It avoids the horrible theory of the mainline Zaitsev and is strategically safer than the Chigorin. It gives Black the chance to slowly outplay his opponent, which suits players such as Magnus Carlsen.

Game 12

No.Davies- M.Adams

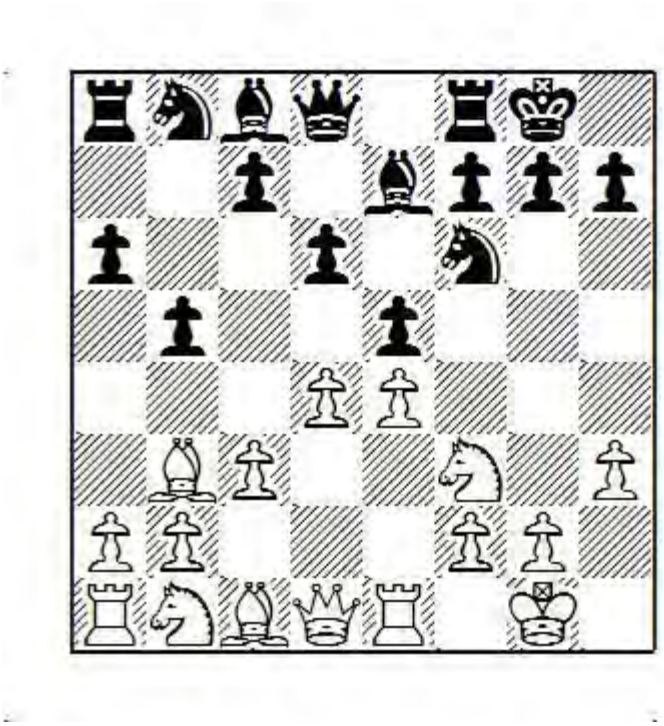
Edmonton 2009

The Ruy Lopez Closed System is basically *a battle of pawn breaks*. If you prepare and advance the correct pawns, whilst the opponent prepares and carries out the wrong pawn advances, or fails to advance any pawns at all, you will win the positional struggle. That is the bedrock on which all the positional and tactical subtleties of the Ruy Lopez are built.

It's wise to take measures to prevent the opponent from advancing the right pawns. Even more skill is required to cajole the opponent into advancing the *wrong* pawns. And it takes sublime talent to wrong foot the opponent by persuading him that you are preparing one pawn advance whilst all the time preparing another.

It is very rare that we see a player carrying out all the right pawn advances, whilst the opponent just sits and waits. Here is such a game, which is a model of how to play the Breyer Variation as Black. In the next game we'll see how best to handle the position with the white pieces.

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 Nb8 10 d4



The pawn advances to claim a space advantage in the centre. Enjoy this moment if you are a fan of White in the Ruy Lopez, as it will be a long time before there is another constructive pawn move.

10 ... Nbd7 11 Nbd2 Bb7 12 Bc2 Re8 13 Nf1 Bf8

Other options for Black in the early stages of the game will be examined in the next game.

14 Ng3

Both players have manoeuvred well so far. They have developed their positions and begun middlegame manoeuvres.

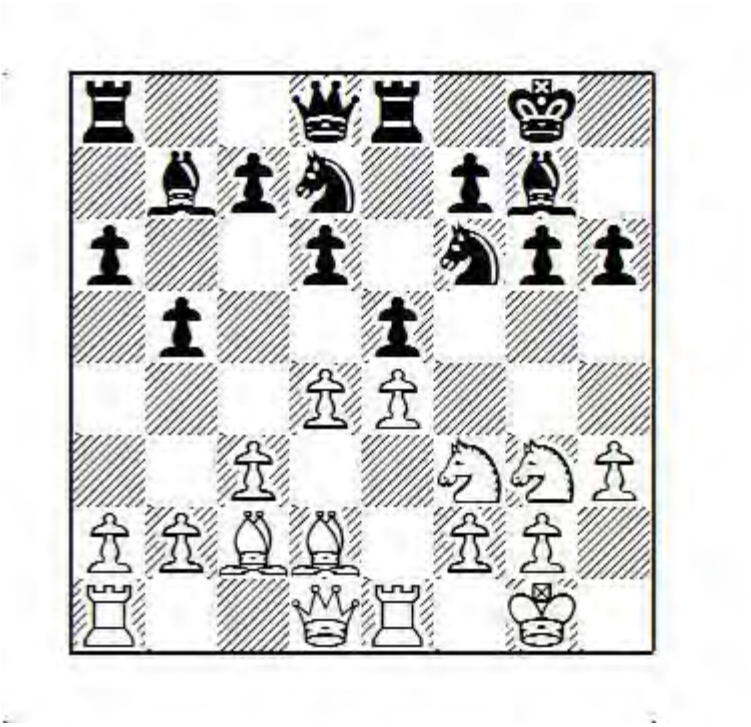
14 ... g6

Black's pawns are in top form. One of them clears the way for Bg7 ...

15 Bg5 h6

... and another breaks the pin on f6.

16 Bd2 Bg7



17 dxe5?

Question: Can you tell me why this is a bad move?

What should White do instead?

Answer: At this point White's pawn play enters a deep decline. It is the beginning of a gradual process in which the world-class Grandmaster outplays his opponent.

Capturing on e5 hands over the c5 centre square to the black knight. It loses the option of answering ... c7-c5 with d4-d5, solidifying a space advantage in the centre and restricting the black pieces. It also opens the d-file for the benefit of the black rooks.

White has handed over his birthright of a space advantage and increased the mobility of the black pieces. And the worse thing is that he did it voluntarily, with no pressure from Black. If you have to make bad moves, then at least be forced into them!

Instead of the game move, White might have used his pawns in a healthier manner, say with 17 a4 or 17 b4. We shall strengthen White's play considerably in the next game.

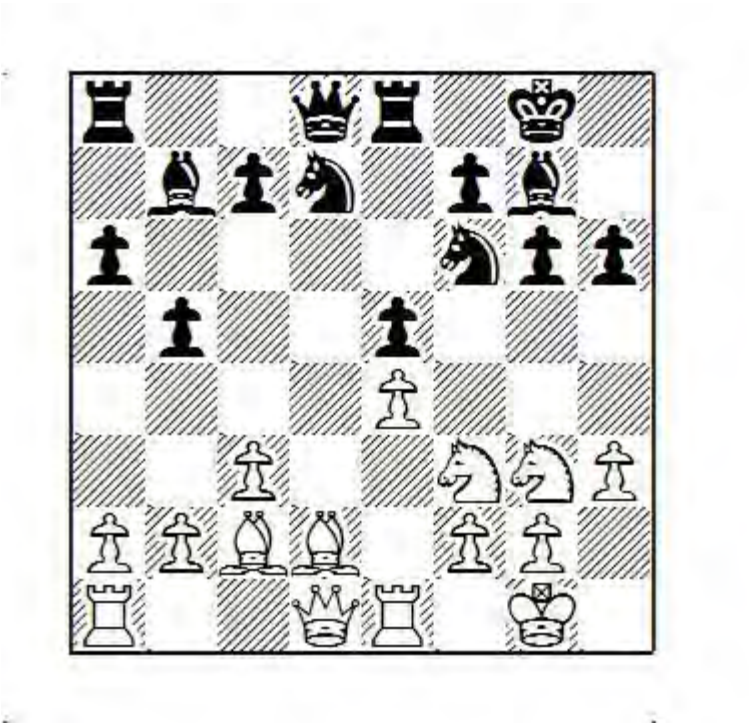
17 ... dxe5

Question: Shouldn't Black prefer 17 ... Nxe5 and after

18 Nxe5 Rxe5 put the e4-pawn under pressure?

Answer: In that scenario it is true that the e4-pawn is under pressure, being attacked by a black rook, knight and bishop. But it is holding firm and constitutes a space advantage for White in the centre. He can continue with 19 a4 to put typical pressure on the queenside.

Generally speaking, Black would be happy after the opening to end up in the position after 18 ... Rxe5. But here he would have missed the chance to make White pay for the poor move 17 dxe5. It makes no sense to give back to White a space advantage.



Instead with 17 ... dxe5 Adams equalizes space in the centre. Also it is significant that the black knight on d7 can improve itself using the c5-square, whereas the white knight on f3 is passive. Therefore it is shrewd of Black to avoid their exchange.

18 Be3

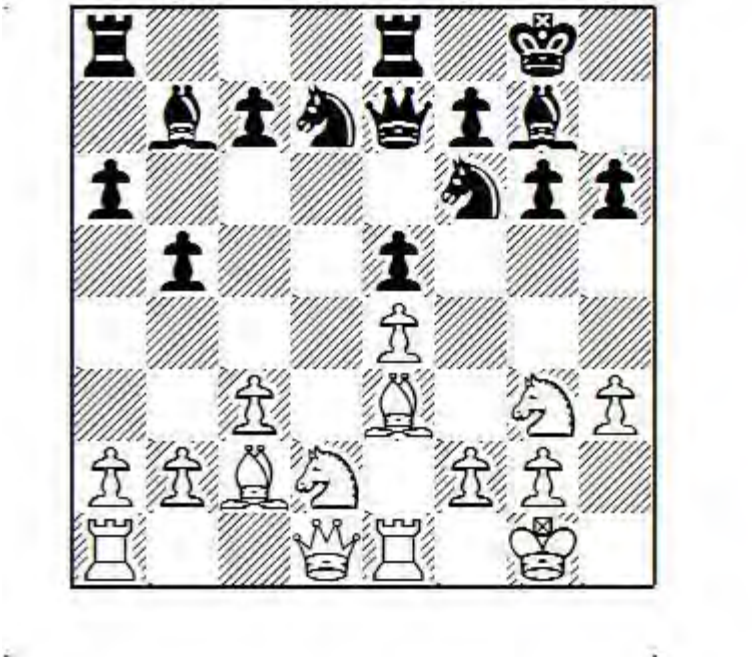
White plays very passively with his pieces, not thinking to call upon his pawns to help him gain counterplay.

18 ... Qe7!

This is a good move as it prepares ... Nc5 and clears the d8-square for the black rook. It therefore adds to the energy of the black position.

19 Nd2

White's only concern is with the defence of e4.



Exercise: To get you thinking about pawn power, you might like to make

a list of *all* Black's possible pawn moves here and decide how they rate from a strategy point of view (yes, every single pawn move!).

19 ... h5!

Answer: I hope this move rated high in your list!

Unquestionably the worst pawn move would be 19 ... g5?? as it allows 20 Nf5. (A strong player would never play a move like that – if he did it would be because he touched the g-pawn by accident when he reached out to play 19 ... h5!).

The second worst move is 19 ... b4? which splits up the black pawns and gives the white knight access to the c4-square.

Third worst is 19 ... a5?, loosening the queenside pawns for no good reason. White might have finally been provoked into pushing a pawn with 20 a4! to undermine the b5-pawn.

Next up is 19 ... c6?! – since b5 isn't under pressure, and the d5-square is already well guarded, this is a waste of a tempo that needlessly shuts in the bishop on b7.

The second best pawn move is 19 ... c5. This makes positional sense: Black can advance the pawn to c4 and then try to invade on the d-file with ... Rad8, ... Nc5 and ... Nd3. Still, it commits the black queenside pawns straightaway, giving more strength to a 20 a4 counterstrike, and takes the c5-square away from the black knight. As we shall see, Adams wants to carry out the manoeuvre ... Nc5 and ... Ne6 before ... c7-c5.

Question: So the best pawn move is 19 ... h5. But what is its merit

and is it superior to the piece move 19..Nc5?

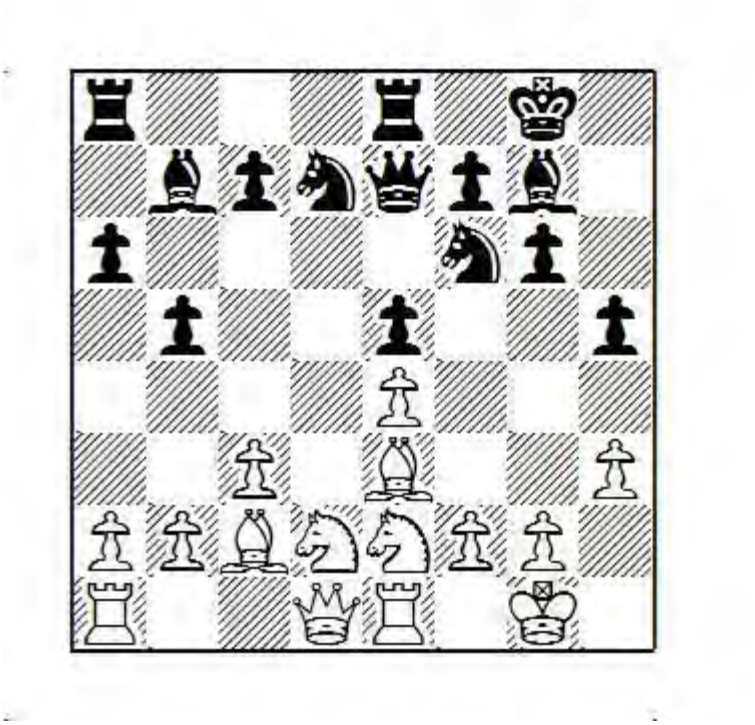
Answer: With 19 ... h5, Adams is taking measures against White ever becoming active with the f2-f4 pawn break. If immediately 20 f4 then 20 ... h4 21 Ngf1 exf4 22 Bxf4 Nh5 23 Be3 Ne5 leaves White dominated on the dark squares on the kingside.

Nor can White afford to play quietly with 20 f3 as 20 ... h4 drives the white knight backwards. Then Black would seize control of the dark squares with moves like ... Nh5, ... Nc5 intending ... Ne6, and perhaps ... Bf6 and ... Bg5 to challenge White's dark-squared bishop.

The upshot of 19 ... h5 is that in the game White retreats the knight to e2, and renounces any attempt to free himself with f2-f4, as the e4-pawn would be left too weak.

Notice how Adams first priority is prophylaxis to stop his opponent ever becoming active. Most of us would have rushed into activity with 19 ... c5 or 19 ... Nc5, but a world-class player knows that if there is a chance to prevent the opponent's natural plan it should be seized upon. According to the old adage, positional chess involves stopping the opponent playing good moves!

20 Ne2



Question: Which rook should Black put on the open file?

20 ... Red8!

Answer: It's a no-brainer for a top Grandmaster! Notice that by dissuading White from action in the centre with 19 ... h5! Adams has made it unnecessary to keep a rook for security purposes on the kingside.

Meanwhile he still has to be wary of White's possible activity on the queenside. If he plays 20 ... Rad8? then White's rook can gain the use of the a-file with a2-a4 followed by a4xb5. Besides, the pawn on b5 might need the defence of a rook. And as we shall see, c8 proves an ideal square for the queen's rook once Black has advanced his queenside pawns.

21 Nc1

White's purely defensive play makes a poor impression, but it lets us see Adams carry out the required regrouping of his pieces.

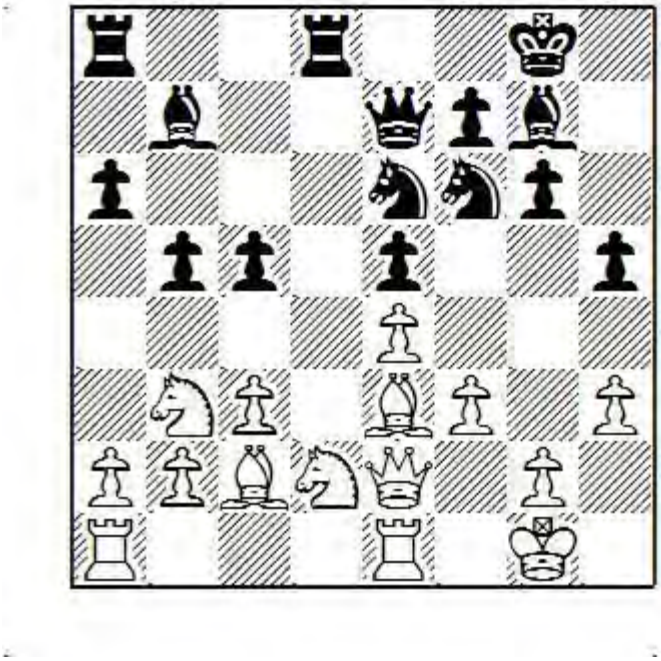
21 ... Nc5

First of all, the knight heads to e6, where it is safe from pawn attack, and has influence over f4, d4 and c5.

22 f3 Ne6 23 Qe2 c5

The second step: a base for a black knight is prepared on d3. Note that c3-c4 by White would give away the d4-square.

24 Ncb3



Question: Should Black now play 24 ... c4?

24 ... Rac8!

Answer: A vital preparatory move. After the immediate 24 ... c4? White would force the exchange of knight for bishop with 25 Na5! as 25 ... Bc8? allows 26 Nc6. White's position is very cramped so any exchanges would help him.

25 Na5 Ba8

Naturally!

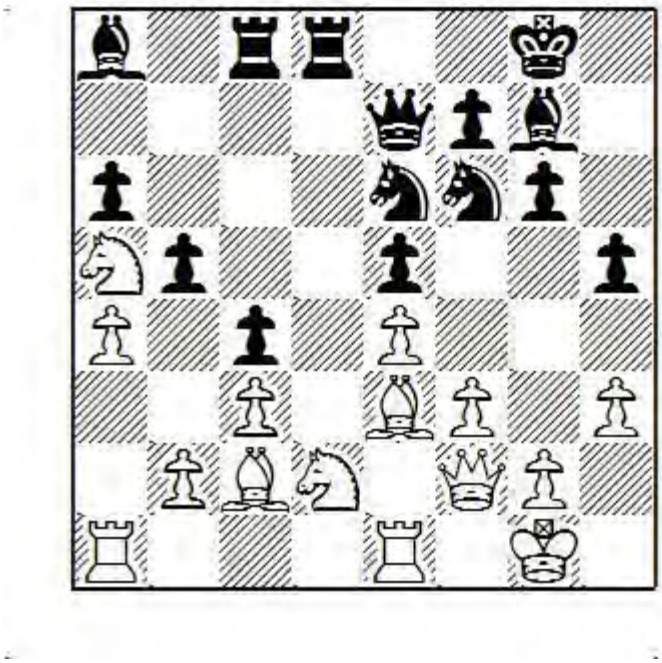
26 a4

This advance is about ten moves too late. White can't benefit from opening the a-file as his own knight is stuck in the way on a5.

26 ... c4!

Not only getting control of d3, but also cutting off the retreat of the white knight. Adams has completely outplayed his opponent in the art of pawn play – the f2-f4 advance has been obstructed, a2-a4 has been neutralized, c3-c4 is impossible and b2-b4 would drop the c3-pawn after c4xb3, though 27 b3!? might actually have been the best way for White to complicate matters.

27 Qf2



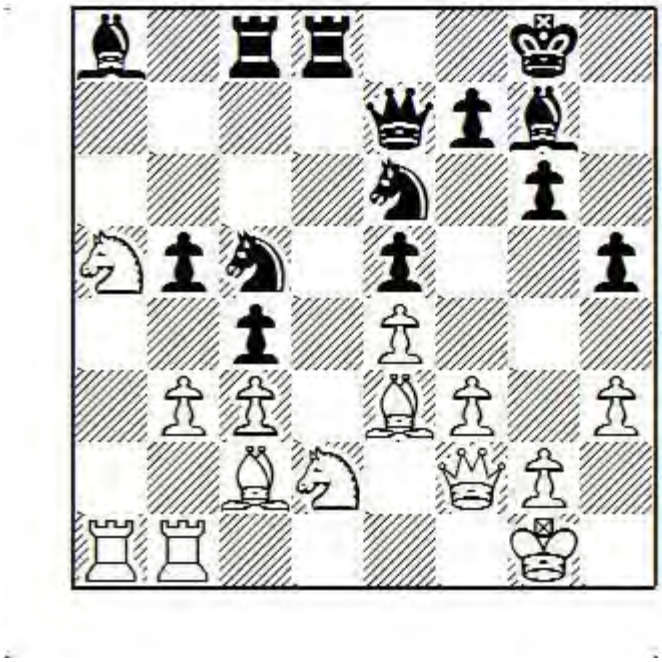
Exercise: Black can try 27 ... Nc5, but can you find a more

efficient way of exploiting the hole on d3?

Answer: **27 ... .Nd7!**

The black knight is excellently placed on e6, so why not use the less active knight for the journey to c5?

28 axb5 axb5 29 Reb1 Ndc5 30 b3



Exercise: Can you see an explosive way for Black to

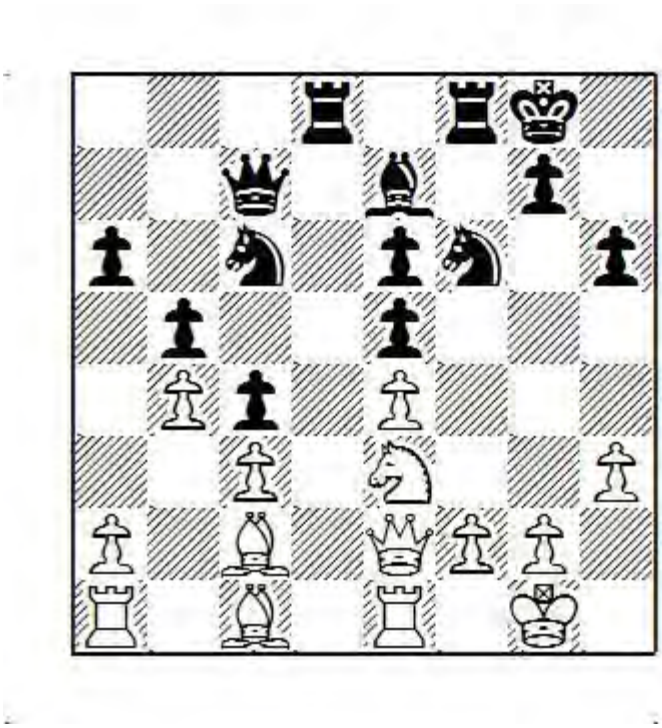
exploit the energy of his pieces?

It looks at first glance as if White might escape after all with this pawn break, which aims at dissolving all the queenside pawns. In reality, Black's dynamic potential has reached its peak.

Answer: **30 ... Nd4!!**

This type of sacrifice was played in the famous game R.Fischer-R.Kholmov, Havana 1965. I expect Adams borrowed the idea consciously, though a player of his calibre could undoubtedly discover it over the board for himself.

Mere mortals like you and I need all the help we get in finding clever concepts and unusual manoeuvres, so here is the 'source game' of ... Nd4: 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 0-0 8 c3 d6 9 h3 Na5 10 Bc2 c5 11 d4 Qc7 12 Nbd2 Nc6 13 dxc5 dxc5 14 Nf1 Be6 15 Ne3 Rad8 16 Qe2 c4 17 Ng5 h6 18 Nxe6 fxe6 19 b4.

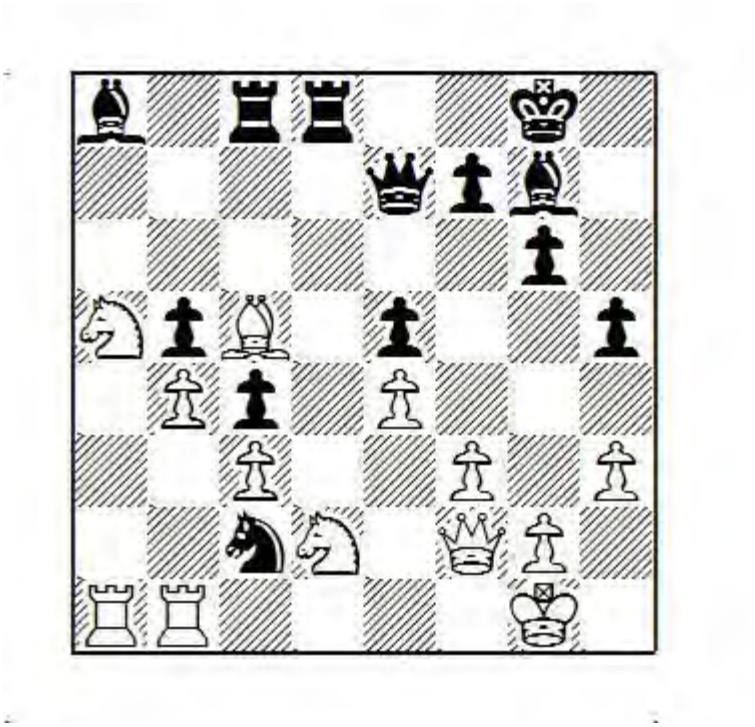


White has just played 19 b2-b4?, a move that makes the coming offer all the stronger. I guess we'll never know what glitch affected Fischer's normally perfect positional radar that day. Kholmov replied 19 ... Nd4! and after 20 cxd4 exd4 21 a3 d3 22 Bxd3 Rxd3 he soon won.

31 b4

White is overwhelmed after 31 cxd4 exd4 32 Bf4 d3 attacking both a1 and d3, and also planning ... c4-c3 etc., with a pawn avalanche.

31 ... Nxc2 32 Bxc5



32 ... Rxc5 33 Qxc5

A blunder, but Black wins easily enough after 33 bxc5 Nxa1 34 Rxa1 Bf8 35 c6 Qc7 and 36 ... Bxc6.

33 ... Qxc5+ 34 bxc5 Nxa1 35 Rxa1 Rxd2 36 c6 Rd8 37 Nb7 Re8 38 Ra7 Bf8 39 c7 Rc8 0-1

A smooth positional win for Black. Now let's give the white piece to a young chess maestro and see how the outcome can be entirely different *if White uses his pawns*.

Game 13

M.Carlsen-G.Tallaksen

Gausdal 2005

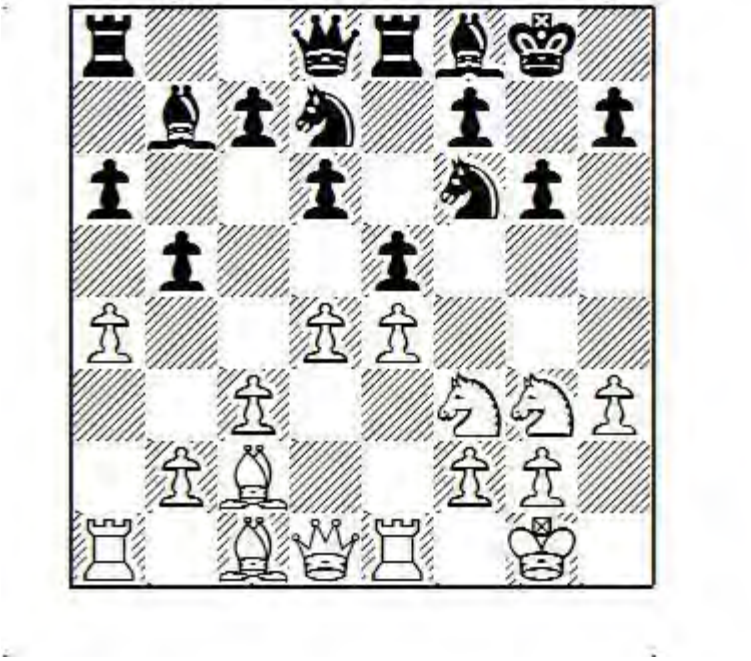
1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 Nb8 10 d4 Nbd7 11 Nbd2 Bb7 12 Bc2 Re8 13 Nf1 Bf8

In this type of position both White and Black have to keep a close eye on whether the freeing advance ... d6-d5 is good enough to equalize. Here for example 13 ... d5 has its fans, but White keeps the initiative after 14 Nxe5 Nxe5 (or 14 ... dxe4 15 Bb3) 15 dxe5 Nxe4 16 f3! Ng5 17 Ng3 g6 18 f4, as in P.Svidler-D.Baramidze, Baden-Baden 2008.

14 Ng3 g6

White has the edge due to the weak black pawn on e4 after 14 ... d5 15 Nxe5 Nxe5 16 dxe5 Nxe4 17 Nxe4 dxe4 18 Bf4.

15 a4!



Already White begins to put pressure on the black queenside. There is no way Carlsen is going to hand over the c5- square to the black knight with a d4xe5? exchange.

15 ... Bg7

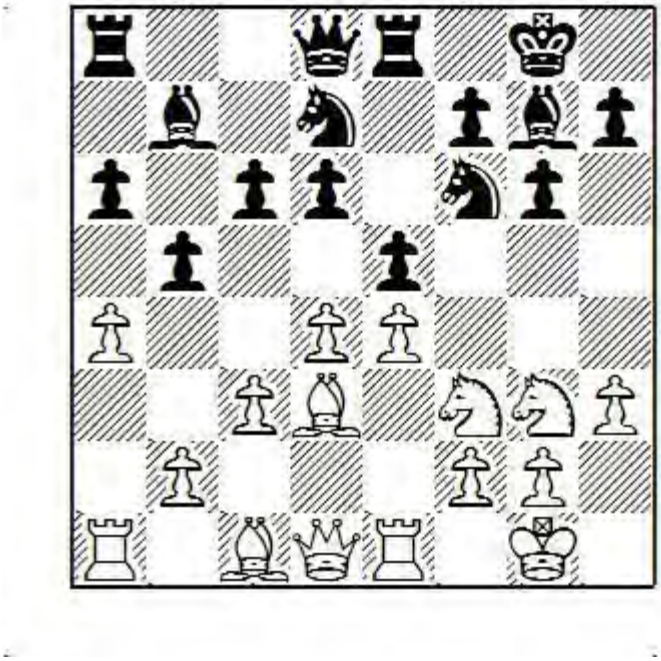
Black could have set up a radically different pawn centre with 15 ... c5!?, for which see the next game.

16 Bd3

Consistent play: the b5-pawn is directly threatened.

16 ... c6

Here was Black's last chance to try the freeing move 16 ... d5. It seems to fail however after 17 Bg5!. For example 17 ... b4 18 c4!? (ignoring the bait on b4 and strengthening White's pawn pressure in the centre; instead after 18 cxb4 h6 19 Bxf6 Qxf6 20 Rc1 Qd6 there was a complicated fight in which Black came out on top in A.Shirov-S.Mamedyarov, Moscow 2010) 18 ... h6 (if 18 ... dxe4 then 19 Bxe4 Bxe4 20 Nxe4 exd4 21 Nxd4 c5 22 Nb3 and Black has trouble defending the c5-pawn) 19 Bxf6 Qxf6 20 exd5 exd4 21 Ne4 Qd8 22 a5! not letting Black secure the b4-pawn with ... a6-a5. White had the advantage due to Black's locked-in bishop on b7 and loose pawns in A.Kosteniuk-N.Kosintseva, Moscow 2010.



Question: Returning to our main game, what has

White achieved by provoking 16 ... c6?

Answer: The bishop on b7 has been shut in, meaning that it can't put pressure on e4 or support a freeing advance with ... d6-d5 in a direct way. Furthermore, having to perform defensive duty stops Black's pawn gaining space in the centre with a ... c7-c5. You can see that just two moves – 15 a4! and 16 Bd3! – have given the white position an energy it entirely lacked in the previous game. Or more precisely, we might say that Black has been kept bottled up and so *his* energy has been reduced.

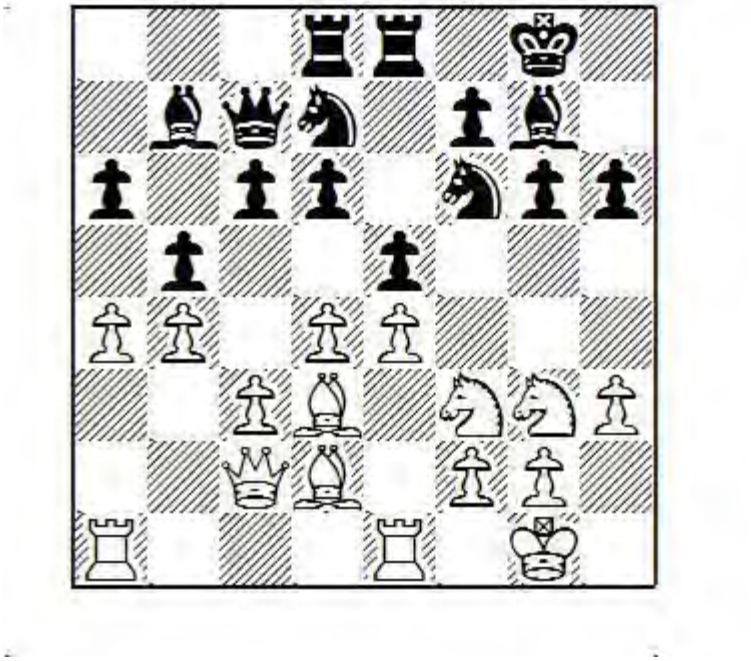
17 Bg5 h6 18 Bd2

Question: Why didn't White just play 17 Bd2?

Isn't 17 ... h6 a useful move for Black?

Answer: As in the previous game, White provokes ... h7-h6 before retreating his bishop to d2. Now the bishop on g7 is tied to the defence of h6 and denied the chance to become active with ... Bh6 should White's bishop ever leave the c1-h6 diagonal. The slight loosening of Black's kingside will also prove vital for the success of White's final attack.

18 ... Qc7 19 Qc2 Rad8 20 b4



Exercise: Try to work out the point of this move. (Hint: think about White's plan on the queenside and what squares he needs to control.)

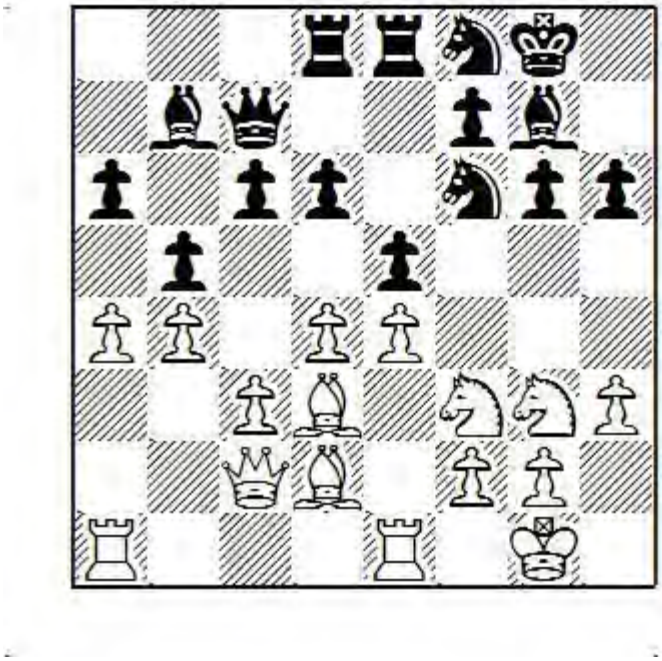
Answer: White wants to break up Black's queenside pawns by ramming b5 with c3-c4. It's not so easy to arrange as the pawn is already performing an important duty on c3 in guarding d4 – after c3-c4 Black would have ... e5xd4!, which lessens White's hold on the centre and activates the black pieces. So White needs first to play d4xe5, to keep the centre fixed, and only then c3-c4. However, this would run into the problem of the previous game – Black's knight would gain the c5-square. And so, as a first measure, Carlsen plays 20 b4 to guard the c5-square. Only then is he ready to take on e5 and then advance c3-c4.

20 ... Nf8

Question: What is the purpose of this move and how do you rate it?

Answer: I don't like 20 ... Nf8 as the knight retires from the fight, though I sympathize with the idea of anticipating c3-c4 by manoeuvring the knight towards the hole that will appear on d4.

Instead 20 ... Nb6!? looks best, when after 21 axb5?! cxb5! the knight has an even more attractive square on c4. So White must prefer 21 a5 even though after 21 ... Nbd7 the pressure is off the b5-pawn somewhat. White could still manoeuvre for d4xe5 and c3-c4 at the best moment, but Black's queenside looks more solid than in the game.



21 dxe5!

White carries out his plan at once. In the previous game the exchange 17 dxe5 was colourless, whereas here it is the logical culmination of White's pawn play.

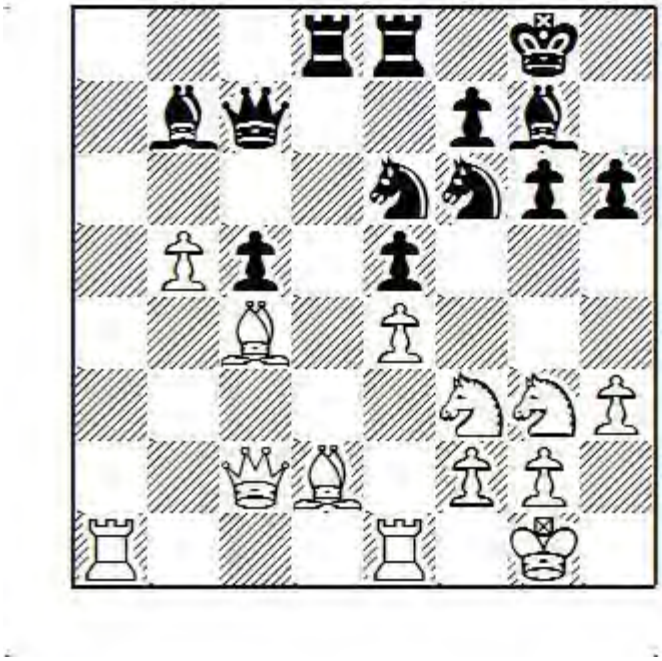
21 ... dxe5 22 c4

The pressure mounts on the black queenside, but on its own it won't be enough to win the game for White. He needs to widen the struggle by creating threats on the kingside.

22 ... Ne6 23 Bf1

Carlsen retreats the bishop out of range of possible attack by ... Nf4 or by the doubling of the black rooks on the d-file.

23 ... bxc4 24 Bxc4 c5 24 b5 axb5 26 axb5



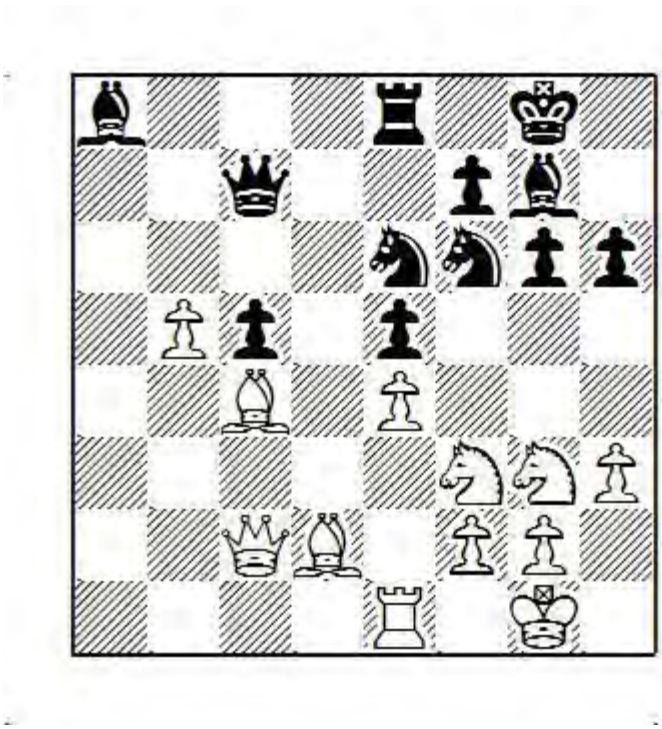
Exercise : Try to assess this position.

Has Black escaped with his queenside liquidation?

Answer: Black has removed potential targets from b5 and c6, brought his bishop on b7 partially back to life (it is still blocked in by the pawn on e4) and created a possible strong point on d4 for his knight. But he is still worse, mainly because of the passive bishop on g7 – compare this feeble piece with White's bishop on d2, which is threatening to win the exchange with 27 Ba5. The imbalance in activity also makes White's passed pawn more dangerous.

Black has therefore almost equalized, but not quite – and that doesn't prove enough against a player with magnificent technique.

26 ... Ra8 27 Rxa8 Bxa8



Exercise: Black would like to gain some freedom and block the d-file

with 28 ... Nd4. Can you see how Carlsen deters him from this plan?

Answer: **28 Qb3**

Not only with ideas of 29 b6 but also setting up latent pressure on the f7-pawn.

28 ... Nd7 29 Rd1

Black has stopped 29 b6 by putting his knight on d7, but now he can't play 29 ... Nd4 because it would leave f7 en prise. Very clever positional play by a 14-year-old!

29 ... Bb7 30 Nh4

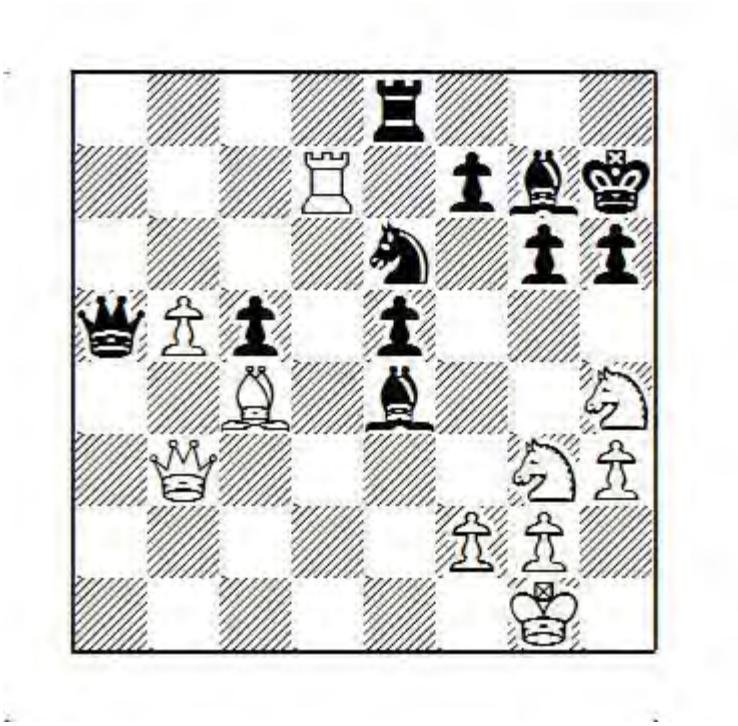
Turning the screw. The threat is 31 Nxg6!

30 ... Kh7 31 Ba5! Qxa5?

Allowing the white rook to the seventh rank is fatal. He had to defend grimly with 31 ... Qc8.

32 Rxd7 Bxe4

Black hopes for counterplay after 33 Nxe4? Qe1+ 34 Kh2 Qxe4 or 33 Rxf7 Ng5 34 Rd7 Qe1+ etc.



Exercise: Can you see White's quiet reply that killed

Black's activity stone dead?

Answer: **33 Qd1!**

Now the black bishop must save itself, when White can take on f7 without allowing the black queen to invade on e1.

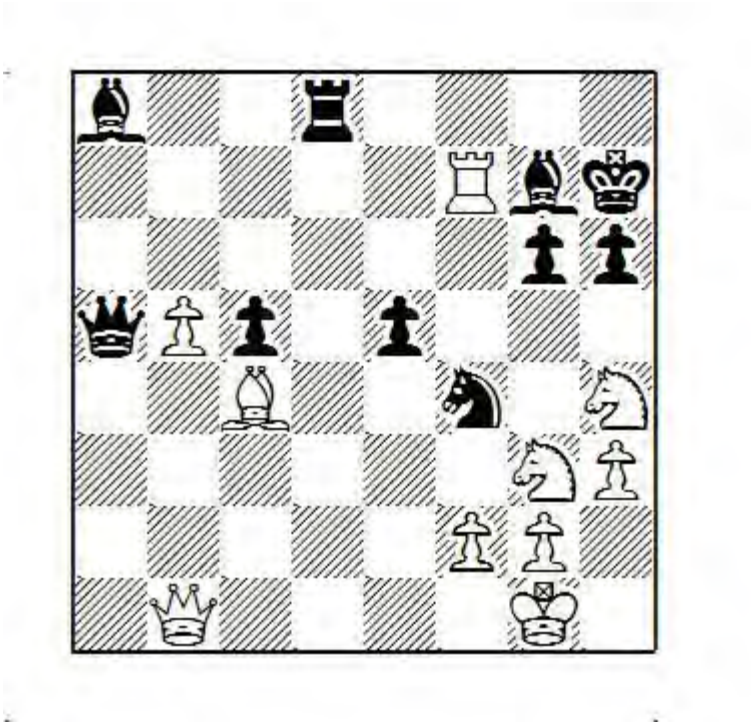
33 ... Ba8 34 Rxf7

The collapse of this vital fortification means that Black's kingside is tottering.

34 ... Rd8

Black hopes for counterplay along the d-file, but it has the unfortunate effect of driving the white queen to a strong attacking square.

35 Qb1! Nf4



Exercise: Can you see how Carlsen overturned the defence?

Answer: **36 Nh5!**

Winning in style, and far more forceful than 36 Nxg6! Nxg6 37 Nh5, though that would do the trick as well after 37 ... Rg8 38 Nf6+.

36 ... Nxh5 37 Rxg7+ 1-0

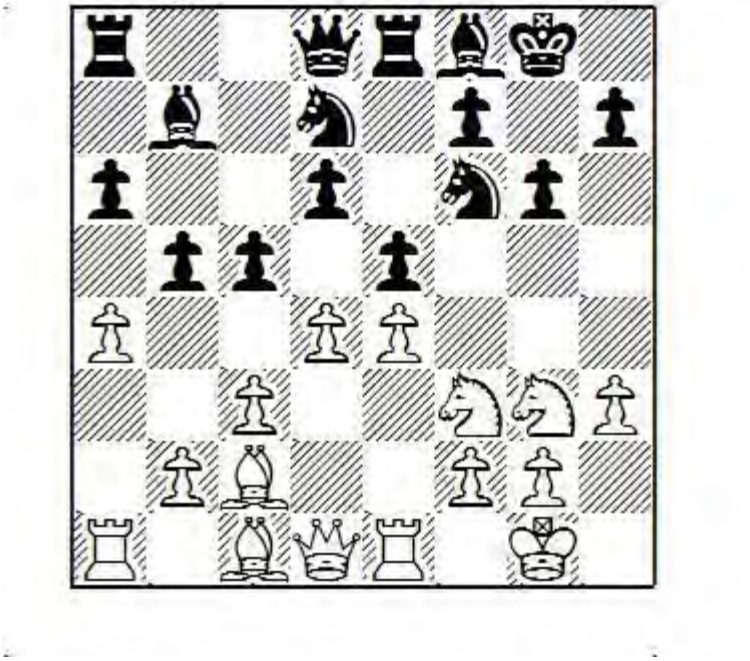
If 37 ... Nxg7 38 Qxg6+ and mate follows on h6, or 37 ... Kh8 38 Rh7+! and Black will again be mated on h6.

Game 14

V.Topalov-P.Van der Sterren

Antwerp 1997

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 Nb8 10 d4 Nbd7 11 Nbd2 Bb7 12 Bc2 Re8 13 Nf1 Bf8 14 Ng3 g6 15 a4 c5!?



Black challenges the d4-pawn. It is a case of now or never: if he delays the idea for a move with 15 ... Bg7, then White could play 16 Bd3, attacking b5, when after 16 ... c6 the opportunity has gone (see the previous game).

16 d5 c4

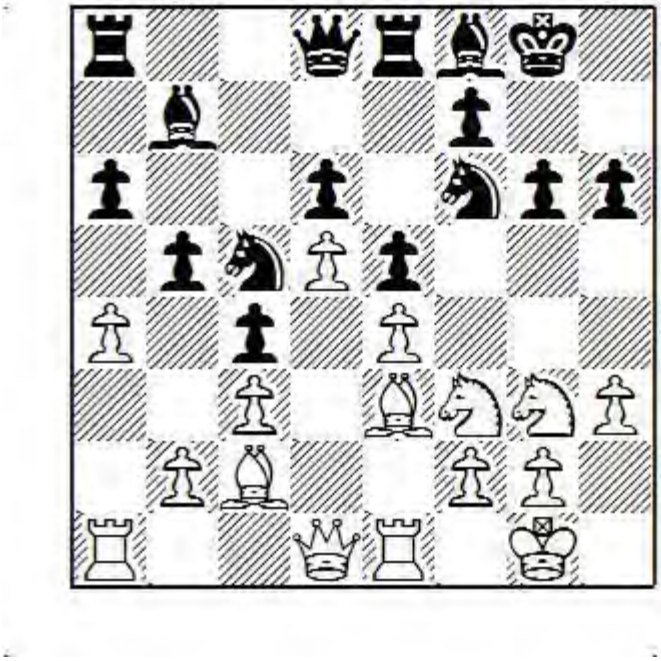
We have reached a pawn structure with which we are familiar from our discussion of the Chigorin Variation. Both players have gained space: White can be pleased to have shut in the bishop on b7, whilst Black has secured the c5-square for his knight.

17 Bg5

Another typical idea: White hopes to profit by provoking a slight loosening of the black kingside.

17 ... h6 18 Be3 Nc5

White's bishop on e3 might be said to be ideally placed, as it can influence matters on both sides of the board. Meanwhile Black's knight has taken up an excellent post on c5. These two pieces, white and black, might be said to be the 'winners' in this pawn structure.



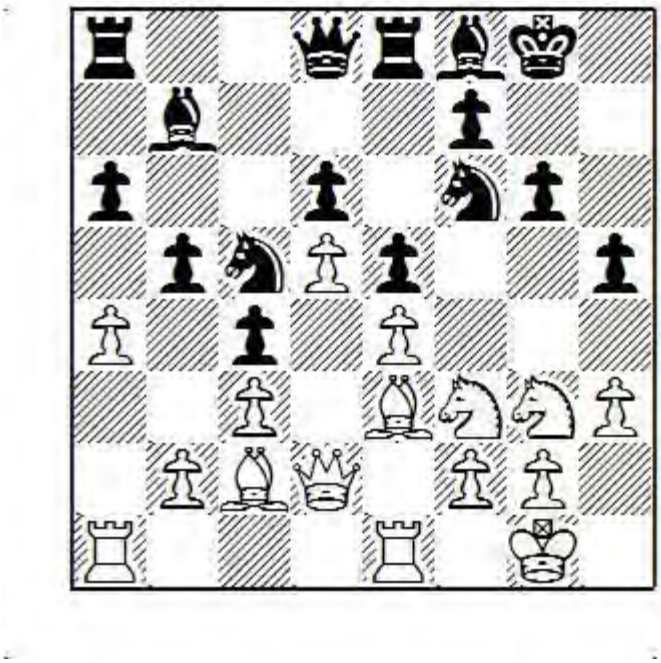
The main 'losers' are White's bishop on c2 and Black's bishop on b7, which are both boxed in. Black's bishop on f8 also has little scope, though it's fairly useful as a defensive piece, so counting up for both sides we might conclude that White has a small plus.

Question: What is White's general plan in this position?

19 Qd2

Answer: The standard plan is doubling rooks on the a-file, and so Topalov gets his queen out of the way with gain of time by hitting the h6-pawn. White will also be keeping a close eye on the kingside in case the number of black defenders becomes depleted by the struggle on the queenside – see the note that follows.

19 ... h5



Question: Why not 19 ... Kh7 defending the pawn

and not leaving any holes on the kingside?

Answer: Playing 19 ... h5 indeed weakens the black kingside. Imagine a scenario in the distant future, when the black knight has moved over to b6 to help man the defences on the queenside. White might put his queen on d1, move his knight from f3 to g5, and then play Nxh5!, sacrificing a piece so that after ... g6xh5, Qxh5 he gains a strong attack on the denuded black king. Less dramatically, White might find a way to wrong foot the black pieces by arranging a quick f2-f4 breakthrough, when they would be too far away on the queenside to come to the aid of their king in time.

Such devilish possibilities on the kingside give Black pause for thought when he decides where his pieces should be stationed. For example, should he resist when his knight on f6 is pulled as if by a magnet towards the queenside?

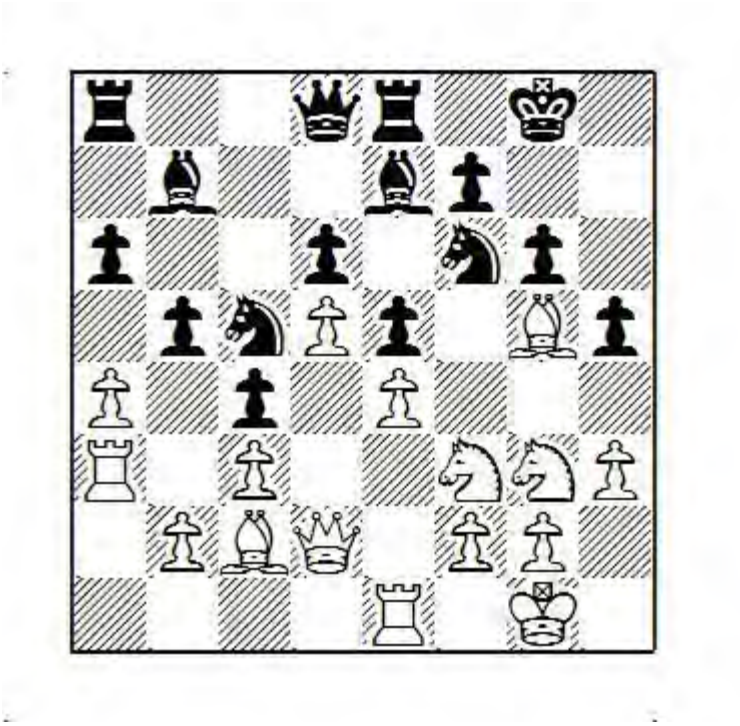
On the other hand, if Black plays 19 ... Kh7, it means that the bishop on f8 remains tied to the defence of the pawn. It also spurns a strategical motif after 19 ... h5, namely the chance to disrupt White's build-up with ... h5-h4 at an appropriate moment. And finally, White might have more chances to engineer an attack based on f2-f4 if the black king relinquishes its defence of f7. For these reasons modern players prefer 19 ... h5.

20 Bg5

Question: Why does the bishop return to g5?

Answer: In order to free his queen from the pin, Black is obliged to play his bishop to e7 (it can get buried on g7). This not only makes the black kingside weaker – the bishop is better placed on f8 guarding g7 and h6 – but also cuts off the defence of e5 by the rook on e8. This becomes significant on move 22 when Black decides what to do with his knight on f6.

20 ... Be7 21 Ra3



Topalov carries out his plan of gaining control of the a-file. He doesn't rush to play 21 axb5 axb5, as that would needlessly give Black extra options.

21 ... Rb8

Van der Sterren cedes the a-file. He trusts that the white rooks will never get past the barrier of the bishop on b7.

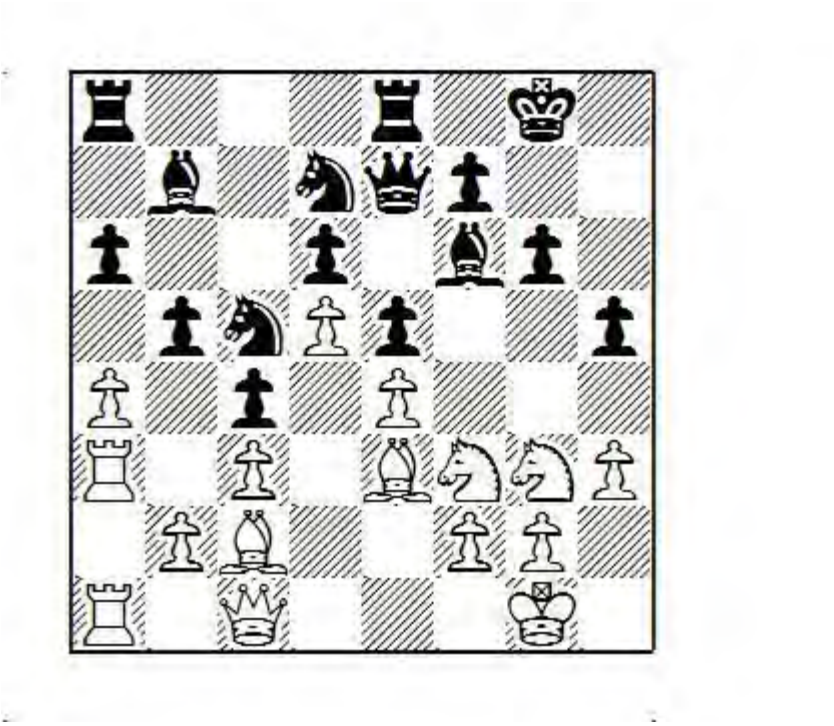
Question: Should the black knight have headed straight over

to the queenside with 21 ... Nfd7?

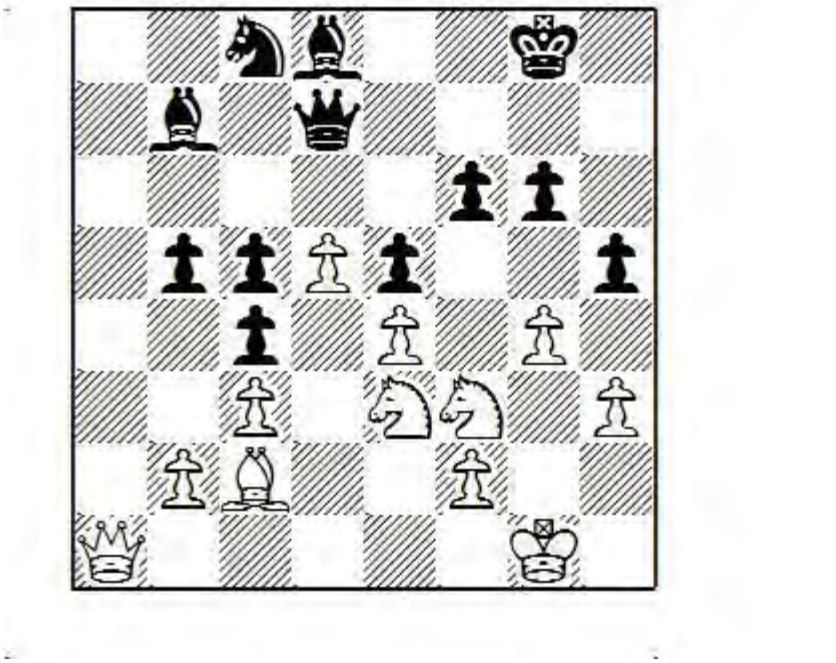
Answer: Judging from modern preference, probably yes, though Black remains under pressure.

Here is a game between Michael Adams, playing White, and GM Tatiana Kosintseva at Gibraltar in 2011: 21 ... Nfd7 22 Be3 Bf6 23

Rea1 Qe7 24 Qc1!



(a subtle little move – Adams wants his queen on the open a-file after the rooks are exchanged) 24 ... Nb6 25 axb5 axb5 26 Ra5! (targeting the b5-pawn, which forces the black queen into an unwelcome defensive role) 26 ... Qd7 27 Bxc5! (White's passed pawn will be of value in the endgame, though a nice blockade square for the remaining black knight is created on d6) 27 ... dxc5 28 Nf1 Rxa5 29 Rxa5 Ra8 30 Rxa8+ Bxa8 31 Qa1 Bb7 32 Qa5 Nc8 33 Ne3 Bd8! (Black resists White's probing; if now 34 Nxe5? Qe8 and White loses a piece) 34 Qa1 f6 35 g4! (repelled on the queenside, White opens a second front on the kingside)

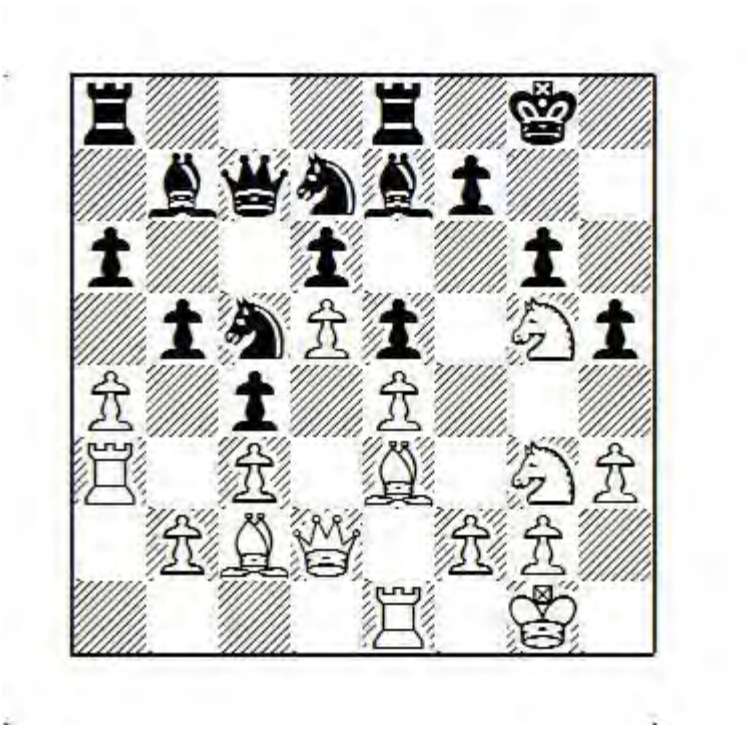


35 ... hxg4? (it often happens that a player suddenly collapses after being under long-term pressure; here after 35 ... Nd6! Black wouldn't have much to fear) 36 hxg4 g5? (completing her downfall; White is somewhat better after 36 ... Nd6 37 g5, but 37 ... Qh3 should then hold; the game move gives away the f5-square and leaves Black in a horrible bind) 37 Nf5 Nd6 38 Nh2! (sublime manoeuvring play by Adams, as you'd expect) 38 ... Bb6 39 Nf1 Nxf5. A dilemma for Black: if she doesn't exchange, the other white knight will go to g3 and take control of f5 after Nxd6 etc. But after the game move, White's 'bad' light-squared bishop is able to infiltrate on the kingside. The remaining moves were 40 gxf5 Bc8 41 Ne3 Bd8 42 Bd1 Kf8 43 Bh5 Ke7 44 Kg2 Qb7 45 Qd1! (White's winning plan involves bringing the queen to h5) 45 ... Qa6 46 Bg6 Kd6 47 Qh5 Be7 48 Be8 Bd7 49 Qf7 Qc8 50 Bxd7 Qxd7 51 Qe6+ Kc7 52 Ng4 Qd6 53 Nh6 1-0. White will

play 54 Nf7 then after 54 ... Qxe6 55 fxe6 his king can advance at his leisure via g4 and f5 to force home the passed pawns.

Question: Why did Black waste time on 22 ... Bf6 and 23 ... Qe7? She could have shored up the queenside with 22 ... Qc7 and 23 ... Nb6. Then after the pawn exchange, she might have been able to block off the a-file with ... Nba4. In that case Adams wouldn't have been able to attack b5 with Ra5 or break up her pawns with Bxc5, as the queen or knight could recapture.

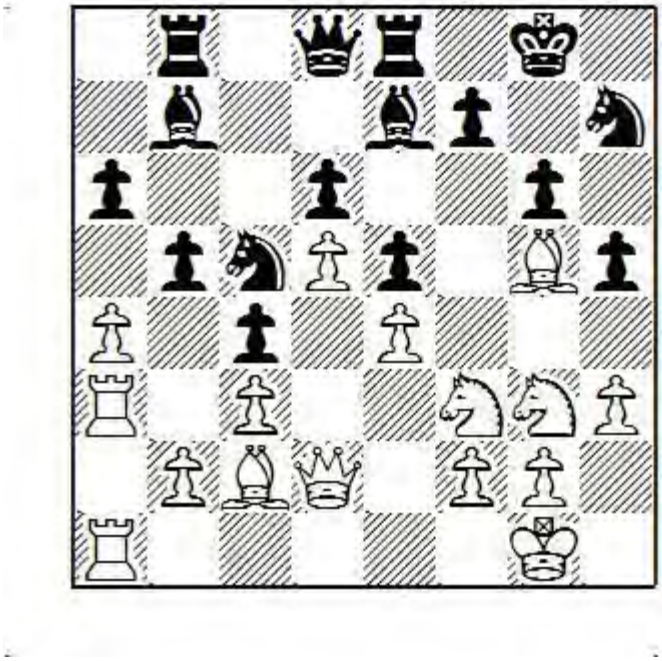
Answer: After 21 ... Nfd7 22 Be3 there was a reason for ... Bf6 and ... Qe7, they weren't just idle moves. Don't forget that the black kingside is rather flimsy. Removing the black queen from the defensive equation with 22 ... Qc7 encourages 23 Ng5! followed by a quick f2-f4.



The game A.Timofeev-S.Azarov, Plovdiv 2008, then continued 23 ... Nb6 (in an earlier game Nigel Short survived after 23 ... f6 24 Nf3 Kf7 25 Nh4 Rh8 etc, but I still think White's initiative was ominous for him in N.Mamedov-N-Short, Baku 2007) 24 a5 (it's a radical decision to close the queenside, but Black's knights are a long way from defending their king) 24 ... Nba4 25 Ra2 Bf6 26 f4 Nb3 27 Qd1 exf4 28 Bxf4 Qe7 and now Peter Wells recommends 29 h4!? for White. Black certainly has things to worry about with three of his minor pieces so far from the kingside.

22 Rea1 Nh7

Black decides, temporarily at least, to keep his knight on the kingside as a safety measure – see the note to his next move.



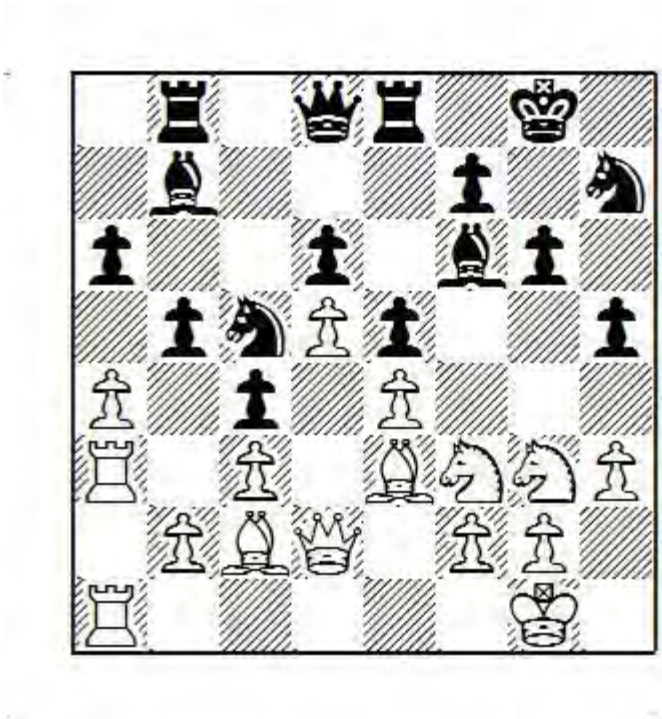
Question: Now what should White do with his bishop?

23 Be3!

Answer: The exchange 23 Bxe7? Qxe7 would completely miss the point. White's active bishop shouldn't be swapped for the restricted one on e7. If instead 23 Bh6, Black could carry on harrying the bishop with 23 ... .Bf8!. If White then avoids the exchange again with 24 Be3, as he should, he has foolishly let the black bishop back to f8, where it is better placed than on e7. So the only sensible move is for the bishop to revisit the e3-square.

Still, its foray to g5 was by no means in vain.

23 ... Bf6



Exercise: Try to find a manoeuvre by a white knight that would

allow its opposite number on c5 to be challenged.

Black's bishop goes to f6 and so rules out any threat of Bxc5 followed by Nxe5. Its main role is to bolster the kingside and, together with the knight on h7, dissuade White from trying his luck as in the notes above with Ng5 and f2-f4.

Answer: **24 Ne2!**

Beginning a really high-class plan. The knight heads for c1 where it can support the pawn advance b2-b4 to dislodge the black horse from its fine post.

24 ... Nf8?

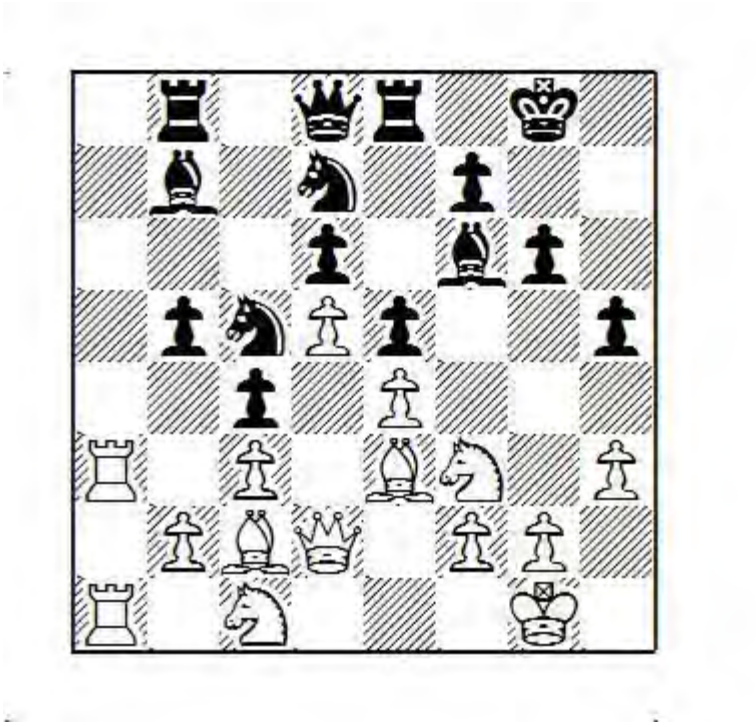
The Dutch Grandmaster anticipates White's idea and so brings his other knight to d7 to bolster its comrade on c5. This appears a sensible plan, but in R.Robson-G.Kamsky, Saint Louis 2011, Black found a better use for the d7-square.

Exercise: With that clue, can you work out what Gata Kamsky played?

Answer: On the way to another US title, he played 24 ... Bc8! when after 25 axb5 axb5 26 Nc1 Bd7 the pawn on b5, which two moves ago was looking vulnerable, enjoyed the protection of both the rook on b8 and bishop on d7. Black managed to hold the balance after 27 b3 cxb3 28 Nxb3 Na4! etc. Here we see another good feature of ... Bd7 – the bishop supports the knight 'through' the pawn on b5.

I'm curious to know how Topalov (or Adams) would have opposed this plan. Perhaps instead of 26 Nc1, the double-edged 26 Bxc5!? dxc5 27 Qe3 is the way to keep some advantage.

25 Nc1 Nfd7 26 axb5 axb5



Question: Is there any difference between 27 b3 and 23 b4,

or do they amount to the same thing?

27 b4!

Answer: After 27 b3 Black would have the option of 27 ... Nb6!? so it's better to force Black's hand by directly attacking c5.

27 ... cxb3 28 Nxb3 Qc7 29 Nxc5 Nxc5

Question: Black has replaced the knight on c5, so what has White gained

by arranging the b2-b4 breakthrough? And what's his next move?

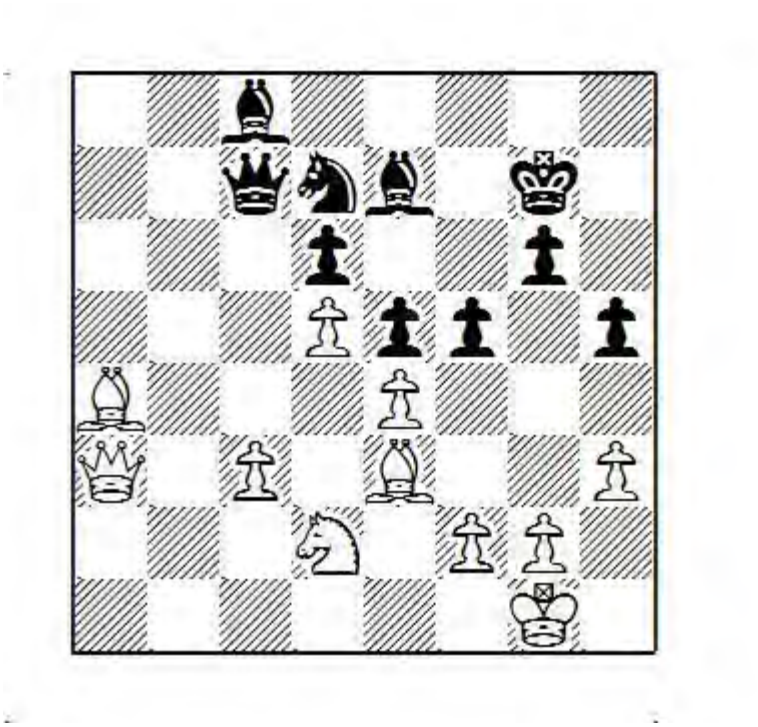
27 b4

Answer: The removal of Black's c4-pawn has exposed the b5-pawn to diagonal attack by the white queen. Here we see how wise Kamsky was to play 24 ... Bc8 and 26 ... Bd7, as the black pieces become disorganized by the need to hold onto the pawn, with the result that the white rooks infiltrate along the a-file.

30 ... Bc8 31 Ra7 Qd8 32 R1a5 Re7

Van der Sterren gives up a pawn to gain some freedom, after which Topalov gets to show the technique of a future FIDE World Champion. Instead 32 ... Bd7 33 Bxc5!? dxc5 34 Qe3 is very unpleasant for Black: for example 34 ... c4 35 R5a6 threatening 36 Rxf6; or 34 ... Qc8 35 d6 Bd8 36 Qh6! Bxa5?! 37 Ng5! and the threat of mate in two is decisive.

33 Rxe7 Bxe7 34 Rxb5 Ba6 35 Rxb8 Qxb8 36 Qd1 Qc7 37 Qa1 Bc8 38 Qa3 Nd7 39 Nd2 Kg7 40 Ba4 f5



Exercise: Try to work out White's next step in the

exploitation of the extra pawn.

Answer: **41 Bxd7!**

As he will need to breakthrough with c4-c5 to create a passed pawn, it makes sense to eliminate the knight that controls the c5-square.

41 ... Bxd7 42 Qb4 Bc8 43 c4 Ba6 44 Qa4 Qc8 45 f3 Kf7

Question: This is tough resistance by Van der Sterren. White's queen

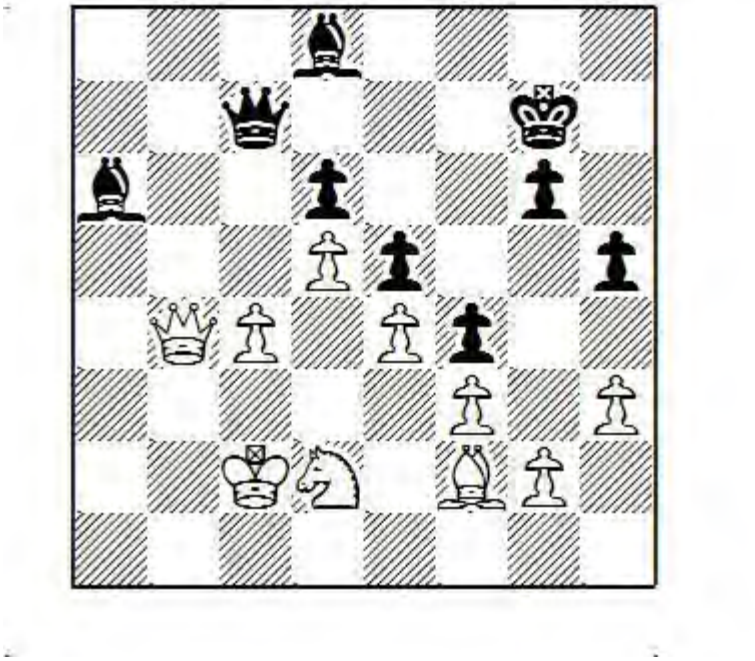
and knight are both tied to the defence of c4, making it difficult

for them to arrange c4-c5. How can they be helped?

46 Kf1!

Answer: Topalov will bring his king to b3 to help shepherd the pawn forwards.

46 ... Bh4 47 Ke2 Kg7 48 Qb4 Qc7 49 Kd1 Bd8 50 Kc2 f4 51 Bf2



51 ... Qa5

Black tries a last ditch counterattack. If he waits then, amongst other winning plans, White could put his king on b3 then manoeuvre his knight via b1 and c3 to a4 and then break through with c4-c5.

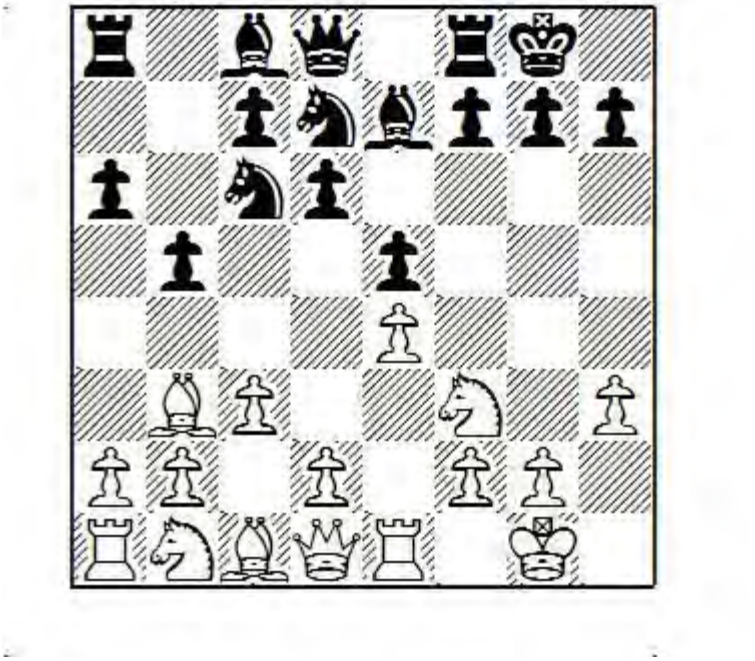
52 Qxd6 Qa2+ 53 Kc1 Qa1+ 54 Nb1 Ba5 55 Qa3! 1-0

The simplest way for White to end the game, as the exchange of queens kills all resistance. Though I can't help wishing Topalov had had a brainstorm and fallen for the trap 55 Qxa6?? which leads to a very interesting endgame after 55 ... Bd2+ 56 Kd1! (keeping d2 for the knight where it defends c4) 56 ... Qxa6 57 Nxd2.

The Karpov Variation

Here Black withdraws his knight to d7: **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 Nd7**.

It was used by Anatoly Karpov no less than four times in his 1990 World Championship match with Kasparov. The idea is to put the bishop on f6, either to keep e5 as a strong point or to concede the centre with ... e5xd4 and gain counterplay.



The move order in the game below was actually 9 h3 Bb7 10 d4 Nd7, but we'll look at Black's most common sequence.

Game 15

M.Adams-V.Georgiev

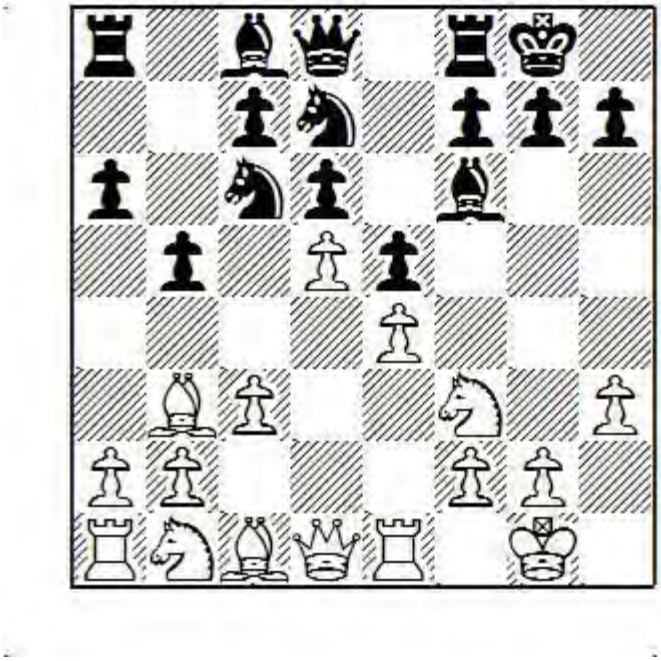
Novi Sad 2009

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 Nd7

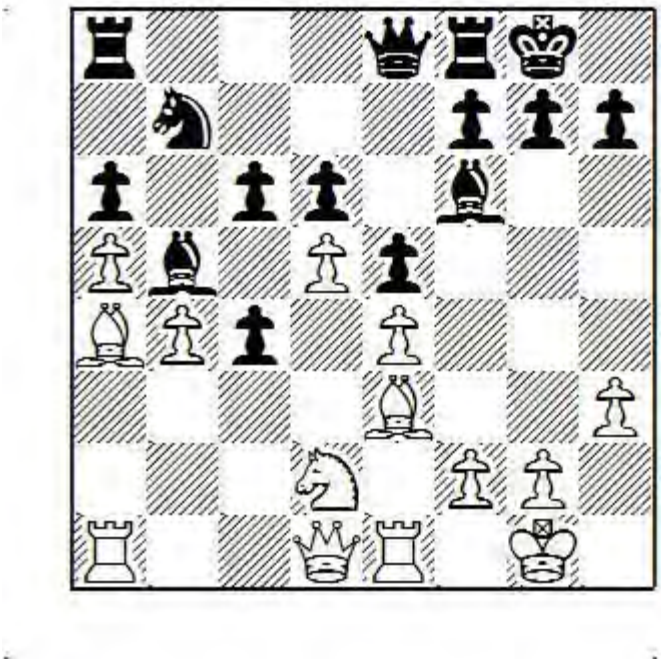
10 d4 Bb7

Another try for Black is 10 ... Nb6. For example 11 Nbd2 exd4 (White has some advantage after 11 ... Bf6 12 Nf1 Re8 13 N1h2! exd4 14 cxd4 Na5 15 Bc2 c5 16 b3!? Nc6 17 Bb2 etc.) 12 cxd4 Nb4 13 Nf1 c5 14 a3 Nc6 15 Be3 c4 16 Bc2 d5 17 Ng3 Be6 (after 17 ... dxe4 18 Bxe4 Nd5 19 Qc2 White's attack on h7 is awkward to meet) 18 e5 a5 19 Nh5 and White had a kingside initiative in A.Zhigalko-P.Staniszewski, Warsaw 2006.

Meanwhile if 10 ... Bf6 White could try 11 d5!? leaving the bishop with little to do on f6.



This led to a creative victory by Alexander Morozevich against B.Socko at Lugo 2007: 11 ... Na5 (in a later game Socko tried the retreat 11 ... Ne7, but he was struggling after 12 a4 Bb7 13 axb5 axb5 14 Rxa8 Qxa8 15 Na3 in S.Azarov-B.Socko, Ostrava 2009) 12 Bc2 Nb6 13 a4 Bd7 14 b4 Nb7 15 a5 Nc8 16 c4! (an unexpected breakthrough that exploits the unfortunate situation of the black knight on b7) 16 ... Na7 (if 16 ... bxc4 then 17 Nc3 as in the game) 17 Nc3 bxc4 18 Be3 Nb5 19 Nxb5 Bxb5 (unfortunately for Black he can't consolidate with 19 ... axb5 as 20 a6 traps his knight; if it wasn't for this tactic White's play would have been simply unsound) 20 Ba4 Qe8 21 Nd2 c6.



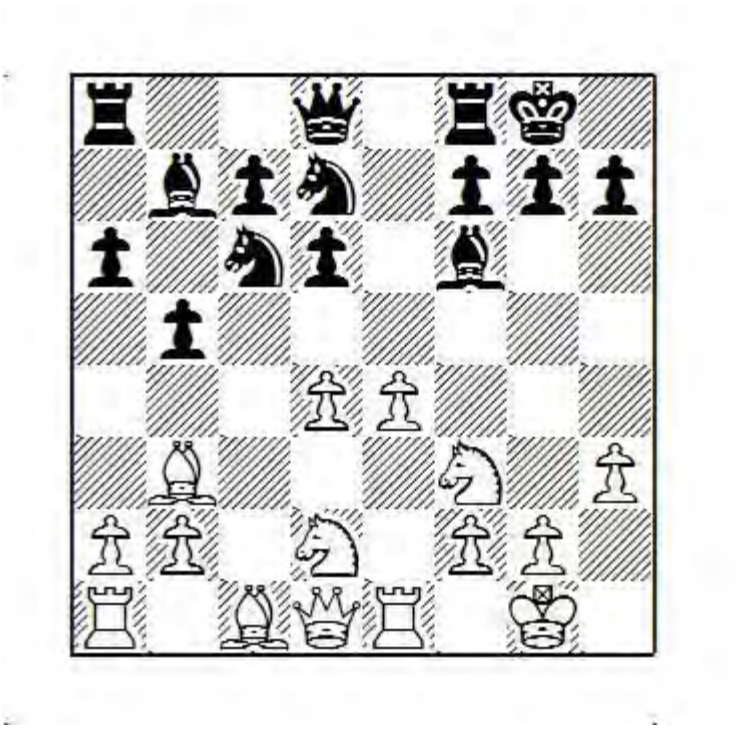
It looks as if Black might be holding it together on the queenside, but: 22 Nxc4! Bxc4 23 dxc6 Nd8 24 c7 Qe6 (or 24 ... Nc6 25 Qxd6 Bb5 26 Bxb5 axb5 27 Rac1 Nd4 28 Bxd4 exd4 29 e5 Be7 30 Qxd4 and Black is boxed in by the white pawns) 25 Rc1! (White is in no hurry to regain his piece, as if 25 ... Nb7 26 Bc6! traps the knight) 25 ... Rc8 26 Bb6! (not giving Black the breathing space of 26 cxd8Q Bxd8) 26 ... Be7 27 Qc2 Bb5 28 Bxb5 axb5 29 Qd3 Qh6 30 cxd8Q (White finally takes the material, after which his queenside pawns decide the game) 30 ... Rfxd8 31 Ra1 Rf8 32 Qxb5 Bd8 33 Be3 Bg5 34 Bxg5 Qxg5 35 a6 Qd2 36 a7 Ra8 37 Qb7 1-0.

11 Nbd2 exd4

Black concedes the centre at once. In L.Ljubojevic-A.Karpov, Turin 1982, White got some advantage after 11 ... Bf6 12 Nf1 Re8 13 Ng3 g6 14 Bh6 Na5 15 Bc2 c5 16 d5 Nc4 17 Qc1 Bg7 18 a4 and eventually ground out a win against the World Champion.

12 cxd4 Bf6

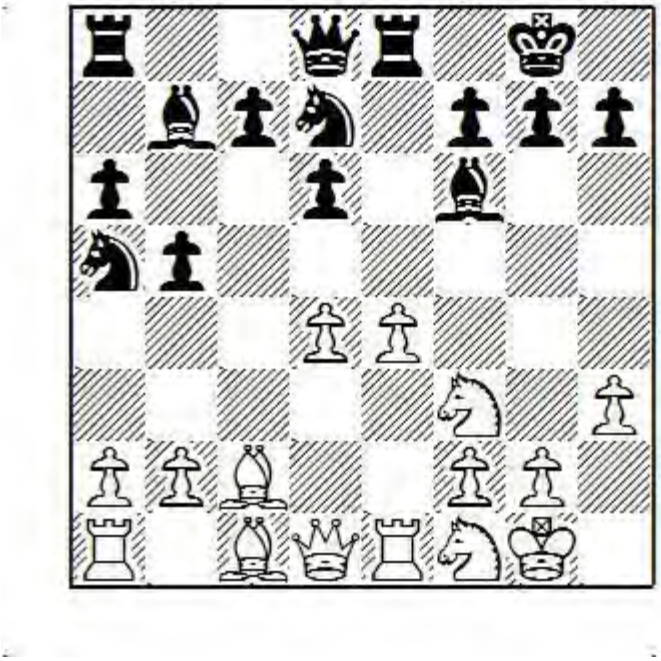
The bishop attacks the white d4-pawn and, having vacated the e7-square, clears the way for ... Re8 to put direct pressure on e4. The next part of Black's plan will be to further assail d4 with ... Na5 and ... c7-c5, which will also expose the white e4-pawn to added attack by the bishop on b7. If Black succeeds in carrying out this strategy, he will have an active and lively game.



Question: Are there any drawbacks to this plan?

Answer: In the Zaitsev mainline (considered in the next game), Black often plays ... Re8, ... Bf8, ... g7-g6 and ... Bg7 to put pressure on d4 and e4. Here Black has speeded up the idea with ... Bf6. The question is whether the bishop will be okay on that square. It is clearly far more exposed than on g7. It might be hit by a pawn advance e4-e5, for example, or forced into an unwelcome exchange for a white knight. Note that neither of these ideas – White hitting the bishop with e4-e5 or offering an unwelcome exchange for a knight – would arise if Black had adopted the usual, albeit time-consuming, ... g7-g6 and ... Bg7 deployment of the bishop.

13 Nf1 Na5 14 Bc2 Re8



Question: What is the best way to provoke a

weakness in the black kingside?

Answer: **15 N1h2!**

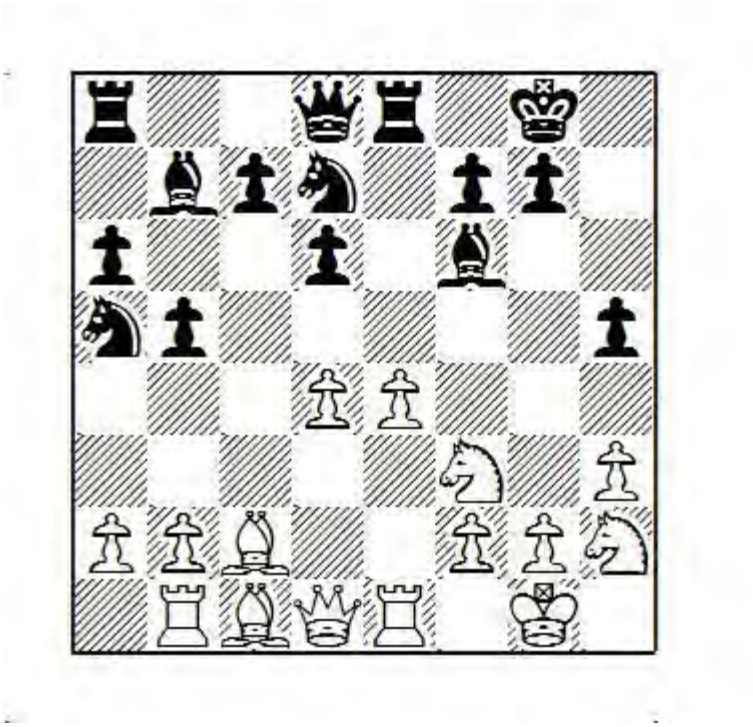
Not so effective is 15 Ng3 as Black can make an escape square for his bishop with 15 ... g6.

After the game move Black is in a dilemma. The positional threat is 16 Ng4 followed by the exchange of his proud bishop for a white knight with 17 Nxf6+ (not that White would have to hurry with this capture: he might have even more attractive attacking options). If Black plays 15 ... g6 16 Ng4 Bg7 to keep the bishop, 17 Nh6+ gives White a very dangerous initiative as 17 ... Kf8 would be forced. Therefore Black's next move, though it looks odd, is more or less forced from a strategical point of view.

15 ... h5!

Now at least the white knight on h2 is shut out of the game for the time being.

16 Rb1



Exercise: Try to work out the purpose of this move.

You can see a summary of Black's intentions at move 12 above.

Which of these is White opposing with 16 Rb1?

Answer: A modern army, no matter how sophisticated, requires help from foot soldiers at some point. And the same is true in chess. Remember that Adams is fighting his opponent's plan on all fronts – kingside, centre and queenside. An integral part of Black's plan is to attack the d4-pawn with ... c7-c5. This will energize his pieces and cut the white centre down in size. Adams is aware of this, and so is taking a prophylactic measure. He would reply to 16 ... c5 with17 b4!. If 17 ... Nc4? (17 ... Nc6 is met with the same moves by White) in reply, then 18 bxc5 dxc5 19 e5 Be7 20 d5 looks disastrous for Black – the white centre pawns have overrun all restraints. Black's best try after 16 ... c5 17 b4 is 17 ... cxb4. The white centre remains intact after 18 Rxb4, keeping the black pieces shut out of good squares, though there is still plenty of fight left after 18 ... Nc4.

16 ... Nf8?

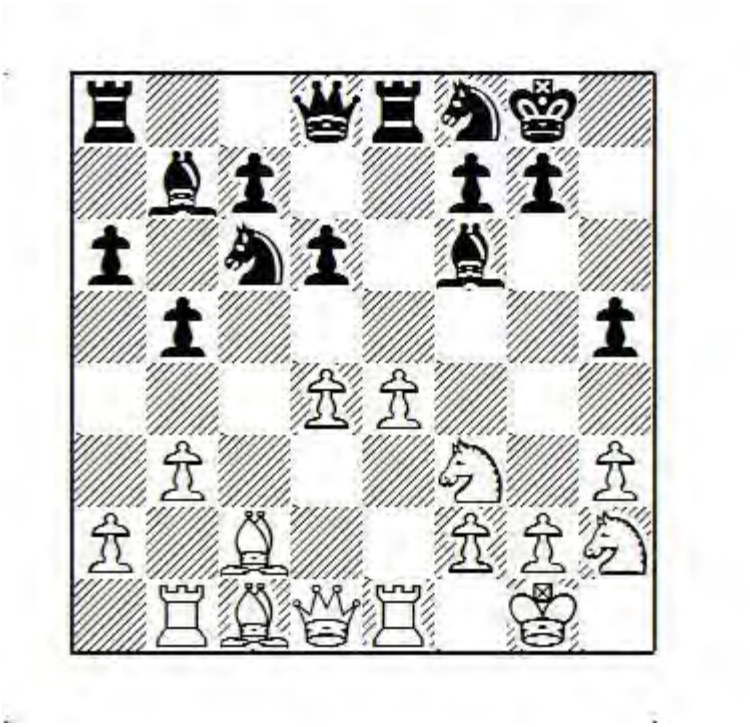
Black has lost heart. If he is going to avoid 16 ... c5 he might as well play 16 ... Nc4! when after 17 b3 Ncb6 the knight is on a better square than a5 or c6. In that case he could still aim for ... c7-c5 at an appropriate moment – the riposte b3-b4 by White wouldn't be effective with no knight hanging on a5. The manoeuvre ... Na5-c4-b6 is an important idea for Black in the Closed pawn centre.

Question: So Black has missed the chance for ... Nc4 and ... Nb6 – for a move. How can we make sure he doesn't play it next move?

17 b3!

Answer: Another simple prophylactic move, controlling the c4-square.

17 ... Nc6



Exercise: Black is threatening to force an unwelcome exchange.

What is it, and how should White meet the threat?

18 b4!

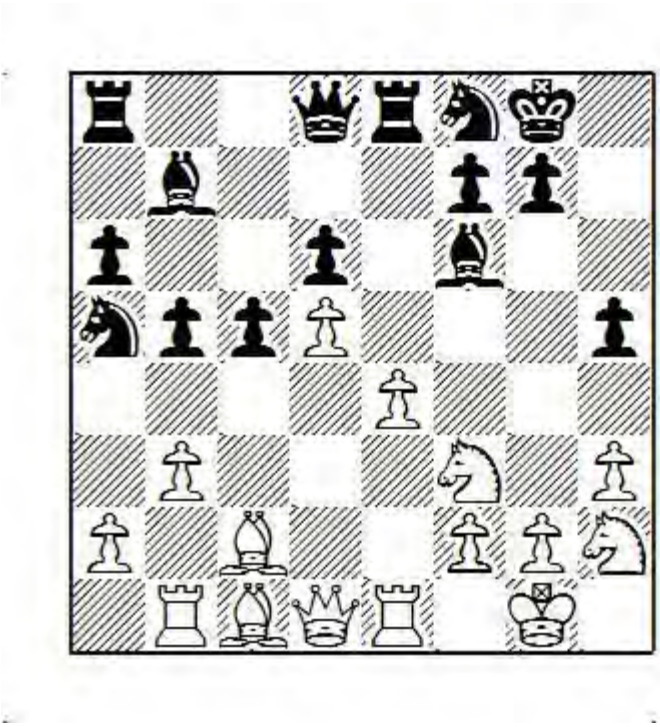
Answer: As a general principle, every more or less equal exchange of pieces favours the player with less space. Here the threat was 18 ... Nb4! and 19 ... Nxc2, getting rid of the troubled knight in exchange for White's strong bishop: a decidedly favourable swap for Black.

White's preventive move is excellent. It has additional value in that Black's freeing ... c7-c5 is further restrained, even if the knight moves from c6.

Note that the pawn was no longer needed on b3 once the black knight had gone back to c6. It feels odd to play 17 b3! and then 18 b4! but Adams is without prejudice – he plays the best move on the board no matter what the history.

Question: If Black had played 17 ... c5, is 18 b4 still the best idea?

Answer: After 17 ... c5 White could still consider 18 b4, though this allows the black knight the c4-square. Having restrained the offside horse from returning to the centre via c4 with 17 b3, it is now attractive to deny it the c6-square as well after 17 ... c5 with 18 d5!?.

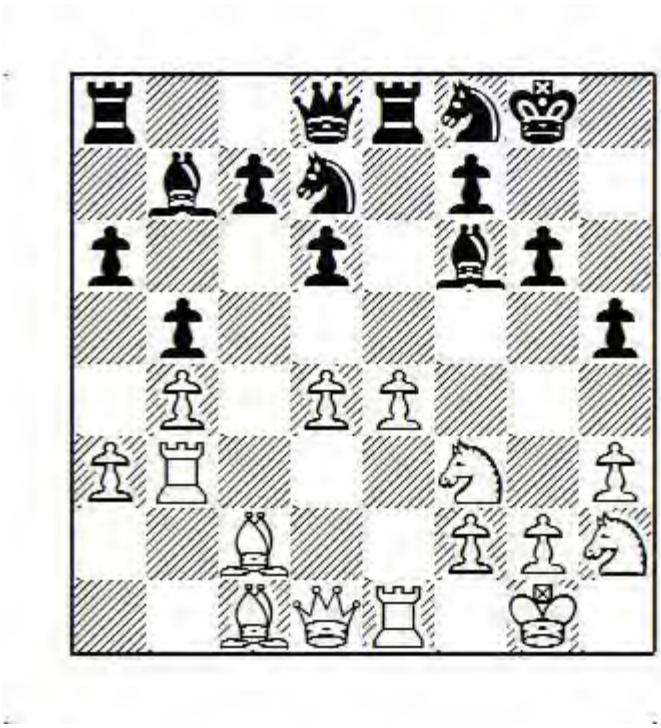


Then it's difficult to see how the knight is going to be able to attack anything in the future, as even if Black plays ... Bc8 and ... Nb7 it is still uselessly placed. With the knight stranded on the queenside, White could try to build up an assault in the centre or on the kingside. With careful preparation, an outlandish move such as g2-g4!? could be powerful.

18 ... g6 19 a3 Nb8 20 Rb3!

The rook will prove powerful on the third rank. Adams plays a series of brilliant positional moves in this game. He anticipates how Black is going to try to free his game and frustrates him at every turn.

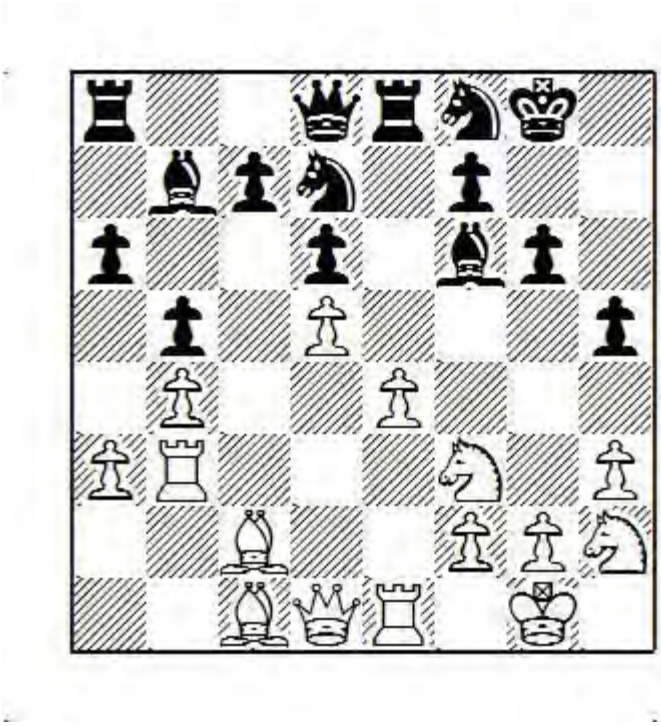
20 ... Nbd7



Exercise: Try to work out Black's positional threat, and how to stop it.

21 d5!

White's loss of control of the e5-square and the opening of the a1-h8 diagonal for the black bishop are minor inconveniences compared to the problems he would face after 21 Nf1? c5! when Black is suddenly dynamic.

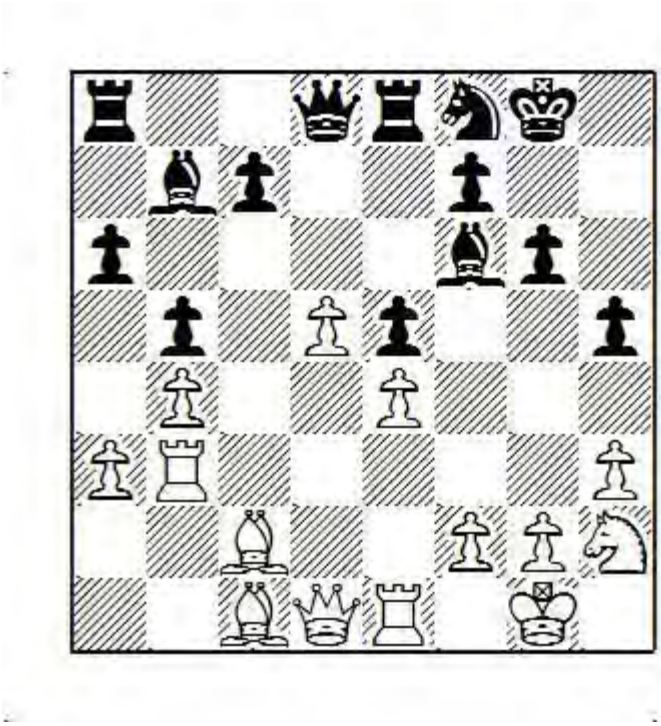


21 ... Ne5

Naturally if 21 ... c5? White plays 22 dxc6 Bxc6 23 Qxd6.

22 Nxe5 dxe5

After 22 ... Bxe5 23 Nf3 Bg7 White has to avoid falling for the trap 24 Nd4? when he loses a pawn after 24 ... Bxd5 25 exd5 Rxe1+ 26 Qxe1 Bxd4. However, 24 Be3 and then 25 Nd4 leaves Black suffering with no space and a poor pawn structure.



Question: After the game move, Black hopes to slip out of

his problems with 23 ... c6. How do we restrain him?

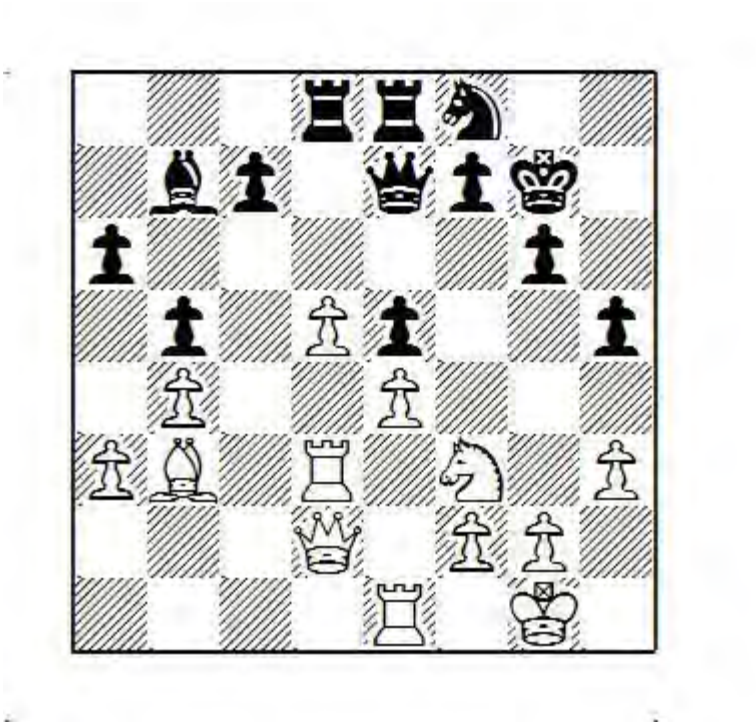
Answer: **23 Rd3!**

White must have seen this strong move when he played 20 Rb3. If now 23 ... c6 24 dxc6 wins a piece.

23 ... Bg5

After the exchange of bishops Black can do nothing active. He should have tried to keep some tension with 23 ... Qd6 24 Be3 Nd7.

24 Bxg5 Qxg5 25 Nf3 Qe7 26 Qd2 Rad8 27 Bb3 Kg7



Exercise: White has won the opening battle and has

the superior pawn structure. What is his correct plan?

28 Rc1!

Answer: White will triple his major pieces against the backward pawn on c7, which will tie down the black pieces to its defence.

28 ... f6 29 Qc2 Rd7 30 Rc3 Rc8

Exercise: With the black queen and rooks immobilized, what should

be the next stage in White's strategy? (Hint: What other serious

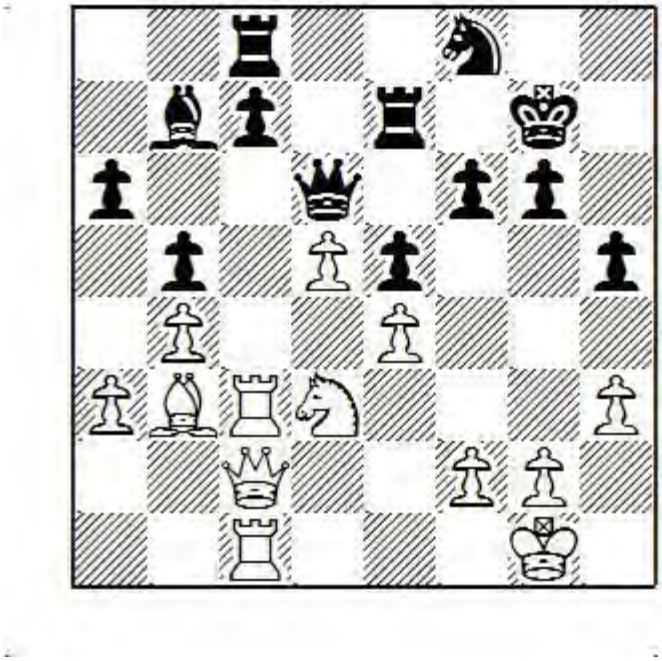
defect is there in Black's pawn structure besides the weak pawn

on c7? How can this be exploited?)

31 Ne1!

Answer: The white knight heads for the hole on the c5-square.

31 ... Qd6 32 Nd3 Re7



Exercise: So far White has the pawn on c7 and the hole

on c5 to play against. Try to find a way to create further stress

in the black pawn structure.

Answer: **33 a4! Qb6 34 Nc5 bxa4**

Georgiev has no wish to bring White's bishop to life on the a4-e8 diagonal, but otherwise White can acquire a decisive passed pawn or bury the black queen for example 34 ... Rb8 35 a5 Qd6 (instead 35 ... Qa7 is horrible for Black) 36 Nxb7 Rxb7 37 Rc6 Qxb4 38 Rxa6 Rb8 39 Qc5 Qxc5 40 Rxc5 Rd7 41 Ra7 and either the b5- or c7-pawn will fall.

35 Bxa4 Ba8

Not 35 ... Qxb4 36 Rb1 Qd4 (or 36 ... Qa5 37 Nxb7) 37 Rxb7 and to add to the insult of losing a piece, the black queen will be trapped by 38 Rc4.

36 Bb3 h4

If 36 ... Qxb4 then 37 Nxa6 and 38 Nxc7 follows.

37 Bc4

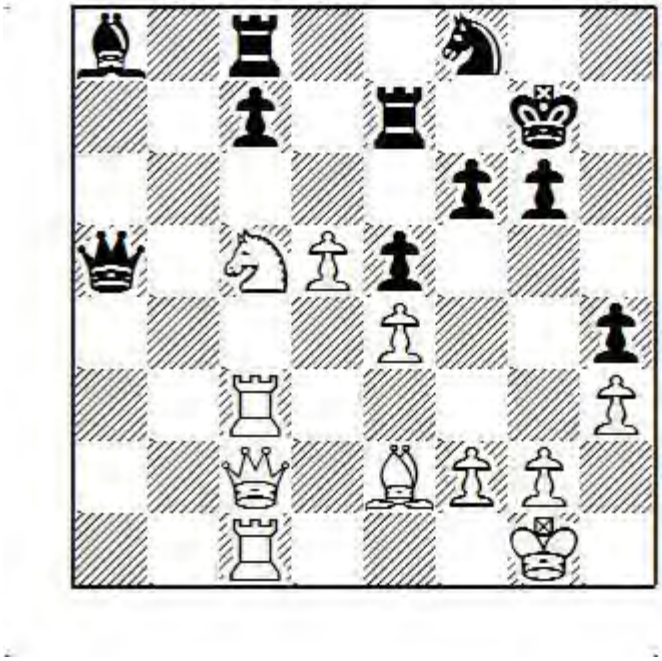
The white pieces make an aesthetic impression on the c-file.

37 ... a5 38 bxa5 Qxa5

If Black hopes he has escaped the worst by liquidating on the queenside he is soon disillusioned.

39 Be2!

There were several winning moves, but this is the most thematic. White threatens 40 Bg4, driving the rook away from c8, when the c7-pawn soon falls. Black resorts to desperate measures to prevent this, leading to the fragmentation of his kingside.

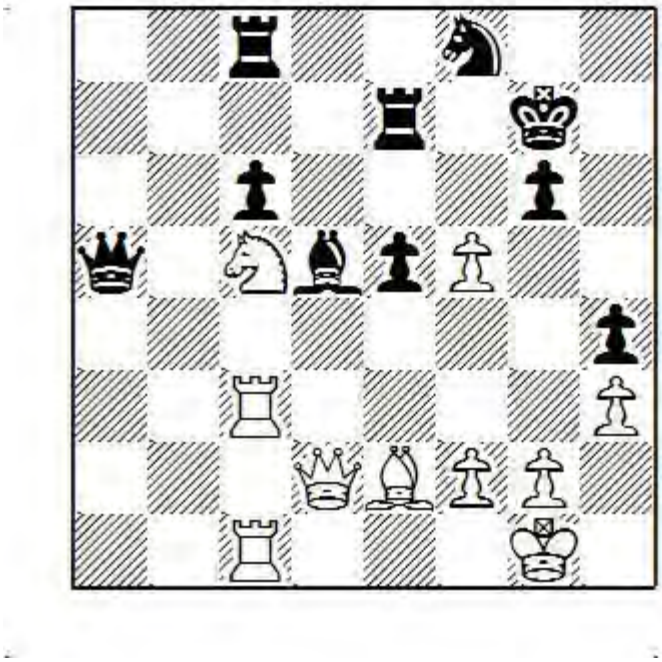


39 ... f5 40 exf5 Bxd5 41 Qd2!

It appears that White wants to gain time to get his queen to g5 by attacking the black bishop. He is also setting an insidious trap that Black misses.

41 ... c6?

He had to play 41 ... Qa8 or 41 ... Qa2 though White has a winning attack after 42 Qg5 attacking the rook on e7 and also threatening 43 f6+. If Black tries 42 ... Rf7 then 43 fxg6, exposing an attack on e5, would tear up the black kingside.



Exercise: After 41 ... .c6 it's time to test your tactics. White to play and win!

42 f6+!

An example of a fork setting up a discovered attack.

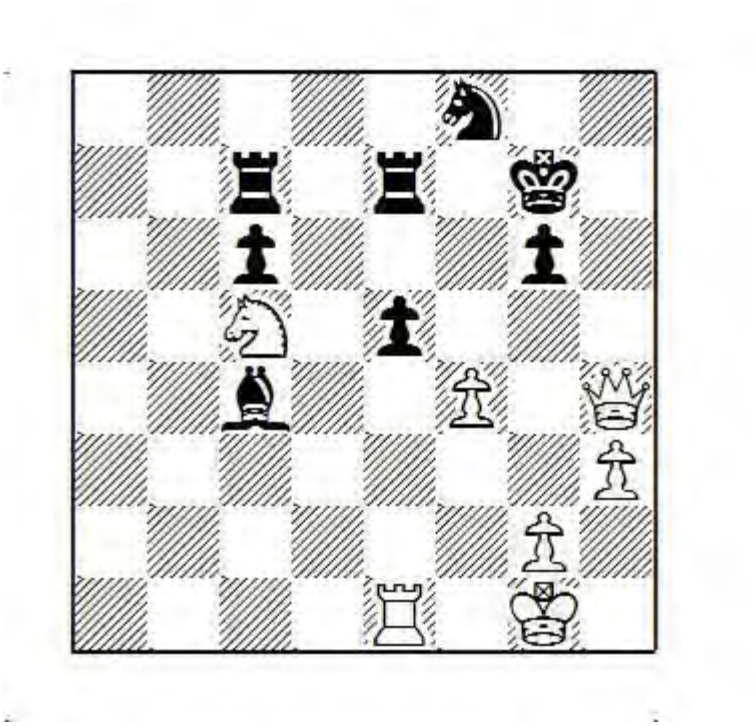
42 ... Kxf6 43 Rf3+ Bxf3 44 Qxa5 Bxe2 45 Qb4!

Even with a queen in his pocket Adams doesn't loosen up on the tactics. He wins the h4-pawn as 45 ... g5 46 Ne4+ Ke6 47 Qd6+ Kf7 48 Qf6+ Ke8 49 Nd6+ will pick up a rook with the fork.

45 ... Kg7 46 Qxh4 Rcc7 47 Re1! Bb5 48 f4

Adding another pawn to his booty. The e5-pawn will drop due to the pin on e7.

48 ... Bc4?!



Exercise: Can you find one last tactic to end the game?

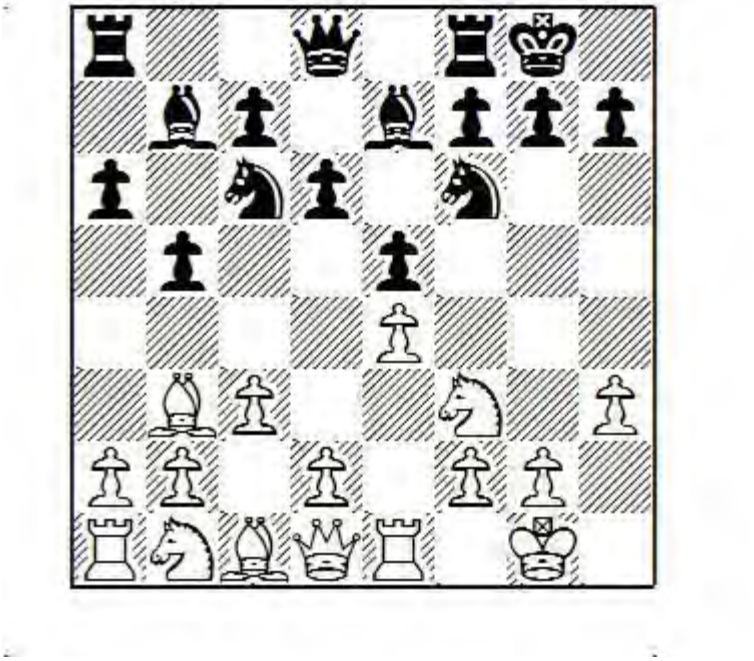
49 f5! 1-0

Black had no luck with forks and discovered attacks in this game. The twin threats of 50 f6+ and 50 Qxc4 win at once.

The Zaitsev Variation

This begins **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 Bb7**.

It is named after GM Igor Zaitsev (1938-), who recommended putting the bishop on b7 back in 1968. It is a very natural move that completes the development of Black's minor pieces and aims the bishop at the important e4-square. A further good point is soon revealed after a couple of natural moves, which we'll examine in an illustrative game.



Game 16

A.Naiditsch-Z.Efimenko

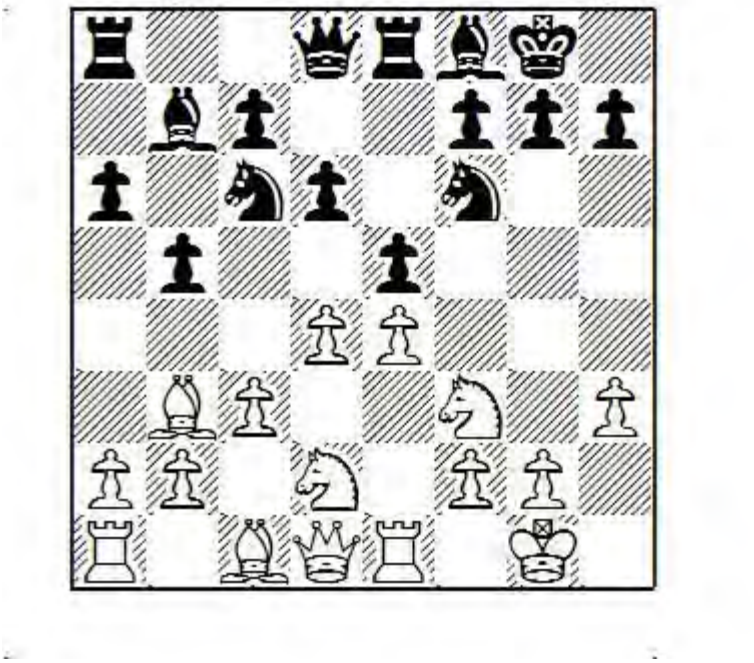
Poikovsky 2009

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 Bb7 10 d4 Re8 11 Nbd2

Question: White can play 11 a4 or 11 Nbd2 first – does it matter?

Answer: The move 11 a4 will lead you into the sharp mainline discussed in the notes to the next move. The advantage of 11 Nbd2 is that White can try the less studied, more strategic approach of our main game.

11 ... Bf8!



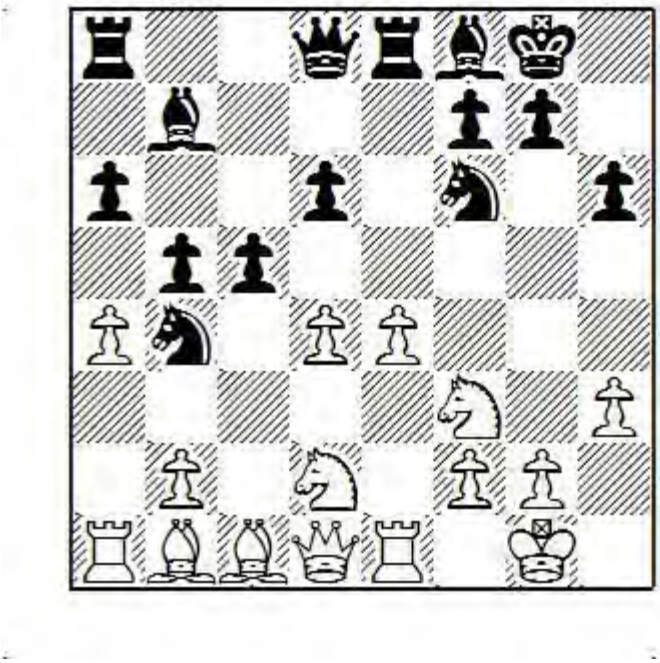
In the Closed Lopez Black cannot stop White applying pressure to his e5-pawn. There is also little he can do about the a2-a4 pawn thrust, which undermines the b5-pawn. A third great tormentor is White's knight manoeuvre Nbd2, Nf1 and Ng3, and this he has prevented with his wily move order. If now 12 Nf1? exd4 leaves the e4-pawn hanging.

Question: So much for my eulogy on 9 ... Bb7.

Can you see any drawbacks to the move?

Answer: The obvious reply is that the bishop has been withdrawn from the fight along the c8-h3 diagonal. However, since one of the points of 9 ... Bb7 is to prevent White's manoeuvre 12 Nf1 and 13 Ng3, it could be argued that the bishop move has actually increased the safety of the black kingside. Still, Black's inability to play ... Be6, to challenge the bishop on b3, might prove a disadvantage in the future.

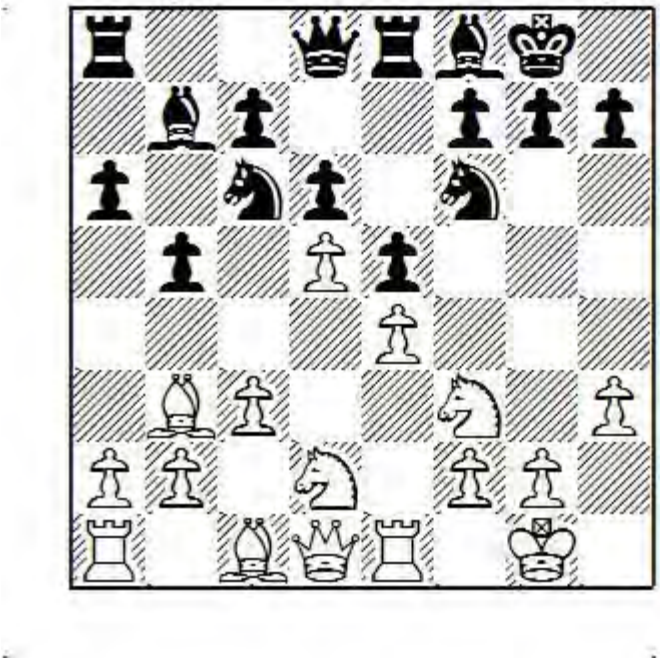
A sharp attempt to refute the Zaitsev is seen after the moves 12 a4 h6 13 Bc2. Having renounced the chance to increase his share of space with 9 ... Na5 and 10 ... c5, as in the Chigorin, or regroup his knight and free his c-pawn for action with the Breyer move 9 ... Nb8, Black needs to get counterplay from somewhere. The way to do so is by conceding the centre with 13 ... exd4 14 cxd4 Nb4 15 Bb1 and then gaining space by 15 ... c5.



You can tell from this reasoning why the Zaitsev never found much favour among the old masters – the move ... e5xd4 seems against the spirit of the Closed Ruy Lopez, which aims to hold onto e5 as a strongpoint. It took an appreciation of dynamics that is characteristic of the modern attitude towards chess, supported by a lot of concrete analysis, to prove that Black's activity gives just enough compensation for the 'positional mistake' of conceding the centre.

There are horrendous complications, with the mainline running 16 d5 Nd7 17 Ra3 c4 (or 17 ... f5!?) etc. White might have a slight plus here, but it is so theory intensive that I don't recommend it. Instead we'll follow Naiditsch's recipe in the main game.

12 d5!?



In most examples in this chapter, White only plays this advance in response to ... c7-c5 by Black. In such cases the pawn on d5 is safe from pawn attack, and only has to worry about its supporting pillar on e4 being undermined by ... f7-f5. Here things are different, as Black still has the option of ... c7-c6 to attack the pawn. White's idea is therefore *not* to maintain a pawn on d5 – as we shall see, he hopes instead to benefit from the resulting d5xc6 exchange.

12 ... Nb8 13 Nf1

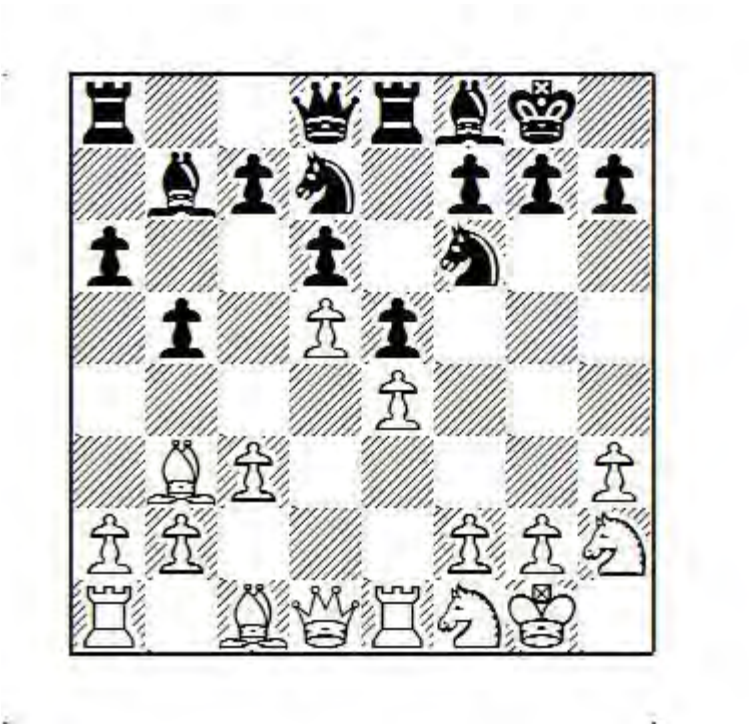
Our standard retreat, but this time with more specific ideas in mind than a general 'put the knight on g3 where it is well placed'. White anticipates Black's move ... c7-c6, and so prepares to bring his knight to e3 to fight for the outpost square on d5 that will appear after the reply d5xc6. At the same time the way is cleared for the bishop on c1 to join the attack.

13 ... Nbd7

Strategically speaking Black surely has to challenge White's d5-pawn at some point. However, first of all Efimenko brings his knight to c5, a centre square that has been left undefended by the advance 12 d5. A good point of this deployment is that the white bishop is chased from b3, and so won't enjoy an open diagonal aiming at f7 after the exchange d5xc6.

14 N3h2!

White replies with his own knight manoeuvre.



Question: What is the purpose of this move?

Surely White isn't preparing 15 f4, is he?

Answer: The move 15 f4? isn't part of White's plans at all. In that case after 15 ... exf4 it would be White, not Black, who had a hole in his centre. The black pieces could increase their grip on the e5-square with ... g7-g6 and ... Bg7.

Instead we are witnessing some very sophisticated positional jockeying. Still looking ahead to the d5xc6 exchange, White wants to make sure that he has more pieces than Black that can fight for the outpost square or – from Black's viewpoint – hole on d5. Therefore he prepares Ng4 to exchange off his knight for one of the black knights that exerts influence over d5.

14 ... Nc5

Here 14 ... Rc8!? is interesting, delaying the attack on d5. Then Ni Hua-M.Leon Hoyos, Reggio Emilia 2008, continued 15 Bg5 h5?! (not as crazy as it looks as Black wants to stop Ng4, but it still proves an unwarranted weakening of the kingside) 16 a4 g6 17 Nf3 Nc5 18 axb5 axb5 19 Bc2 c6 20 b4 Ncd7 21 dxc6 Bxc6 22 Bb3 Qc7 23 Nh4! (attacking g6) 23 ... Kg7 24 Ng3 and Black's kingside was menaced by the possibility of a 25 Nghf5+ sacrifice.

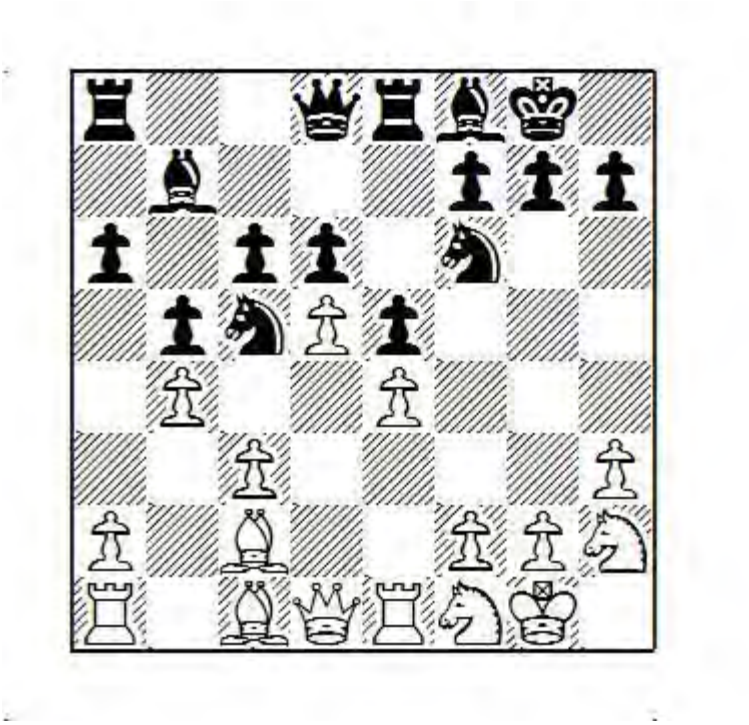
If 15 ... h6 (instead of 15 ... h5?!) 16 Bh4 Be7 White could build up typical pressure with 17 a4, for example 17..Nc5 (here 17 ... Nxd5?, trying to win a pawn by uncovering an attack on h4, rebounds after 18 Bxd5 winning a piece) 18 axb5 axb5 19 Bxf6 (a necessary precaution as after 19 Bc2 Nxd5! works for Black) 19 ... Bxf6 20 Bc2. Black will surely need to play ... c7-c6 at some point, so the idea behind 14 ... Rc8 appears to have missed its mark.

15 Bc2 c6

At last Black bites the bullet and makes the long awaited challenge to the d5-pawn.

16 b4

The well placed knight is driven back immediately, as otherwise after 16 dxc6 Bxc6 the e4-pawn is attacked three times, and besides the black knight would have access to a superior retreat square on e6.



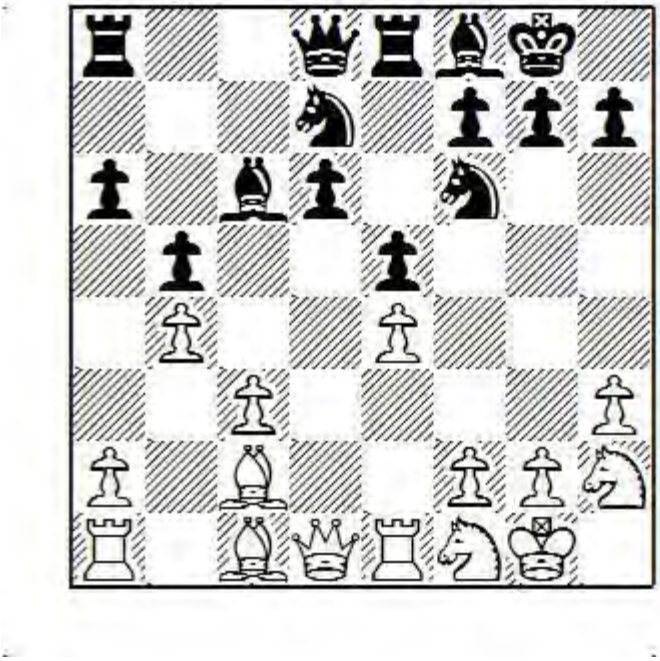
16 ... .Ncd7

Despite having to go back, the black knight's venture to c5 hasn't been in vain. Besides making the white bishop retire to c2, it has provoked a loosening of White's queenside pawn structure, allowing future counterplay against the backward pawn on c3.

17 dxc6

As discussed above, White is not interested in maintaining a pawn on d5. It would be a liability, not a source of strength, after 17 Ne3? ! cxd5 18 exd5. It is far better to have the d5-square cleared for his pieces.

17 ... Bxc6



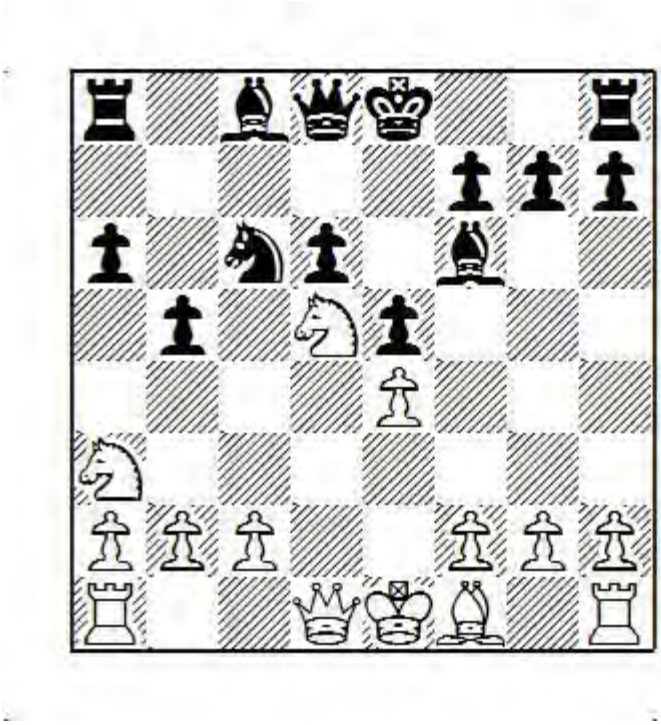
Exercise: We've talked about Ng4 at move 14, but can you

see another exchange that will help White's plan?

18 Bg5!

Answer: On the whole the move Bg5 gets a bad press in the Closed Lopez, as the exchange of White's bishop for a black knight is normally insipid to say the least. Here, however, the black horse can do something that is beyond the power of the colour blind cleric – it can directly control the d5-square. White is more than willing to part with the bishop pair if he gains mastery over d5 as a result.

It's not often that a comparison with events in the Sicilian Defence is of any help in understanding the Ruy Lopez, but consider this typical variation in the Sveshnikov: 1 e4 c5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 d4 cxd4 4 Nxd4 Nf6 5 Nc3 e5 6 Ndb5 d6 7 Bg5 a6 8 Na3 b5 9 Nd5 Be7 10 Bxf6 Bxf6.



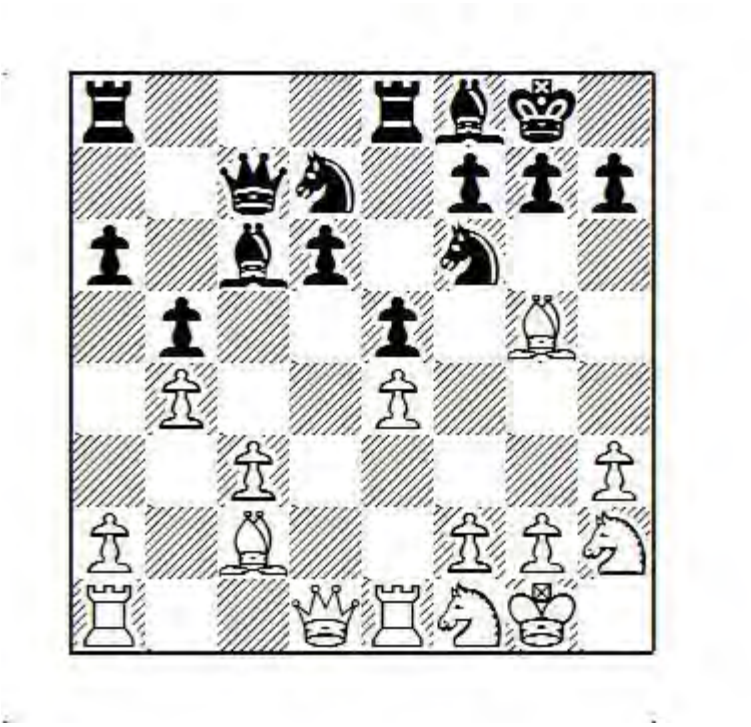
White has removed the immediate challenger to his knight on d5, but the fight for the square isn't over yet: 11 c3! (even more

important than developing the kingside is an immediate preparation to bring the knight on a3 into the battle for the d5-square) 11 ... 0-0 12 Nc2 (ready to go to e3 or in some cases b4 to support the other knight) 12 ... Bg5 (unable to directly fight for d5, the bishop prepares in some cases to eliminate a piece that can – with ... Bxe3 if White plays his knight from c2 to e3) 13 a4! (to clear the way for his bishop to support d5) 13 ... bxa4 14 Rxa4 a5 15 Bc4 Rb8 16 b3 Kh8 17 Nce3 Be6 and the battle for the key square is in full swing.

Notice that both in this Sveshnikov variation and the Lopez line under investigation almost everything revolves around one vital centre square. In this type of centre pawn structure the concept of the bishop pair as something precious that shouldn't be dispensed with is irrelevant – even in an attacking opening like the Sicilian.

18 ... Qc7

Black breaks the pin on f6 and reminds White that he also has his weaknesses along the c-file.



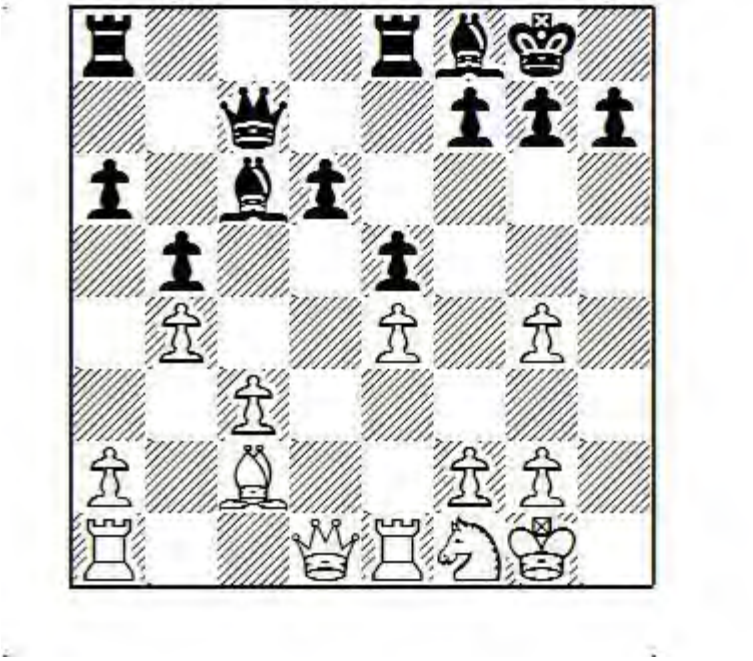
Exercise: See if you can guess White's next two moves.

(Hint: we want Black's knights off the board!)

Answer: **19 Bxf6! Nxf6 20 Ng4 Nxg4**

Question: How should White recapture on g4?

21 hxg4



Answer: I hope you aren't considering the finer points of whether it is better to have the pawn on g4 as an attacking weapon, or to activate the queen, as 21 Qxg4? undoes all the work of our strategy: Black can advance 21 ... d5! to dissolve the hole on d5, and after 22 exd5 Bxd5 he has the better pawn structure (just look at c3) and we can start talking about the value of the bishop pair again. In such situations, a move like 21 ... d5 should only be permitted if White has a tactical refutation in mind – for example if after 22 exd5 Bxd5 the bishop on c2 could have struck a blow down the long diagonal at h7. But such not being the case, the queen capture is simply a strategic disaster for White.

After the game move, the odds of Naiditsch achieving supremacy over d5 are increasing: now there is only one black minor piece that has influence over the square, whereas White has potentially two.

21 ... a5?!

Efimenko seeks counterplay by wearing down the white queenside pawns.

Exercise: Can you see a more circumspect move for Black?

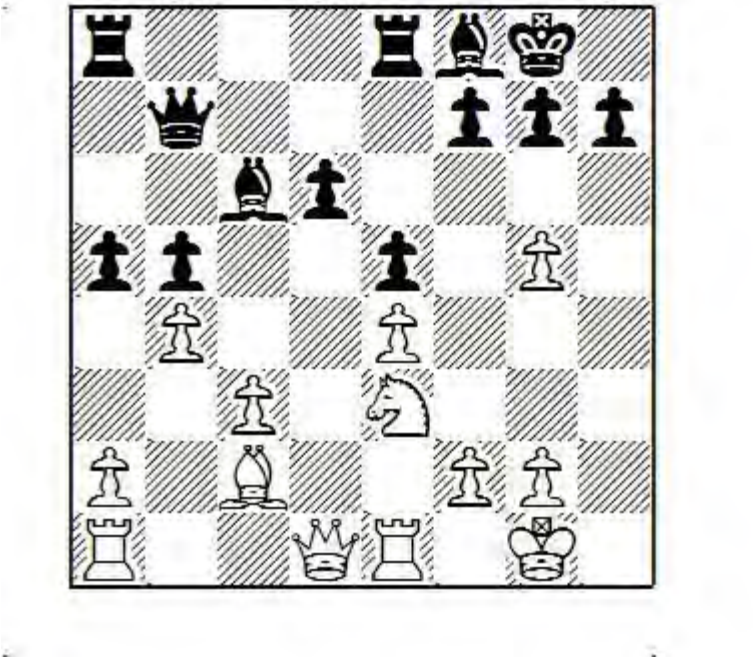
(Hint: the game continues 22 Ne3 Qb7 23 g5)

Answer: With 21 ... Be7! Black could stop the advance of White's g-pawn (the reason why 23 g5 is a good move is explained below).

Then in the big-name game A.Shirov-S.Karjakin, Odessa 2010, White got some advantage with a pawn offer: 22 Ne3 Bg5 23 Bb3 (here 23 Qd3!? might be a little better for White) 23 ... a5 24 Nd5 Qb7 and now 25 a4! (Mikhalevski) is good for White, but the critical test is surely 23 ... Bxe4 24 Bd5 Bxd5 25 Nd5 Qc6. White has a strong knight and chances to put pressure on the queenside, but I don't trust it for him, e.g. if 26 a4 bxa4 27 Rxa4 Black can upset the apple cart with 27 ... Bd2! overloading the white queen who can't defend both a4 and d5.

Instead White might delay Ne3 for a while so that e4 remains defended, e.g. 22 Bb3, when after 22 ... Bg5 23 Qf3 Rf8 24 Ne3 Bxe3 25 Rxe3 Bd7 26 Rd3 a5 27 bxa5 Rxa5 28 Rad1 Ra6 29 R1d2 Be6 30 Qd1 Rd8 31 g5 Qe7, as in B.Vuckovic-E.Inarkiev, Budva 2009, White might have a small plus with 32 Qh5.

22 Ne3 Qb7 23 g5!



White cramps the black kingside and prepares for a future Qh5 in combination with the rook lift Re3 and Rh3 to create threats against h7. Of course such a plan, if it turns out to be feasible, is a long way off and has to be adapted to meet the particular circumstances that arise in the game. But it is useful to have the pawn on g5, as will be proved in another 14 moves by White's game-winning combination.

23 ... axb4

Question: Why not grab the e-pawn with 23 ... .Bxe4

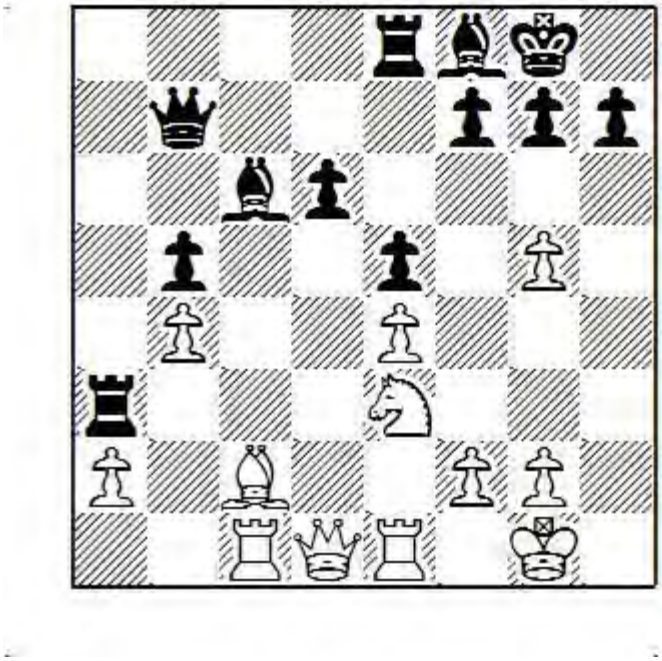
or next move with 24 ... .Bxe4?

24 cxb4 Ra3

Answer: If 24 ... Bxe4 25 Bxe4 Qxe4 26 Nd5 and next move White will win the exchange with 27 Nc7, unless Black plays 27 ... Qc4 when 28 Nb6 does the trick. Black could pick up a couple of pawns for the exchange but the passive bishop on f8 would ensure that White had the better of it. If Black had on the previous move played 23 ... Qxb4 the same mechanism would have cost him the exchange.

25 Rc1

Naiditsch refuse to let his pieces be tied down to his pawns. If now 25 ... .Bxe4, then 26 Bxe4 Qxe4 27 Nc2 wins the exchange.

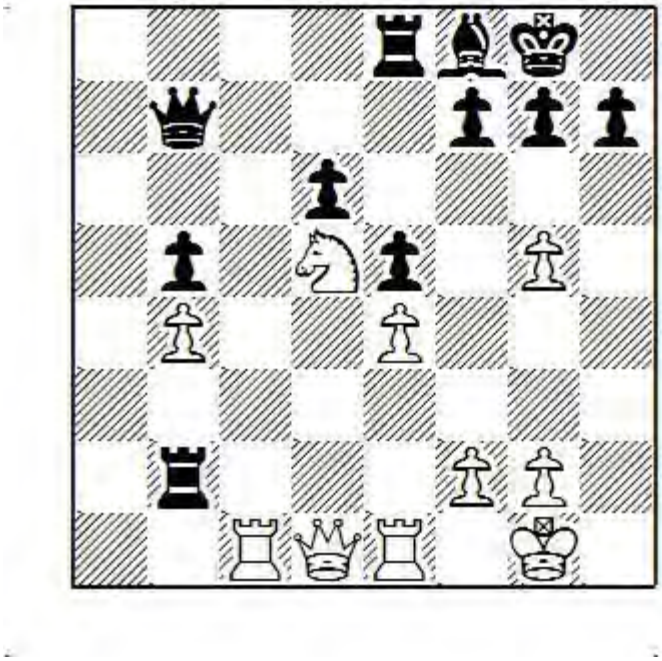


Exercise: Can you work out how White responds to 25 ... Rxa2 in the game? (Give yourself full marks for strategic awareness if you see his plan.)

Answer: **25 ... Rxa2 26 Bb3! Rb2 27 Bd5 Bxd5 28 Nxd5**

Compare the position here with the situation before 25 Rc1. Black has an extra pawn and a rook on the seventh rank; but White's position has improved far more. He has got his passive rook on a1 to an open file and is even threatening to invade with 29 Rc7. He has exchanged off his bishop on c2 which had a defensive role in guarding e4, for Black's bishop on c6 which was attacking the pawn. But most important of all, White has got his knight to its dream square on d5. There is no black pawn or minor piece that can dislodge it, and it would be hard for Black to arrange ... Rxd5, even if he were willing to sacrifice the exchange. The knight is therefore for all intents invincible on d5. It dominates the black bishop on f8, which has a purely defensive role.

It is no wonder that the white pieces, spearheaded by their brilliant knight, are able to start an attack on the black king that is far more potent than anything the black rooks and queen, who get no help from their own minor piece, can muster against the white king.



28 ... .Rc8

Exercise: Black contests the c-file. Can you see how

White can wrest control of it?

Answer: **29 Re3!**

On the third rank the rook can go 'left' to seize the c-file, or 'right' to attack the black king – or, as we shall see, it can do both.

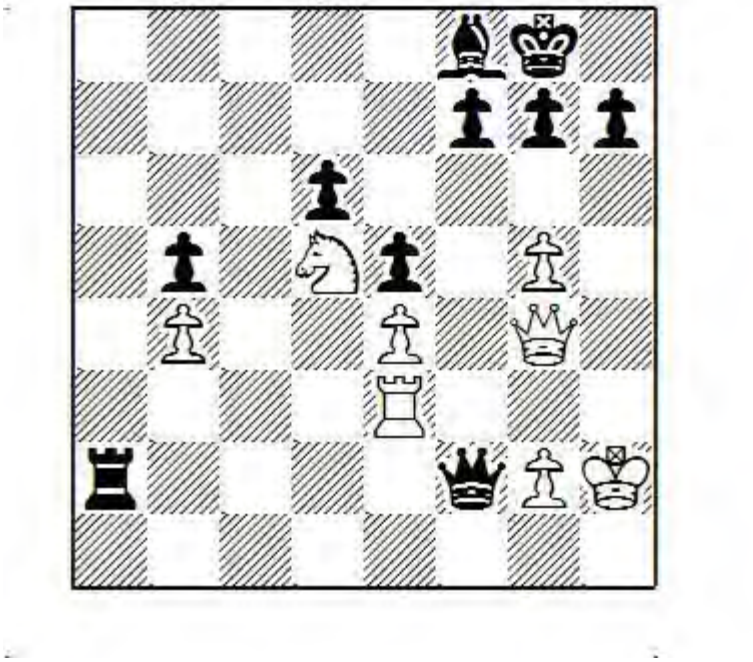
29 ... Rxc1 30 Qxc1 Ra2 31 Qd1!

The white queen wasn't distracted for long from the kingside.

31 ... Qa7 32 Qf3 Qd4 33 Rc3 Qd2 34 Re3

It might appear that Naiditsch is being pushed around, but as discussed above the wonderful knight ensures that the logic of the position favours his attack, not Black's.

34 ... Ra1+ 35 Kh2 Ra2 36 Qg4 Qxf2



Exercise: See if you can spot White's combination here.

Besides his two extra pawns Efimenko has a very active queen and rook, with pressure against g2. However, it turns out that these pieces should have been defending their king – the bishop can't hold the fort on its own.

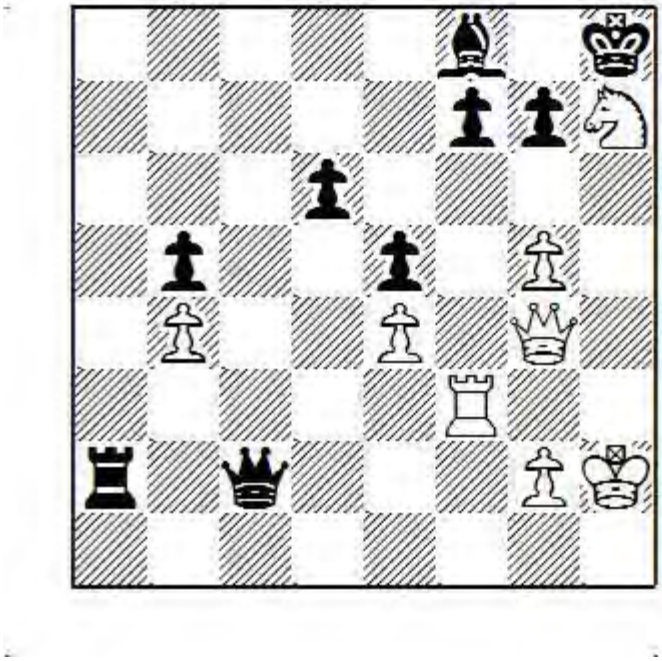
Answer: **37 Nf6+! Kh8**

After 37 ... gxf6 38 gxf6+ Kh8 39 Rg3 Black has to give up his queen to stop mate on g8: 39 ... Qxg3+ 40 Kxg3! and now the threat of 41 Qd7, or 41 Qc8 and 42 Qb8 to win the b5-pawn and create a passed pawn, is decisive.

38 Rf3

White aligns his rook against f7 with gain of time and so sets up his winning move.

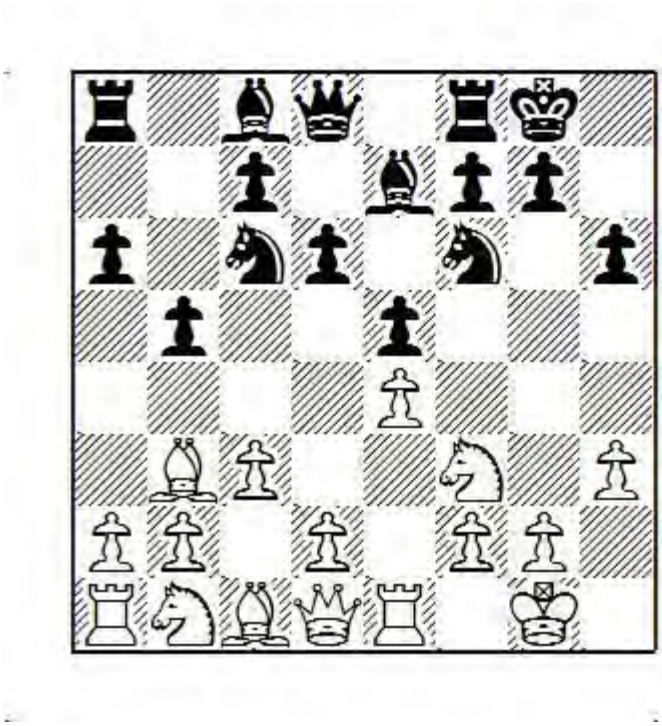
38 ... Qc2 39 Nxh7! 1-0



The game might end 39 ... Kxh7 (also leading to mate is 39 ... Be7 40 Rxf7 Kxh7 41 Qh3+ Kg8 42 Rxe7 Qxe4 43 Re8+ Kf7 44 Qe6 mate, while the endgame after 39 ... Qxg2+ 40 Qxg2 Rxg2+ 41 Kxg2 Kxh7 42 Rxf7 Kg8 43 Rb7 is entirely hopeless for Black) 40 Qh5+ Kg8 41 Qxf7+ Kh7 42 Rh3 mate.

The Smyslov Variation

The Smyslov Variation is named after former World Champion Vasily Smyslov (1921-2010), who played it against Tal in the 1961 USSR Championship. After **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3** the defining move of the Smyslov is **9 ... h6**.



The Smyslov is a rather old fashioned and passive option for Black, and it was only used by Kasparov in the illustrative game below

because he was trying to escape the computer's theory. Nonetheless, it is instructive to see games in which White is allowed to execute his standard ideas without any 'fog' of counterplay.

Game 17

Deep Blue-**G.Kasparov**

Man vs Machine, New York 1997

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 h6

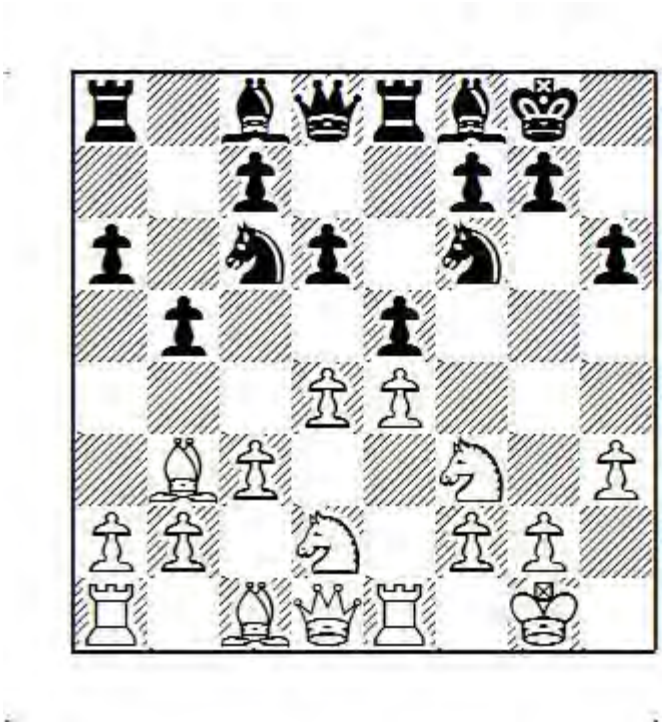
Despite being named after a brilliant master of strategical chess, this is hardly the best use of a precious tempo.

Question: But hold on! 9 ... h6 was played by Gary Kasparov,

the greatest theorist of all time.

Answer: As explained above, Kasparov is playing passively on purpose because he is facing a computer. Against a tactical behemoth he wants to block the centre and manoeuvre behind his lines. Back in 1997 the wisdom was that computers didn't handle closed positions well. But as we shall see, the World Champion is in for a surprise.

10 d4 Re8 11 Nbd2 Bf8



Question: Doesn't this prevent White's knight manoeuvre,

as after 12 Nf1 exd4 the e4-pawn is hanging?

12 Nf1!

Answer: Black is unable to prevent the white knight getting to the g3-square, for if 12 ... exd4 13 cxd4 Nxe4? 14 Bd5 and White wins a piece.

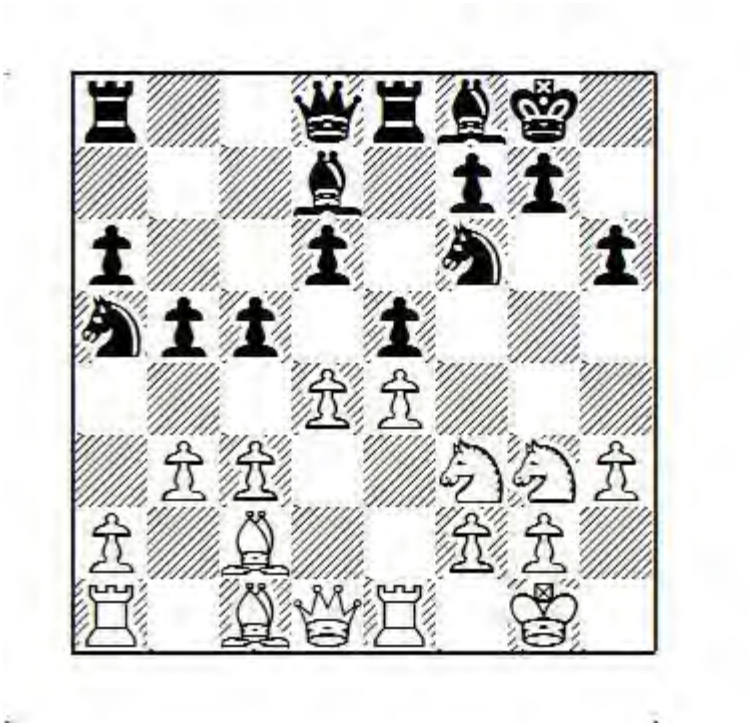
12 ... Bd7

Instead 12 ... Bb7, though certainly playable, would be closing the stable gate after the horse (or white knight) has bolted. Therefore Kasparov keeps the bishop on a diagonal where it fights for the f5-square.

13 Ng3 Na5

By arranging ... c7-c5, Black aims to force his opponent to make a decision over the type of pawn centre he wants in the middlegame.

14 Bc2 c5 15 b3



Keeping the black knight out of the c4-square, from where it could retreat if necessary to b6 and be better placed than in the game.

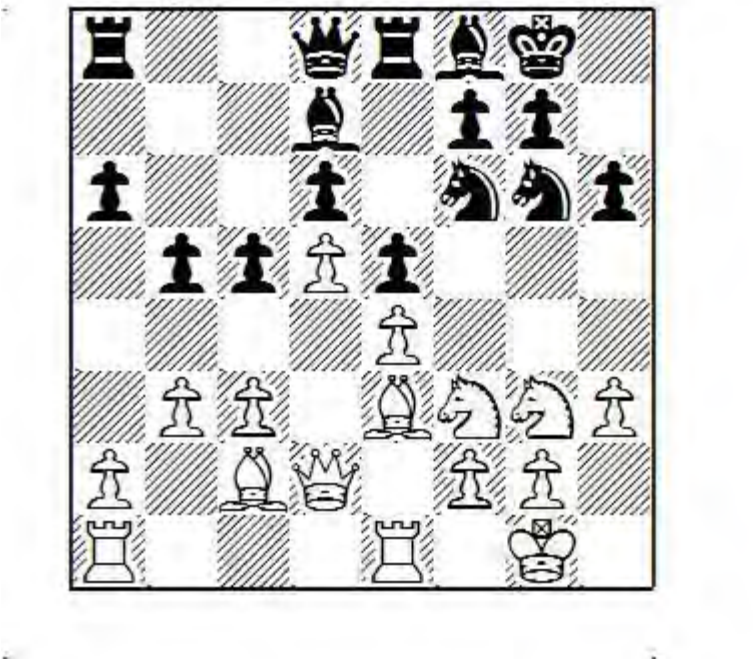
15 ... Nc6 16 d5

Deep Blue blocks the centre in the style of the Adams-Torre game we saw above.

16 ... Ne7 17 Be3

The bishop will enjoy an open diagonal pointing at a7 if White's pressure after b3-b4 removes the barrier on c5.

17 ... Ng6 18 Qd2



Question: Why does White stand better? On what side

of the board should he try to open lines?

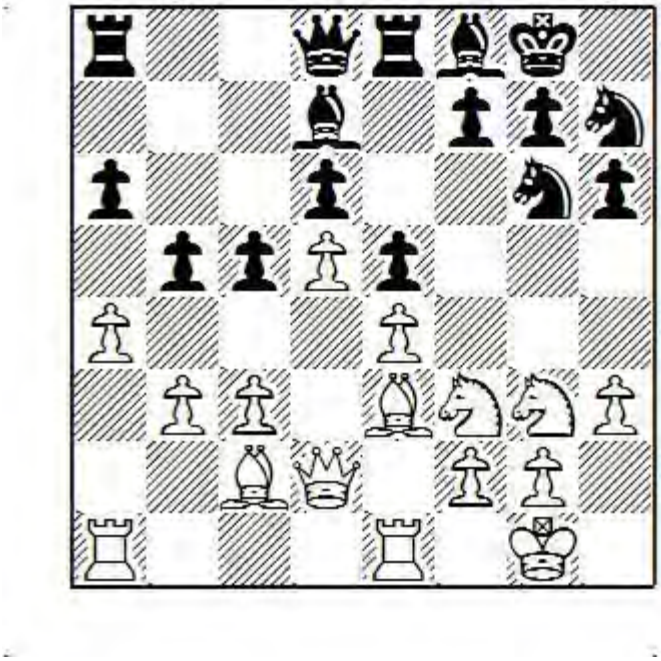
Answer: White is better due to his space advantage. Black's natural freeing move, the advance ... f7-f5, has been prevented. His pawns are therefore static, and as a consequence his pieces, bunched together on the kingside and lacking the air that ... f7-f5 would provide, are stifled.

In contrast, among the white pieces and pawns on the queenside we will soon see a positive feedback at work. His pieces are better placed than Black's to influence matters on that wing – we only need to compare the bishop on e3 with its entombed counterpart on f8 to understand this. Because of the potential of white pieces, the white pawns are energized, which in turn gives the pieces more opportunity to sparkle.

18 ... .Nh7?

In a cramped position, with no constructive way to gain counterplay, Kasparov falls back on a time honoured recipe – try to exchange some pieces. Nonetheless, his position would be a tough nut to crack after 18 ... Qc8 19 Kh2 Qb7 20 a4 Reb8, when the queenside is packed with black defenders. In contrast, the plan of ... Nh4 wastes a lot of time and allows White a freehand on the queenside.

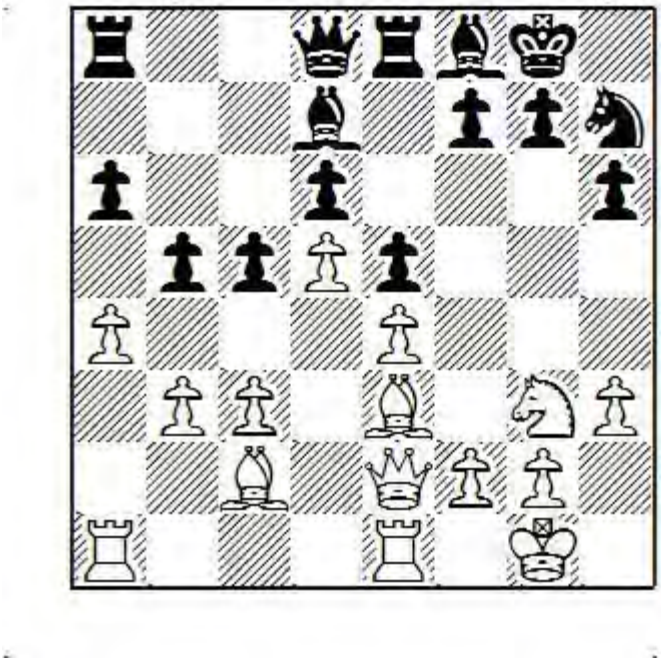
19 a4!



White begins to set up a queenside pawn structure that is familiar to us from other games in this chapter.

19 ... Nh4 20 Nxh4 Qxh4 21 Qe2 Qd8 22 b4 Qc7 23 Rec1 c4 24 Ra3! Rec8 25 Rca1 Qd8

Black defends a8 a second time so that 26 axb5 can be answered by 26 ... axb5, avoiding being left with a weak pawn on a6.



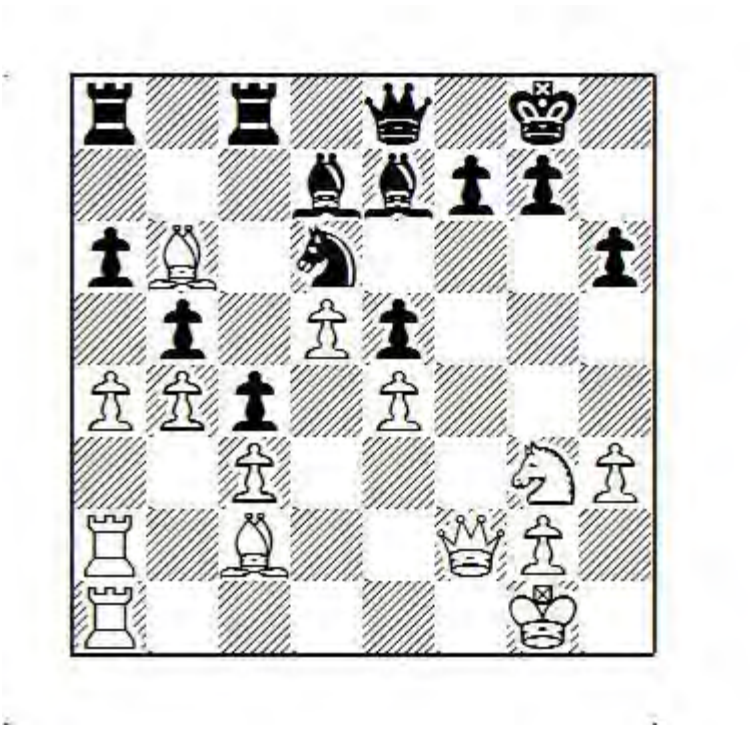
Exercise: It might seem that Kasparov is holding firm as he has kept White's queenside pressure within acceptable limits. But can you find Deep Blue's next move?

Answer: **26 f4!**

The computer plays a 'human' move. It understands that control of the a-file isn't enough to win the game by itself – White needs to open a second front in the centre. As we shall see when discussing White's winning plan at move 32 below, his knight and light-squared bishop having access to squares on the e-file and f-file proves vital.

If now 26 ... exf4 27 Bxf4 and White is ready to clear the diagonal of the bishop on c2 with 28 e5, or if 27 ... f6 then 28 h4!? leaves the knight on h7 shut out of the game and the black centre full of light-square holes.

26 ... Nf6 27 fxe5 dxe5 28 Qf1 Ne8 29 Qf2 Nd6 30 Bb6 Qe8 31 R3a2 Be7



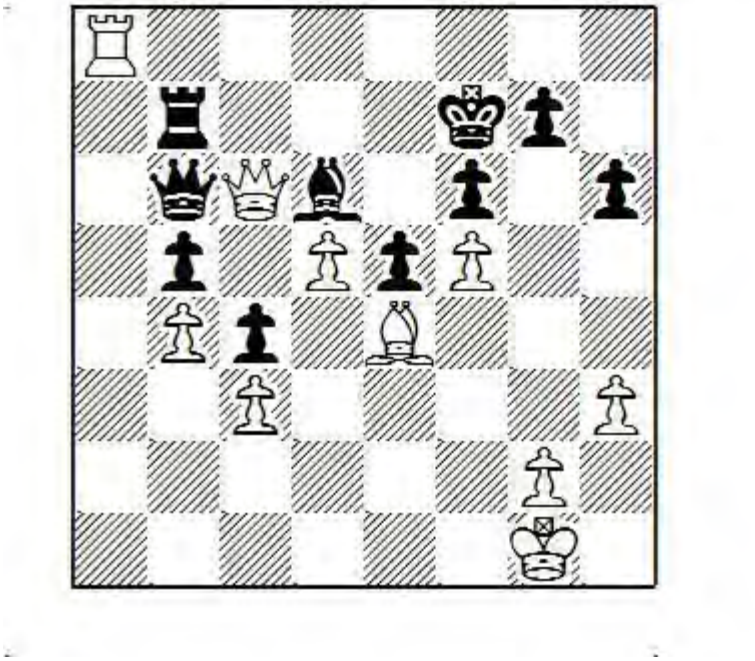
Exercise: Try to devise a step-by-step plan that will win the game for White.

Answer: **32 Bc5!**

Deep Blue can't think verbally like a human, but calculation will tell it what needs to be done: firstly, attack d6. Then play 33 Nf5! to force the exchange 33 ... Bxf5 34 exf5 which opens up the e4-square. After that, exchange again with 35 Bxd6 Bxd6. Then plug the e4-square with 37 Be4! to support d5 and rule out any black counterplay based on ... e5-e4. Finally, infiltrate with the queen and rooks on the queenside. The bishop on e4 and pawn on d5 will provide a base for the white queen on c6 which will help squash the black defenders, as a queen exchange on c6 would give White a lethal passed pawn.

The only danger is falling for a perpetual at the end of a long variation – but computers calculate pretty well, don't they?

32 ... Bf8 33 Nf5 Bxf5 34 exf5 f6 35 Bxd6 Bxd6 36 axb5 axb5 37 Be4! Rxa2 38 Qxa2 Qd7 39 Qa7 Rc7 40 Qb6 Rb7 41 Ra8+ Kf7 42 Qa6 Qc7 43 Qc6 Qb6+



Deep Blue has outplayed his opponent according to the plan outlined at move 32. Now it should have played 44 Kh1 with a clear win.

44 Kf1? Rb8 45 Ra6 1-0

After 45 ... Qxc6 46 dxc6 Rc8 47 Ra7+ Rc7 48 Ra5 (also good is 48 Ra8!?) White can capture on b5 with a simple win.

Only after he had resigned did Kasparov learn that there was a draw to be had with 45 ... Qe3! 46 Qxd6 Re8! 47 h4 h5 48 Bf3 Qc1+ 49 Kf2 Qd2+ 50 Be2 Qf4+, with perpetual.

The Steinitz Deferred and similar centre-holding ideas

Game 18

D.Stellwagen-M.Gagunashvili

Vlissingen 2004

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6

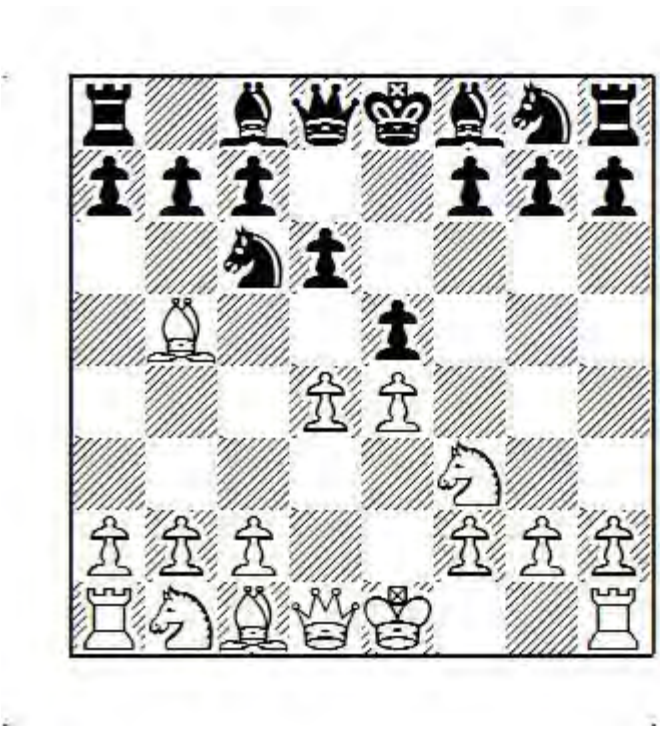
The game actually began with the move order 3 ... g6 4 0-0 Bg7 5 c3 a6 6 Ba4 d6 7 d4 Bd7 8 d5 etc, but I have amended it to reflect more usual practice.

Some other possibilities for Black should be considered:

a) We don't need to spend long analysing 3 ... Bb4, a bizarre move which actually encourages White to play the useful move c2-c3. The simplest response is 4 c3 Ba5 5 Na3! and White stands to gain time/acquire the bishop pair after 6 Nc4.

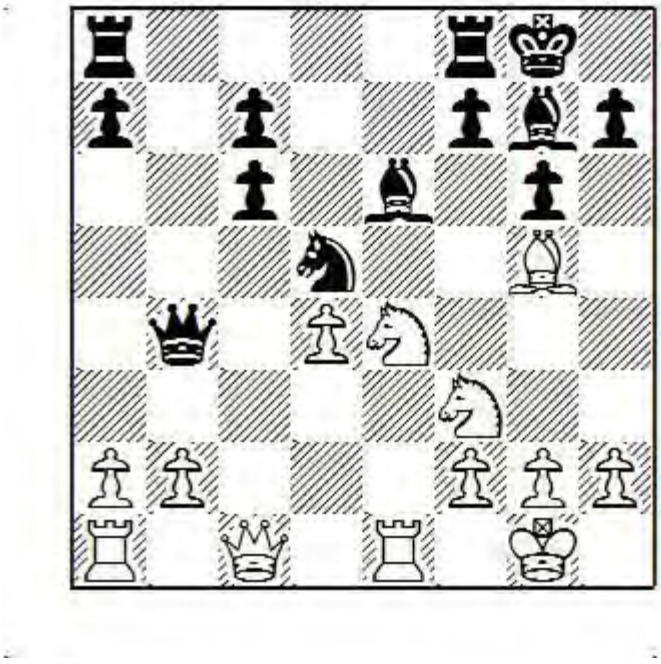
b) The reply 3 ... a5!? is best reserved for a blitz game against someone who likes to copy Magnus Carlsen by playing d2-d3 against everything, as now 4 d3?! Na7 5 Bc4 (or 5 a4 though 5 ... Nxb5 6 axb5 has rather justified Black's play) 5 ... b5 will win a piece by trapping the bishop with the pawns. However, the sacrifice 6 Bxf7+ Kxf7 7 Nxe5+ might be good for White. Naturally White shouldn't meddle in any of this – the simple 4 0-0 makes Black's third move look lousy.

c) Third up is 3 ... d6 which is the 'Old' version of the Steinitz (i.e. no 3 ... a6 4 Ba4 is thrown in before playing ... d7-d6). It suffers from the fundamental problem that after 4 d4! Black is unable to maintain his strong point on e5.



For example 4 ... Bd7 (trying to maintain the e5-pawn, as 4 ... exd4 4 Nxd4 is a small but pleasant edge for White) 5 Nc3 Nf6 (or 5 ... exd4 6 Nxd4 g6 7 Be3 Bg7 8 Qd2 Nf6 9 Bxc6 bxc6 10 Bh6! and the exchange of dark-squared bishops to neutralize Black's fianchetto works well for White – 10 ... 0-0 11 Bxg7 Kxg7 12 0-0-0 Re8 13 f3 Qb8 14 g4 and White has the superior attacking chances) 6 0-0 Be7 7 Bxc6 Bxc6 8 Qd3! (defending e4 so that the threat of 9 dxe5 pocketing a pawn is now real) 8 ... exd4 9 Nxd4 Bd7 10 b3 0-0 11 Bb2 c6 12 Rad1 Qc7 13 Rfe1. White has achieved a full development, with a space advantage and a general superiority in the centre that outweighs Black's bishop pair.

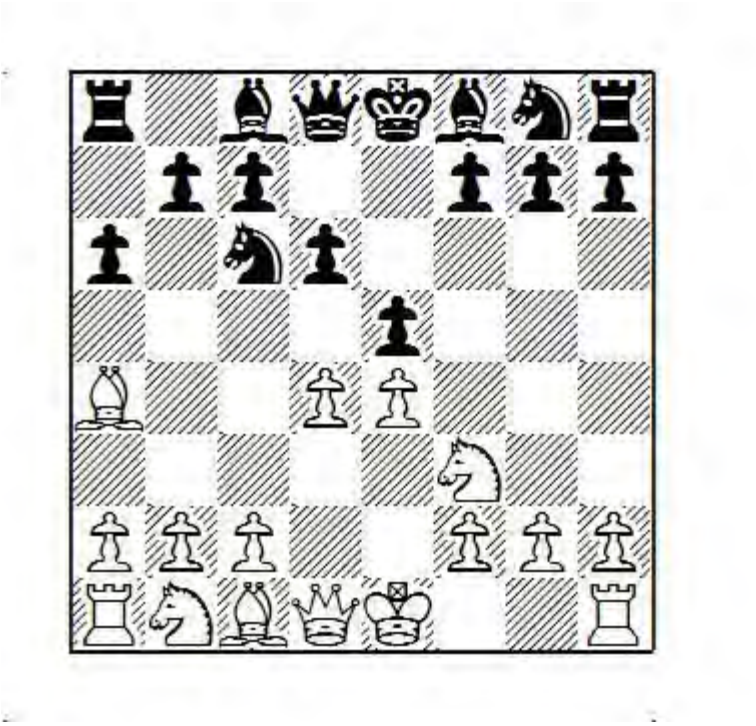
d) After 3 ... Nge7 4 0-0 g6 5 c3 Bg7 6 d4 Black is forced to concede the centre as White threatens 7 d5, attacking the knight on c6, then 8 d6 inflicting a pawn weakness on the d-file. So play typically goes 6 ... exd4 7 cxd4 d5 (gaining vital space for his pieces) 8 exd5 Nxd5 9 Re1+ Be6 10 Bg5 Qd6 11 Nbd2 0-0 12 Ne4 Qb4 13 Bxc6 bxc6 14 Qc1! and White can claim that the doubled black c-pawns are a more important factor than the two bishops.



In D.Kokarev-A.Alavkin, Izhevsk 2010, Black played 14 ... Qb6, defending c6 but allowing White to exchange off dark-squared bishops with 15 Bh6!. After 15 ... Rfe8 16 Bxg7 Kxg7 17 b3 Bf5 18 Nc5 Black was weak on the dark squares and even worse had no constructive plan available in the middlegame. He should have played 14 ... Rfe8 to avoid the bishop exchange, as the attack on c6 isn't yet critical – White's queen has to defend b2. Even so, 15 Bd2 Qb6 16 Nc5 Bf5 17 Ne5 left White with a grip on the dark squares in S.Azarov-H.Stevic, Warsaw 2005.

4 Ba4 d6

Black has adopted the Steinitz Deferred. If White now tries 5 d4?! (in the style of 3 ... d6 4 d4 in the note to 3 ... a6 above) the insertion of the moves ... a7-a6/Ba4 makes a profound difference.



Exercise: Can you work out how Black exploits this insertion?

Answer: Black has the intermezzo 5 ... b5 when after 6 Bb3 Nxd4 7 Nxd4 exd4 White is unable to recapture on d4 as 8 Qxd4? c5 9 Qd5 Be6 10 Qc6+ Bd7 11 Qd5 c4 wins his bishop with the celebrated Noah's Ark Trap.

So White would be reduced to a dubious gambit with 8 c3?! which doesn't give him enough after 8 ... dxc3. Or else he would have to give away his opening advantage in order to get the pawn back with 8 Bd5 Rb8 9 Bc6+ (or 9 Qxd4 Nf6) 9 ... Bd7 10 Bxd7+ Qxd7 11 Qxd4, when after 11 ... Nf6 12 Nc3 Be7 13 0-0 0-0 Black is already better.

5 c3

A simple, straightforward plan: White edges his centre pawns forwards, first building a structure on c3 and d4, and then expanding to d5 and c4.

5 ... Bd7

In contrast to the Closed Lopez, Black is under no compulsion to play ... b7-b5: his e5 point can be maintained without making that concession. However, he needs to anticipate the threat of d4-d5, and as we shall see putting the bishop on d7 isn't without a positional drawback of its own – see the note to 8 d5.

The gambit alternative 5 ... f5!? is the so-called 'Siesta' Variation and can be found in Chapter Five.

6 d4 g6

After 6 ... Nge7 7 0-0 Ng6 White can play in the style of the main game with 8 d5!?. For example 8 ... .Nb8 9 c4 Be7 10 Nc3 h6 11 b4 a5 12 a3 0-0 13 Be3 Bxa4 as in A.Motylev-J.Timman, Gothenburg 2005, and now Erenburg's suggestion of 14 Qxa4!? activating the queen looks good for White after 14 ... Nd7 15 Qb5.

7 0-0 Bg7

We have already discussed the importance of this fianchetto in Chapter One. The bishop is excellently placed on g7, where it guards e5 and solidifies the black kingside. The ... g7-g6 part of the fianchetto is also of great value, as it defends f5 – a square that in the Closed Lopez is often threatened with invasion by Nf5.

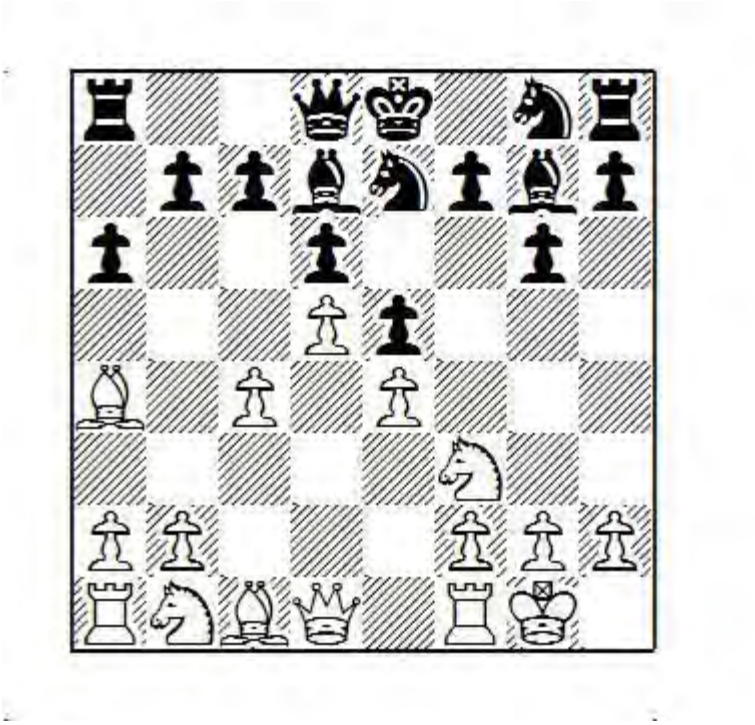
8 d5

White bypasses the e5-pawn in order to seize more space. A King's Indian style pawn structure is established, and the resulting exchange of light-squared bishops favours White – see the note to move 11.

8 ... Nce7

Note how astute Black has been to delay the development of his king's knight. If he had played ... Nge7, his other knight wouldn't now have this centre post – it would have had to retreat to b8 or another inferior square. Alternatively if Black had played ... Ngf6 he wouldn't be able to advance with ... f7-f5 so quickly.

9 c4



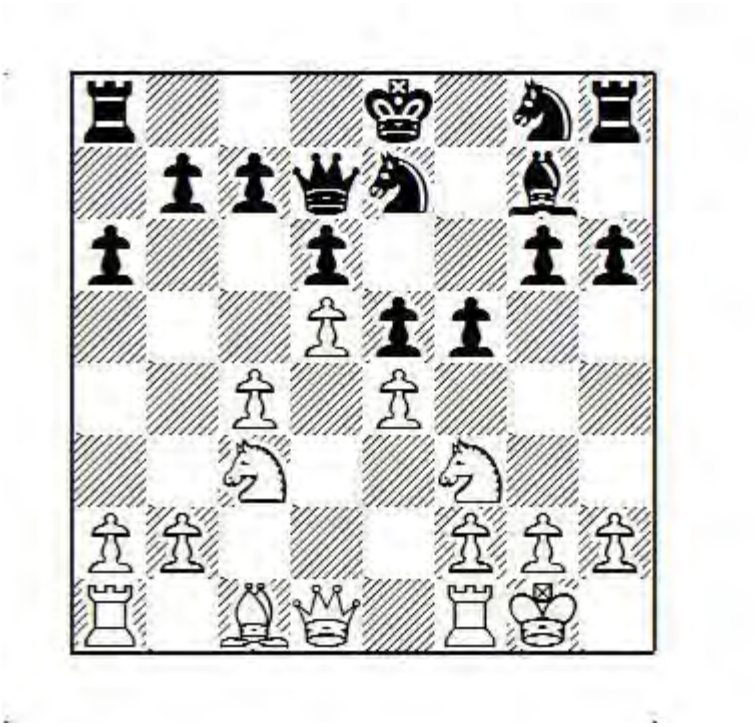
9 ... h6

Question: Why does he play this little pawn move?

Answer: If 9 ... f5 10 Ng5! and the white knight will invade on e6. This would be a positional catastrophe. Black has to be especially vigilant about his light squares in view of the looming exchange of bishops on d7.

10 Nc3 f5 11 Bxd7+ Qxd7

As mentioned above, we have a pawn structure akin to that in the King's Indian Defence, for example after the moves 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 e4 d6 5 Nf3 0-0 6 Be2 e5 7 0-0 Nc6 8 d5 Ne7.



Exercise: Have a think about how the Steinitz version compares with the King's Indian version. Which would you rather play as White?

Answer: In this Steinitz version, White has spent a little more time setting up his King's Indian pawn structure: two moves with his c-pawn. On the other hand, the exchange of light-squared bishops is a big plus for him. In the King's Indian proper, White's bishop usually languishes inside its pawn structure (on e2 in the extract given). Meanwhile Black's bishop on c8 is his 'good' bishop and often plays an important part in his kingside operations once he advances with ... f7-f5. So because of the demise of Black's good bishop, I would prefer to play the Steinitz version as White.

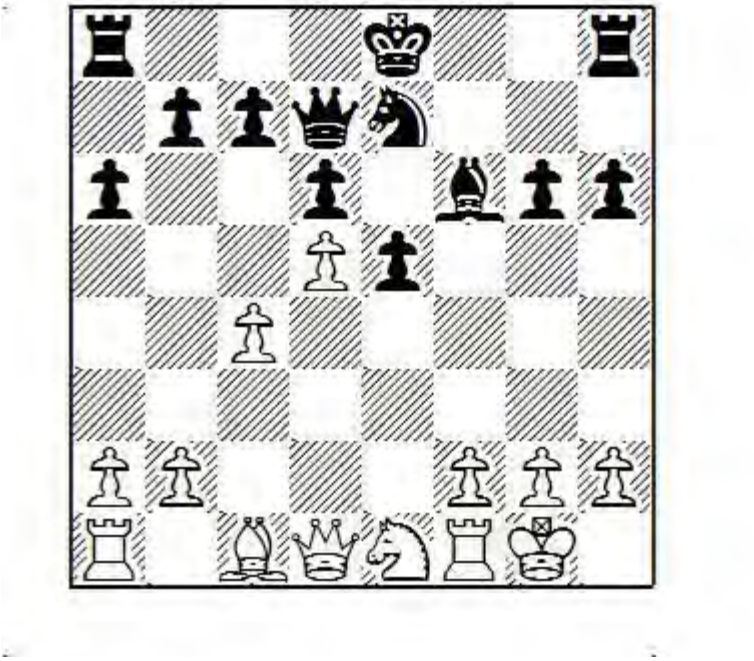
12 Ne1!

An important move also borrowed from the King's Indian. White intends to fortify his e4 point with 13 f3, after which 14 Nd3 will recentralize the knight and prepare action on the queenside with c4-c5. This provokes Black into immediate action in the centre.

12 ... fxe4

A dubious decision as the e4-square becomes an excellent base for a white knight. Still, 12 ... Nf6 13 f3 looks like a pleasant edge for White.

13 Nxe4 Nf6 14 Nxf6+ Bxf6



Question: How can White re-establish his ascendancy over the e4-square?

Answer: **15 Nf3!**

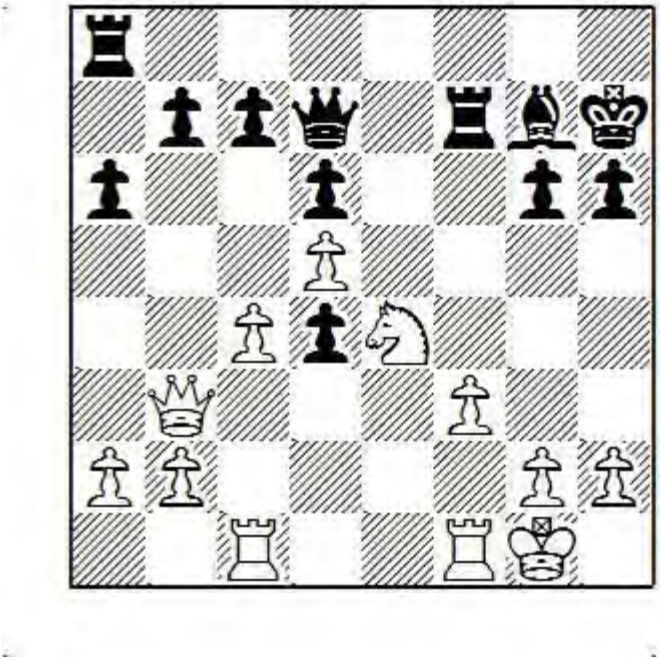
An excellent manoeuvre: the knight goes back to f3 and then to d2 en route to e4.

15 ... Bg7 16 Nd2 0-0 17 Ne4 Nf5

Perhaps Black should have prepared to challenge the knight on e4 with a knight manoeuvre of his own: 17 ... Kh7, 18 ... Ng8 and 19 ... Nf6.

18 Be3 Nd4 19 Rc1 Kh7 20 f3 Rf7 21 Bxd4 exd4 22 Qb3

Stellwagen has clearly won the opening battle as Black's 'bad' bishop is no match for the knight on e4. He now doubles rooks on the e-file, rearranges the pawn structure in the most favourable manner, and prepares the best moment for simplification.



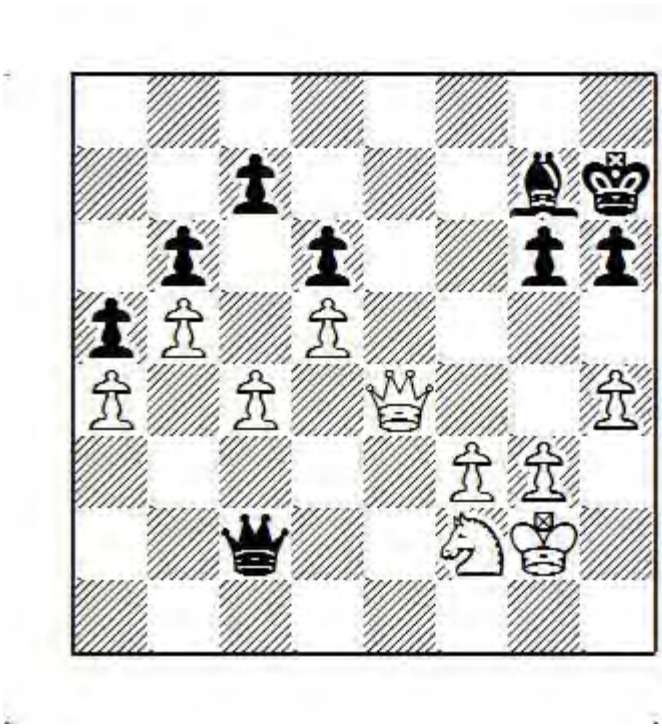
22 ... b6 23 Rce1 Re8 24 Re2 Rfe7 25 Rfe1 Kh8 26 Qd3 Qf5 27 b4 Re5 28 a4 Qf7 29 b5 a5 30 g3 Qf5 31 Kg2 R5e7 32 h4 Kg8 33 Nf2!

A well calculated retreat.

33 ... Re3

A desperate attempt to gain counterplay. Instead after 33 ... Qxd3 34 Rxe7 the exchange 34 ... Rxe7 35 Nxd3 leaves Black in a horrible endgame, while if 34 ... Qxc4 35 Rxe8+ Bf8 36 R1e7 Qxd5 37 Ng4 and the black king is soon mated.

34 Rxe3 dxe3 35 Rxe3 Rxe3 36 Qxe3 Qc2 37 Qe8+ Kh7 38 Qe4!



Black has no time for 38 ... Qxa4 because of 39 h5 when g6 drops.

38 ... Qd2

The last chance is to pin the knight with ... Bd4.

39 Qd3 Qb2 40 h5 Bd4 41 Qxg6+ Kh8 42 Qe8+ Kg7 43 Qe7+ Kh8 44 Qd8+ Kh7 45 Qxc7+ Kg8 46 Qd8+ Kg7 47 Qe7+ Kh8 48 Qe8+ Kg7 49 Qg6+ 1-0

After 49 ... Kh8 50 Qxh6+ Kg8 51 Qe6+ Kh8 52 Qe1 White can begin to advance his passed pawns.

Chapter Three

Black Plays ... Bc5

Here we shall examine the following defences:

1. The Classical (or Cordel) Defence

2. The Berlin Defence with ... Bc5

3. The Møller Defence

4. Bird's Defence

... and other lines with ... Bc5 that fall somewhere between these defences.

Question: Why is ... Bc5 played?

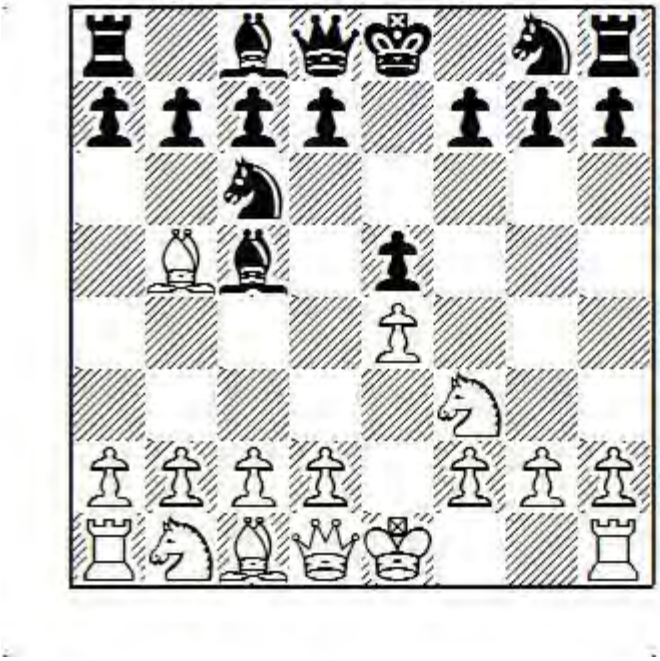
Answer: In the Closed Lopez, the black bishop on f8 often struggles to find an active role. It is normally shut in by an early ... d7-d6, with Black frequently resorting to the time-consuming sequence ... Be7, ... Bf8 (after he has played ... 0-0 and ... Re8), ... g7-g6 and ... Bg7 to get the bishop to a useful square. The idea of a quick ... Bc5 is therefore attractive for Black: he gets his bishop outside of its pawn chain before playing ... d7-d6, puts pressure on f2 and deters the advance d2-d4.

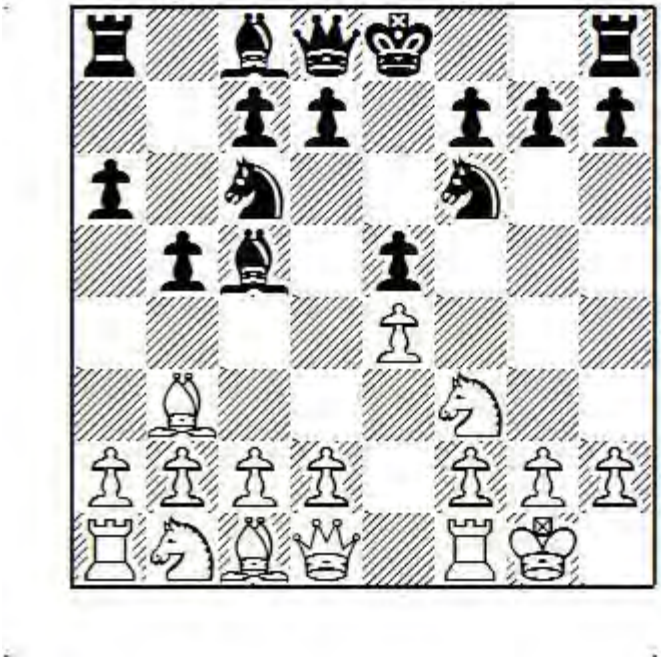
Question: When is ... Bc5 played?

Answer: At any time Black wishes to play it! For example the bishop might go to c5 on move three, or be held back a couple of moves.

The diagrams show the position after 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Bc5, the Classical (or Cordel) Defence; and after 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 b5 6 Bb3 Bc5, the Møller Defence.

The reader might be surprised to see 3 ... Nd4, Bird's Defence, included in this chapter. But after the exchange 4 Nxd4 exd4, Black usually develops his bishop outside his pawn structure in support of d4 with ... Bc5.





Question: What are the disadvantages of ... Bc5?

Answer: Of course we have come here to bury the ... Bc5 move, not praise it. So let's consider some of its potential drawbacks.

Firstly, whilst it temporarily hinders White's d2-d4 advance, it actually encourages the build up c2-c3 and d2-d4, which gains a tempo by hitting the bishop.

Secondly, if Black has delayed the move ... d7-d6 then in some cases White can detonate the black centre in a favourable manner with the pseudo-piece sacrifice Nxe5. After Black replies ... Nxe5, d2-d4 regains the piece by forking the black knight and bishop. This is the so-called *Fork Trick*.

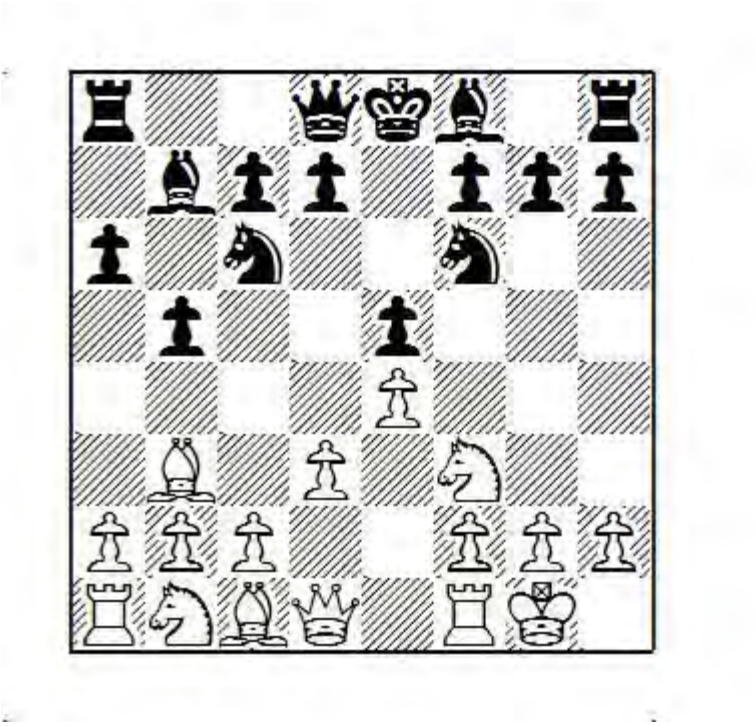
Thirdly, in playing ... Bc5, Black is removing a defender from his kingside. A subsequent ... d7-d6 (or ... Bb6) then cuts out any chance the bishop might return to e7 or f8 in a crisis. Therefore White has more chance to gain the initiative on the kingside, for example with Bg5 – a strong pin now that the black bishop is far away – or with the usual build-up involving Nf1 and Ng3, as Black can't build a fortress with ... g7-g6 (stopping Nf5) and ... Bg7.

Fourthly, with regard to 3 ... Bc5, the typical retreat ... Bb6, either in response to c2-c3 and d2-d4, or in anticipation of it, leaves the bishop vulnerable to an unfavourable exchange for a white knight.

In the Møller Defence of the second diagram above, where Black has played 5 ... .b5, there is a different, but even more pressing problem with ... Bb6. The b5-pawn is far more exposed to a quick attack than is normal in the Closed Lopez. Black not only spends time developing his bishop rather than securing his centre, but also cuts off the natural defence of the pawn with ... Rb8 by putting the bishop on the b6-square. Thus in the second diagram White can already get the initiative with 7 a4!.

Don't forget you can play d2-d3!

I should remind you that we already have a d2-d3 repertoire against the Møller and the Archangelsk from Chapter One of the book. In fact after the Archangelsk sequence 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 b5 6 Bb3 Bb7, where Black puts his bishop on b7 before playing ... Bc5, the plan of 7 d3! can't be bettered.



So I don't propose to look at anything new here and recommend you follow the Carlsen-Beliavsky game of Chapter One that continued 7 ... Bc5 8 Nc3. Notice that I cheated there to make it fit into a 5 d3 repertoire, but here you can follow the usual move order as given above.

Regarding the Møller, I've given the critical mainline because in my opinion it is the most dangerous thing Black has to face, and White should 'call his bluff'. On the other hand, if you really don't have the stomach for complications then the Berg-Rudd recipe in Chapter One is for you, but with the move order 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 b5 6 Bb3 Bc5 7 d3.

The Classical (or Cordel) Defence

Game 19

V.Anand-V.Tkachiev

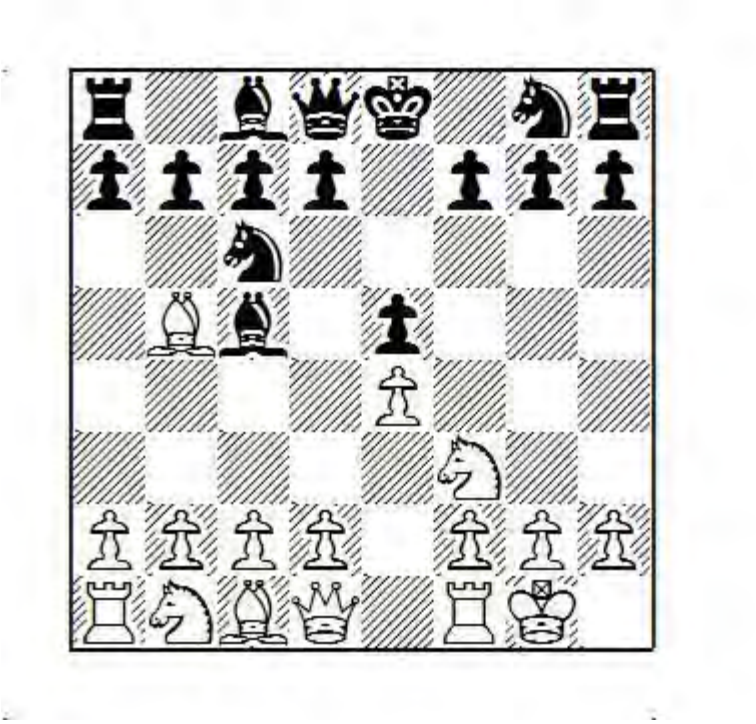
Moscow (blitz) 2009

The following was a blitz game, but Anand handled the opening in exemplary style.

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Bc5

This is the Classical (or Cordel) Defence. The basic tactic that justifies this idea is that 4 Bxc6 dxc6 5 Nxe5? fails to 5 ... Qd4, hitting – in order of importance – f2, e5 and e4. Black will regain his pawn with at least equality. Nonetheless, the need for Black to defend and maintain e5 is soon going to become critical. And then the question arises: is ... Bc5 a luxury that Black can't really afford?

4 0-0



The simplest. White gets his king to safety as a prelude to building up in the centre with c2-c3 and d2-d4. Black's immediate task is to meet the threat of Bxc6 and Nxe5.

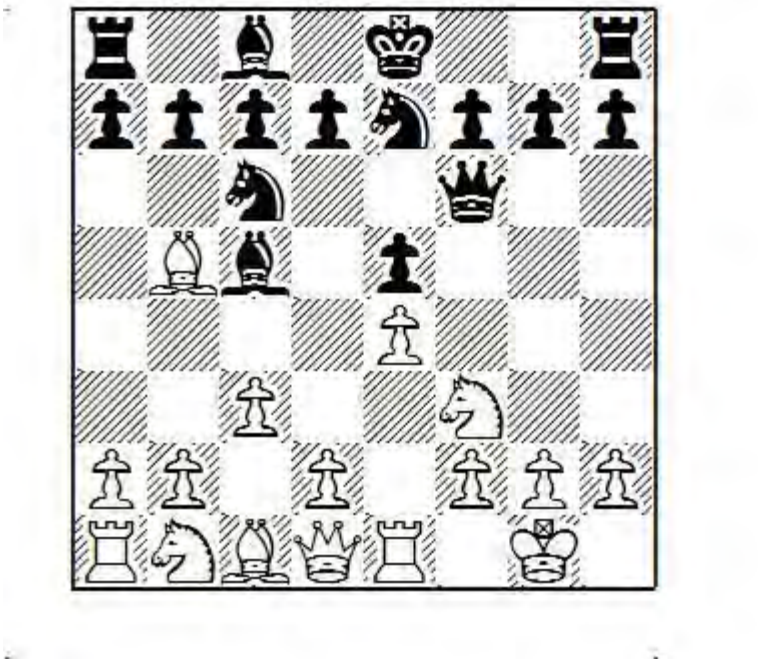
As a practical decision, it's probably best for White to steer clear of the more complex 4 c3 f5!? (instead 4 ... Nge7 5 0-0 transposes to 4 0-0 Nge7 5 c3 below). This line has been championed for Black by GM Ivan Sokolov, with the mainline running 5 d4 fxe4 6 Bxc6 dxc6 7 Nxe5. His latest try is 7 ... Bd6!? when Black survived in A.Motylev-I.Sokolov, Poikovsky 2010, after 8 Qh5+ g6 9 Qe2 Bf5.

4 ... Nd4

Paying homage to Bird's Defence. Black has various alternatives here.

Firstly, he could transpose to the Berlin Defence, ... Bc5 variation, with 4 ... Nf6 (see the next game).

Secondly, 4 ... Qf6 is a well meaning gesture by the black queen – she defends e5, fights against the d2-d4 advance and hopes to become active in the middlegame. The downside is that she denies the knight on g8 its natural square and can become exposed to attack. After 5 c3 Nge7 I like the quiet preparatory move 6 Re1!.



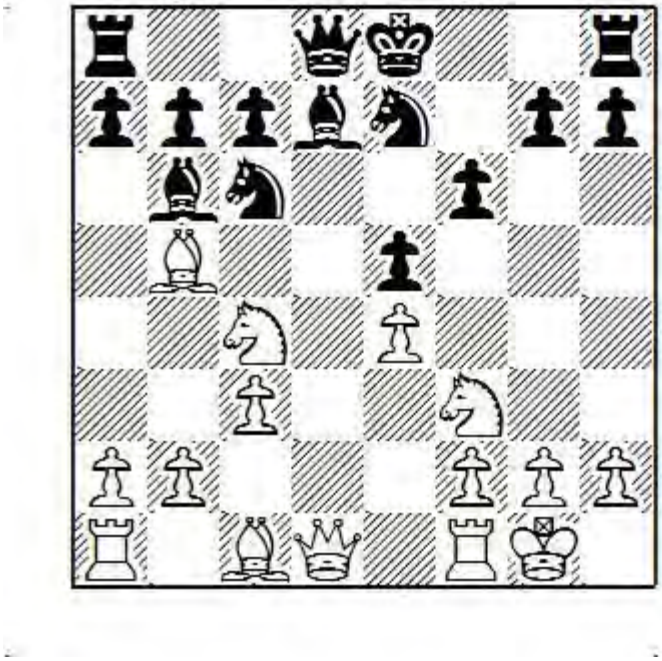
Then 6 ... d6 self pins the knight on c6 which thereby loses control over d4, making 7 d4! a very strong response. If instead 6 ... 0-0 7 d4 and Black can't maintain his pawn on e5. After 7 ... exd4 8 e5! (the reason I like 6 Re1!), both 8 ... Qe6 9 Ng5!? Qg6 10 Bd3 f5 11 exf6 Qxf6 12 Bxh7+ Kh8 13 Bd3 and 8 ... Qg6 9 b4 Bb6 10 Bd3 Qh5 11 b5 Nd8 12 cxd4 give White a substantial advantage.

Thirdly, after 4 ... Nge7 Black can't maintain a pawn on e5. Nonetheless he can counterpunch with ... d7-d5, which stops him being overrun in the centre. A long established variation gives White some advantage: 5 c3 Bb6 6 d4 exd4 (if 6 ... d6? 7 d5 wins, so Black is forced to concede his strongpoint) 7 cxd4 d5 (an essential grab of space) 8 exd5 Nxd5 9 Re1+ Be6 10 Bg5 Qd6 11 Nbd2 0-0 12 Nc4 Qb4 (the harassed queen finally has to abandon the defence of her pawn structure) 13 Bxc6 bxc6 14 Rc1 and the weak pawn on c6 means that Black hasn't equalized.

Finally, 4 ... d6 bolsters e5, but we can employ a familiar plan: chase the black bishop back to b6 with c2-c3 and d2-d4, and then gain the bishop pair with Nbd2 (or Na3) followed by Nc4 and Nxb6. For example 5 c3 Bd7 6 d4 Bb6 7 dxe5 and now:

a) 7 ... Nxe5 8 Nxe5! leaves Black with no good reply as 8 ... dxe5 9 Qd5! costs him a pawn, since b7 and e5 are both hanging – if 9 ... Bxb5 10 Qxe5+ and 11 Qxb5. Or if Black tries 8 ... Bxb5, he falls for the trap 9 Nxf7! (10 Qd5!? also looks good) 9 ... Kxf7 10 Qh5+ and 11 Qxb5, regaining the piece a pawn up.

b) 7 ... dxe5 8 Nbd2 Nge7 9 Nc4 f6 was played in the game A.Onischuk-F.De la Paz Perdomo, Monterrey 2010.



Question: Now what is the best way for White to increase his advantage?

Answer: Grandmaster Onischuk played 10 a4!. An instructive moment: White could grab the bishop pair with 10 Nxb6 axb6, but Onischuk is astute enough to make Black weaken his queenside pawns to deal with the threat of a4-a5, trapping the bishop. Then Nxb6 will come with even more force as Black is obliged to weaken his pawns by recapturing with the c7-pawn. The game continued 10 ... Be6 11 b4 a6 12 Nxb6 cxb6 13 Qxd8+ Rxd8 14 Be2 a5 15 Rb1 and Black's weak pawn on b6 eventually fell to the white bishop.

5 Nxd4 Bxd4

5 ... exd4 transposes to Bird's Defence – see the Hübner-Nunn game later in the chapter.

6 c3

A simple example of tactics supporting strategy: White builds his pawn centre with gain of tempo by attacking the black bishop.

6 ... Bb6

Of course he would just lose more time after 6 ... Bc5? 7 d4.

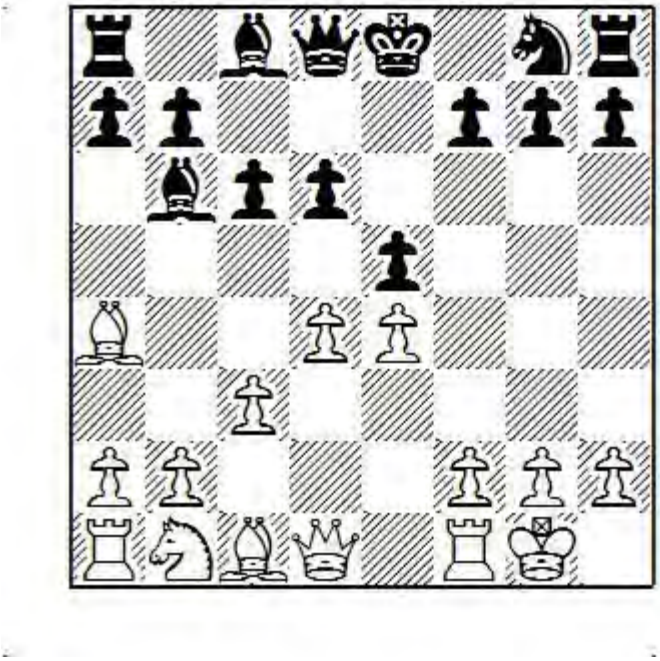
7 d4 c6

Black makes the white bishop choose between one of two diagonals.

8 Ba4!?

Instead 8 Bc4 would expose the bishop to a time-gaining counterattack after 8 ... exd4 9 cxd4 d5. One of the joys of the Ruy Lopez for White is that compared to the Italian Game (1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bc4) his bishop is out of the way of a time/space gaining ... d7-d5 advance. There is another, more specific, reason to leave the c4-square free which becomes clear at move 9.

8 ... d6



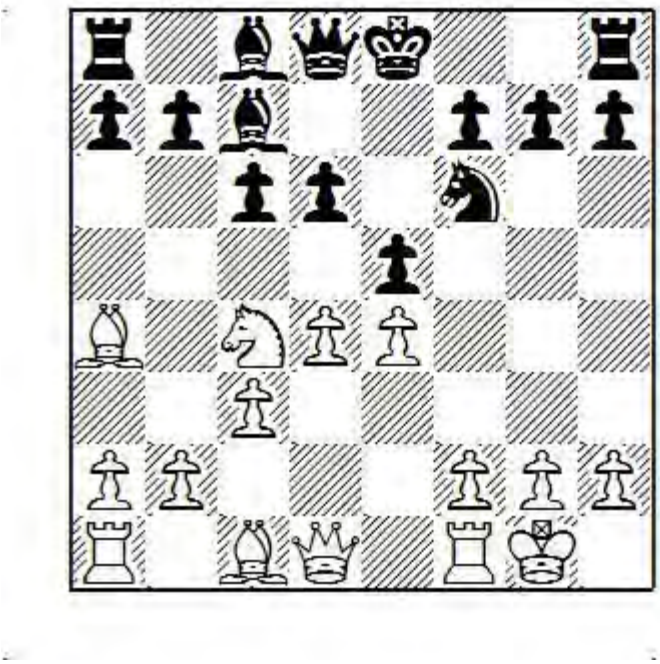
Exercise: It is time to devise a plan. How can White add the most power to his position? (Hint: an important centre square has been left undefended by Black's opening set-up. How can we exploit it?)

Answer: **9 Na3!**

There was nothing to be gained by 9 d5 Ne7, when Black's bishop on b6 has an open diagonal, nor 9 dxe5 dxe5 10 Qxd8+ Bxd8. The attacking move 9 f4 can be rebuffed with the calm 9 ... Nf6! intending 10 ... 0-0. Then White has to worry about his loose centre, as 10 fxe5? dxe5 leaves d4 attacked three ways. Notice how over-aggressive play by White – 9 d5, 9 dxe5 or 9 f4 – merely serves to justify Black's opening play.

In contrast, the positional move 9 Na3! really keeps the initiative. The knight will advance to c4 to attack e5 and d6, and harass the bishop on b6.

9 ... Nf6 10 Nc4 Bc7



Everything else being equal, the exchange of his dark-squared bishop for a white knight is undesirable for Black in the Ruy Lopez. Here 10 ... 0-0 11 Nxb6 axb6 12 Bc2 would leave him with a passive game. The pressure would be off the d4-pawn, so White could arrange the f2-f4 pawn advance without worrying about his centre becoming unstable. You might like to compare the Carlsen-Topalov game in Chapter One, where Black soon fell under a fatal attack after he lost the services of his dark-squared bishop.

Question: Now what's the most economical way

to meet the threat of 11 ... b5?

Answer: **11 Bc2**

White saves his bishop from the fork on b5 and defends the e4-pawn**.**

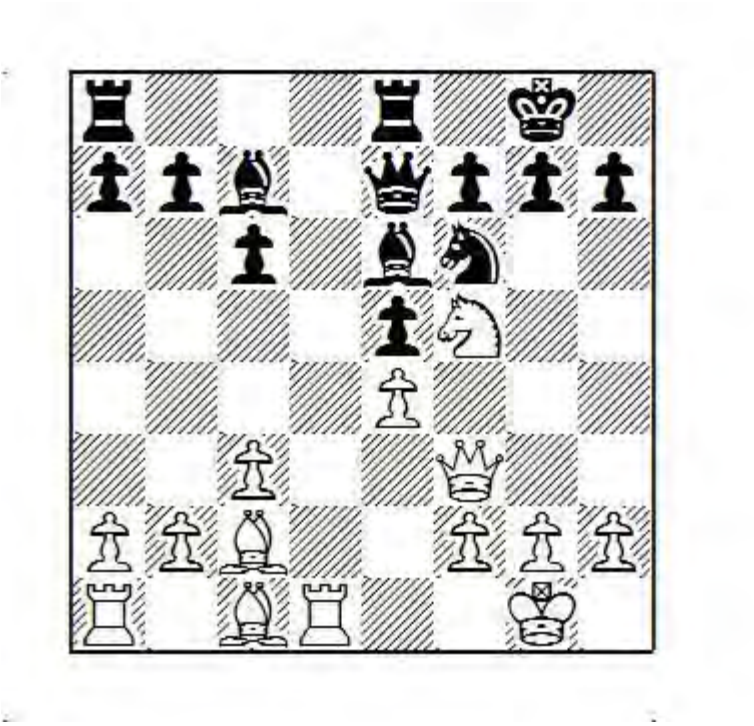
11 ... Be6 12 Ne3 0-0 13 Qf3

Anand finds an excellent square for his queen. She bolsters the e4-pawn and supports an invasion into Black's territory with Nf5.

13 ... Re8 14 Rd1 Qe7 15 dxe5 dxe5 16 Nf5!

Notice how the World Champion's positional play flows naturally – his moves are built one upon another, mutually supporting and interconnected.

Thus the white queen frees the d1-square, so that the black queen can be chased to e7 by the white rook, and then the knight jumps into f5 to attack the queen again, after which the white queen is in the right place to gain the bishop pair with 17 Qxf5 ... it is all beautifully simple and logical.



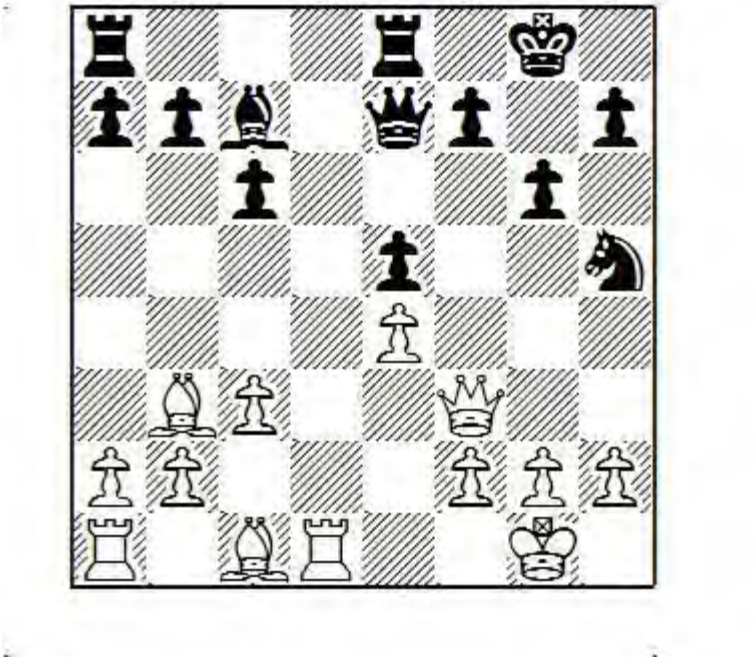
16 ... Bxf5 17 Qxf5

Threatening an awkward pin with 18 Bg5.

17 ... g6

Tkachiev tries to shake off the pressure, but loosening his pawns makes the absence of the dark-squared bishop from the kingside sorely felt.

18 Qf3 Nh5 19 Bb3



Question: What happens if Black centralizes with 19 ... Rad8?

Answer: After 19 ... Rad8 we see the bishop pair at their most ferocious: 20 Bg5! Qxg5 (20 ... Rxd1+ 21 Rxd1 Qxg5 22 Qxf7+ is even worse for Black as 23 Qxe8+ follows) 21 Qxf7+ Kh8 22 Rd7! (even stronger than 22 Qxc7) 22 ... Qh6 (22 ... Rxd7 drops both e8 and then d7 with check) 23 Rxc7 and White is winning.

19 ... Kg7

Black defends precisely. A passive position isn't the same as a losing position, and we can't accuse Tkachiev of anything worse than giving his opponent an easy game with the two bishops and the initiative. Nonetheless, few players have mastered the art of dour defence, and a lack of counterplay often leads to mistakes.

Question: Left to his own devices, Black will play 20 ... Rad8

to guard the d-file and then 21 ... Qf6 to challenge the white queen.

How can White throw a spanner in the works?

Answer: **20 Bg5!**

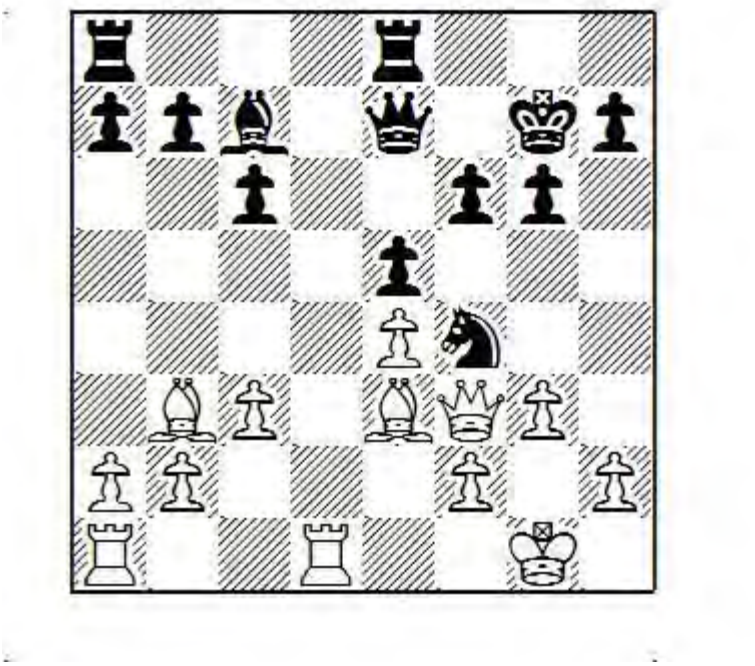
Still a strong move.

20 ... f6

Anand wasn't expecting his Grandmaster opponent to fall for 20 ... Qxg5? 21 Qxf7+. The point of the exercise was to rule out the consolidating move ... Qf6, whilst at the same time further loosening the black kingside.

21 Be3 Nf4 22 g3

Anand's opening play has been very instructive, but as this is a blitz game we can't draw too many conclusions from the middlegame. Here 22 a4!? gaining space on the queenside, looks a better way to handle it.



Question: Where should the black knight go – to e6, to h3 or back to h5?

22 ... Ne6?!

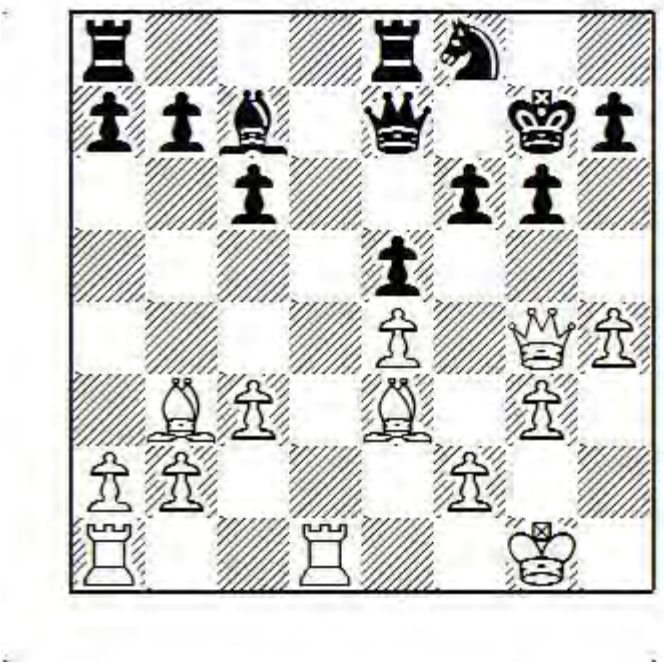
Answer: The obvious move isn't always best. Anand is now able to maintain his initiative. Instead retreating the knight back to h5 would leave it paralysed, but 22 ... Nh3+! escapes most of the pressure: 23 Kg2 Ng5 24 Bxg5 (if 24 Qg4, then 24 ... h5 25 Qh4 leaves the white queen boxed in, while 24 Qe2 Nxe4 is unhelpful) 24 ... fxg5 and due to the opposite-coloured bishops Black would have good drawing chances.

23 Qg4 Nf8

Question: Should Black exchange bishops at once with 23 ... Bb6?

Answer: No, as 23 ... Bb6? loses a pawn after 24 Bxb6 axb6 25 Qxe6 Qxe6 26 Bxe6 Rxe6 27 Rd7+ Kh6 28 Rxb7. Offering the exchange of bishops is an excellent idea, indeed Black plays it next move, but as a rule tactics come before strategy in chess. The most beautiful, original, daring idea has to be rejected if it doesn't pass the tactical test – unless of course you are trying to bamboozle your opponent in time pressure, or trying to confuse him when in a lost position, or hoping to exploit his nervousness or general tactical weakness.

24 h4!



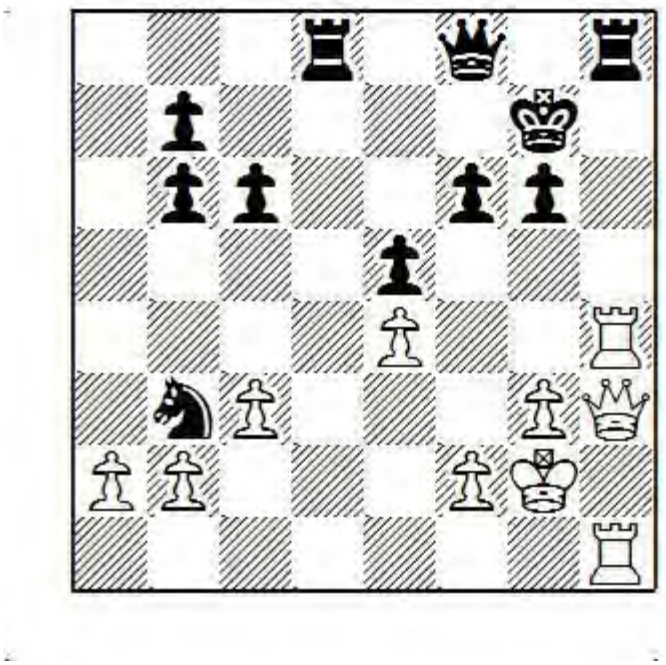
With the situation in the centre static, White is justified in beginning an assault against the slightly impaired black defences. Anand plans to open the h-file and create direct threats against the black king. We'll jump forwards some moves to see the denouement:

24 ... Bb6 25 Bxb6 axb6 26 h5 Rad8 27 hxg6 hxg6 28 Kg2 Nd7 29 Rh1 Nc5 30 Rh4 Rh8 31 Rah1 Nxb3 32 Qh3!

This took Tkachiev by surprise.

32 ... Qf8?

He might still have defended successfully after 32 ... Rxh4 33 Qxh4 Kf7! (not however 33 ... Nc5? 34 Qh7+ Kf8 35 Qh8+ Kf7 36 Rh7+ when Black loses his queen with check) when White can recapture on b3 with some initiative.



33 Rh7+! 1-0

Black is mated in one move if he takes the rook, or in two moves after 33 ... Kg8 beginning 34 Qe6+.

The Berlin with ... Bc5

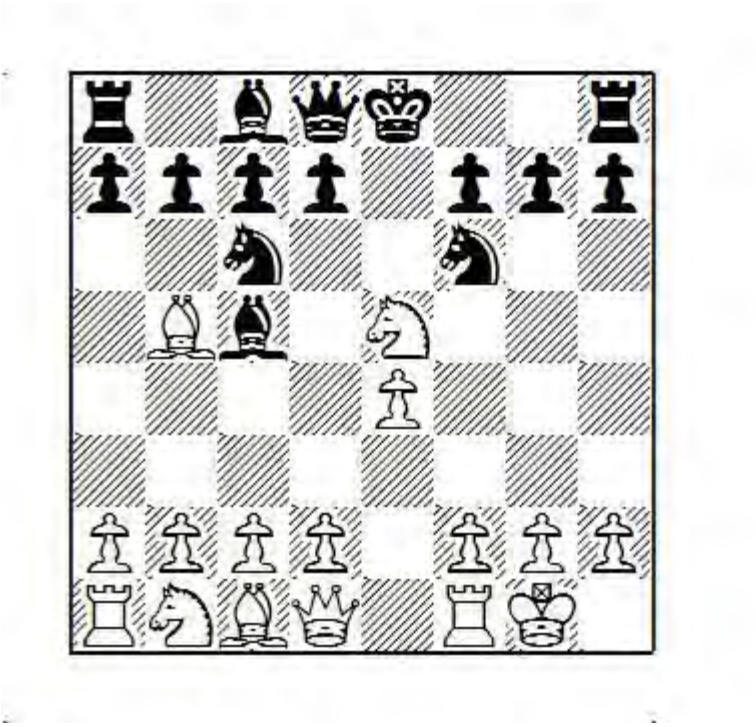
Note that this can arise from the move order 3 Bb5 Bc5 4 0-0 Nf6 or 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 0-0 Bc5.

Game 20

J.Ashwin-C.Gokhale

Singapore 2009

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Bc5 4 0-0 Nf6 5 Nxe5!?



White employs a Fork Trick to remove the e5-pawn. This idea varies in attractiveness – for example it looks pretty good here, but with ... a7-a6 and Ba4 included in the sequence 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Bc5 I prefer 6 c3 to 6 Nxe5 – see the Nijboer-Vedder game below.

5 ... Nxe5?

Just what White was hoping for. After this dubious move I can't see how Black can equalize. The alternative 5 ... Nxe4 is examined in the next game.

6 d4 a6

Black is in trouble after 6 ... Bb6 7 dxe5 Nxe4 8 Qg4 as both e4 and g7 are hanging. Instead White's pressure yielded a structural advantage after 6 ... c6 7 dxe5 Nxe4 8 Bd3 d5 9 exd6 Nf6 10 Nc3 Be6 11 Bg5 Bxd6 12 Ne4 Be7 13 Bxf6 Bxf6 14 Nc5 0-0 (naturally 14 ... Bc8 15 Re1+ is unpleasant for Black) 15 Nxe6 fxe6 16 c3 when the pawn on e6 was weak in A.Volokitin-Z.Hracek, Ohrid 2009.

7 Be2!

The possibility of this retreat is one of the reasons I prefer this line to the one with 3 ... a6 and 4 Ba4 inserted – see the comment to 5

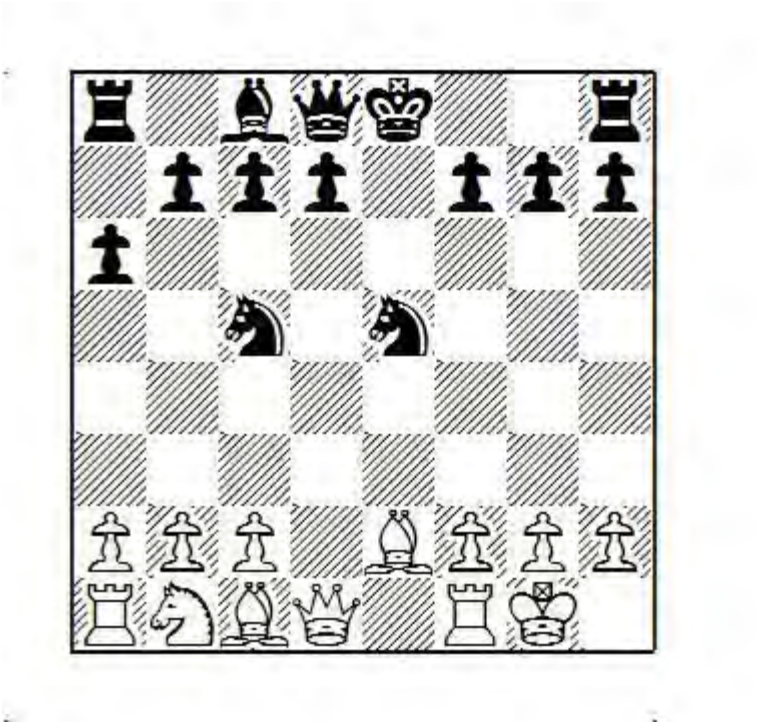
Nxe5 above.

7 ... Nxe4

White has a pleasant edge with the bishop pair after 7 ... Bxd4 8 Qxd4. If instead 7 ... Ba7 then 8 dxe5 Nxe4 9 Qd5! is good for White, for example G.Vescovi-S.Iuldachev, Hyderabad 2002, went 9 ... Ng5 10 Nc3 0-0 11 Bf4 Rb8 12 Rad1 Ne6 13 Qd2 and Black remained under pressure along the d-file.

8 dxc5 Nxc5

So Black has emerged with an extra pawn.



Exercise: Can you see a strong attacking move for White?

Answer: **9 b4!**

Not only clearing b2 for his bishop, but crucially setting up the advance of the f-pawn when more time will be gained by attacking the black knights.

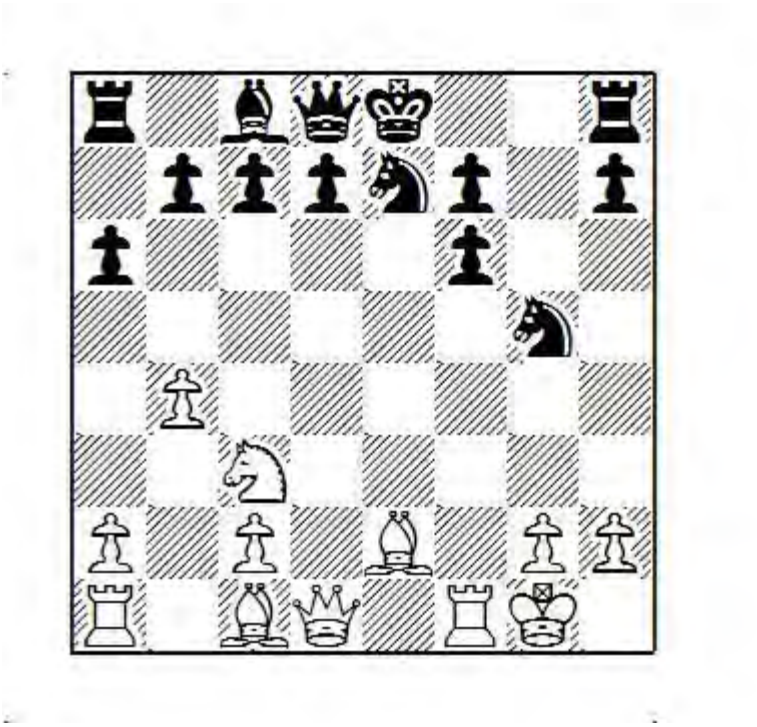
9 ... Ne6 10 f4 Nc6 11 f5 Ng5 12 f6!

White's attack has developed with remarkable speed, leaving Black with no time to consolidate.

12 ... gxf6 13 Nc3

Intending 14 Nd5 when f6 drops.

13 ... Ne7



Exercise: The obvious move is 14 Rxf6, but can you see how

White can get his knight on c3 into the attack?

Answer: **14 h4!**

Yet another prod on a black knight by a white pawn. It wins White's horse access to the e4-square.

14 ... Ne6 15 Ne4 Ng8 16 Bb2

All the better for being delayed.

16 ... c6 17 Nxf6+ Nxf6 18 Bxf6 Qb6+ 19 Rf2 1-0

There is a lethal threat of 20 Qd6 and 21 Qe7 mate, and if 19 ... 0-0 then 20 Bc4 intending 21 Qg4+ is fatal.

Game 21

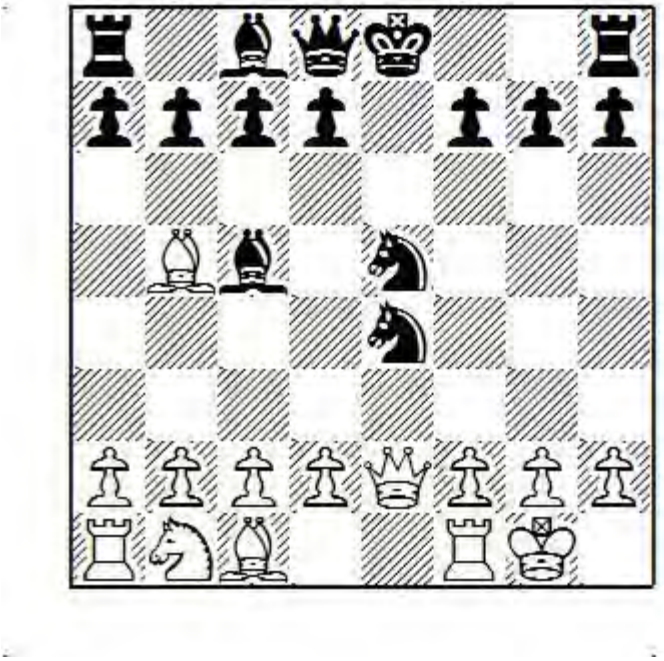
A.Shirov-S.Fedorchuk

FIDE World Cup, Khanty-Mansiysk 2009

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 0-0 Bc5 5 Nxe5 Nxe4

Diverging from 5 ... Nxe5 in the previous game**.** If I didn't know the capture on e4 was established theory, checked by computers and played by Grandmasters, I would have thought that Black could be punished for putting his knight in peril. That is why it is necessary to know concrete opening theory and not rely on general principles. Sometimes moves that look too risky are perfectly acceptable, whilst safe-looking moves can turn out to be blunders.

6 Qe2 Nxe5



7 d4!?

Question: Can't White just play 7 Qxe4 to exploit the pin/fork?

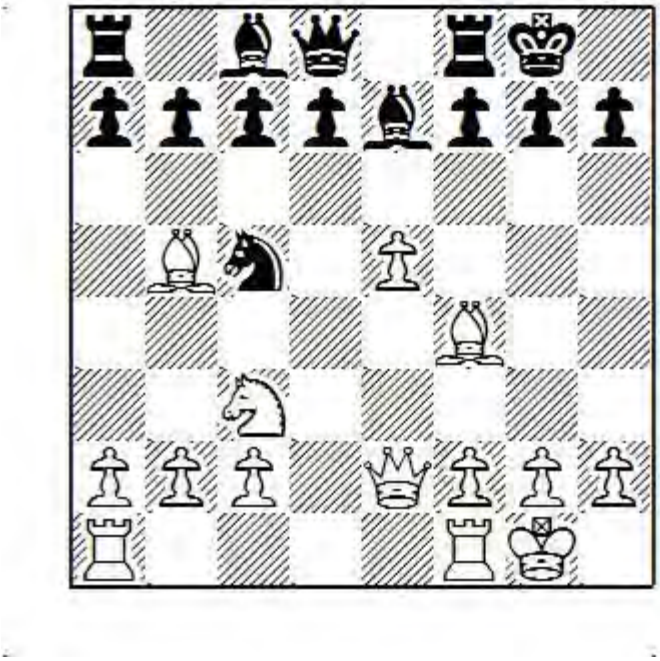
Answer: The immediate 7 Qxe4 doesn't win any material for White: 7 ... Qe7 (Black neutralizes the threat of the fork on d4) 8 d4 Nc6 and here 9 Qxe7+ Bxe7 is fairly equal, though White managed to drum up some interesting complications after 9 Qg4!? h5 10 Qg3!? Bxd4 11 Nc3 in V.Gashimov-V.Topalov, Linares 2010.

7 ... Be7

After 7 ... Bxd4? 8 Qxe4 Qf6 9 c3! (but not 9 Qxd4? Nf3+) 9 ... Bc5 10 Bf4 Bd6 11 Re1 White wins a piece.

Alternatively 7 ... Qe7 8 Qxe4 Nc6 9 Qxe7+ Bxe7 10 c3 gives White a slight edge. I like the way White manoeuvred for advantage in Z.Almasi-T.Nabaty, Rijeka 2010: 10 ... a6 11 Ba4 d6 12 Re1 Be6 13 Nd2 Kd7 14 Nf1 d5 15 Ng3 (first of all the knight has ideas of going to h5 and then f4 to win White the bishop pair) 15 ... g6 16 Ne2! (and now it settles for a different route) 16 ... Rhe8 17 Nf4 Bd6 18 Nxe6 Rxe6 19 Be3 b5 20 Bb3 Ne7 21 a4 and White ground out a win.

8 dxe5 Nc5 9 Nc3 0-0 10 Bf4



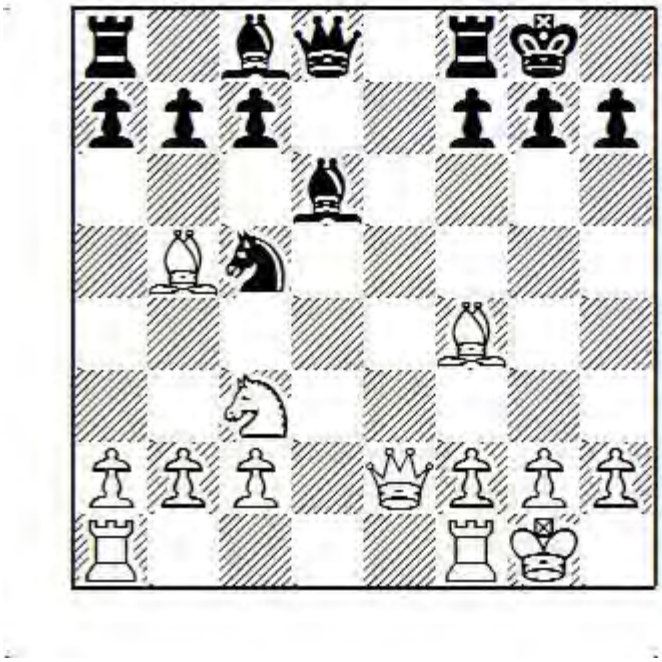
10 ... d5?

An important moment. The text leads to a structural weakness for which Black gets no counterplay. In contrast, after 10 ... c6 11 Bd3 Nxd3 12 Qxd3 f6! 13 Qg3 a draw was agreed in V.Ivanchuk-P.Leko, Linares 1999, as Black will remove the e5-pawn then get in ... d7-d5. Shirov would have known about the Leko game. Was he really happy to agree a quick draw with the white pieces if his opponent had played 10 ... c6? Or did he have an improvement ready?

Exercise: Have a go at finding an improvement for White after 10 ... c6.

Answer: After 10 ... c6 11 Bc4!? obliges Black to weaken his pawns with 11 ... b5 if he wants to get in ... Nxd3. Following 12 Bd3 Nxd3 13 Qxd3 f6 White could play 14 Nd5! keeping the initiative as 14 ... cxd5? is met by 15 Qxd5+. 11 Bc4 might well have been Shirov's intended improvement. Still, Black should certainly have preferred 10 ... .c6 to the game continuation.

11 exd6 Bxd6



Question: How should White play to get the advantage?

Answer: **12 Rad1!**

Of course: now Black can't avoid an isolated pawn on d6.

12 ... Qf6 13 Bxd6 cxd6 14 Rd5 a6 15 Bd3 g6? 16 Rd1

Now White has a clear plus. The interest of the remainder of the game centres on Shirov's technique which combines threats to the d6-pawn with as gradual build-up against the black king.

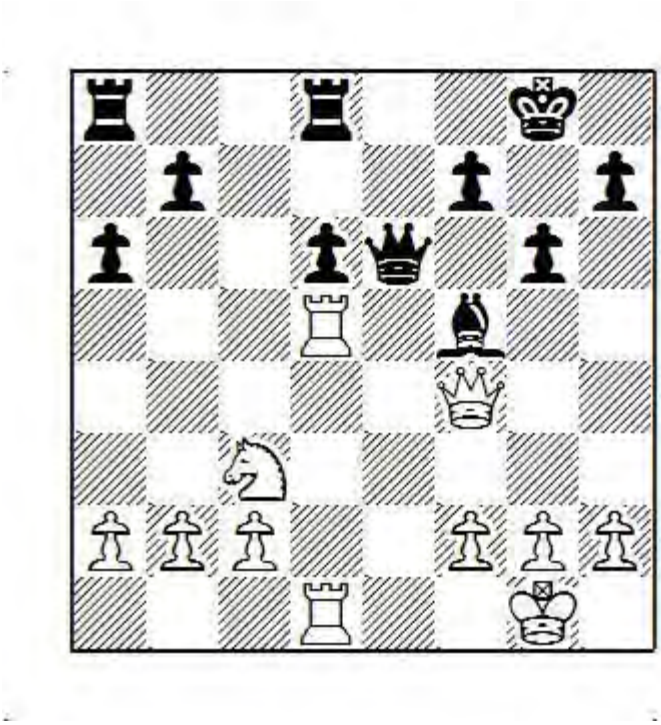
16 ... Rd8

Question: Can you see a quiet move that increases the pressure on d6 whilst enhancing White's chances of a successful kingside attack?

Answer: **17 Be4!**

Now Black has to complete his development but he can't put his bishop on d7 or e6 without dropping the d6-pawn. Therefore he exchanges on e4 to free the f5-square for the cleric. This is a serious concession as the disappearance of his knight opens up the dark squares around his king to White's own horse.

17 ... Nxe4 18 Qxe4 Bf5 19 Qf4 Qe6



Exercise: Find a move that furthers White's plan of a kingside attack.

(Hint: when all your pieces are on optimum squares, what type of

move should you be looking for to strengthen your game?)

The retreat 20 R5d2 would be the safe and strong 'computer' move that defends c2, but Shirov chooses something more enterprising:

Answer: **20 h3!**

Almost every plan, no matter how tactical, needs the help of pawns at some point. Shirov's 'little' move contains a lot of venom. He is aiming to win by an attack on the black king rather than by picking up the d6-pawn 'for free'. He therefore intends to crowd out the black bishop from safe squares with g2-g4 etc. so that, in order to save it from capture, the black queen is forced to desert the defence of her king. The move 20 h3 also abets this plan by ruling out any back rank tricks against the white king.

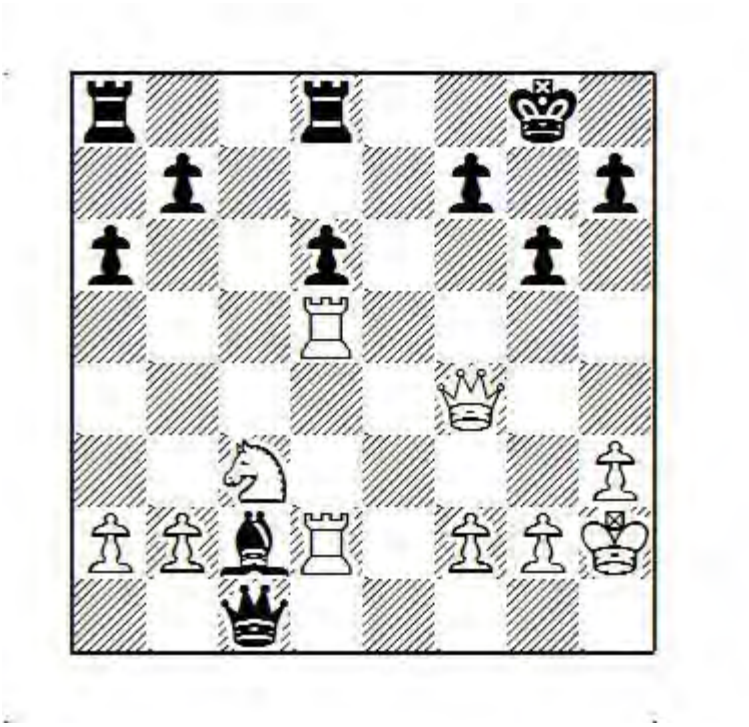
20 ... Bxc2 21 R1d2

Question: Now how does Black stop his bishop dropping off?

Answer: **21 ... Qe1+**

If 21 ... Bf5 22 g4 wins the bishop, so Black has to defend the piece by getting his queen to c1.

22 Kh2 Qc1



Exercise: Find a simple and neat way to get the knight

on c3 involved in the attack.

Answer: **23 R5d4!**

The rook vacates the d5-square for the horse.

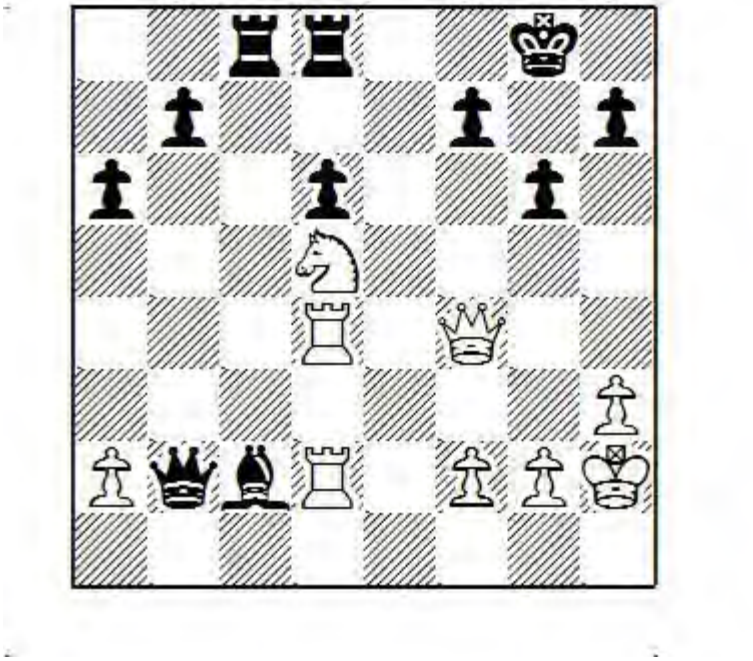
23 ... Rac8

All you can do in such situations is develop your pieces and hope for the best.

24 Nd5

The knight utterly dominates the feeble bishop on c2. Note that it is the weakness caused by ... g7-g6 that accounts for the dramatic difference in value between the two minor pieces – if you push the black pawn back to g7 the hole on f6 vanishes and the bishop has access to a base on g6. In that case White would have a useful initiative for the pawn, but that's all.

24 ... Qxb2



Exercise: White to play and win in the most efficient manner!

Answer: **25 Qh6! 1-0**

Actually 25 Nf6+ Kg7 26 Ng4 gives White a decisive attack, though it takes a bit longer to finish off the black king. If you were attracted by the materialistic 25 Ne7+ Kg7 26 Nxc8 Rxc8, I hope it was because you saw the odd move 27 Rc4! winning the bishop after 27 ... Rxc4 28 Qxc4 Qe5+ 29 f4.

Still the game move is undoubtedly the most incisive, as the dark-square holes around the black king are immediately fatal. After 25 Qh6! f6 (to avoid 26 Nf6+ and then mate on h7) my computer tells me it is mate in ten moves, one variation being 26 Nxf6+ Kf7 27 Qxh7+ (being saddled with a human brain I might settle for a risk-free butcher's approach with 27 Nd5 Kg8 28 Ne7+ Kh8 29 Nxc8 Rxc8 30 Rxd6 etc.) 27 ... Kxf6 28 Rxd6+ Rxd6 29 Rxd6+ Kg5 30 Qe7+ Kh6 31 Qh4+ Kg7 32 Rd7+ Kf8 33 Qe7+ (just think how embarrassing it would be if you played 33 Qh8!? 'mate!' here) 33 ... Kg8 34 Qf7+ Kh8 35 Qh7 mate.

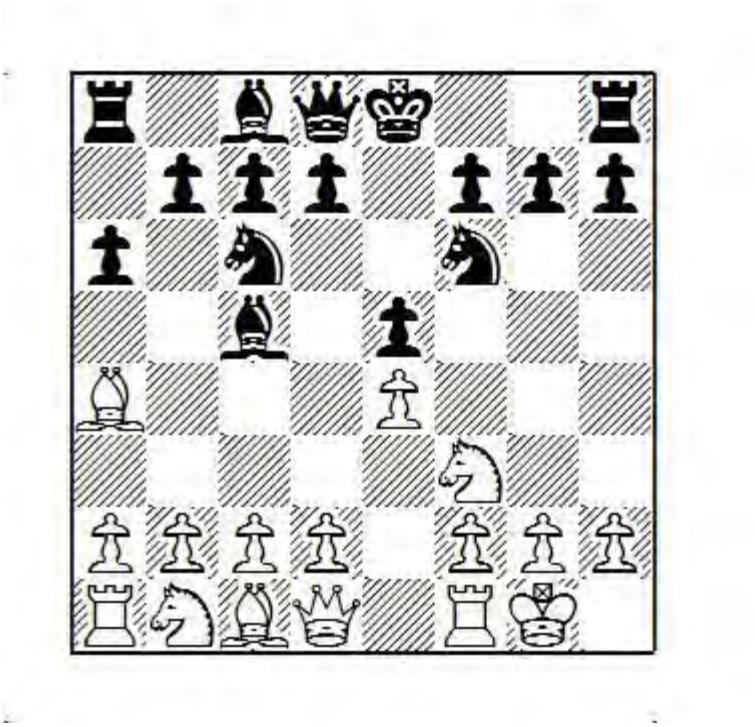
Game 22

F.Nijboer-R.Vedder

Vlissingen 2003

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Bc5

And so we have the Berlin Defence, ... Bc5 line, but with the insertion of the moves ... a7-a6 and Ba4.



Question: Does the Fork Trick with 6 Nxe5 still work here?

Answer: White doesn't have the Be2! option that proved so effective in the Ashwin-Gokhale game above. Here's what might happen if he tries the Fork Trick variation: 6 Nxe5 Nxe5 7 d4 b5! 8 dxe5 (instead 8 Bb3 Bxd4 9 Qxd4 d6 has been well tested by top players, with Black seemingly fine after say 10 f4 Nc6!? 11 Qc3 Bb7 in V.Anand-V.Topalov, Linares 1997) 8 ... Nxe4 9 Bb3 Bb7 10 Bd5. This looks painful for Black, but there is an escape route: 10 ... Nxf2! 11 Rxf2 Bxf2+ 12 Kxf2 Qh4+ 13 Kf1 Bxd5 14 Qxd5 0-0 15 Nd2 Qxh2 16 Nf3. I've tried to make this work for White, but after 16 ... Qh5! pinning the e5-pawn and intending 17 ... d6, I have to admit that Black has sufficient play, as games like V.Sareen-A.Stefanova, Moscow 2006, confirm (World Champions like Antoaneta Stefanova tend to be up-to-date with their opening theory). Besides, Black even has a nominal material advantage: a rook and two pawns for two minor pieces.

So we should reject the Fort Trick and think about transposing directly to the Møller.

6 c3! b5

After 6 ... Nxe4 7 d4 exd4 8 cxd4 Ba7 9 d5 Ne7 10 Bc2 White has a similar initiative to that in the game. Even more precise might be 7 Qe2, for example 7 ... d5 8 d3 Nf6 9 d4 followed by 10 dxe5.

7 Bb3 Nxe4?!

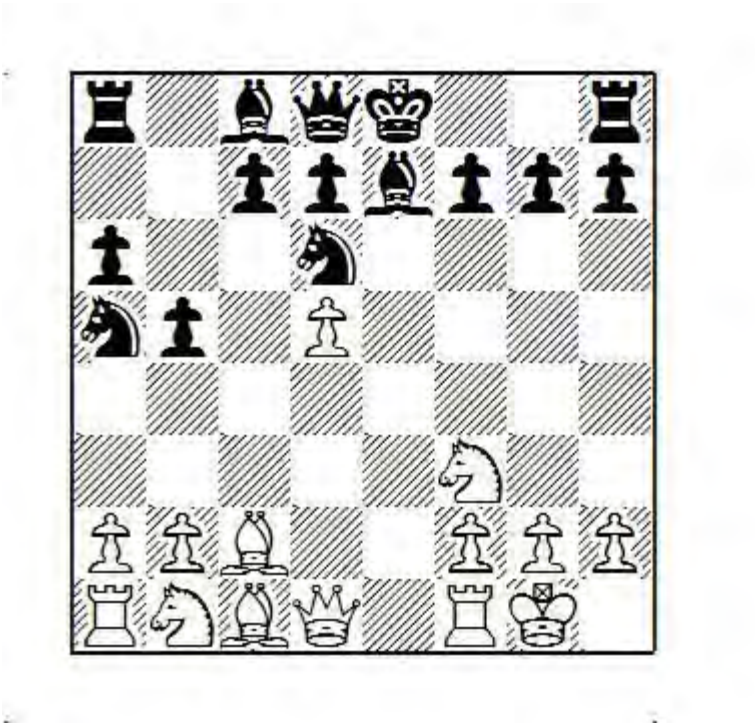
A risky capture to say the least. Instead after 7 ... d6 8 a4, the most common move 8 ... Rb8 would lead us into the territory of the next game. However, Black can also play 8 ... Bg4 here. We have seen the ... Bg4 idea in the Berg-Rudd game of Chapter One, where White was able to profitably avoid playing a2-a4. Still, in that game he had been slowed down by d2-d3, whereas here he can build up an initiative: 8 ... Bg4 9 axb5 axb5 10 Rxa8 Qxa8 (the black queen has been pulled away from the centre) 11 h3 Bd7 (risky for Black is 11 ... Bh5 12 d3 Na5 13 Bc2 b4 14 Ba4+ as in E.Sutovsky-A.Stefanova, Antwerp 2009) 12 d4 Bb6 13 Re1 0-0 14 Na3 and White had his typical pressure on b5 and e5 in R.Van Kampen-A.Gupta, Wijk aan Zee 2010.

Finally after 7 ... d6 8 a4 Black could try 8 ... Bb7. Then 9 d4 Bb6 10 Re1 is the sharp mainline, but I would recommend our customary restrained approach to the ... Bb7 move with 9 d3, for example 9 ... Ne7 10 Nh4 (the knight aims at f5 and frees f3 for the queen) 10 ... Ng6 11Nf5 0-0 12 Qf3 Ne8 13 Be3 Bxe3 14 fxe3 and White had the initiative in S.Movsesian-V.Tkachiev, Halle 2010.

8 d4

Nijboer plays vigorously to disrupt the black pieces and gain space in the centre.

8 ... exd4 9 cxd4 Be7 10 d5 Na5 11 Bc2 Nd6



Question: Now how can White stop his opponent developing his game?

Answer: **12 Qd3!**

In order to mate on h7 if Black castles. But there is more to this move than a cheap trick. Lining up the queen and bishop against the h7-pawn would seem senseless to a player who is only interested in searching for combinations against the enemy king. It contains no threat, and yet positionally speaking it might be said to win the game for White, as it prevents Black from evacuating his king from the centre, which in turn leaves the rook on h8 boxed in.

12 ... Bf6

Question: What do we do after 12 ... g6, preparing 13 ... 0-0?

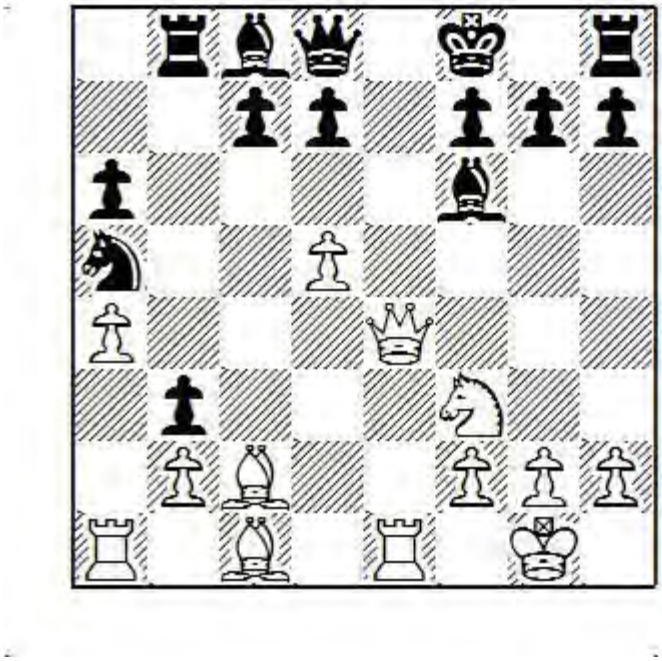
Answer: The consistent move after 12 ... g6 is 13 Bh6 to keep the black king in the centre, but let's play 13 Qc3! winning a piece.

13 Nc3 Kf8

Black submits to the inevitable and renounces castling. But now due to the passive state of his rook on h8 he will be outgunned along the e-file and on the queenside. White therefore tries to open lines in these sectors of the board rather than start a direct attack on the kingside.

14 a4 b4 15 Ne4 Nxe4 16 Qxe4 Rb8 17 Re1 b3?

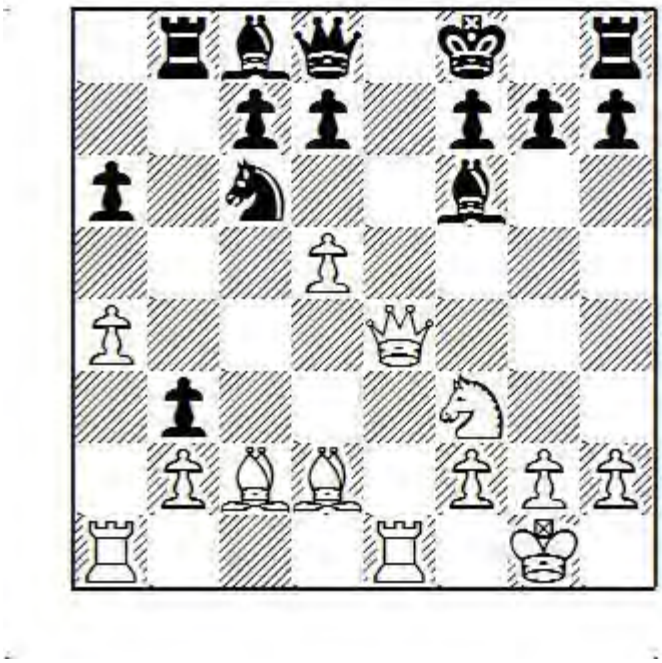
Black should try 17 ... d6 though he remains in trouble after 18 Bd2 Bxb2 19 Rab1 Bf6 (or 19 ... Ba3 20 Ng5!) 20 Bxb4 etc.



Question: Now what is the best way to keep up the attack?

Answer: **18 Bd2! Nc6**

This should make things easier for White, but after 18 ... bxc2 19 Bxa5 there is a threat of 20 d6 or 20 Bxc7! Qxc7 21 Qe8 mate. If then 19 ... Bb7 the simple 20 Rac1 and 21 Rxc2 would be horrible for Black – he cannot survive an open position with a rook shut out of the game on h8.



Exercise: Try to find a nice win for White that was missed in the game.

19 Bxb3?

Answer: White could breakthrough with 19 dxc6 bxc2 20 Bb4+ d6 21 Bxd6+!! cxd6 (if 21 ... Qxd6 22 Qe8 mate) 22 c7 and Black must either allow mate, give up his queen, or let White take a rook and get a second queen. Not a great choice, really.

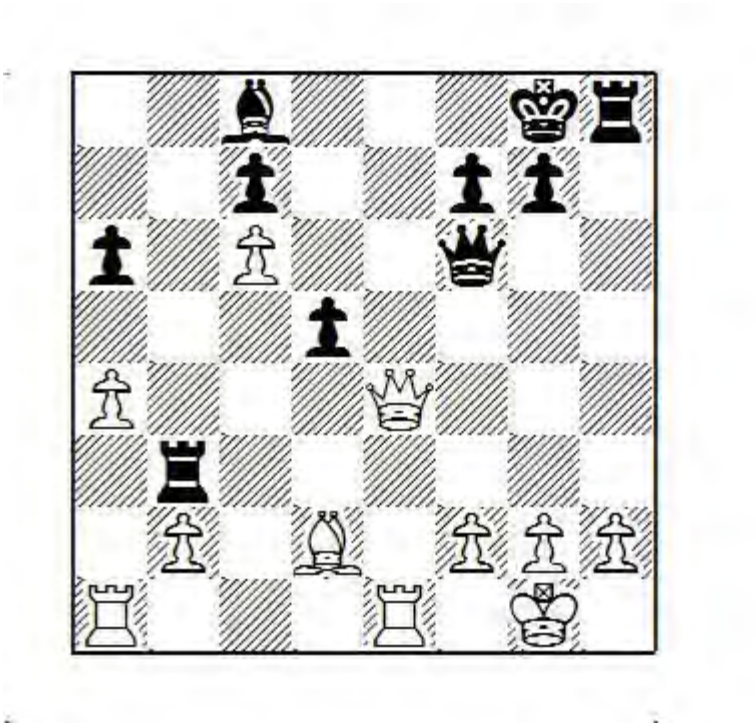
19 ... Rxb3 20 dxc6 d6 21 Ng5

This attacking move is possible because of the continuing weakness of Black's back rank.

21 ... d5?

Returning the compliment, as they say. After 21 ... Rxb2! Black could battle on.

22 Nxh7+ Kg8 23 Nxf6+ Qxf6



Exercise: Find the move that clinched the win.

Answer: **24 Qc2! 1-0**

Black must lose a rook dealing with the threat of 25 Re8 mate.

The Møller Defence

Game 23

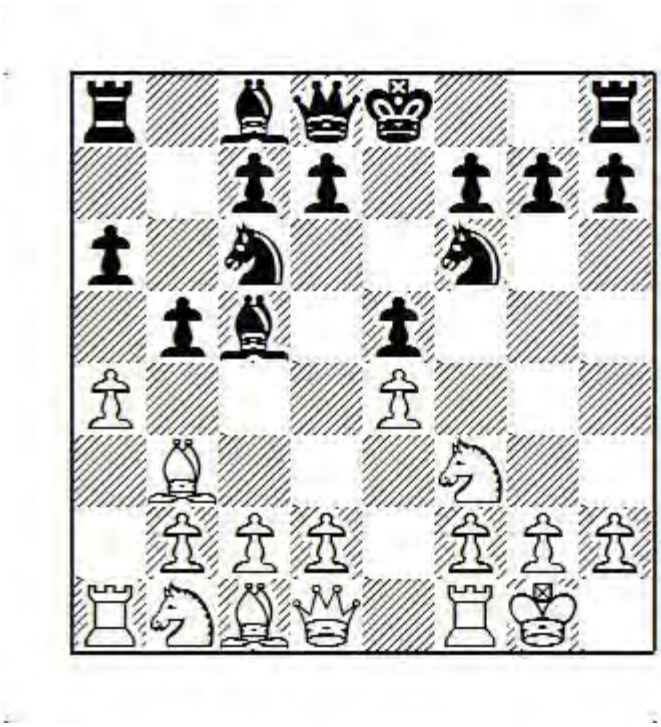
P.Leko-F.Caruana

Wijk aan Zee 2010

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 b5 6 Bb3 Bc5

As indicated in the introduction, after 6 ... Bb7, I recommend you play 7 d3! and then follow the Carlsen-Beliavsky game of Chapter One that continued 7 ... Bc5 8 Nc3. Not wanting the bishop shut in by d2-d3 is the reason 6 ... Bc5 is the preferred move for Black.

7 a4



Before beginning the fight for the d4-square, White takes the chance to put pressure on the b5 point.

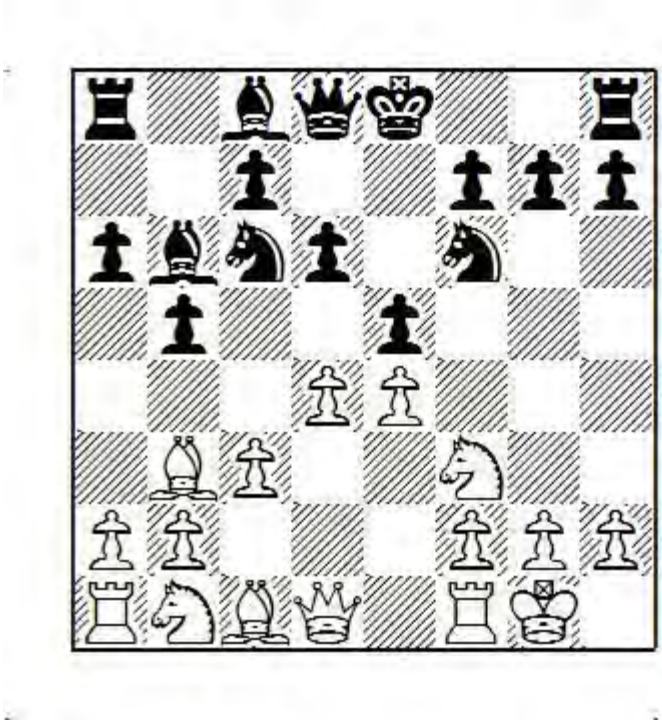
Question: I know the attack on b5 is a key idea, but I didn't

expect it to come so fast! Isn't it more logical to play 7 c3

aiming to kick the bishop back with 8 d4? In fact I don't

see how Black can maintain the pawn on e5 then.

Answer: If we *really* can overrun the black centre with 7 c3 and 8 d4 then we should certainly do it. Unfortunately, it turns out that after 7 c3 d6 8 d4 Black can stand his ground on e5 with 8 ... Bb6!.



Then he is okay in the endgame after 9 dxe5 Nxe5 10 Nxe5 dxe5 11 Qxd8+ Kxd8 12 Bxf7 Rf8, for example 13 Bd5 Nxd5 14 exd5 Bb7

etc. Due to the pressure on f2 White can't keep his extra pawn.

It is this 'hidden' variation that justifies Black's 6 ... Bc5 move. It is a more active and flexible move order than 6 ... Bb7, but it wouldn't be playable if Black was forced to concede the centre with ... e5xd4.

Nonetheless, I better admit I have changed the move order – Leko did in fact play 7 c3 and only after 7 ... d6 attacked b5 with 8 a4. But as a2-a4 is a vital part of our strategy versus the Møller, we might as well play it at once. Many top Grandmasters do so, including Nepomniachtchi in the game quoted below. The decision to follow up with c2-c3 and d2-d4, or else d2-d3 and Nc3, can wait a move or so.

More specifically, the immediate attack on b5 might be described as an 'anti-Bg4' move. White is threatening to win a pawn with 8 axb5 due to the pin on the a-file. If 7 ... Rb8, as in the present game, Black has spent a tempo guarding the b5-pawn. Alternatively, if Black plays 7 ... Bb7, so that a8 is protected, White can happily hold the centre with 8 d3! and go about the business of proving that the bishop is shut in on b7. For coverage of that I must again refer you to Carlsen-Beliavsky in Chapter One.

If we delay the attack on b5 with 7 c3 d6 8 a4, Black has the added option of 8 ... Bg4, activating the bishop ...

Question: Stop there! If Black had chosen the move order 3 Bb5 a6

4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Bc5 (i.e. waiting until White has played

c2-c3 before playing ... b7-b5) then after 6 c3 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 a4

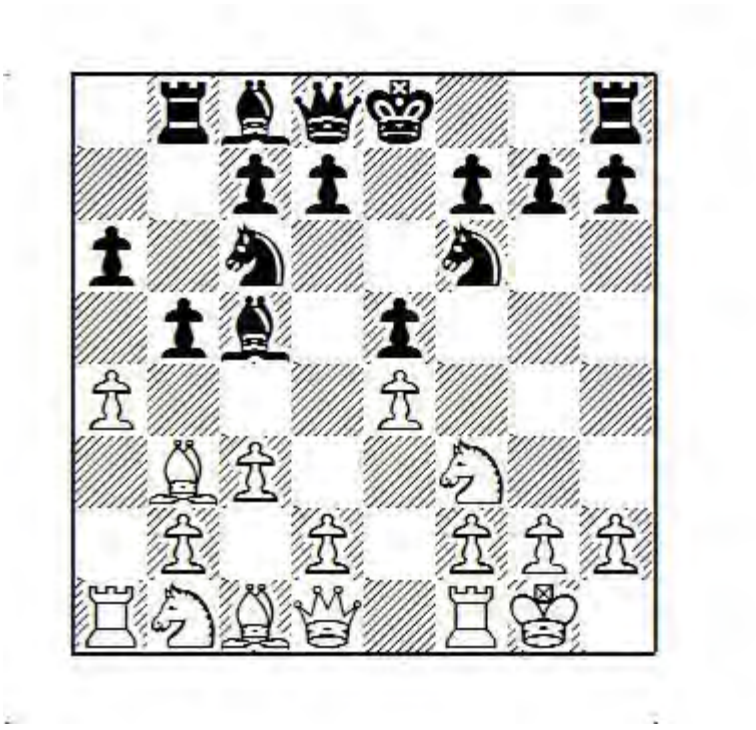
he has wangled the chance to play 8 ... Bg4.

Answer: Yes. But 8 ... Bg4 isn't that great for him – see the note to 7 ... Nxe4?! in Nijboer-Vedder above for two examples – and anyway most players tend to prefer 8 ... .Rb8, transposing back to the 7 a4 Rb8 8 c3 d6 line we are discussing here. But whatever its merits, there is no reason to allow ... Bg4 unless we have to.

7 ... Rb8

The usual way to meet the threat of 8 axb5.

8 c3



8 ... d6

Question: Why not 8 ... Nxe4?

Answer: That would expose Black to the kind of attack we saw in Nijboer-Vedder above. For example 9 axb5 axb5 10 d4 exd4 11 cxd4 Be7 12 d5 Nb4 13 Re1 Nc5 14 Bg5 f6 15 d6! cxd6 16 Nh4! fxg5 17 Qh5+ g6 18 Nxg6 hxg6 19 Qxh8 mate. Of course Black can

defend better than that, but he is still in great difficulty.

9 d4 Bb6

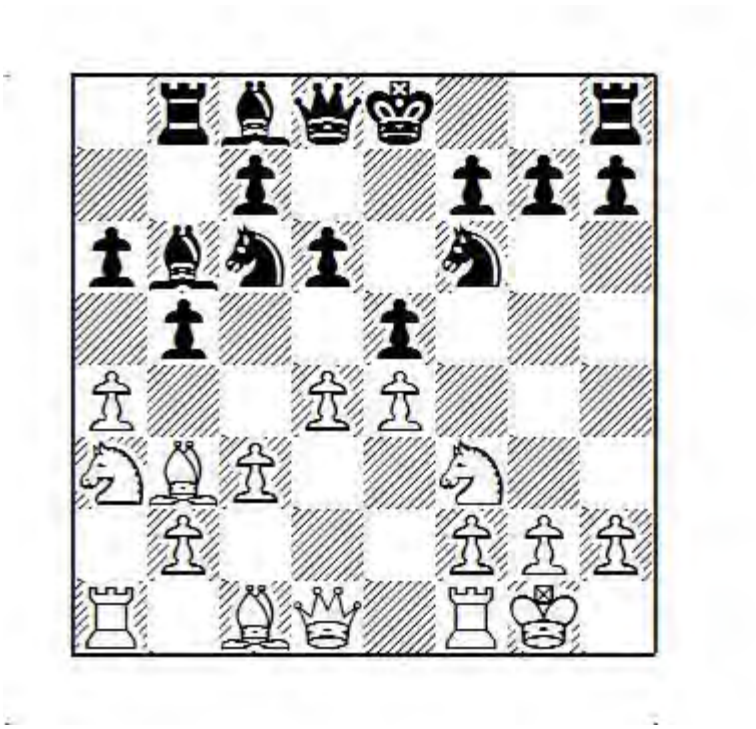
Question: Since the bishop gets in the way of the defence of b5 on b6,

why doesn't Black play 9 ... Ba7?

Answer: Unfortunately for him 9 ... Ba7? leads to disaster after 10 axb5 axb5 (or 10 ... Rxb5 11 d5 Ne7 12 Ba4) 11 Bd5 Nxd5 12 exd5 and Black loses a piece.

After the game move, White has achieved d2-d4, but his centre his under a lot of strain. The d4-pawn itself is attacked three times, and ... Bg4 is looming to increase the pressure on it. The e4-pawn is hanging, though at the moment it is indirectly defended, because if 10 ... Nxe4?? 11 Bd5 forks the two knights. Still, it will need protecting sooner or later. White therefore needs to find a way to bolster his centre. He does so in a very courageous and powerful manner:

10 Na3!



Combining business with pleasure. The knight will aid the d4-pawn from b5, where it will also devour the b5-pawn.

10 ... Bg4!

The tactical battle in the centre is in full swing. If instead 10 ... b4 11 Nc4 bxc3 12 bxc3 Nxe4 13 Qc2 Na5 (Black loses material after 13 ... Bf5? 14 Ne3 Bg6 15 Bd5, while 13 ... Nf6 14 dxe5 is simply bad for Black) 14 Nxa5 Bxa5 15 Qxe4 Rxb3 16 Nxe5! dxe5 17 Qxe5+ Be6 18 Qxa5 and White is a pawn up.

11 axb5 axb5 12 Nxb5

Leko wins his pawn and safeguards d4, but it still looks precarious for him.

12 ... 0-0

Similar is 12 ... Bxf3 13 gxf3. Meanwhile 12 ... Nxe4 still fails to 13 Bd5.

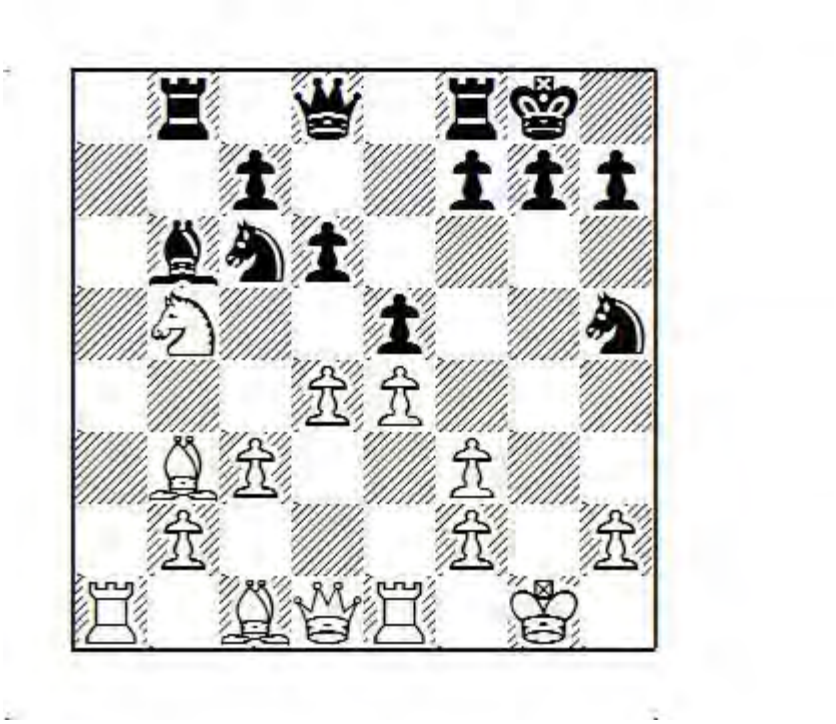
13 Re1

White finally defends e4 after leaving it undefended for eight moves.

13 ... Bxf3 14 gxf3

There is no choice, as 14 Qxf3 drops the d4-pawn.

14 ... Nh5!



White has an extra pawn, but his kingside is compromised. Caruana clears the way for ... Qf6 to put more pressure on d4, and also aims the knight at the hole on f4.

15 Kh1!

Preparing to fight against Black's next move.

15 ... Qf6 16 Rg1

Threatening 17 Bg5 Qg6 when White will at least win the exchange with 18 Be7.

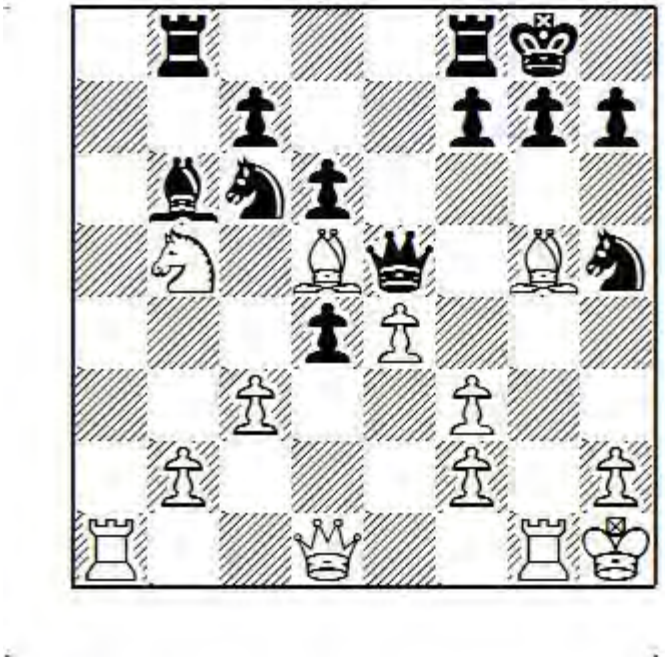
16 ... exd4!

Caruana rightly chooses the complicated path. He conquers the d4-square and clears e5 for his queen.

Instead White has solid control after 16 ... Nf4 17 Be3. The game K.Szabo-M.Nemeth, Szombathely 2010, then continued 17 ... Kh8 18 Ra6 (threatening 19 Nxc7! Bxc7 20 Rxc6) 18 ... exd4 19 cxd4 Ne7 20 Ra4 Neg6 21 Nc3. White had a very good position that became winning after 21 ... Ra8? 22 Nd5! Nxd5 23 Bg5! and Black had to give up his queen for insufficient compensation with 23 ... Rxa4 as 23 ... Qe6 24 Bxd5 would be a fatal fork.

17 Bg5 Qe5 18 Bd5!

This seems highly embarrassing for Black. If the knight runs away from c6 then 19 cxd4 regains the pawn centre with a crushing advantage for White. Therefore, Black is obliged to complete the destruction of the white d4/c3/b2 pawn chain at the cost of a piece:



18 ... dxc3!

Question: It all seems very complicated!

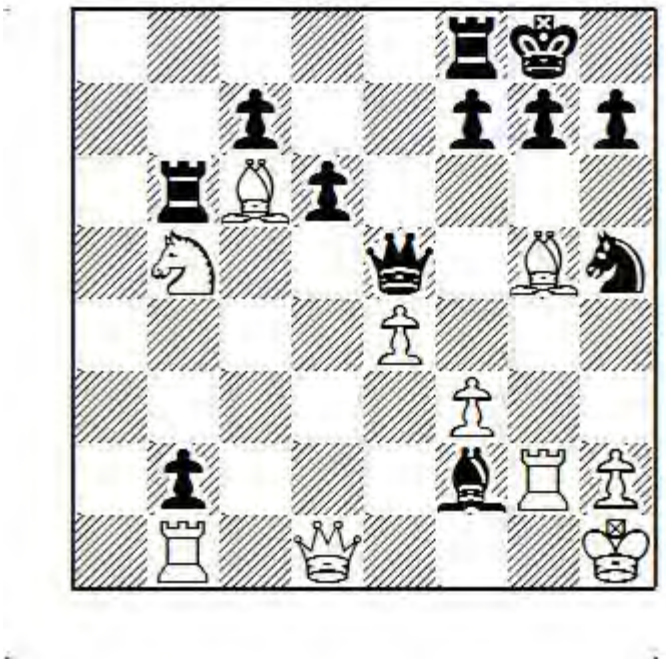
Answer: Indeed, we are going to have to examine a couple of complicated variations, but I don't think this should scare us away from playing the most promising line against the Møller. We aren't taking a huge risk – as you can see, Black doesn't have any real winning chances, as White can at worst neutralize the pawn that appears on b2 and get a draw.

19 Bxc6 cxb2 20 Rb1 Bxf2 21 Rg2

Leko attacks the black bishop ...

21 ... Rb6!

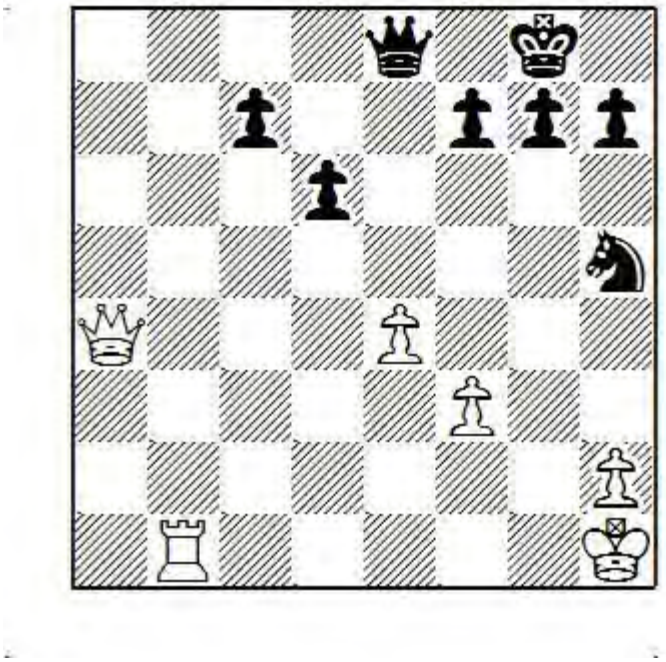
... and Black counterattacks against the bishop on c6.



Exercise: Before reading on, you might like to spend some time familiarizing yourself with this complex position. Also take a look at 21 ... Rxb5, when 22 f4 Qd4 and 22 Bxb5 Qxb5 23 Be7 are both worth thinking about.

Answer: After 21 ... Rxb5 the first move to consider is 22 f4!? (attacking the queen and exposing an attack on h5). Then best play seems to be 22 ... Qd4! (taking twice on f4 drops b5) 23 Qxd4 Bxd4 24 Bxb5 24 Bxb5 Ra8 25 Rgxb2 (White needs to give back the exchange to be rid of the pesky pawn) 25 ... Bxb2 26 Rxb2 Rb8 27 Ra2! (slipping out of the pin) 27 ... h6 (not 27 ... Rxb5 28 Ra8+ and mates, but now the king has a square on h7) 28 Be2! (the only move – he has to attack h5 or lose a piece) 28 ... hxg5 29 Bxh5 g6 30 Be2 gxf4 31 Ra7 and the white bishop is worth more than the three pawns. White can bring his king into the attack with Kg2 and Kf3. It won't be easy for White to win the endgame, but it's not at all fun for Black to defend it either.

However, after 21 ... Rxb5 the alternative 22 Bxb5! Qxb5 23 Be7 looks even stronger for White. Black has back rank problems after 23 ... Re8 24 Rxf2 Rxe7 25 Rfxb2 Qd7 26 Rb8+ Re8 27 Rxe8+ Qxe8 28 Qa4!.

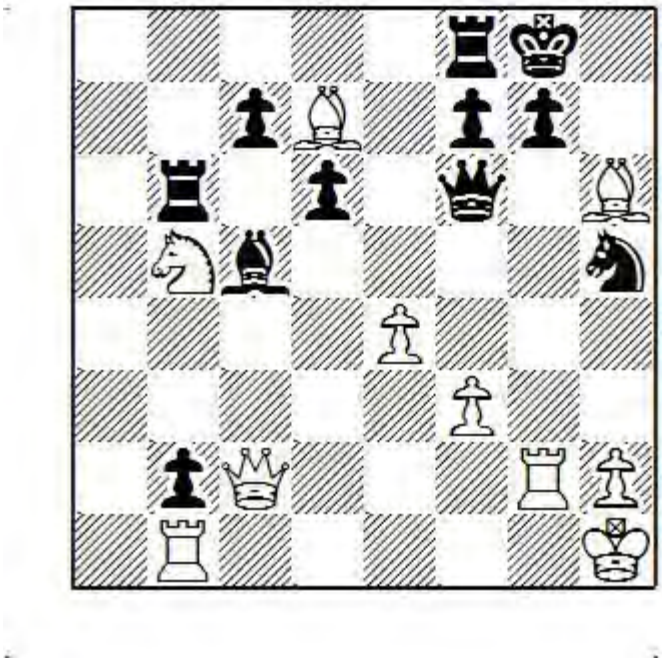


For example 28 ... Nf6 29 Qa7 (threat 30 Rb8) 29 ... Qd7 (he doesn't have to drop c7 so spectacularly, but if Black just gives up the c7- and d6-pawns he will have a lost endgame) 30 Rb8+ Ne8 31 Qxc7!.

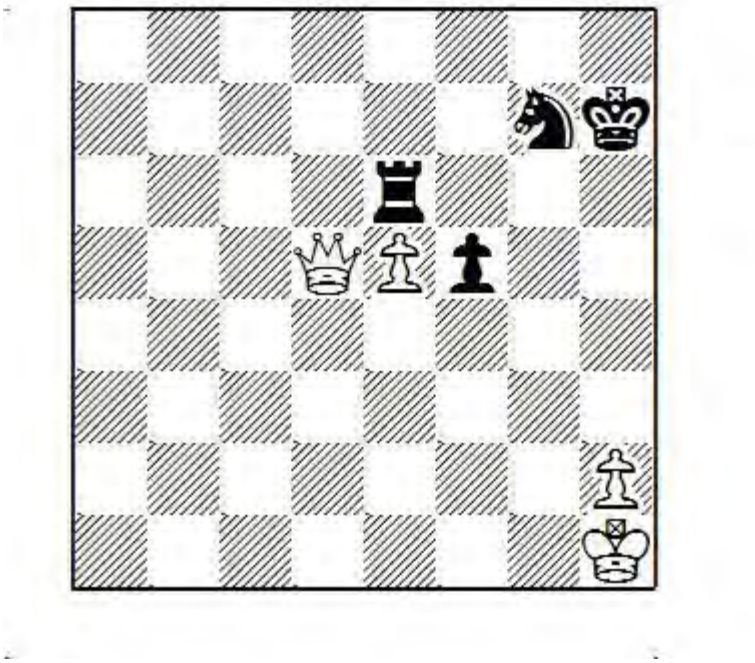
In this sequence after 22 Bxb5 Qxb5 23 Be7 Black could offer a second exchange with 23 ... Qb6, when 24 Bxf8 Kxf8 would be hard for White to win. But the attacking 24 Qd5! seems to do the trick: 24 ... Nf4 (if 24 ... Qe3 25 Bxf8 Qc1+ simply 26 Qd1 wins) 25 Rxg7+! Kxg7 (or 25 ... Kh8 26 Qf5 – aiming at h7 – 26 ... Ng6 27 Bf6) 26 Qg5+ Ng6 27 Bf6+ Kg8 28 Qh6 and mate follows on g7.

22 Rxf2

Instead 22 Bd7 was played in I.Nepomniachtchi-A.Shirov, at the famous Tata Steel tournament in Wijk aan Zee 2011. In that game the players apparently rattled off the first 40 or so moves in about 45 minutes, reaching a simplified endgame whilst most of the other players in that round were still contemplating what to do around the 12 move mark. I don't recommend 22 Bd7, but I still can't resist showing you this game, which continued 22 ... Bc5 23 Qc2 h6! (Shirov reignites the tactics before White can consolidate his extra piece) 24 Bxh6 (if the bishop retreats, e.g. 24 Bd2, then Black might have 24 ... Qe7 or 24 ... Rd8 harassing the bishop that is defending b5) 24 ... Qf6! (attacking the correct bishop; there is no time for 24 ... Qe7 as 25 Qxb2 aims at g7)



25 Bxg7 (giving up a piece to open the g-file and immobilize the black knight on g7) 25 ... Nxg7 26 Nxc7 (threatening a fork on d5) 26 ... Qxf3 27 Nd5 Rb3 28 Ba4! (winning time to put the bishop on the better square c6) 28 ... Rb7 29 Bc6 Rb3 30 Qd2 (intending 31 Qh6 and then mate by the queen on g7 or with the knight on e7) 30 ... Be3! 31 Nxe3 Qxe3 32 Qxd6 Rc3 (so that if 33 Qf6?? Rc1+) 33 Rbg1 Qxg1+! (the only way to stave off the attack on g7) 34 Rxg1 Rc1 35 Qg3 Rxg1+ 36 Qxg1 Rc8 37 Qb6 (of course not 37 Bd5 Rc1) 37 ... Rxc6 38 Qxb2 Rg6 (cutting off the white king's entry into the game) 39 Qb8+ Kh7 40 Qb7 f5 41 e5 (after 41 exf5 Rf6 the f5-pawn drops with a complete draw – the rook can swing back from f5 to h5, defended by the knight, ad infinitum) 41 ... Re6 42 Qd5 ...

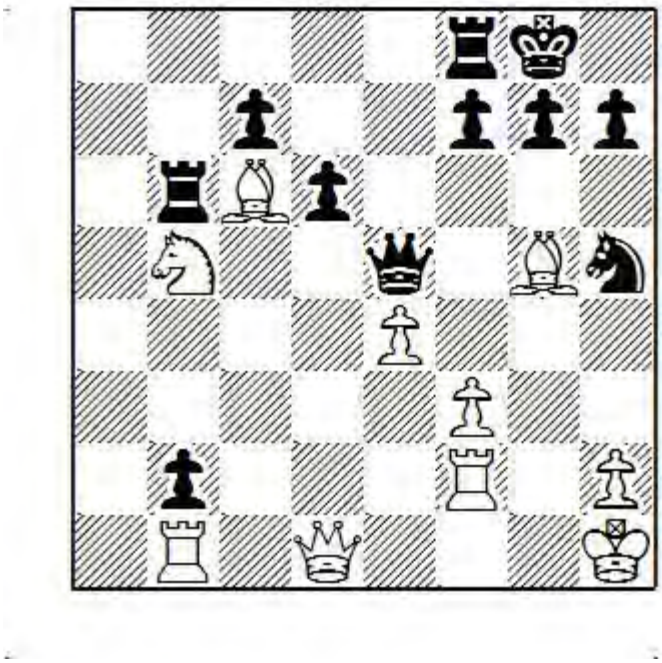


... and we have the endgame that both players evidently prepared at home. I'm curious what the reader thinks about this. Like Bobby Fischer, are you horrified at the way entire chess games are being 'rehearsed'? Or do you marvel at the colossal preparation involved in top-class chess, which might be considered an art form in itself?

Personally my feelings are ambivalent. Preparation gives players the confidence to enter sharp variations, where they not infrequently still have the chance to show spontaneous creativity. If a way was found to cut out deep opening preparation the game might on the whole get duller. Of course this is only a problem for top-class chess – the rest of us have bad memories or lack the inclination or time to learn 42 moves of theory.

Returning to the Shirov game, it turns out that White can't win – the black king, rook, knight and pawn form a blockade which ensures a positional draw. The game ended: 42 Qd5 Rg6 43 Qf3 Re6 44 Qf4 Rg6 45 h3 Kg8 46 Kh2 Kh7 47 Qc4 Re6 48 Qd5 Rg6 49 Qd4 Kg8 50 Qc4+ Kh7 51 Qc7 Kg8 52 h4 Kh7 53 Kh3 Kh6 54 Qd7 Kh7 55 Qf7 Re6 56 Qc7 Rg6 57 Qb8 Nh5 58 Qa7+ Ng7 59 Qe3 Rh6 60 Kg3 Rg6+ 61 Kh3 (the king retreats again, as if 61 Kf3 Rg4 62 e6?! Rxh4 – even 62 ... Re4 is good enough – 63 e7?? Rh3+ and it's Black who wins) 61 ... Rh6 62 Qd3 Re6 63 Qd5 Rg6 64 Qb5 Kh6 65 Qb3 Kh7 66 Qd5 Ne6 67 Kh2 Ng7 68 Qb5 Kh6 69 Qb3 Kh7 70 Qd5 Rg4 71 h5 Nxh5 72 Qf7+ Ng7 73 e6 Re4 74 e7 Kh6 (with the white king cut off, the blockade of the e8-square is enough to ensure a draw) 75 Kg2 Rg4+ 76 Kf2 Re4 77 Kf3 Kh7 78 Qf6 Kg8 79 Qf8+ ½-½

In case you've forgotten, we are looking at Leko-Caruana after 22 Rxf2.

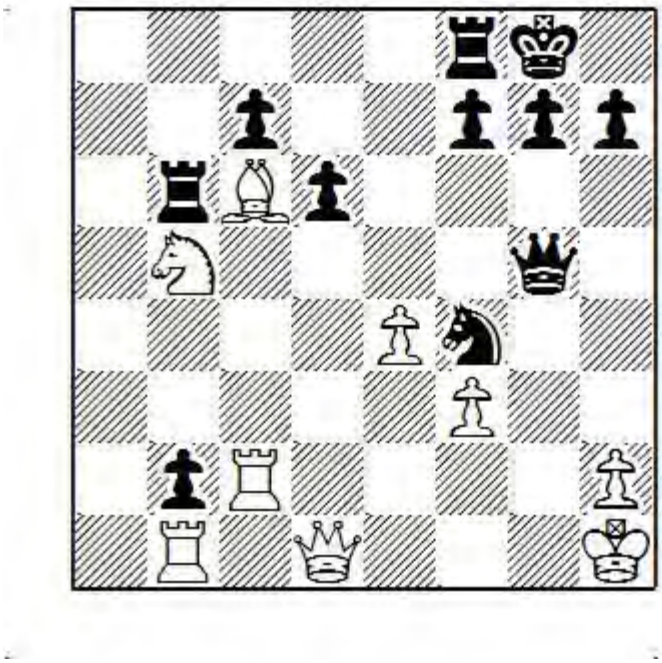


22 ... Qxg5

Exercise: Instead 22 ... Rxc6 has been recommended. Again you might like to study this move for a while before reading on. How do you assess it?

Answer: It seems to me that White can coordinate his pieces and neutralize the threat from the b2-pawn, for example 23 Nd4 (gaining vital time by hitting the rook on c6, as if now 23 ... Rc4 White has 24 Be3) 23 ... Rb6 24 Nf5 Ra8 25 Be3 (again attacking the black rook and also threatening to target g7 with 26 Bd4) 25 ... c5 26 Rg2 Kh8 27 Bg1! making sure there are no checks on the back rank. White is on top with ideas such as 28 Ne3 or 28 Rd2, and if 27 ... Ra1 there's 28 Rgxb2!.

23 Rc2 Nf4



Exercise: Find Black's threat. How should White deal with it?

After 23 ... Rxc6 24 Rxc6 Qxb5 25 Rxc7 White will be able to round up the b2-pawn with fair winning chances.

24 Qf1

Answer: Guarding g2 to prevent the threat of 24 ... Rxc6 25 Rxc6 Qg2 mate. Instead 25 Rbxb2? needlessly allows a pin with 25 ... Rfb8. White has no need to hurry.

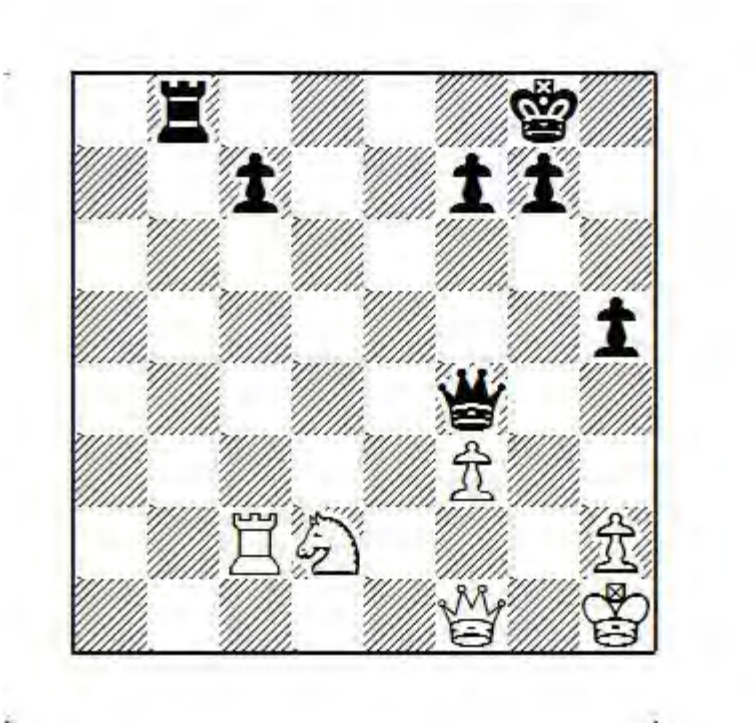
24 ... d5

If 24 ... Rfb8 25 Nxc7 Rc8 26 Rcxb2 Rxb2 27 Rxb2 and the knight is taboo because of a back rank mate.

25 exd5 Nxd5 26 Bxd5 Qxd5 27 Rcxb2 Qc5

Black has very slight drawing chances due to White's shortage of pawns, but Leko's technique proves too good.

28 Rc1 Qe5 29 Rbb1 Rfb8 30 Na3 Rb2 31 Rxb2 Rxb2 32 Rc2 Rb8 33 Nc4 Qf4 34 Nd2 h5



I guess Black's only chance is to sit tight on the kingside and hope that White can't arrange his pieces to strike a decisive blow. An attempt to gain counterplay by pushing his pawns leads to a predictably swift finish.

35 Qe2 Ra8 36 Rc4 Qd6 37 Nf1 f5 38 Ng3 Ra1+ 39 Kg2 f4 40 Qe8+ Kh7 41 Qxh5+ Kg8 42 Qe8+ Kh7 43 Qe4+ Kg8 44 Qxf4 Ra2+ 45 Kh3 1-0

Bird's Defence

Game 24

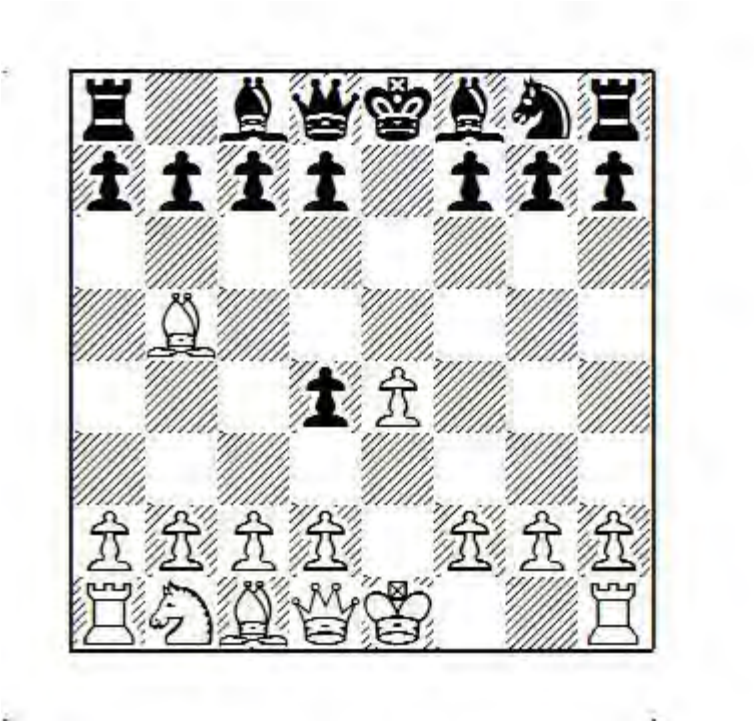
R.Hübner-J.Nunn

Brussels 1986

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nd4

The hunted becomes the hunter ... Black counterattacks against the white bishop.

4 Nxd4 exd4



Question: Generally speaking, do you think the transfer of the black pawn from e5 to d4 has helped or hindered the development of White's game?

Answer: With the pawn on d4 White is denied the natural developing move Nc3. The advance d2-d4 is also at least temporarily blocked. On the other hand, White's kingside pawns are more mobile – not only is the obstacle on e5 removed, but the white knight on f3 is no longer getting in the way of f2-f4.

5 0-0 Bc5

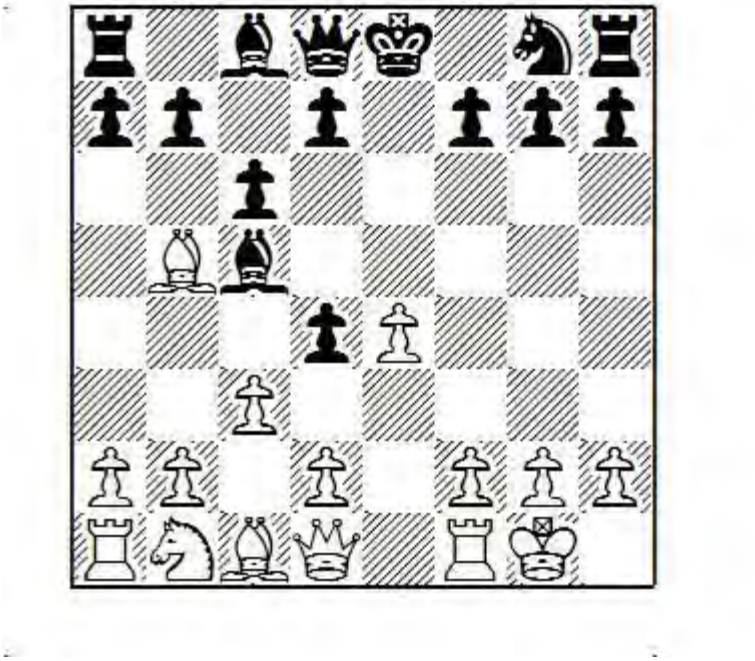
Black defends the d4 point and prepares to develop with ... Ne7 without blocking in his bishop. He doesn't want to put the knight on f6 as in the absence of his own e-pawn it could be attacked by White's with e4-e5.

6 c3

Hübner's first priority is to dissolve the pawn on d4. He will be aided in this by the chance to gain time by attacking the bishop on c5 with Nd2 and Nb3. Only then will he begin to assert his potential space advantage on the kingside.

Another way for White to play is 6 d3, ignoring the pawn on d4 for the moment and intending to advance quickly on the kingside with f2-f4.

6 ... c6



It would be entirely wrong for Black to relinquish his hold on d4 with 6 ... dxc3. White could even play a gambit with 7 d4 cxb2 8 Bxb2 with excellent attacking chances. Black needs to force White to spend a couple of moves to conquer d4, so that in the meantime he can establish a second foothold in the centre with ... d7-d5 (or less ambitiously with ... d7-d6).

Question: Why does Black attack the bishop?

And should it retreat to a4 or c4?

7 Ba4

Answer: Black plays ... c7-c6 to break the pin on his d7-pawn, so that it can advance one or two squares as desired.

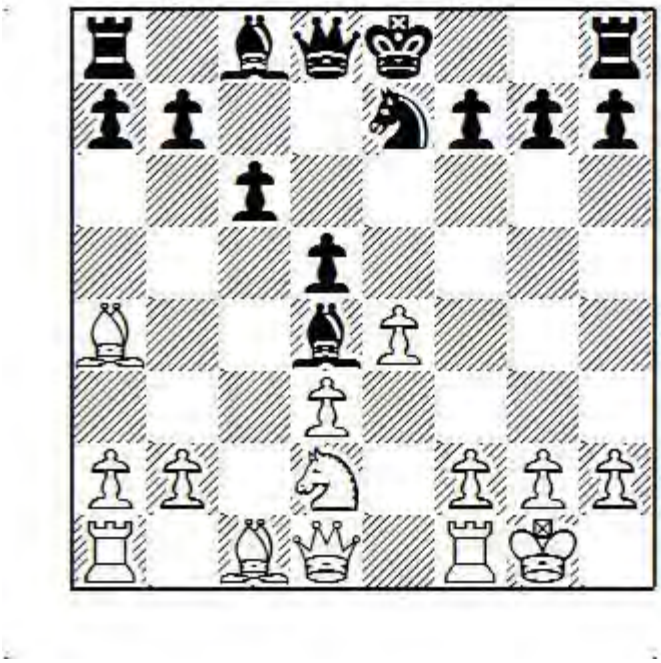
After 7 Bc4, White is actually threatening to win a pawn with 8 Bxf7+! Kxf7 9 Qh5+. Black can play solidly with 7 ... d6 planning ... Nf6, or else speculate with 7 ... d5 8 exd5 cxd5 9 Bb5+ Bd7 (or 9 ... Kf8!?) when it's not easy for White to prove his advantage.

The retreat to a4 doesn't allow Black to gain time by hitting the bishop with ... d7-d5, so White maintains a pawn presence on e4.

7 ... Ne7 8 d3 d5 9 Nd2 Bb6

The bishop retreats before it is hit by 10 Nb3, which would win the d4-pawn.

10 cxd4 Bxd4



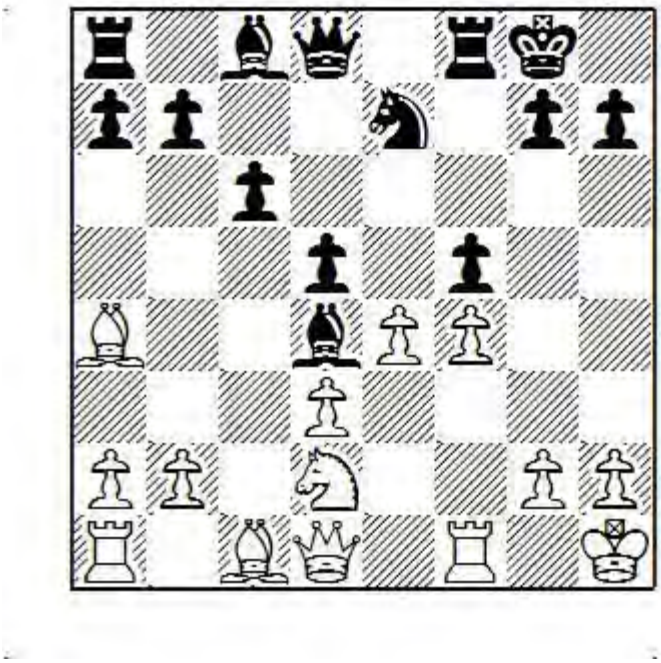
Question: Hasn't Black just lost time with his bishop? Since the pawn on d4 has dropped anyway, why not 9 ... dxc3 without any more ado?

Answer: Nunn is happy that the pawn exchange took place on d4. If instead 9 ... dxc3, after 10 bxc3 another white pawn comes to the centre, meaning that White can expand with d3-d4 and then possibly e4-e5. If the black bishop retreated to b6, Ba3 would bring White's bishop to life. So the loss of time with ... Bb6 and ... Bxd4 was positionally worth it for Black.

11 Kh1

He needs to break the pin on f2 before he can advance on the kingside.

11 ... 0-0 12 f4 f5



Question: Isn't this a really bad move, shutting in his bishop on c8

and allowing White a protected passed pawn on e5?

Answer: Black is more afraid of being struck down by White's mobile kingside pawns than he is of the passed pawn on e5. For example if White were allowed to play 13 f5 the bishop on c8 would in any case be boxed in, and by following up with Nf3 White would be pushing for the further advance e4-e5. Hence 12 ... f5 is a positionally well founded move which restrains White's aspirations on the kingside.

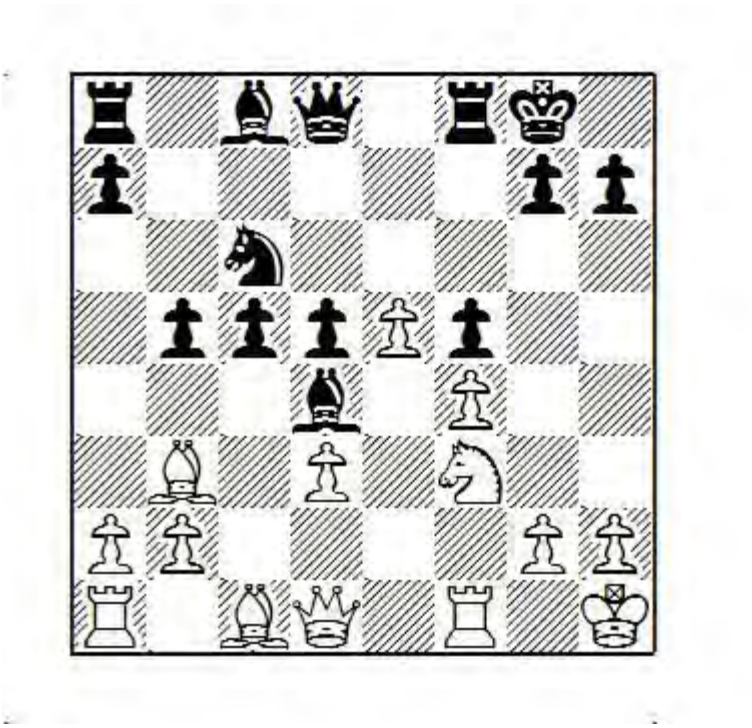
13 e5 b5?

This move, however, is highly suspect. Having stopped White's kingside progress Black becomes ambitious and aims to utilize his 4-3 majority of pawns on the queenside.

It's difficult to point out a typically good or bad plan in the Ruy Lopez, because the same moves or plans can be good or bad according to circumstances. John Nunn was rated in the top 10 players in the World around the time of this game, but even he can make an error of judgment – or more specifically a tactical oversight, as he had missed White's 16th move.

Instead Nunn suggests 13 ... Bb6 with the plan of ... c6-c5 and ... Be6.

14 Bb3 c5 15 Nf3 Nc6



Exercise: Try to find the move Nunn missed and the idea behind it.

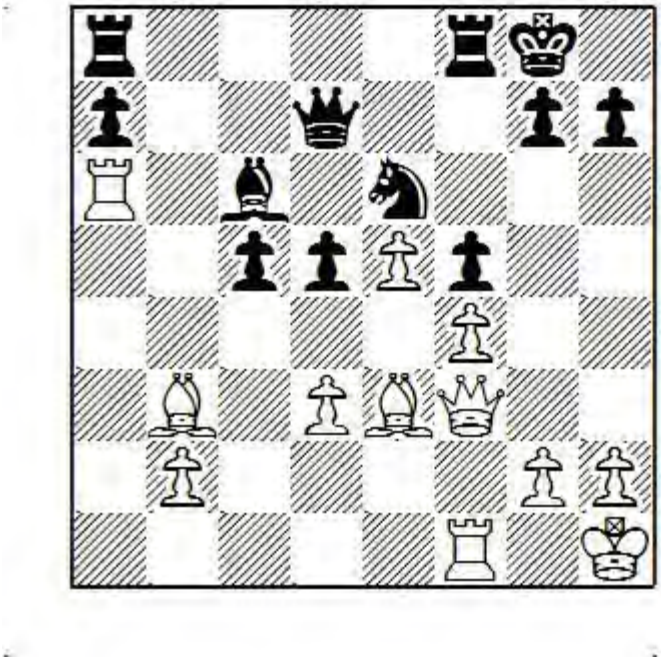
Answer: **16 a4!**

Our old friend the a2-a4 attack makes an unexpected entrance. The point is that after 16 ... b4 17 a5! White has the positionally crushing idea of Ba4, Bxc6 and then Nxd4, when after the forced recapture ... c5xd4 Black will be left with a horrible collection of weak pawns on b4, d4 and d5. A sample line, given in the book of the Brussels 1986 tournament, runs 16 ... h6 18 a6 (saving the pawn from capture before putting the bishop on a4) 18 ... Be6 19 Ba4 Qb6 20 Bxc6 Qxc6 21 Nxd4 cxd4 22 Bd2 etc. There would be zero chance of escape from such a mess against a strategic maestro such as Robert Hübner. Notice that if after 17 a5 Black took the pawn with 17 ... Nxa5? he would lose a piece to 18 Rxa5 Qxa5 19 Bxd5+ and 20 Bxa8.

16 ... Ba6 17 Nxd4 Nxd4 18 axb5 Bxb5 19 Be3 Ne6

The c5-pawn will drop after 19 ... Nxb3 20 Qxb3 as the black bishop is hanging.

20 Qf3 Bc6 21 Ra6 Qd7



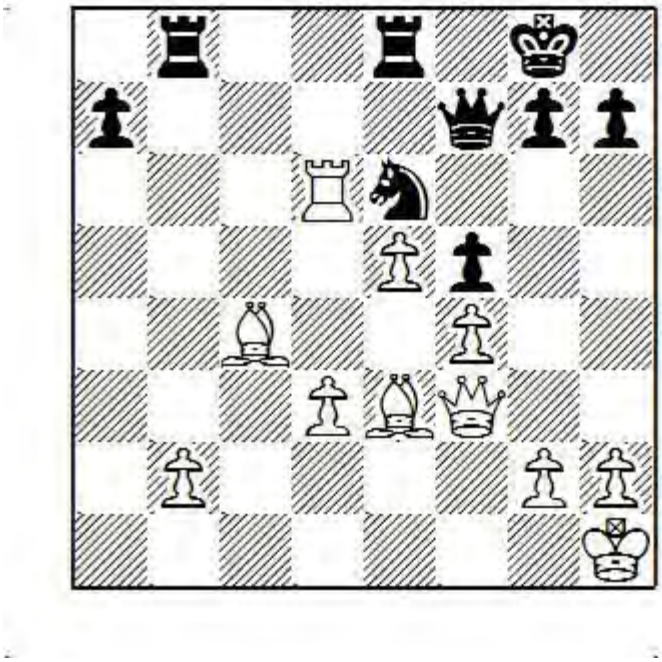
Exercise: Can you see the elegant way that White now breaks open the

centre for his bishop pair and acquires central united passed pawns?

Answer: **22 Rxc6! Qxc6 23 Bxd5 Qc8 24 Rc1!**

Much stronger than taking back the exchange with 24 Bxa8. The c5-pawn now drops and Black can do nothing about the pin on e6 which will abet the advance of the white centre pawns.

24 ... Rb8 25 Rxc5 Qd7 26 Rc6 Rfe8 27 Rd6 Qf7 28 Bc4! 1-0



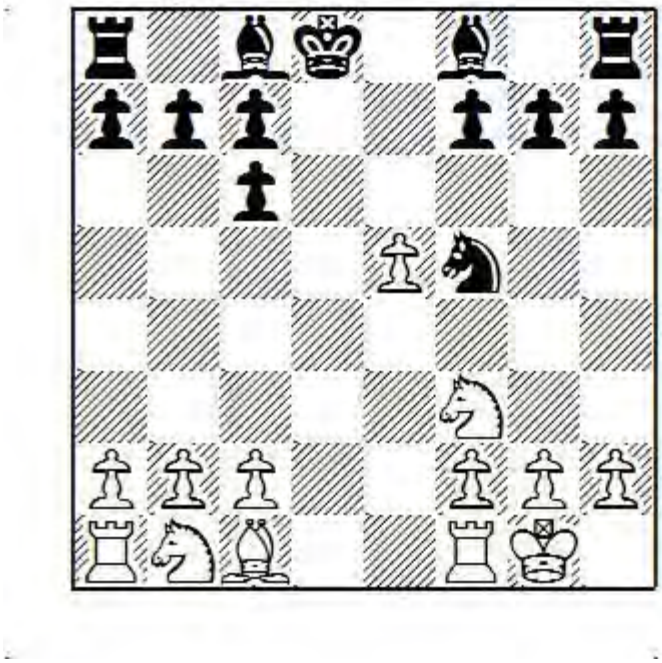
If 28 ... Rxb2 then 29 Rxe6 Rb1+ 30 Bg1 Rxe6 31 Qa8+ and mates.

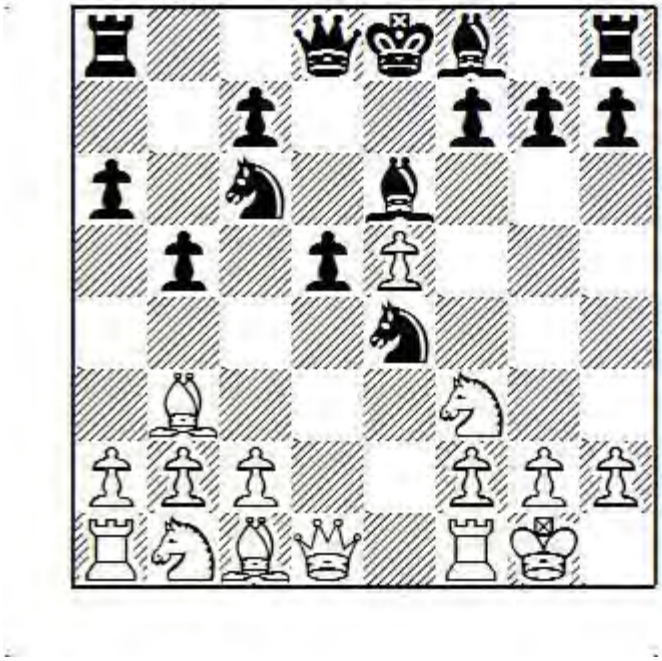
Chapter Four

White's e5 Pawn Centre

Here we'll examine two defences. The first is the Berlin Endgame, with the standard sequence **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 0-0 Nxe4 5 d4 Nd6 6 Bxc6 dxc6 7 dxe5 Nf5 8 Qxd8+ Kxd8**.

The second is the Open Variation of the Ruy Lopez, which typically begins **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Nxe4 6 d4 b5 7 Bb3 d5 8 dxe5 Be6**.





Note that, if White wishes, he can rule out the Berlin Endgame by 4 d3 (or 4 Qe2). Similarly, 5 d3 stops the capture on e4 and so prevents the Open Variation.

Question: Should I allow the Berlin Endgame and Open Variation?

Answer: You should give serious consideration to these avoidance measures, which have been examined in Chapter One. They have been used regularly by Carlsen and other top players and don't give Black an easy life. From a practical point of view, it saves on the amount of theory you have to learn and denies the opponent the chance to play what might be his favourite defence.

Question: Why is the pawn structure in these defences

so different from what we have seen so far?

Answer: White has been allowed to conquer the e5-square with a pawn. This is contrary to the philosophy of the previous sections, in which Black does his utmost to maintain his own pawn on e5 as a stronghold in the centre. However, as we shall see, in return for this positional concession Black gains active play for his pieces.

The Berlin Defence with 4 0-0 Nxe4 5 d4 Be7

We'll begin by examining a game in which Black declines the chance for the Berlin Endgame in favour of 5 ... Be7. This will also give us the chance to look at other early options.

Game 25

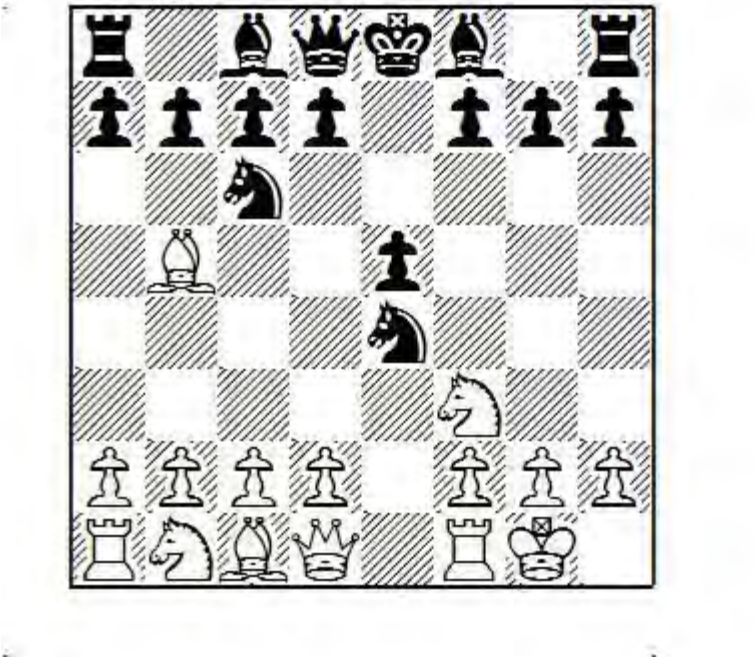
M.Adams-D.Howell

London Classic 2010

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6

Black spurns 3 ... a6 in favour of immediate development and a counterattack against e4. This was an approach advocated by World Champion Emanuel Lasker in his book *Common Sense in Chess* way back in 1895. For most of the 20th Century 3 ... a6 held unchallenged sway. But will the 21st Century be a new age of the Berlin Defence?

4 0-0 Nxe4



Question: So what are the pros and cons for Black

in taking the pawn on e4?

Answer: The positive point of the capture is that, although White will get a pawn on e5, he won't be able to construct a 'perfect' centre with pawns on d4 and e4 any longer. Having reduced the white centre in size and flexibility, Black is in less danger of falling into a long term positional bind. His pieces have more centre squares available to them.

On the minus side, capturing on e4 and getting the knight away takes three moves, so the white pieces are getting out more quickly than the black pieces. Black will have to make some concession to survive the increased energy he is giving the white pieces by opening lines in the centre. In the Berlin Endgame, for example, Black 'buys off' White's immediate pressure by forfeiting the right to castle.

5 d4!

More energetic than 5 Re1. White wants to keep the initiative as well as regain his pawn.

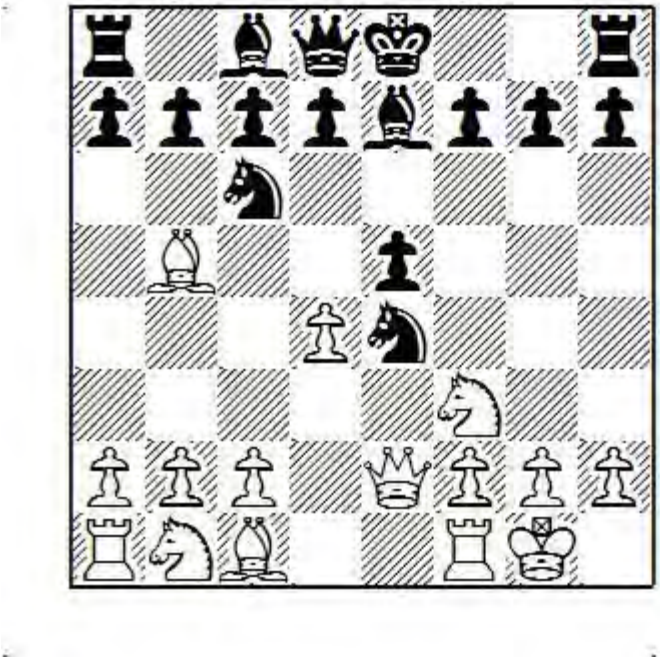
5 ... Be7

The Rio de Janeiro Variation. Howell returns the pawn at once to speed up his development. Similar to the game would be 5 ... Nd6 6 Bxc6 bxc6 (6 ... dxc6 is the Berlin Endgame discussed below) 7 dxe5 Nb7, and now Hübner suggests 8 Nd4!? intending 9 Qf3 as clearly better for White. Black would certainly have problems unravelling his game.

Question: But why not grab a pawn with 5 ... exd4 or 5 ... Nxd4?

Answer: We can quickly dismiss 5 ... Nxd4? as after 6 Nxd4 exd4 7 Re1 f5 8 f3 White wins a piece. More tricky is 5 ... exd4, though 6 Re1 f5 7 Nxd4 Nxd4 8 Qxd4 c6 9 f3! leads to a good endgame for White after 9 ... cxb5 10 fxe4 Qb6 – Black gets the queens off to avoid the frontal attack on his king – 11 exf5+ Kf7, and now rather than 12 Be3, which turned out pretty well for White in O.Korneev-Z.Varga, Zalaegerszeg 2004, the simple 12 Qxb6 axb6 13 Nc3, leaving Black with mangled pawns, looks even stronger to me – if 13 ... Bc5+ 14 Be3.

6 Qe2



Question: Can you guess why this might be preferred to 6 Re1?

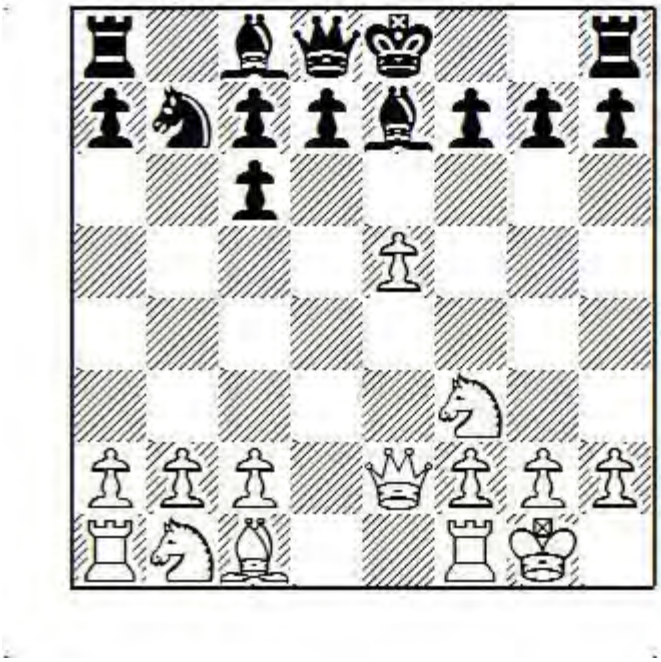
(Hint: think of the Berlin Variation with 5 ... Nd6 6 Bxc6 dxc6.)

Answer: after 6 Re1 Nd6 7 Bxc6 dxc6 8 dxe5 Nf5, in contrast to the normal Berlin Endgame Black has his bishop on e7, so that 9 Qxd8+ doesn't displace his king – he can recapture 9 ... Bxd8. Therefore White plays 6 Qe2 instead of 6 Re1, so if Black headed for this line he could be hit at the end by 9 Rd1, embarrassing his queen. That is why he recaptures with 7 ... bxc6 rather than 7 ... dxc6 below.

6 ... Nd6

Black saves his knight with gain of time by hitting the white bishop. Besides, he doesn't want to walk into a pin on c6 after 6 ... d5 7 Nxe5.

7 Bxc6 bxc6 8 dxe5 Nb7



Strategically speaking, a very double edged situation has arisen. Black's development has suffered – the bishop on c8 is still shut in – and his knight is on a strange square, though given time it could go from c5 to e6, where it would sit nicely in the centre. Meanwhile White has a serious space advantage, but Black hopes to neutralize it with ... f7-f6, when his bishop pair might become the defining feature of the position.

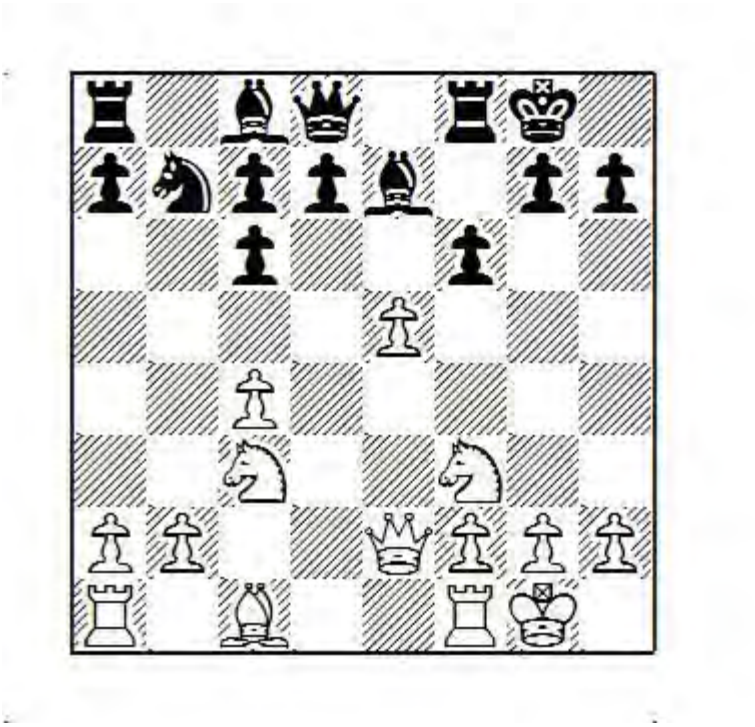
Instead after 8 ... Nf5 the black horse can become a target for White's kingside expansion. For example 9 c4 0-0 10 Nc3 d5 11 Rd1 Be6 12 g4! Nh4 13 Nxh4 Bxh4 14 f4 when Black had no answer to the double threat of 15 f5, winning the d5-pawn, or 15 g5, shutting in the bishop on h4, in M.Vachier Lagrave-A.Kosten, Haute Le Port Marly 2009.

9 c4

Adams increases his pawn presence in the centre before developing his knight to c3.

9 ... 0-0 10 Nc3 f6

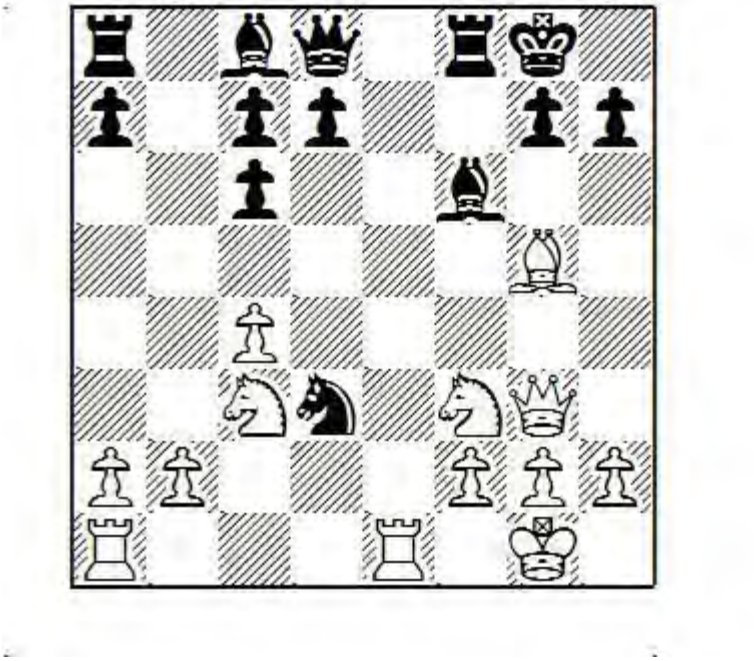
The thematic challenge to the white centre. Even so, Black has to be careful not to try for too much activity when his queenside is still undeveloped. I have seen a photograph of the game M.Tal-V.Smyslov, Moscow 1971, and Tal looked pretty satisfied with his position from the opening after 10 ... Nc5 11 b3 f6 12 Bb2 fxe5 13 Nxe5 etc.



11 Re1 fxe5 12 Qxe5 Bf6 13 Qg3 Nc5

After 13 ... Nd6, trying to exploit the white queen by putting the knight on f5, White got the edge in D.Stellwagen-V.Erdos, Remagen 2011, with 14 c5 Nf5 15 Qf4 Rb8 16 Ne4 d6 17 Nxf6+ Qxf6 18 Qc4+ Qf7 19 Qxf7+ Rxf7 20 b3! as the black queenside pawns are mouldy.

14 Bg5 Nd3



Question: Now how should White deal with the threat to e1 and b2?

Answer: **15 Re3!**

A moment that shows the importance of the initiative. It was possible to play the safe, respectable-looking, routine move 15 Re2, defending the b2-pawn. However, that would give Black vital breathing space to develop his pieces. He might for example try 15 ... d5, stopping the white knight going to e4 and getting his bishop involved in the game. Also after a ... Bxg5 exchange, the black knight could jump to f4, where it is available for the defence and gains time by hitting the rook on e2.

You can see the energy would have drained from the white position after 15 Re2. Whereas after the game move, Black has to deal with the threat to the knight, giving him no time to develop his other pieces.

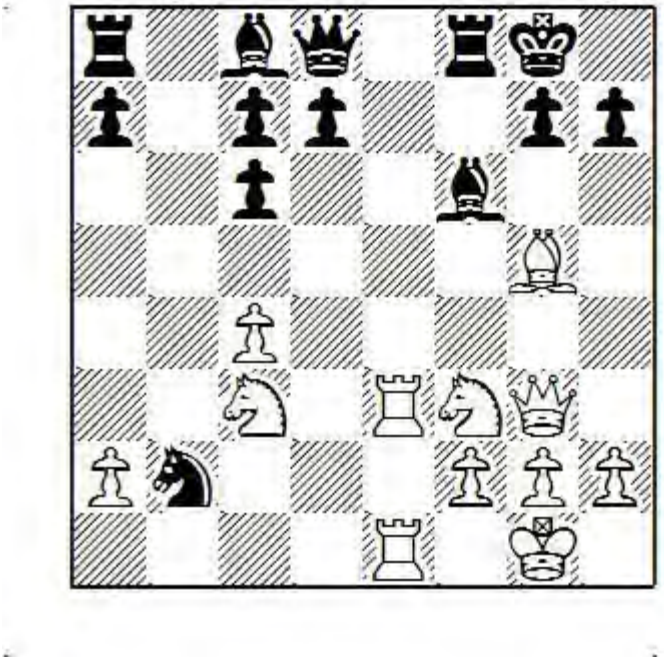
As his knight raid ends in disaster, Black should have thought about development with 14 ... d6 and 15 ... Bf5, though White can still build up in the style of the game with 15 Re3 and 16 Rae1.

15 ... Nxb2

Black grabs a pawn, but it means the knight won't be able to help his king.

16 Rae1!

Played in Morphy style. The American genius specialized in making pawn sacrifices so that his rooks could outpace the enemy rooks in gaining control of an open file. Incidentally, that was also a hallmark of the style of Kasparov, especially in his younger days.

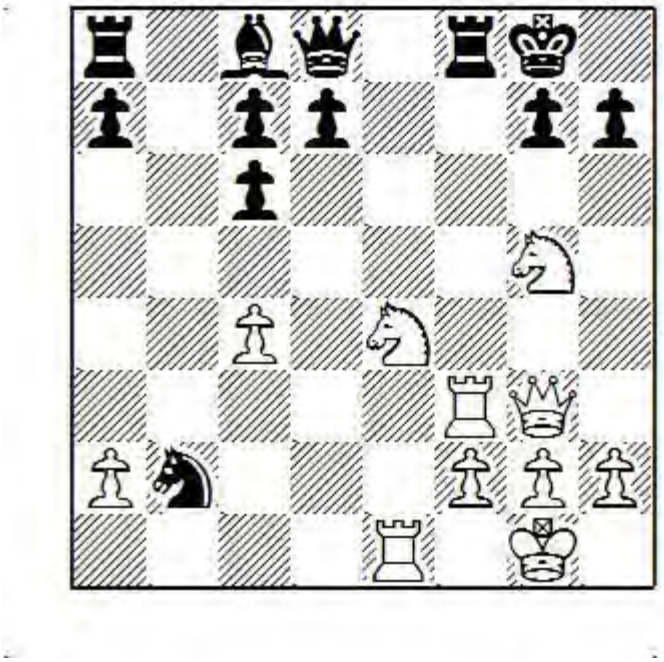


Exercise: Try to work out what happens after 16 ... Nxc4.

16 ... Bxg5

Answer: After 16 ... Nxc4 17 Re7! the pressure on g7 is decisive. For example 17 ... Bxe7 18 Rxe7 (one threat is now 19 Rxg7+ Kxg7 20 Bxd8+) 18 ... Rxf3 (clearing f8 for the queen) 19 gxf3 Qf8 20 Ne4 d5 21 Bf6 Qxe7 (or 21 ... g6 22 Qxc7 dxe4 23 Rg7+ Kh8 24 Rxh7+ Kg8 25 Rh8 mate) 22 Bxe7 dxe4 23 Bf6 g6 24 Qxc7 and the mate threat on g7 soon decides – it's mate in three at the latest. That might seem a long variation, but the writing was on the wall after 20 Ne4 as Black's defence was hopelessly outnumbered.

17 Nxg5 Qf6 18 Rf3 Qd8 19 Nce4



Exercise: How should White continue after 19 ... Nxc4?

Generally speaking, in order to carry out a successful attack on the enemy king, a large superiority in firepower is required. This is because the king himself and his defensive wall of pawns can be surprisingly resilient.

Here, however, White's advantage is overwhelming. He has all his pieces – the queen, two rooks and a knight – engaged in the attack, whereas only the black queen and rook on f8 are available to the defence.

19 ... Ba6

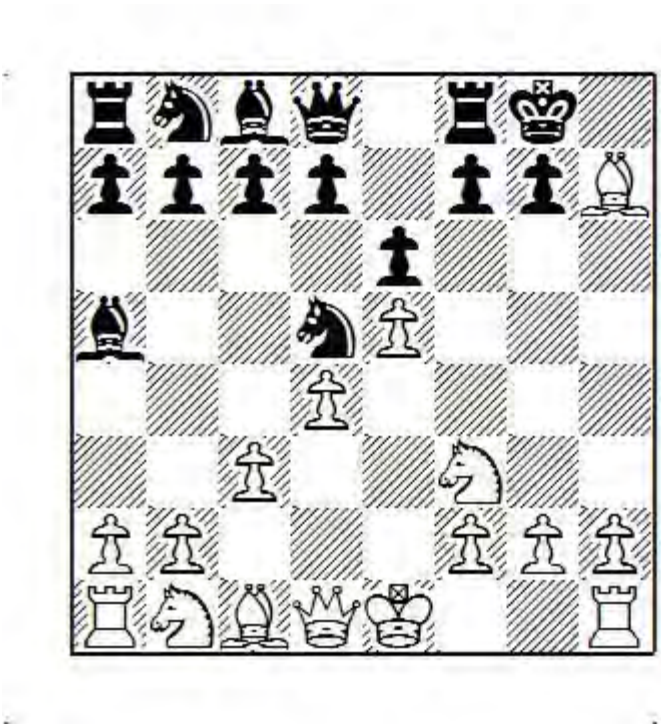
Answer: After 19 ... Nxc4, 20 Rxf8+ Qxf8 21 Nf6+! wins: 21 ... gxf6 22 Ne6+ picks up the queen, as does 21 ... Qxf6 22 Re8+ Qf8 23 Rxf8+ Kxf8 with the knight to follow as well after 24 Qf4+, while upon 21 ... Kh8 the quickest of many wins is 22 Qh4 h6 23 Qe4! with catastrophe on h7 for the black king.

20 Nxh7!

Question: I guess you need strong powers of

calculation to carry out a kingside attack?

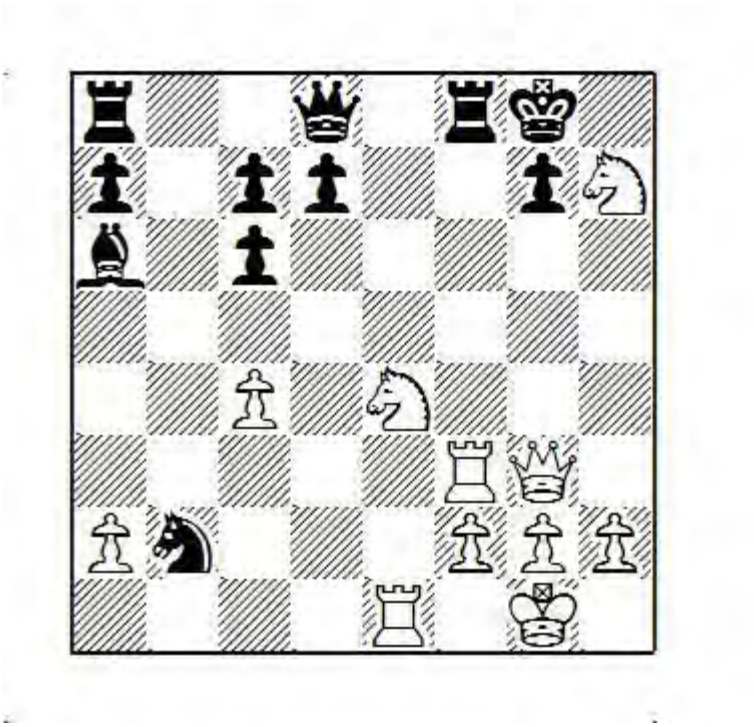
Answer: Not particularly, the important thing is to be familiar with standard attacking patterns. For example you might have seen the 'Greek Gift' sacrifice. Here is the earliest example, from a 16th century manuscript by Polerio: 1 e4 e6 2 d4 Nf6 3 Bd3 Bb4+ 4 c3 Ba5 5 Nf3 0-0 6 e5 Nd5 7 Bxh7+!.



The Greek Gift sacrifice. It wins time for the white queen and knight to launch a decisive attack on the black king. After 7 ... Kxh7 8 Ng5+ it is soon over, for example 8 ... Kg8 (or 8 ... Kh6 9 Nxe6+ winning the queen, while after 8 ... Kg6 9 h4! followed by 10 h5+ or 10 Qg4 the black king is defenceless) 9 Qh5 Re8 (he had to give up the queen with 9 ... Qxg5) 10 Qxf7+ Kh8 11 Qh5+ Kg8 12 Qh7+ Kf8 13 Qh8+ Ke7 14 Qxg7 mate.

The latest example I know about was played by one of my Redhill Chess Club team mates, Cliff Chandler: 1 e4 e6 2 d4 d5 3 Nc3 Nf6 4 Bg5 Be7 5 e5 Nfd7 6 h4 0-0 7 Bd3 c5 8 Nh3 cxd4?? 9 Bxe7 Qxe7 and, familiar with the Greek Gift pattern, Cliff played 10 Bxh7+!. His opponent knew it as well and so resigned rather than face 10 ... Kxh7 11 Qh5+ Kg8 12 Qh5.

If you look at Adams' move 20 Nxh7!, you can see it borrows the theme of the Greek Gift – a piece is sacrificed on h7 to expose the black king and so win time for a decisive combination by the white queen and knight. It isn't quite as forcing as there is no check, but Black can't ignore the destruction of his kingside. So Howell decides to take the knight and in sporting style lets his opponent carry out a neat mate in the centre of the board.



20 ... Rxf3 21 gxf3!

The white queen has to stay on g3 to support his next move.

21 ... Kxh7 22 Ng5+ Kg8 23 Qh4 Bxc4 24 Qh7+ Kf8 25 Re5!

Threatening 26 Rf5+.

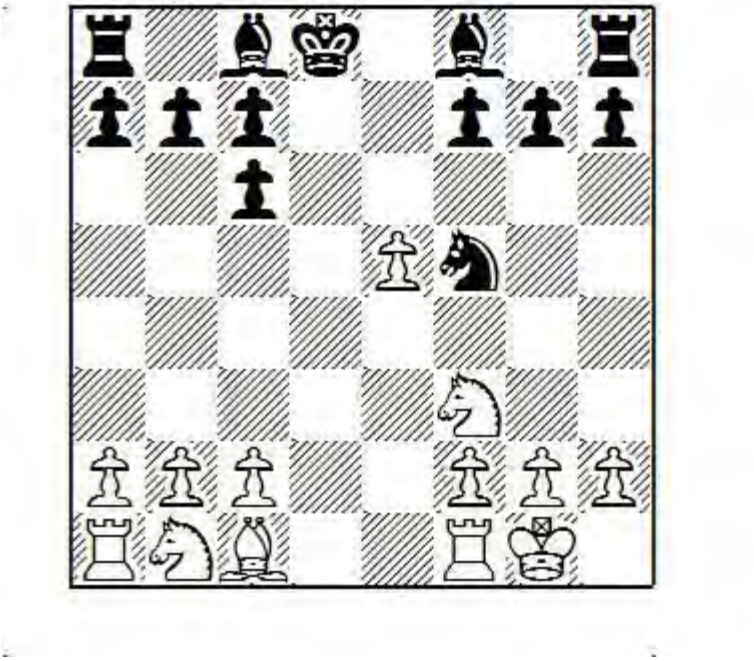
25 ... Be6 26 Qh8+ Ke7 27 Qxg7+ Kd6 28 Ne4 mate.

The Berlin Endgame

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6

At the time of writing, 3 ... Nf6 has become a choice of champions, being adopted by the current World Champion Anand, former World Champions Kramnik and Topalov, and the highest-rated player in the world Magnus Carlsen. The emphasis has very much been on the endgame reached after:

4 0-0 Nxe4 5 d4 Nd6 6 Bxc6 dxc6 (Lasker preferred 6 ... bxc6) **7 dxe5 f5 8 Qxd8+ Kxd8**



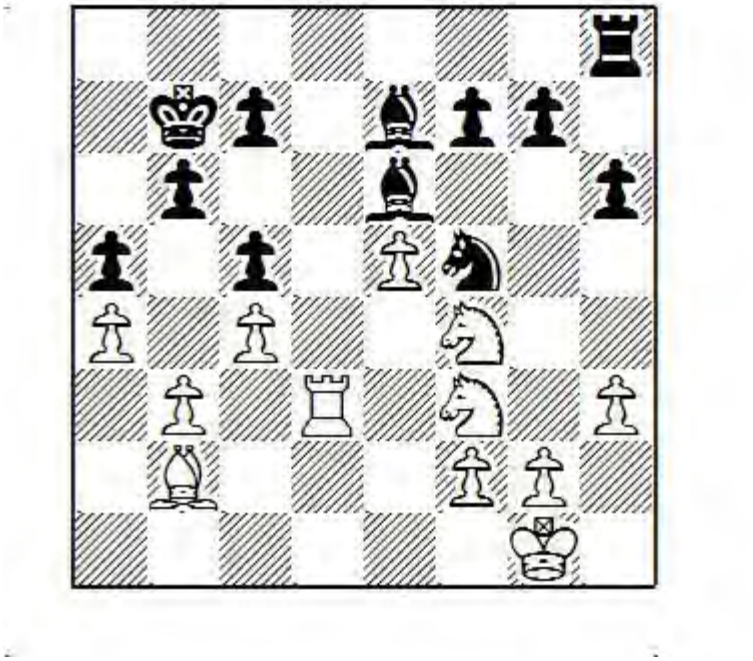
Using the Berlin Defence as a surprise weapon, Kramnik was undefeated as Black in four games from this position in his World Championship match against Kasparov in 2000. This was a tremendous achievement in view of Kasparov's fearsome record with the white pieces, and it helped Kramnik considerably in his bid to win the title.

Despite deep analysis in the decade or so since the 2000 match, White has found it extraordinarily difficult to prove an advantage in the Berlin endgame. Perhaps that explains its popularity – the Berlin Defence is curiously resistant to computer-based analysis of variations. White might find a way to get a slight advantage, but it will be in the field of strategy – he is unlikely to find a stunning combinative blow at the end of a long sequence of moves.

The endgame from this diagram will form the centrepiece of our discussion of the Berlin Defence. Black has a compact pawn structure. It is defensively strong, but in a simple endgame it might prove dynamically weak, for the basic reason that White's 4-3 pawn majority on the kingside can be converted into a passed pawn just by advancing, whereas black's queenside majority with its doubled pawns can be blocked by White's three pawns. Of course, we are imagining a scenario where things have gone seriously wrong for Black, but it is worth bearing in mind that if a lot of pieces are exchanged off, White's kingside pawns could prove significantly more mobile than Black's queenside pawns.

Before looking at theory and middlegame ideas (I still regard the position after 8 ... Kxd8 as a middlegame despite the queen exchange!), we should familiarize ourselves with the type of simplified endgame that White is aiming for.

Endgame Scenario One



The diagram shows the position reached in the game **D.Kokarev-P.Palachev**, Tolyatti 2011, after the moves 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 0-0 Nxe4 5 d4 Nd6 6 Bxc6 dxc6 7 dxe5 Nf5 8 Qxd8+ Kxd8 9 Nc3 Bd7 10 h3 h6 11 b3 Kc8 12 Bb2 Be7 13 Rfd1 a5 14 a4 b6 15 Rd3 Be6 16 Ne2 c5 17 c4 Kb7 18 Nf4 Rad8 19 Rad1 Rxd3 20 Rxd3.

Note that White has been allowed to manoeuvre his knight to the f4-square. This gives him the chance to fracture the black kingside pawns with Nxe6 – an exchange that is often, though by no means always, associated with an advantage to White.

Question: Do you mean Black normally stops

this knight manoeuvre – how?

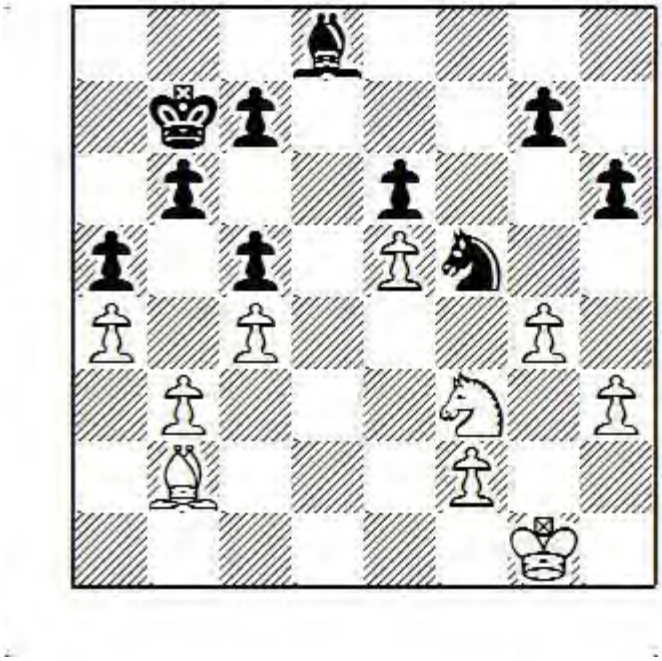
Answer: Despite its weakening appearance, in the Berlin Black often plays ... g7-g5 to restrain White's kingside pawns. One of its good points is that it stops Nf4 by White – another is the freeing of the g7-square for Black's bishop. You can see an example of the ... g7-g5 structure in the third endgame scenario.

From the diagram, play continued:

20 ... Rd8?

Black confidently exchanges off all the pieces. As his king is so far away from the kingside, where White is planning a breakthrough, this is a dubious strategy. He should keep the rook to fight White's pawns – perhaps by supporting an immediate 20 ... h5!?. Alternatively he could sit tight and secure the d-file against invasion with 20 ... Kc8.

21 Rxd8 Bxd8 22 Nxe6 fxe6 23 g4



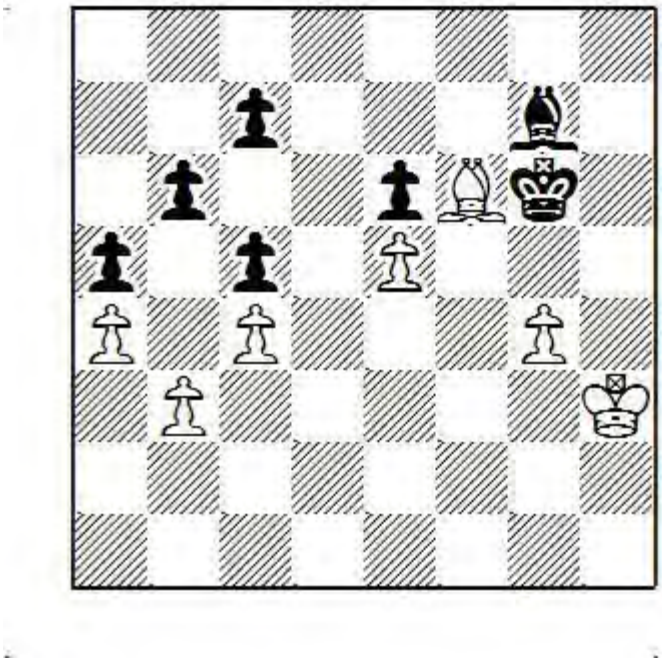
23 ... Nh4

Again we must recommend avoiding exchanges, this time with 23 ... Ne7.

24 Nxh4 Bxh4 25 Bc1 Kc6 26 Kg2 Kd7 27 Bf4 Ke8 28 Bg3 Be7

At least Black realizes that with doubled pawns the king and pawn endgame would be hopeless for him.

29 h4 g5 30 f4 gxf4 31 Bxf4 Bxh4 32 Bxh6 Kf7 33 Kh3 Be7 34 Bf4 Kg6 35 Bg3 Bf8 36 Bh4 Bg7 37 Bf6!



Nakamura escaped when a pawn down versus Anand in a Berlin bishop endgame at the 2010 London Classic, but Black has no such luck here.

37 ... Bxf6

He cannot refuse the offer, as 37 ... Bh6 allows the massacre of his queenside pawns with 38 Bd8.

38 exf6 Kxf6

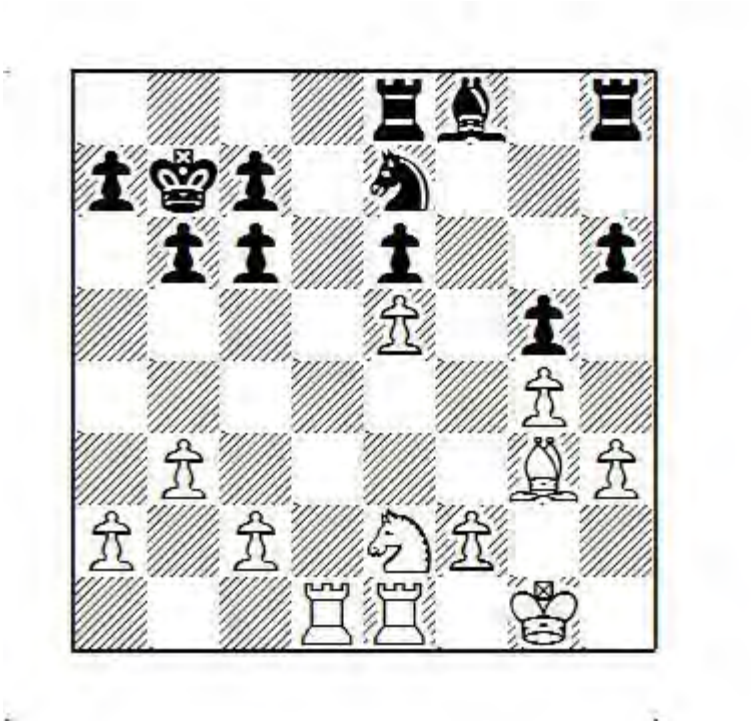
Now White's outside passed pawn will deflect the black king long enough for his own king to chomp on the e-pawn and then reach the queenside first. Still, Kokarev had to calculate it accurately as the result of the game depends on a single tempo.

39 Kg3 e5 40 Kf3 Kg5 41 Ke4 Kxg4 42 Kxe5 Kf3 43 Kd5 Ke3 44 Kc6 Kd3 45 Kxc7 Kc3 46 Kxb6 Kb4

Or 46 ... Kxb3 47 Kb5!

47 Kc6 Kxb3 48 Kb5 1-0

Endgame Scenario Two



The diagrammed position was reached in **A.Timofeev-A.Mastrovasilis**, Warsaw 2005, after 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 0-0 Nxe4 5 d4 Nd6 6 Bxc6 dxc6 7 dxe5 Nf5 8 Qxd8+ Kxd8 9 Nc3 Bd7 10 h3 b6 11 Bf4 Kc8 12 Rad1 h6 13 Ne4 Be6 14 g4 Ne7 15 Nd4 Bd5 16 Nc3 Bc4 17 Rfe1 Kb7 18 b3 Be6 19 Nxe6 fxe6 20 Ne2 Re8 21 Bg3 g5. As in the example above, White has been allowed to exchange a knight for a bishop on the e6-square, weakening Black's pawns. Timofeev showed some impressive technique to exploit his advantage – the first step is to get his king to the e4-square.

22 Kg2!

Question: Is the white king always in the thick

of things in the Berlin Endgame?

Answer: Yes, that's pretty much the case. White's strategic plan is to try to create a passed pawn by pushing his kingside pawns, and as he has castled kingside, his king is caught up in the action whether he likes it or not! Often this is good thing – here for example the black king can only watch enviously as the white monarch strides forwards. However, in more complex situations, White has to be careful that his king doesn't get caught in the crossfire between the white and black pieces.

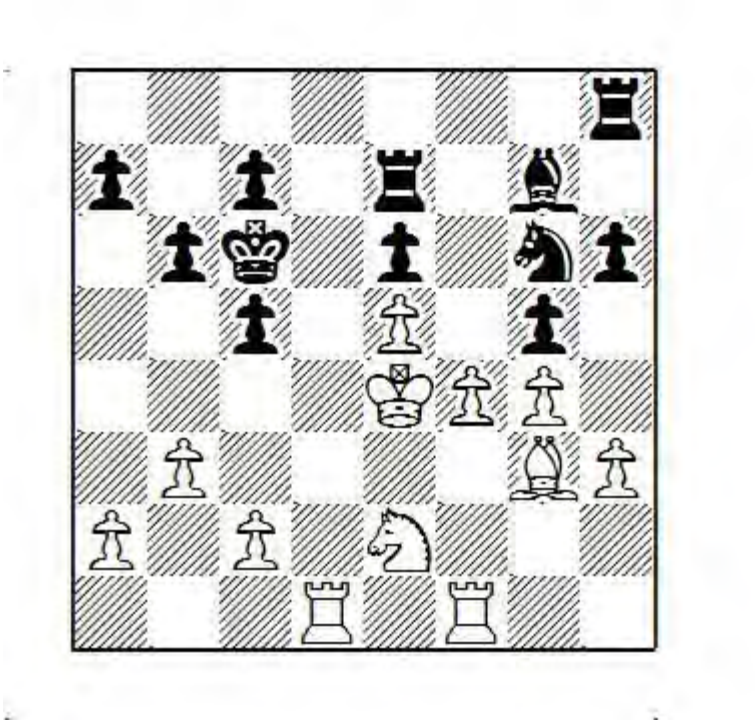
22 ... Bg7 23 Kf3 c5 24 Ke4 Kc6

The black king does his best to be involved in the battle, but there is no escaping the fact that he is unable to help restrain White's kingside pawns.

25 f4

At last White begins his advance.

25 ... Ng6 26 Rf1 Re7



Exercise: Try to find a way for White to prepare a breakthrough on the kingside without allowing the black pieces to spring to life.

If 27 f5? exf5+ 28 Rxf5 Rhe8 29 Rd5 – the only way to defend the e5-pawn which was attacked four times – Black has the dainty move 29 ... Kb7! clearing the way for 30 ... c6 to drive away the white rook, after which e5 collapses.

It is this type of scenario that Black is aiming for when he plays the Berlin. White is making all the running, he is dreaming of queening a pawn and then – crunch! – it suddenly falls apart for him because his pawns have become too loose or over-extended.

It is this positional complexity that makes the Berlin a favourite of ambitious players of Black. There is nothing dull about the variation, despite the exchange of queens.

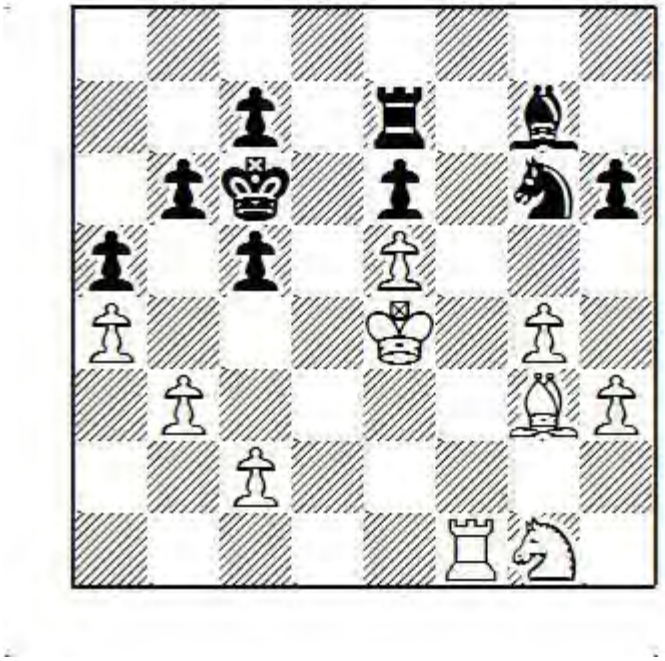
Answer: **27 Ng1!**

Well done if you saw this move. White intends to put his knight on f3 when Black will be compelled to exchange on f4 or else g5 drops. Then White will have a 2-1 pawn majority on the kingside that he can gradually advance in order to create a passed pawn. It won't be easy to win, but White would certainly have good chances. As is so often the case, the prospect of a gruelling defence proves too much for a player, and Black does White's work for him by making a doomed bid for counterplay on the queenside.

27 ... a5 28 a4!

Not letting Black break things up with 28 ... a4.

28 ... gxf4 29 Bxf4 Rf8 30 Bg3 Rxf1 31 Rxf1



Question: How bad is this position for Black?

Answer: Pretty miserable, but I could imagine Kramnik getting a draw with some beautifully passive defence. Instead there came:

31 ... b5?

I couldn't imagine Kramnik playing a move like this, though! Nothing can be gained by this move which wrecks Black's queenside pawns.

32 Nf3 bxa4 33 bxa4 Re8 34 Nd2!

White's knight proves a versatile beast. Black has no time for 34 ... Rb8 because of 35 Rf7.

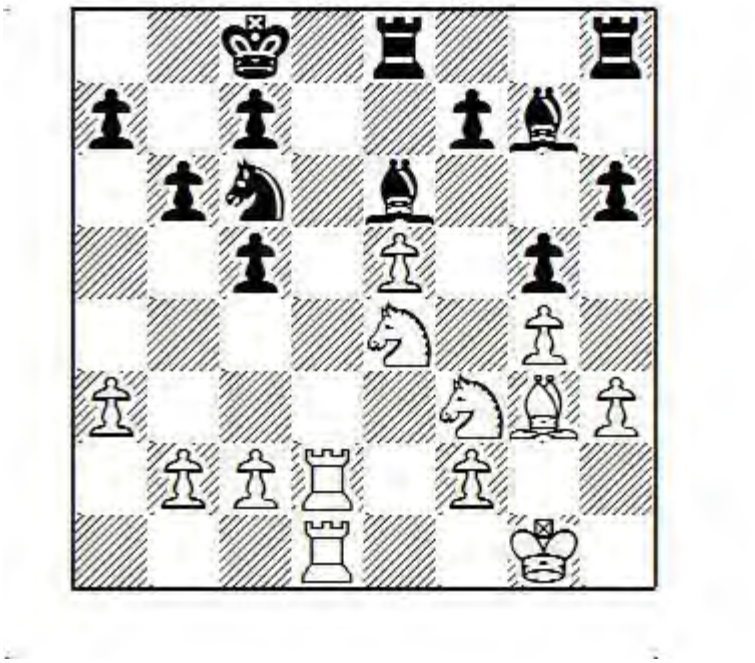
34 ... Rd8 35 Nb3! c4

Losing, but otherwise 35 ... Ra8 36 Rf7 Bh8 37 Rh7 is gruesome.

36 Nd4+ 1-0

The e6-pawn drops, as if 36 ... Kd7 White has 37 Rf7+.

Endgame Scenario Three



The diagrammed position is from **A.Predke-A.Kharlov**, Tolyatti 2011, after 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 0-0 Nxe4 5 d4 Nd6 6 Bxc6 dxc6 7 dxe5 Nf5 8 Qxd8+ Kxd8 9 Nc3 Bd7 10 h3 b6 11 Bf4 h6 12 Rad1 Kc8 13 g4 Ne7 14 Rd3 c5 15 Rfd1 Be6 16 Bg3 Kb7 17 a3 Re8 18 R3d2 Kc8 19 Ne2 g5 20 Nc3 Bg7 21 Ne4 Nc6. Here White swapped knight for bishop with:

22 Nf6 Bxf6 23 exf6

Question: Surely this exchange eases Black's defence

as there are now opposite-coloured bishops?

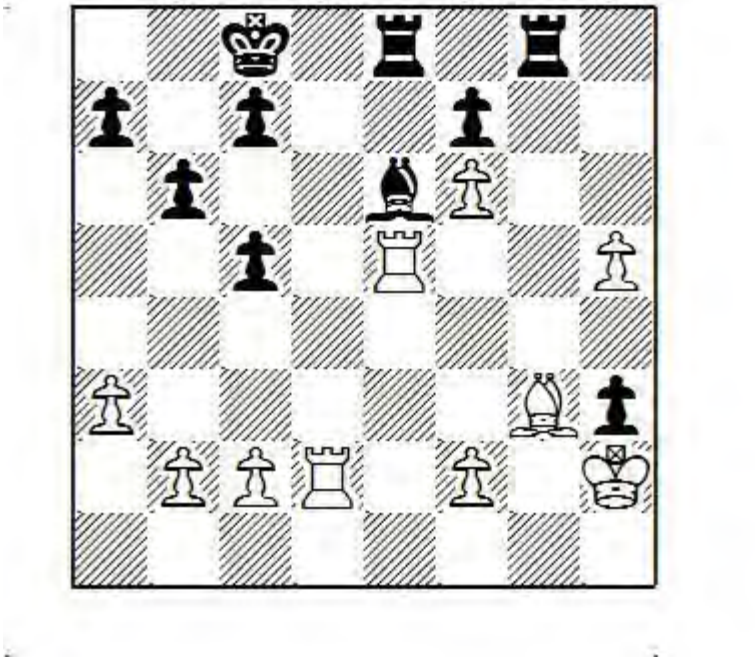
Assuming of course White is playing for a win ...

Answer: Generally speaking it should favour the defender. But notice that White's bishop on g3 can now see daylight and his knight has access to the e5-square. Also the pawn on f6 is only two steps from queening (admittedly taking one more step is mightily difficult). If White manages to break through on the kingside the pawn will be a very useful asset.

23 ... Rhg8 24 Re1 Bd7 25 Red1

It seems that White is peaceably inclined, or else trying (successfully!) to provoke his opponent into inappropriate action. He might for example have played 25 Ne5 Nxe5 26 Bxe5, and then after 26 ... Bc6 tried to edge forwards on the kingside with moves like 27 Rde2, Re3, f2-f3, Kg2, Kg3 and h3-h4. It wouldn't be at all easy, but it would be a dour defence for Black. Instead White found an easier way to create winning chances – offer a draw by repetition and let his higher-rated opponent make a reckless bid for activity.

25 ... Be6 26 Re1 h5? 27 gxh5 g4 28 Ne5 Nxe5 29 Rxe5 gxh3 30 Kh2!



Exactly: White is in effect a king up, as his monarch can block the black passed pawn whereas his opposite number can do nothing to fight against the white passed pawn.

30 ... Rh8 31 Bf4 Reg8

If 31 ... Bg4 32 Re7! attacking c7, when the creation of another passed pawn with 32 ... Rxe7 33 fxe7 is too much to bear.

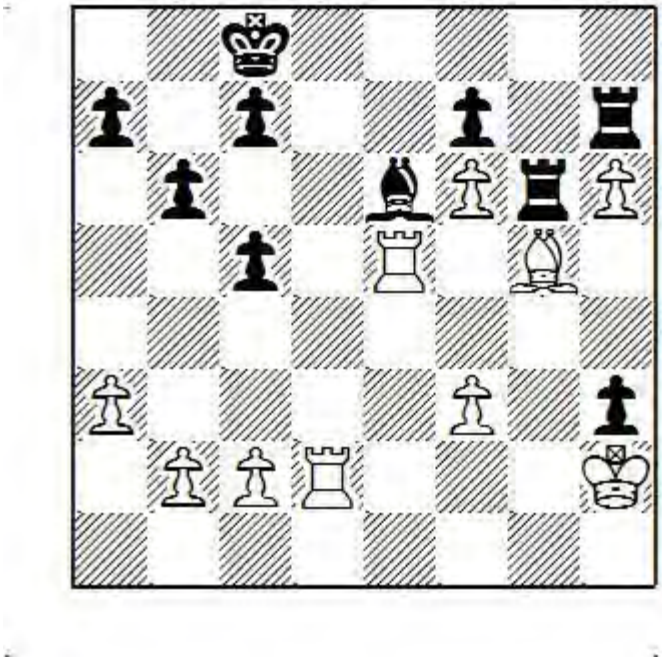
32 f3!

A simple move that rules out the check on g2.

32 ... Rh7 33 h6

Instead 33 Rde2 would offer White more winning chances, as the game move gives Black the chance to sacrifice the exchange to be rid of White's passed pawn.

33 ... Rg6 34 Bg5



Exercise: Should Black play 34 ... Rgxh6 or 33 ... Rhxh6,

or is there no difference?

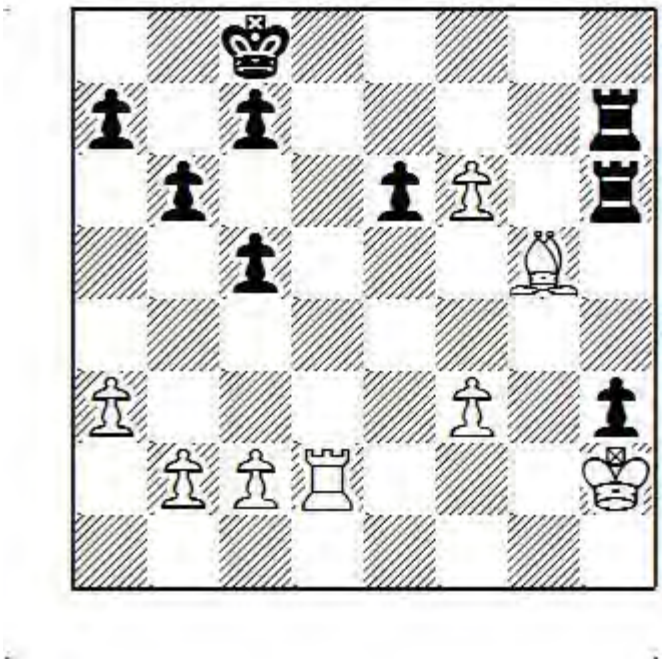
34 ... Rgxh6?

Answer: Instead after 34 ... Rhxh6! 35 Bxh6 (if 35 Rxe6 Rxg5!) 35 ... Rxh6 Black will pick up the f6-pawn with good drawing chances.

35 Rxe6!

Kharlov must have overlooked this breakthrough.

35 ... fxe6



Exercise: Find a clever way for White to conclude the game.

36 f7?

So the pawn did manage to take one more step. But there was a much more spectacular way of doing things.

Answer: 36 Rd8+! ends the game at once after 36 ... Kxd8 37 f7+ and the pawn queens, or 36 ... Kb7 37 Bxh6 Rxh6 38 f7 and Black will lose his rook.

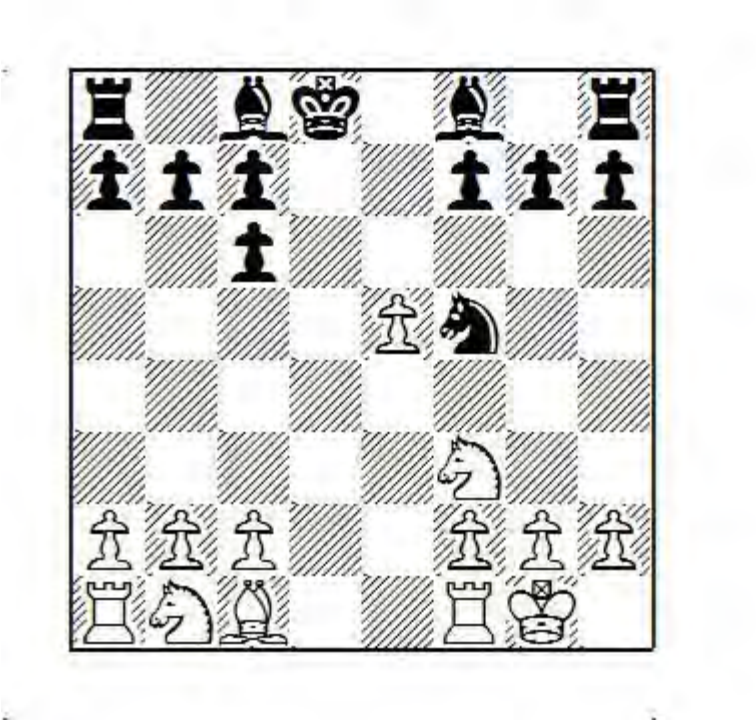
36 ... Rxf7 37 Bxh6 Rxf3

and Black managed to scrape a draw by the skin of his teeth by swapping off all the pawns and defending a rook and bishop versus rook endgame.

A heavyweight struggle in the middlegame

It is time to return to the middlegame and consider the problems that White faces in trying to reach the favourable endgame scenarios discussed above.

Let's return to the position after **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 0-0 Nxe4 5 d4 Nd6 6 Bxc6 dxc6 7 dxe5 Nf5 8 Qxd8+ Kxd8**.



Whereas Black's queenside pawns are defensively strong but dynamically weak, we might say that White's e5-pawn is *potentially* strong from a dynamic viewpoint but defensively weak. It has rather overshot the mark – given the choice White would rather have the pawn back on e4, where it defends the d5 and f5 light squares and can be supported by f2-f3 to keep the pawns in a trim formation. With the pawn on e5, there are already the beginnings of a light-square vacuum around it.

Black might try to gain a grip on these light squares with moves like ... h7-h5, ... Be6 and ... Ne7 followed by ... Ng6, restricting the white pawns and trying to impose a light-square blockade. It is a well known fact of chess strategy that a pawn majority that is blocked and inert becomes a strategic liability.

Question: So how should White counter this plan?

Answer: Ideally he would like to get his pawn majority on the kingside rolling and, with his pieces offering support from the rear, create a passed pawn and queen it. Easily said than done: the practical difficulties in carrying out this plan are horrendous. That is why, even if White objectively is a little better at the beginning of the Berlin battle, he could easily end up being outplayed by a more skilled opponent. By the time the white kingside pawns are advancing, the black pieces have normally manned the barricades. Unless properly backed up, the kingside charge can degenerate into a massacre of white pawns.

Not that everything is easy for Black. He has to solve the problem of connecting his rooks, and be wary lest his king comes under

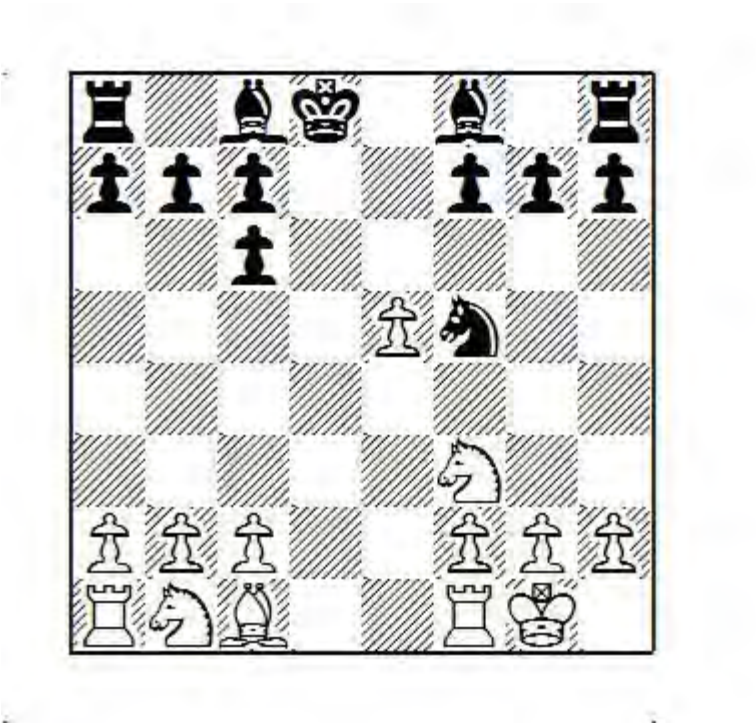
direct fire from the enemy rooks via the d-file. The f7-square is a possible weakness, and putting the bishop on e6 can backfire if White can respond with Ng5 or (after Nc3 and Ne2) Nf4 followed by Nxe6, disposing of the black bishop pair and isolating the e6-pawn.

Game 26

I.Nepomniachtchi-L.Bruzon Batista

Capablanca Memorial, Havana 2010

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 0-0 Nxe4 5 d4 Nd6 6 Bxc6 dxc6 7 dxe5 Nf5 8 Qxd8+ Kxd8



Question: After 9 Rd1+ would Black do better to block the check with 9 ... Bd7 or move his king to e8? In general, do you think giving the check

is a good, bad or simply okay idea for White?

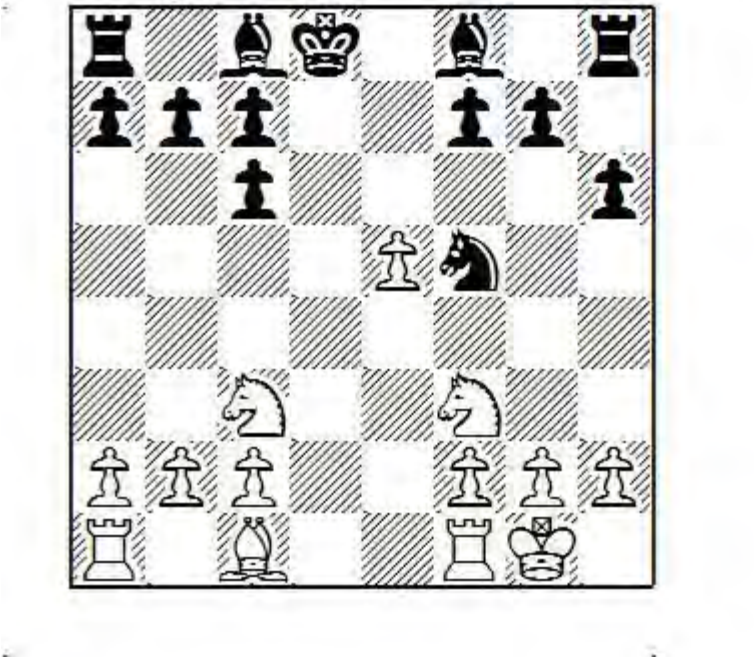
9 Nc3

Answer: 9 Rd1+ would lead to embarrassment for Black after 9 ... Bd7? 10 g4! Ne7 11 e6! (the pawn advance that Black must always ensure is never good for White) 11 ... fxe6 12 Ne5 Nd5 and White wins material with 13 Nf7+ or 13 c4.

However, after 13 Rd1+ Ke8! White has achieved less than nothing with his rook check. Black might have been intending to play ... Ke8 of his own accord, so White has been rather silly to chase the king there. Furthermore, the rook might well prove to be misplaced on d1, especially as White is aiming at kingside action. Speaking in general, Rad1 rather than Rfd1 would be the correct occupation of the d-file by White.

The game move 9 Nc3 is good way for White to start. It makes more sense to put a piece on what is almost certainly its best square than speculate with the rook check.

9 ... h6



Question: What is the purpose of this move?

And what would the best response be to 9 ... Be6?

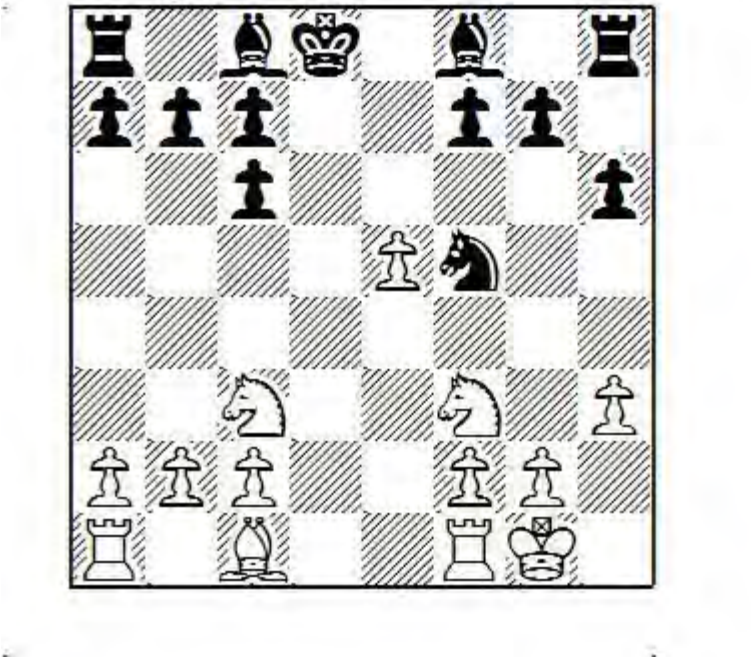
Answer: The move 9 ... h6 takes control of the g5-square. If Black had played 9 ... Be6, which on the face of it seems better as it clears c8 for the king and defends f7, 10 Ng5! is somewhat awkward. For example 10 ... Ke7 (to avoid his pawns being broken up by 11 Nxe6+ fxe6) 11 f4!? (planning to charge with 12 g4 and 13 f5) 11 ... h5 13 Rd1 Rd8 14 Rxd8 Kxd8 15 Nxe6+ fxe6 16 Ne4 and in M.Carlsen-A.Kharlov, Warsaw 2005, a very young Magnus Carlsen gradually edged forwards his pawns on the kingside culminating in an f4-f5 breakthrough. Black is by no means losing after 10 ... Ke7, but it feels as if he has created unnecessary trouble for himself.

Bruzon intends to follow up with ... Bd7 and ... Kc8. He therefore uses 9 ... h6 to guard g5 as otherwise Ng5, threatening Nxf7, would be hard to meet with the king on c8.

Black has also ruled out Bg5 by White, which with the black king on c8 might be part of a plan to double the white rooks on the d-file and then invade on d8.

We shall soon see another role that 9 ... h6 serves in the kingside struggle.

10 h3



A very subtle opening this, with both players making little moves with their h-pawns.

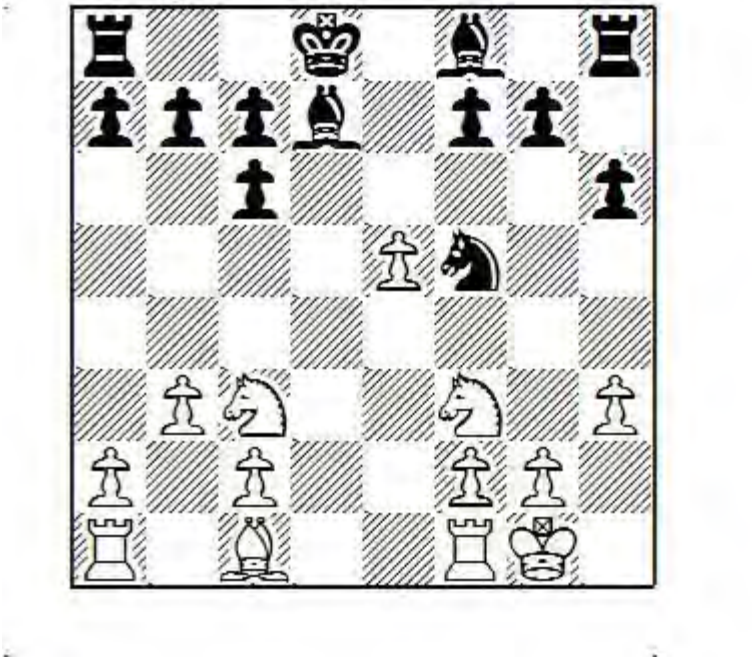
White's h2-h3 will almost certainly prove useful at some point in supporting g2-g4. If Black plays 10 ... Be6, we can charge straightaway with 11 g4!? Ne7 12 Nd4 (clearing the way for the f-pawn with gain of time as Black has no wish to allow 13 Nxe6+) 12 ... Bd7 13 f4 Nd5 14 Nxd5 cxd5 15 f5 etc., as in A.Shirov-F.Vallejo Pons, Arvier 2010. Shirov managed to win this game but he had to show all his tactical and positional virtuosity to keep control. Black has enormous defensive/counterattacking resources due to the bishop pair.

It won't always be a good idea for White to push his pawns in this fashion, but 10 h3 keeps the latent threat of g2-g4 hanging over Black's head. It also rules out any idea of ... Bg4 by Black after the knight retreats to e7 (the regrouping ... Ne7 and ... Ng6 is a common manoeuvre for Black in the Berlin).

10 ... Bd7!?

A move favoured by Kramnik, the pioneer of the Berlin Defence in its 21st Century version.

11 b3



The 11 g4?! advance is much less attractive now that there is no black bishop on e6 to gain a tempo off with Nd4. After 11 ... Ne7 White already has to worry about 12 ... h5. The white pawns look like targets rather than a dynamic mass.

The game move is very sensible. White's bishop doesn't have much scope along the c1-h6 diagonal, so Nepomniachtchi elects to put it on b2, where it overprotects e5 and might suddenly come alive if the chance for an e5-e6 breakthrough arises.

11 ... c5

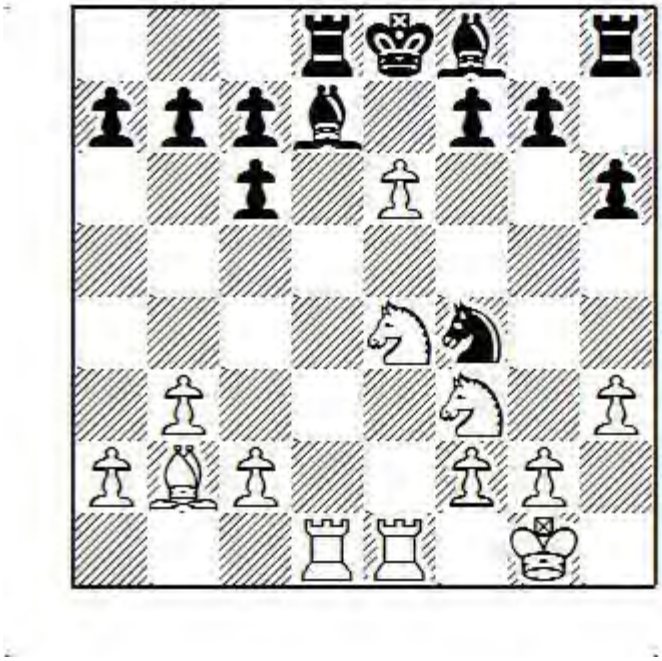
Encouraged by White's 'slow' 11 b3, Black immediately utilizes his queenside pawns to gain control of the d4-square. See the note to 14 ... g5 for one reason why this is positionally useful.

Question: Assuming the black king won't stay

indefinitely on d8, should it go to c8 or e8?

Answer: The modern preference is for the king to go to c8, as played by Bruzon in this game and by Carlsen later in the chapter. Most likely it will be evacuated from the first rank by ... b7-b6 and ... Kb7, when the black rooks are connected. Alternatively it could stay on c8, helping to guard the d-file against White's rooks. In that case the rook on a8 might try to slip into the game via a6 (this isn't possible in the present game after Black plays 15 ... b6).

The alternative direction with ... Ke8 is less popular, even though it has the good features that f7 is defended and ... Rd8 can be quickly played. I guess it is considered that the king gets in the way of defensive action by the black rooks on the kingside – the move ... Rag8 would for example be blocked. More acutely, Black got into trouble in G.Kasparov-V.Kramnik, Astana 2001, after 11 ... Ke8 12 Bb2 Rd8 13 Rad1 Ne7 14 Rfe1 Ng6 15 Ne4 Nf4 16 e6!.

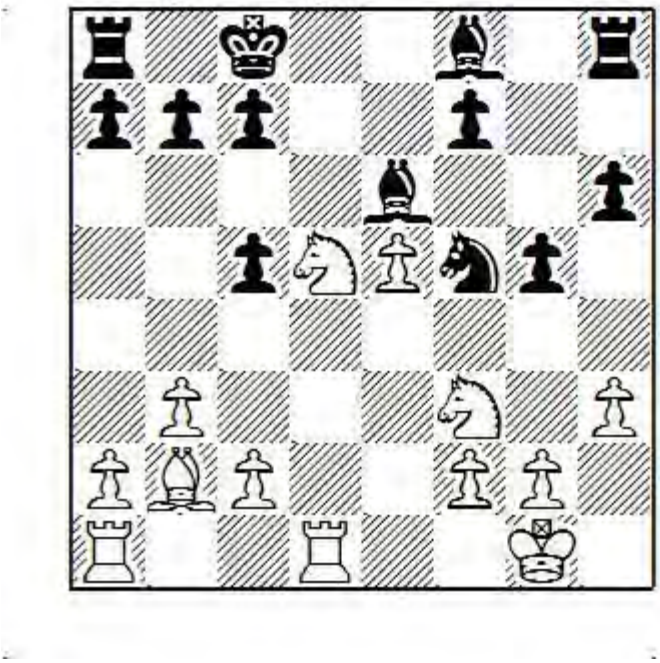


This is a key idea in the Berlin: White advance e5-e6 to disrupt Black's build-up. The game continued 16 ... Nxe6 (if 16 ... Bxe6 17 Nf6+! and Black should resign on account of 17 ... gxf6 18 Rxd8+ Kxd8 19 Bxf6+ Be7 20 Bxh8 or 17 ... Ke7 18 Ba3+ Kxf6 19 Rxd8) 17 Nd4 c5 18 Nf5 Rh7 19 Bf6! (exploiting another potential fork) 19 ... Rc8 and now Kasparov ground out a win after 20 Bxg7, but he said after the game that 20 f4! keeping Black in a bind was even stronger, for example 20 ... Bc6 21 Nfg3 with the terrible threat of 22 f5.

Incidentally, if Kasparov had managed to play this powerfully against Kramnik's Berlin Defence in their 2000 match, modern chess history might have looked very different.

From this extract we can conclude that with the black king on e8, White has the chance to break through before the defence is properly organized. Even with the king on c8 it is usually a serious positional trump for White if he manages to advance e5-e6 in a safe way, even if it amounts to no more than the exchange of the e-pawn for the f7-pawn. Not only would he be breaking Black's potential light-square blockade, he would also be opening lines for his pieces in the centre – and the black king's enforced stay in the centre, whether on c8 or e8, might then become a real liability.

12 Rd1 Kc8 13 Bb2 Be6 14 Nd5 g5



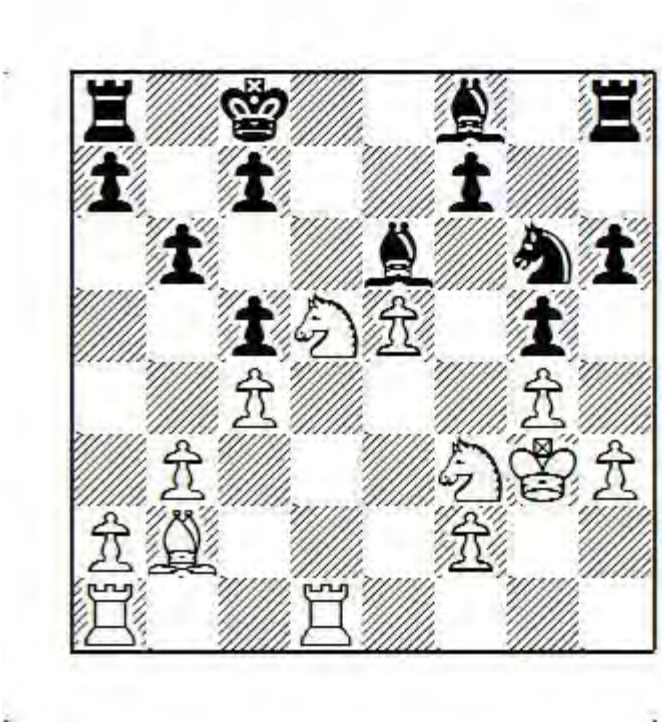
Question: Why on Earth does Black weaken his kingside pawns?

Answer: The general answer is that Black is establishing a barrier to White's looming kingside pawn advance. You will see in the present game that the g5-pawn, supported by the black pieces, is a hard nut for Nepomniachtchi to crack. Indeed, White's game might collapse if he pushes too hard against it.

More specifically, Black is preventing White from carrying out the exchange Nf4 and Nxe6, when after ... f7xe6 his kingside pawns are split and he is deprived of his light-squared bishop, which amongst other things is helping to prevent an invasion by the white rooks on d7. Black has already played 11 ... c5 to guard the bishop against possible exchange by Ne2 and Nd4.

15 c4 b6 16 Kh2 Ne7 17 g4 Ng6 18 Kg3

Now White is ready to advance 19 h4, beginning to remove the black obstacles in the path of his pawn majority.



18 ... Be7!

Preventing White's plan by guarding h4 a third time.

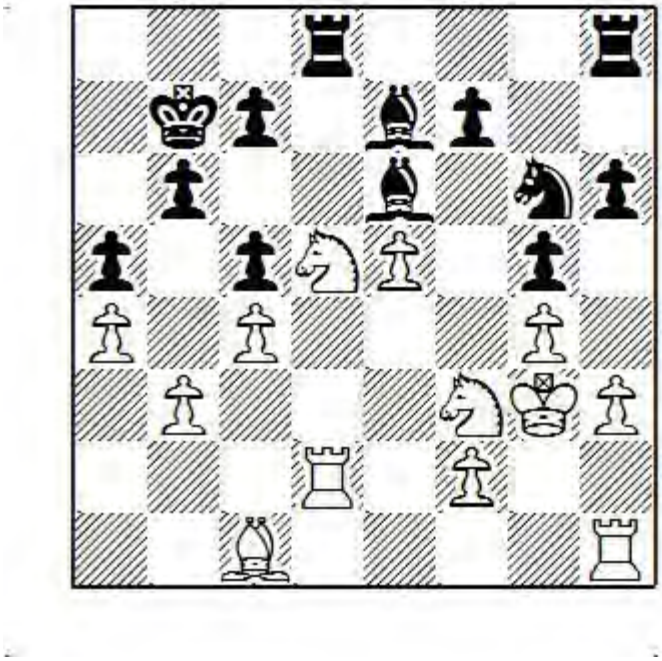
19 Rd2 Kb7

After 19 Nxe7+ Nxe7 White can't advance with 20 h4? because 20 ... gxh4+ puts his king under too much pressure – 21 Nxh4 Rg8 22 f3 h5 or more subtly 21 Kxh4 h5! 22 gxh5 Rg8! and the threats of 23 ... Nf5+ or 23 ... Rg4+ forcing the white king into a discovered check are too painful.

20 Rh1 a5 21 a4!

Not giving Black the chance to open a second front with 21 ... a4.

21 ... Rad8 22 Bc1



Exercise: We have reached a critical point in the game.

Can you suggest a good plan for Black?

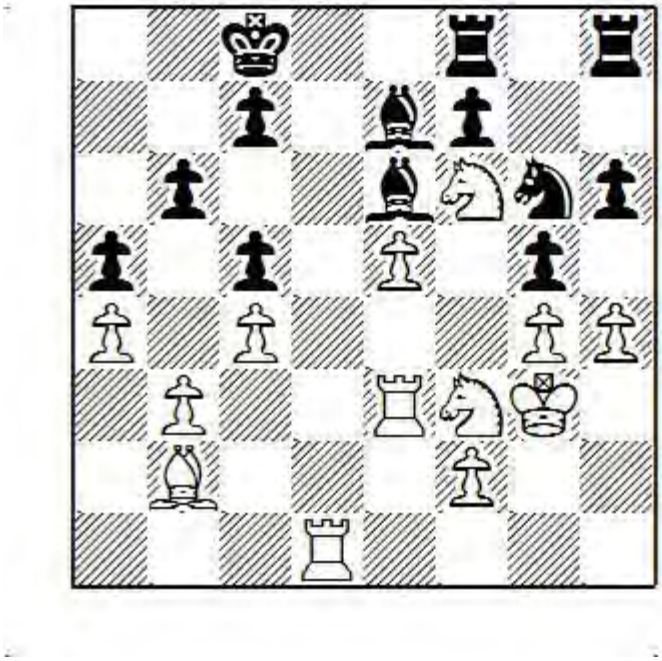
Answer: Passive play doesn't seem sufficient to hold the balance for Black. As we shall see, after some repetitions Nepomniachtchi engineers h3-h4 whereupon the blockade on the kingside starts to crumble. Therefore this seems the moment to counterattack in the centre with 22 ... Bxd5!. After 23 cxd5?! f6! Black suddenly seems better, as 24 e6? (it's wiser to bail out with 24 exf6 though Black is still better after 24 ... Bxf6 as d5 is weak) 24 ... Bd6+ 25 Kg2 Bf4 is highly awkward for White – if the rook moves from d2 then ... Bxc1 and ... Nf4+ follows.

So 23 Rxd5 is forced: 23 ... Rxd5 24 cxd5 Rd8 25 Rd1 f6 26 exf6 Bxf6. Now Black threatens to pick up d5 with 27 ... Ne7, so White has to act fast: 27 h4! gxh4+ 28 Kh3. White is a pawn down but he threatens 29 Bxh6 which would create a passed pawn. 28 ... Rh8 is too passive because of 29 Re1; meanwhile 28 ... Bg7 allows 29 Nxh4. If instead 28 ... Ne7, then 29 Bxh6 Nxd5 (threatening 30 ... Nf4+) 30 Rg1 looks quite promising for White.

22 ... Rdg8 23 Rhd1 Kc8 24 Nf6 Rd8

Note that 24 ... Bxf6?! would be dubious as after 20 exf6 White's far advanced pawn is a menace in the endgame – see Endgame Scenario Three above. The idea of Re1 followed by a Rxe6 exchange sacrifice becomes available to White, clearing the way for the f6-pawn; then Ne5 to help the advance of the pawn is possible.

25 Nd5 Rdg8 26 Rd3 Re8 27 Bb2 Bd8 28 Nf6 Ref8 29 Re3 Be7 30 h4



After a lot of positional jockeying White finally tries to storm the barricades.

30 ... gxh4+ 31 Nxh4 Rfg8

It's important that White can keep his king shielded from the black rooks, for example 31 ... Nxh4 32 Kxh4 Rfg8 33 f3 h5 34 g5 keeps lines closed whilst maintaining the integrity of White's pawn mass. Or alternatively if 31 ... h5 White can choose between 32 g5 and 32 Nxg6 fxg6 33 f3.

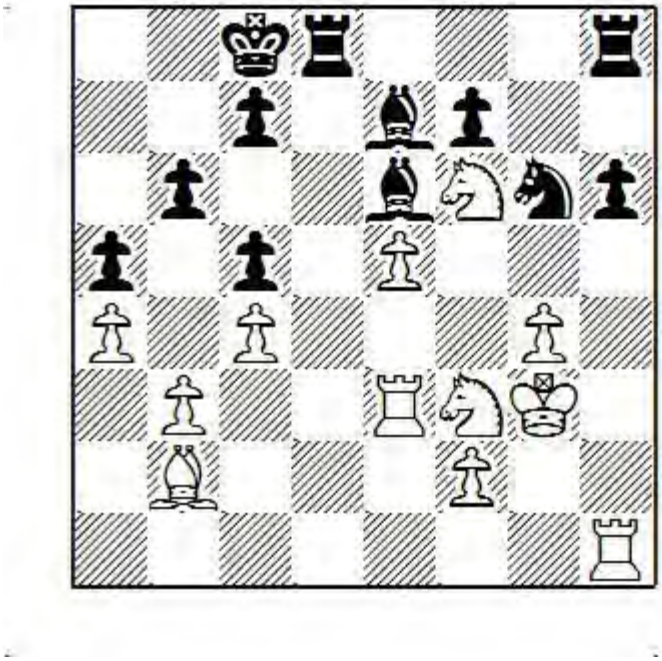
32 Nf3?!

Certainly not 32 Nxg8? Bxh4+. Perhaps more precise was 32 Nxg6 Rxg6 33 f3! keeping his kingside secure. For example if 33 ... Bxf6 (or 33 ... h5 34 Rh1) 34 exf6 the counterattack with 34 ... h5 fails after 35 Rh1! Rgg8 36 Rxe6! fxe6 37 f7 Rf8 38 Bxh8 Rxh8 39 Rxh5 and wins.

32 ... Rd8?!

Black could have put up more resistance with 32 ... Bxf6 33 exf6 Nf8.

33 Rh1!



White's play hereabouts is very thematic – he intends Bc3, Nd2 and then f2-f4 and there is nothing Black can do to stop it.

33 ... c6 34 Bc3 Kc7 35 Nd2 Bf8 36 f4 Ne7 37 Nde4!

Of course he shouldn't allow 37 f5 Bxf5!.

37 ... Bg7 38 Rf3 Bxf6 39 exf6 Nc8 40 f5 1-0

Black either lost on time or gave up in exasperation. Contrary to most Berlin scenarios, White hasn't needed to turn his kingside juggernaut into passed pawns, as its mere presence stops the black pieces functioning properly. After 40 ... Bd7 41 Be5+ Kb7 42 Rd1 Black has no good way to stop 43 Rfd3 winning a piece, as 42 ... Na7 allows 43 Nd6+ and 44 Nxf7.

A good demonstration of the power of White's kingside pawns if they overcome the barriers in their path. You will also have noticed what a strain it was for White to keep control – he got there in the end, but it looked at times as if his kingside might disintegrate. It's no easy task to beat the Berlin Defence!

Black plays ... h7-h5

Exercise: You might like to play through the following two game scores

and ask yourself: why did White suffer a catastrophe in the first game,

and record a beautifully thematic victory in the second? What are

the key differences? (Don't be too hard on yourself, as the losers

in both games were rated well over 2600.)

Game One: 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 0-0 Nxe4 5 d4 Nd6 6 Bxc6 dxc6 7 dxe5 Nf5 8 Qxd8+ Kxd8 9 Nc3 Bd7 10 h3 b6 11 b3 Kc8 12 Bb2 h5 13 g3 Be7 14 Rad1 a5 15 a4 Re8 16 Rd3 c5 17 Nd5 c4 18 Rc3 Bc5 19 Kh2 Bc6 20 bxc4 Bxa4 21 Ra1 Bc6 22 Rf1 a4 23 Ba3 Ra5 24 g4 hxg4 25 hxg4 Ne7 26 Nb4 Bb7 27 Kg3 Ng6 28 Re1 Bxf3 29 Rxf3 Rxe5 30 Rd1 Re4 31 Rxf7 Rxg4+ 32 Kxg4 Ne5+ 33 Kg3 Nxf7 0-1

Game Two: 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 0-0 Nxe4 5 d4 Nd6 6 Bxc6 dxc6 7 dxe5 Nf5 8 Qxd8+ Kxd8 9 Nc3 Bd7 10 b3 Kc8 11 Bb2 h5 12 Ne4 Be7 13 Rad1 a5 14 a4 c5 15 c4 Ra6 16 Rd3 Rg8 17 Rfd1 Bc6 18 Nc3 g5 19 Nd5 Bxd5 20 cxd5 Rd8 21 Bc3 g4 22 Ne1 Bg5 23 g3 f6 24 e6 h4 25 f4 gxf3 26 Nxf3 hxg3 27 h3 Rad6 28 Nxg5 fxg5 29 Be5 Rb6 30 Rf1 Nd6 31 Rdf3 Rb4 32 Rf8 1-0

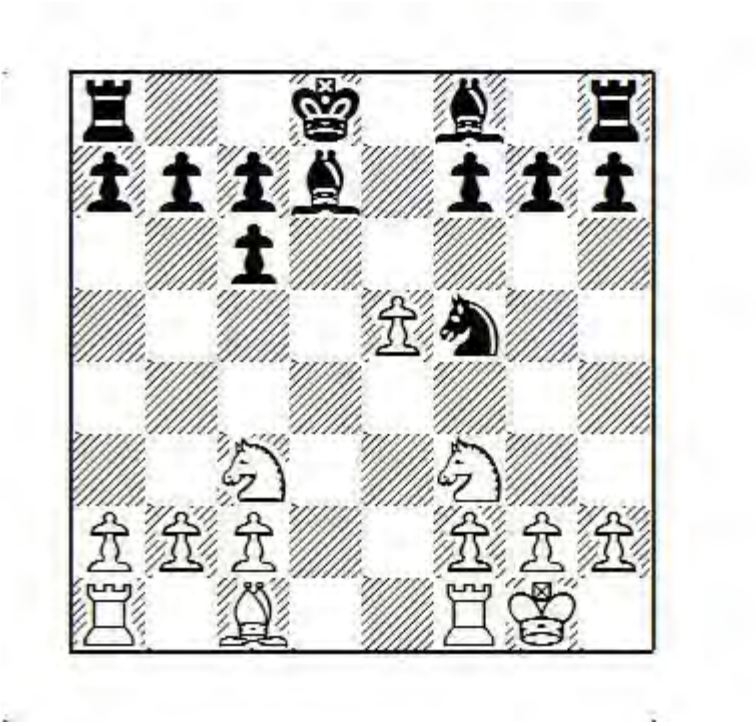
Here are the two games with annotations.

Game 27

J.Smeets-M.Carlsen

Wijk aan Zee 2011

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 0-0 Nxe4 5 d4 Nd6 6 Bxc6 dxc6 7 dxe5 Nf5 8 Qxd8+ Kxd8 9 Nc3 Bd7!?



A speciality of the Norwegian genius. Black doesn't commit himself to ... h7-h6. As we shall see, in the face of passive play by White he can do something more potent with his h-pawn.

10 h3 b6

Making a hole on b7 for his king so that the rooks can be connected.

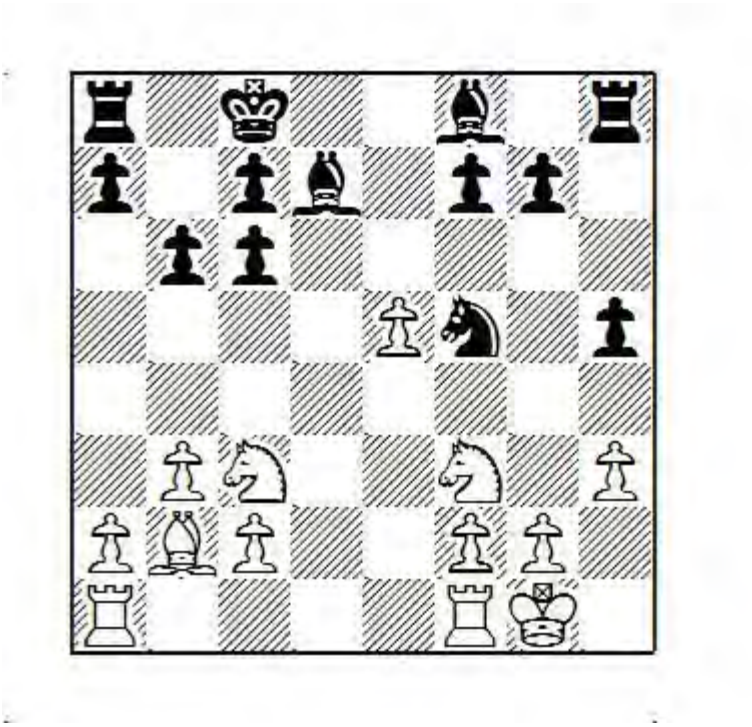
11 b3?

Just the passive response Carlsen was hoping for. More challenging was 11 Bf4 followed by 12 Rad1.

11 ... Kc8 12 Bb2 h5!

Because of White's slow play, which has avoided the active moves Bf4 and Rad1 cited above, Black is less concerned about a sudden attack with Ng5. If now 13 Ng5 Be7!? looks okay for him, for example 14 Nxf7 (or 14 Nce4!? Rf8!? 15 Rad1 c5 with an unclear position) 14 ... Rf8 15 e6 – in order to extricate the knight – 15 ... Bxe6 16 Ne5 Kb7 and Black has nothing to fear.

In view of this Carlsen is able to 'get away' with ... h7-h5. Now in contrast to the Nepomniachtchi-Bruzon game above, White can't smoothly gain space and evict the knight from f5 with g2-g4. Black would reply ... h5xg4, when h3xg4 leaves White with a loose pawn on g4 and the black rook in control of the h-file.



13 g3?

Symptomatic of White's defensive play. Taking control of the d-file with 13 Rad1 looks more sensible. Presumably he feared 13 ... h4 restraining his kingside pawns, but a continuation like 14 Rd3 Be7 15 Rfd1 Be6 16 Ne4 a5 17 a4 gives enough activity to compensate for this.

13 ... Be7 14 Rad1 a5

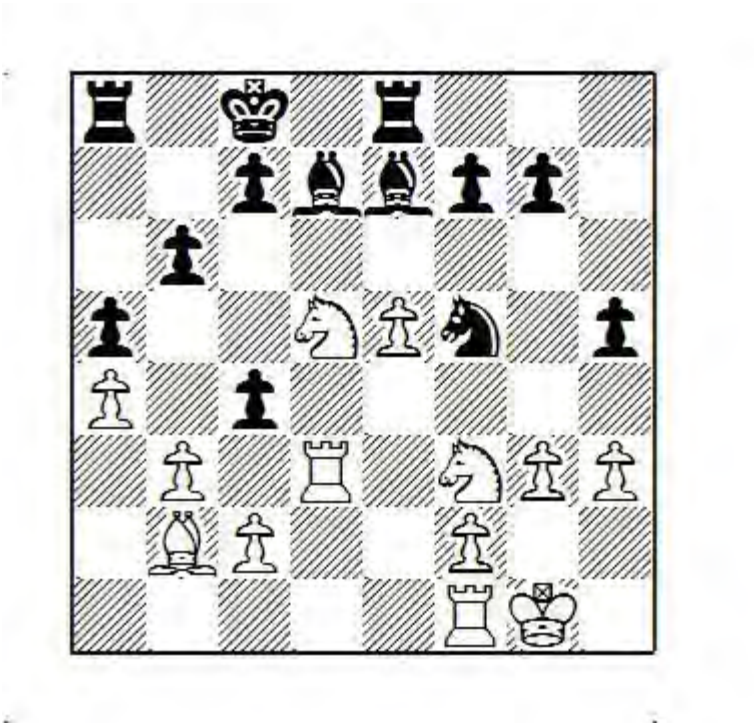
Black provokes White's reply after which his 16th move will have more power.

15 a4 Re8 16 Rd3?!

16 Rd2 was safer.

16 ... c5! 17 Nd5 c4!

It's vital to get in this move, or else White would consolidate with 18 c4! when he is rock-solid on the queenside.



18 Rc3

Or 18 bxc4 Bxa4.

18 ... Bc5

Threatening ... Nxg3.

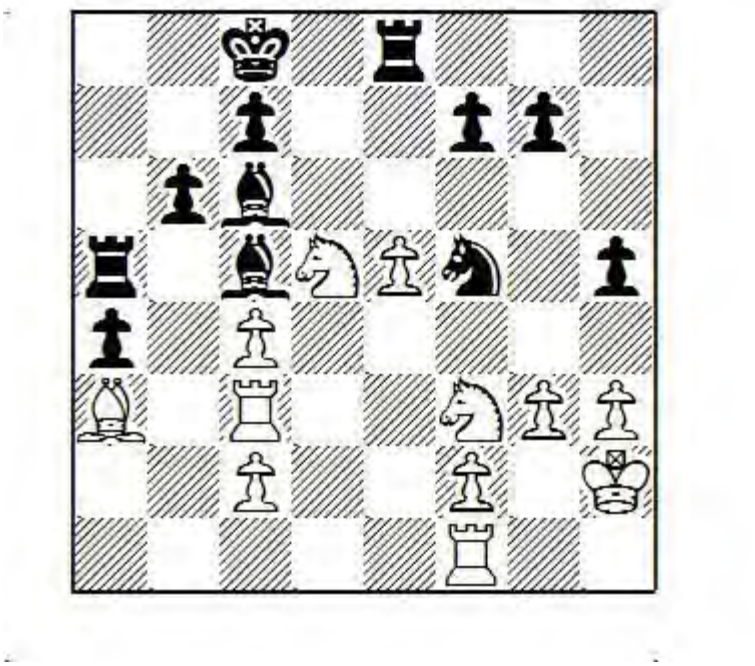
19 Kh2

If 19 Rxc4 then 19 ... Be6 20 Rd1 Rd8 with a gruesome double pin on d5.

19 ... Bc6 20 bxc4

After 20 Nf4 Black wins with 20 ... Bb4.

20 ... Bxa4 21 Ra1 Bc6 22 Rf1 a4 23 Ba3 Ra5!



A nice way to get the rook involved in the centre battle. A serious drawback to the Berlin Wall for Black is the difficulty he has in getting the rooks connected, or indeed activating the rook on a8 at all. Like all great players, Carlsen solves difficult problems in an elegant style.

24 g4 hxg4 25 hxg4 Ne7 26 Nb4 Bb7 27 Kg3 Ng6

Because the white pieces are scattered, the e5-pawn becomes indefensible.

28 Re1 Bxf3 29 Rxf3 Rxe5 30 Rd1 Re4 31 Rxf7 Rxg4+ 32 Kxg4 Ne5+ 33 Kg3 Nxf7 0-1

Carlsen completely outplayed his opponent.

Game 28

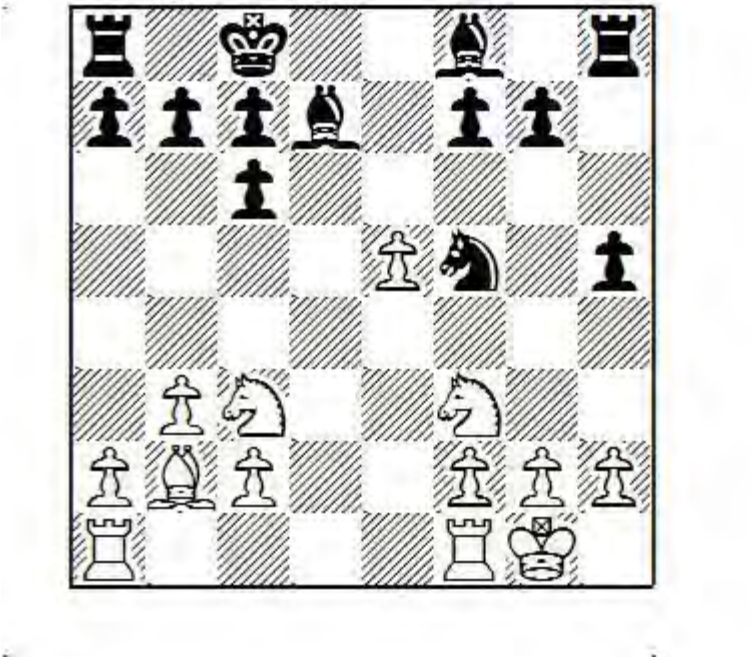
F.Caruana-P.Eljanov

Russian Team Championship, Olginka 2011

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 Nf6 4 0-0 Nxe4 5 d4 Nd6 6 Bxc6 dxc6 7 dxe5 Nf5 8 Qxd8+ Kxd8 9 Nc3 Bd7 10 b3

White's 10 h3 in the previous game was perfectly sound – his strategic blunder was on the next move. However, I recommend that White avoid h2-h3 until Black has committed himself to ... h7-h6.

10 ... Kc8 11 Bb2 h5



Eljanov persists with the plan of ... h7-h5, but we soon see the difference it makes that Caruana doesn't spend two tempi on 10 h3 and 13 g3.

12 Ne4 Be7 13 Rad1 a5 14 a4

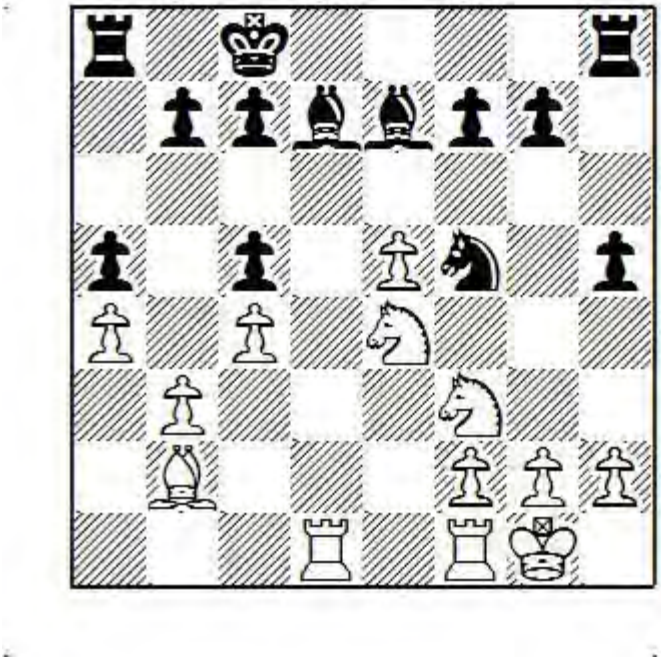
Notice that White is playing all the normal moves – he secures his queenside and takes control of the d-file.

14 ... c5

Black prepares to activate his rook along his third rank, but in doing so he leaves a hole on d5 which Caruana's knight soon seizes control of.

15 c4!

In the previous game, White's time-consuming play with his kingside pawns meant that he never had time for this consolidating move. Caruana ensures that his rook won't be hit by any Carlsen-style 17 ... c4! breakthrough.



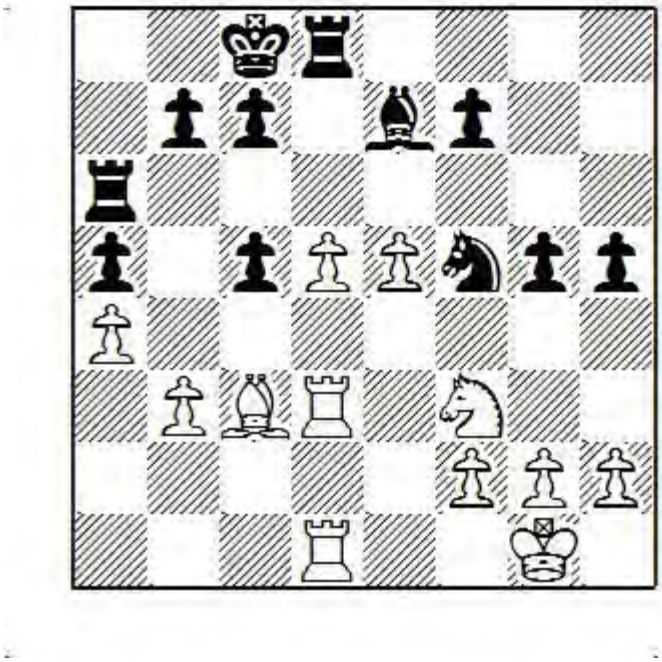
15 ... Ra6 16 Rd3 Rg8

Black decides to play actively, but it soon becomes clear that his kingside counterplay is no match for White's powerful centre build-up.

17 Rfd1 Bc6 18 Nc3 g5 19 Nd5

White has strong pressure in the centre. Black's attempt to gain counterplay on the kingside leads to a surprisingly rapid collapse.

19 ... Bxd5 20 cxd5 Rd8 21 Bc3!



A beautiful little move that ties down the rook on a6 to the a5-pawn. If Black defends the pawn with 21 ... b6 he defeats his own purpose as the rook is then shut in.

21 ... g4 22 Ne1 Bg5 23 g3!

Another fine move that ensures the knight on e1 will return to the battle.

23 ... f6?!

Perhaps 23 ... Rg6!? was the best defence, so that if 24 Bxa5?! Nd4! generates counterplay.

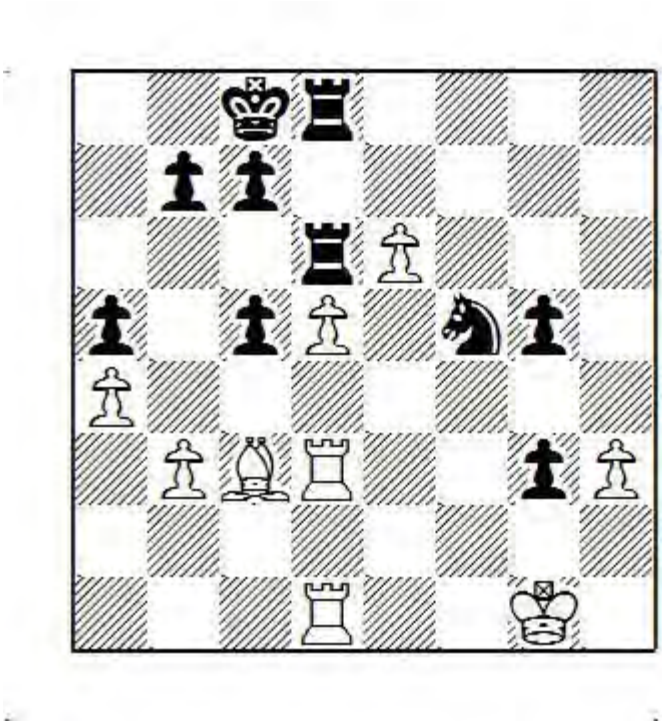
24 e6 h4 25 f4 gxf3 26 Nxf3 hxg3 27 h3!

Keeping things blocked on the kingside. In contrast, after 27 hxg3 Be3+ 28 Kf1 Rg8 Black would have counterplay. There is no need to worry about the black pawn on g3; indeed it is sheltering the white king.

27 ... Rad6?

Disastrous – the last chance to try to tough it out was 27 ... Be3+ 28 Kg2 Rf8!.

28 Nxg5 fxg5



Now White will quickly infiltrate along the f-file, but first of all he has to reduce the pressure on d5.

29 Be5 Rb6 30 Rf1 Nd6 31 Rdf3 Rb4 32 Rf8 1-0

There's no adequate defence against the threat of 33 Bxd6 cxd6 34 e7 when the pawn queens.

To summarize: in the Berlin Endgame White's lack of control on the light squares has been worsened by the exchange of his light-squared bishop and his e-pawn having advanced one square too many. On the other hand he has a 4-3 majority on the kingside that has the potential to advance. Black's displaced king and unconnected rooks make it hard for him to organize a blockade of the enemy pawn majority, but if he succeeds – with the unwitting help of his opponent! – he will have a good game.

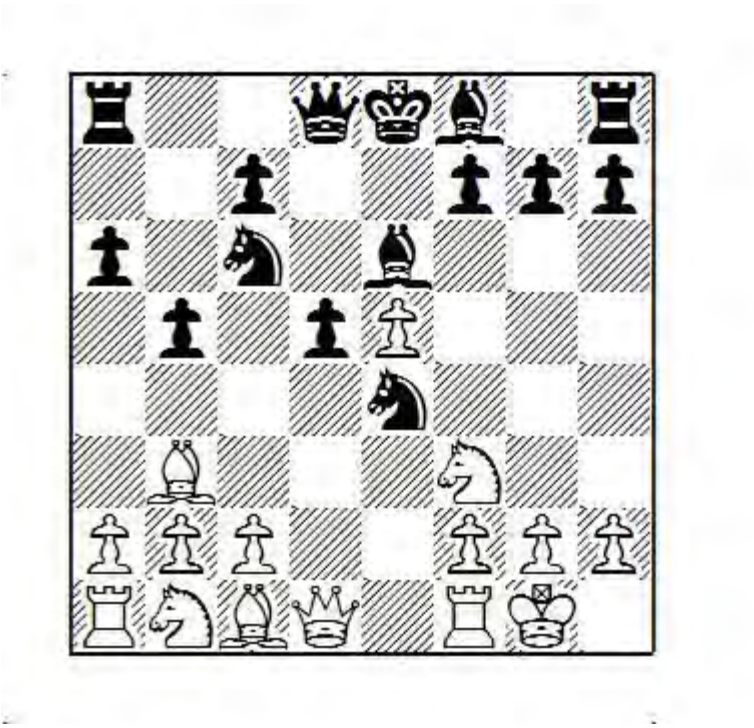
Between good players of equal strength you would expect White to make some progress with his kingside pawns, but Black to cancel this out with vigilant defence before the game eventually burns out to a draw. However, temperament and chess style are also a factor – good (or bad) players aren't all good (or bad) in the same type of position.

Finally, if you are thinking of adding the Berlin to your repertoire with the black pieces, you might like to consider your own style of play before deciding. Are you more of a Kasparov or an Alekhine than a Kramnik or a Capablanca? If you are looking for a tactical fight, stay away from the Berlin!

The Open Variation

Black can only play the freeing move ... d7-d5 with reasonable safety in Closed lines if he is prepared to sacrifice a pawn (as for example in the Marshall Attack or with 10 ... d5 in the Chigorin – see Chapter Five), or if White has been somewhat careless or over-passive.

In contrast, Black is allowed to advance ... d7-d5 without resistance from White in the Open Variation. The mainline runs **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Nxe4 6 d4 b5 7 Bb3 d5 8 dxe5 Be6**.



As you would expect when the ... d7-d5 freeing move has been achieved, Black's minor pieces enjoy a lot of activity. Black's knight sits, albeit temporarily, on e4 – an incredible impertinence as this is usually White's strongest centre square. And, in the absence of a white pawn on d4, the horse can retreat from e4 to c5, or, more boldly, the bishop can be developed from f8 to c5, adding to the pressure on the f2 point.

Of course there is no such thing as complete equality for the player obliged to move second in long established theoretical lines – if any variation were shown to give Black an easy life it would soon vanish from tournament play. And here after 8 ... Be6 White has two reasons to claim an edge – his own advanced pawn on e5 which confers a space advantage, and the backward enemy pawn on c7. This black pawn really needs to advance to c5 to guard the d4-square and energize his fellow queenside pawns. But this is hard to achieve against a vigilant opponent. So the pawn usually sits idly on c7, as a result of which Black's queenside pawns remain immobile and the d4-square acts as a potential centre base for the white pieces.

White might use his control of the d4-square to make Black's inability to play ... c7-c5 permanent. For example an exchange of knights on d4 with the resulting pawn recapture c3xd4 would leave the c7-pawn backward on an open file. Black must try to avoid falling into such a bind.

Still, we shouldn't exaggerate White's advantage. Black has a lot of activity and freedom to compensate for his structural fragility.

Question: The Open Variation isn't as popular as the Closed Variation.

I guess that means it's not so good for Black.

Answer: Not necessarily. It might just mean that at this point in history the type of player who looks for piece activity at the cost of space is starting his or her games 1 ... c5! The Open might yet have its day in the sun.

From the diagram above, we'll focus on 9 Nbd2, when Black has three main alternatives: 9 ... Bc5, 9 ... Be7 and 9 ... Nc5. We'll examine these in four illustrative games. First of all we should look at a sharp early divergence by Black.

Open Scenario One: The Riga Variation

Game 29

J.Martin Perez-M.Pena Dieguez

Dos Hermanas 2004

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Nxe4

Black accepts the unguarded pawn. Readers will be aware by now that 5 d3!? as given in Chapter One would avoid the Open Variation.

6 d4!

As we saw in the Berlin section above, White wants to regain his material *and* keep the initiative in the centre. That's why he attacks e5 with his pawn and speeds up his queenside development rather than meekly plays 6 Re1 etc.

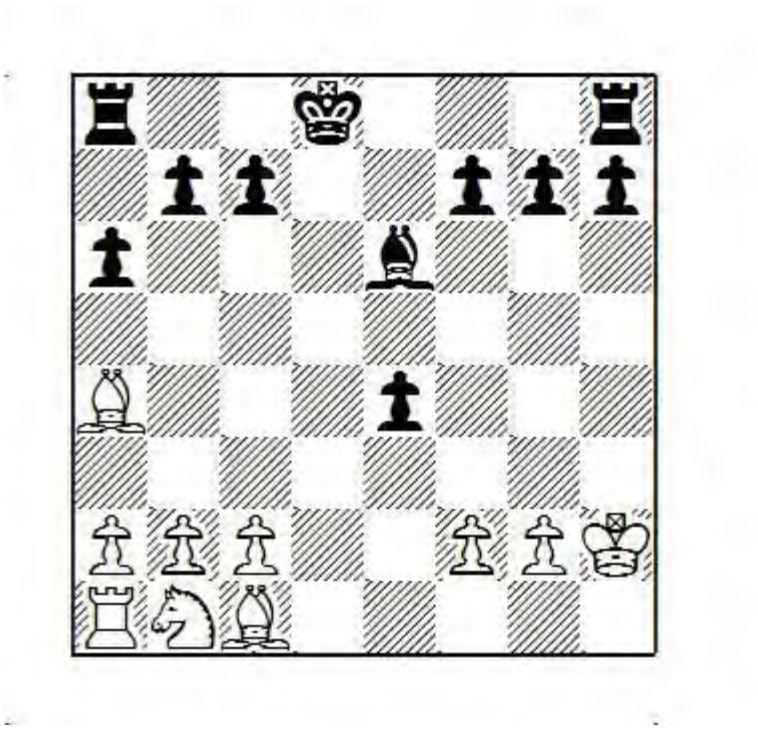
6 ... exd4?!

The Riga Variation: Black tries to get by without 6 ... b5.

7 Re1 d5 8 Bg5!

A very potent attacking move. Some convincing analysis by Grandmaster Jozsef Palkovi, originally published on the Tiger Chess Yahoo Group, seems to put the Riga Variation out of business.

The traditional sequence is 8 Nxd4?! when in view of the threats of 9 Nxc6 and 9 f3, Black has to counterattack against h2, leading to the following sharp variation: 8 ... Bd6 (inadequate is 8 ... Bc5 9 Bxc6+ bxc6 10 f3) 9 Nxc6 Bxh2+! 10 Kh1 (it's a draw by perpetual check after 10 Kxh2 Qh4+ 11 Kg1 Qxf2+ 12 Kh2 Qh4+) 10 ... Qh4 11 Rxe4+! dxe4 12 Qd8+! Qxd8 13 Nxd8+ Kxd8 14 Kxh2 Be6.



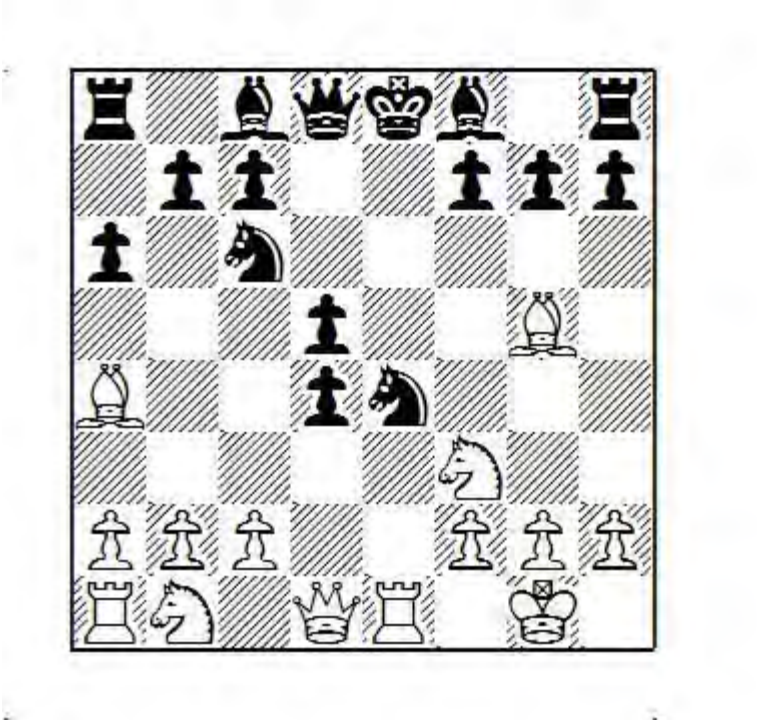
Black has a nominal material advantage, with a rook and two pawns for two pieces, but theory somewhat prefers White as he can exert a lot of pressure with his three minor pieces and rook.

Question: From the diagram, should White develop with

15 Nc3 or 15 Be3, or does it make no real difference?

Answer: It makes a huge difference, as after 15 Nc3? c5! White's bishop on a4 suddenly finds itself ensnared by the Noah's Ark Trap. There is no good way out, as if 16 a3 c4! and then 17 ... b5 follows. The game F.Kwiatkowski-P.Talsma, Great Yarmouth 2007, continued (after 15 ... c5!) 16 Nxe4 b5 17 Nxc5 bxa4 18 Nxa4 Kc7 and Black went on to win.

Paul Talsma, the winner of this game, has written articles on the Riga Variation. He believes Black is about okay after 15 Be3! (which stops the Noah's Ark Trap), but thinks that 8 Bg5! might be the end for the Riga.



8 ... f6?!

After 8 ... Be7 9 Bxe7 Qxe7 10 Nxd4 the pin on c6 is costly for Black, e.g. 10 ... 0-0 11 Bxc6 bxc6 12 f3 c5 13 Nc6 Qd6 14 Qxd5! and White regains his pawn due to the potential fork on e7 whilst leaving Black's queenside structure mangled.

Against 8 ... Qd6 Palkovi discovered the strength of 9 c4!. Black's knight on e4 will be undermined whether or not he captures the c-pawn. He gives the following variation from which it's difficult to see how Black can effectively diverge: 9 ... dxc3 10 Nxc3 Be6 11 Nxe4 dxe4 12 Nd4 h6 13 Bh4 b5 (if 13 ... Bd5 then 14 Rc1 b5 15 Bxb5 axb5 16 Nxb5 Qd7 17 Nxc7+ Qxc7 18 Qxd5 gives White a winning attack) 14 Rxe4 bxa4 15 Qxa4 Qd5 16 Nxe6 fxe6 17 Rd1 Qb5 18 Rxe6+ Kf7 19 Qe4 Rb8 20 Rd7+ Ne7 21 Rexe7+ Bxe7 22 Qxe7+ Kg6 23 Qf7+ Kh7 24 Qxg7 mate.

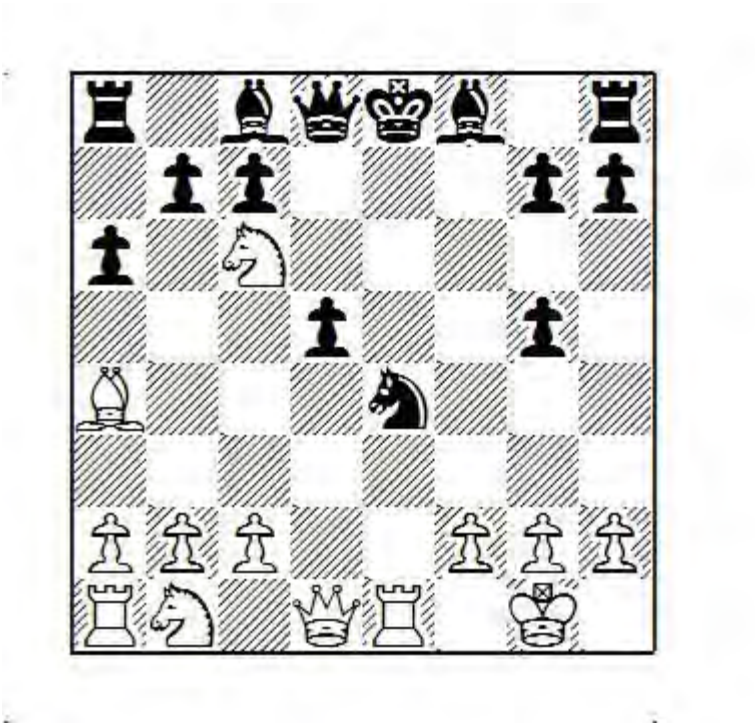
9 Nxd4 fxg5?

Here Palkovi gives two superior (but still insufficient) alternatives:

a) 9 ... Bc5 10 Nxc6 Bxf2+ 11 Kf1 Qd7 12 Nc3 bxc6 13 Nxe4 Bxe1 14 Nxf6+ gxf6 15 Qh5+ Kf8 16 Bh6+ Ke7 17 Rxe1+ Kd8 18 Bxc6 Qxc6 19 Bg7 Rg8 20 Qf7 Bf5 21 Qxg8+ Kd7 22 Qf7+ Kc8 23 Bxf6 with an extra pawn for White.

b) After 9 ... Bd7 there follows another forcing variation: 10 Nc3 Bb4 11 Nxe4 Bxe1 12 Nxf6+ gxf6 13 Qh5+ Kf8 14 Bh6+ Ke7 15 Rxe1+ Kd6 16 Bf4+ Kc5 17 Nb3+ Kb6 18 Be3+ Nd4 19 Bxd4+ c5 20 Bxc5+ with a crushing advantage for White.

10 Nxc6



10 ... Qf6

Everything is dropping after 10 ... bxc6 11 Bxc6+ Bd7 12 Qxd5 Bxc6 13 Rxe4+, while if 10 ... Qd6 simply 11 Nc3!.

11 Nb4+ Bd7 12 Rxe4+! Be7

Or 12 ... dxe4 13 Qxd7 mate.

13 Nxd5 1-0

Open Scenario Two: Black plays 9 ... Bc5

Game 30

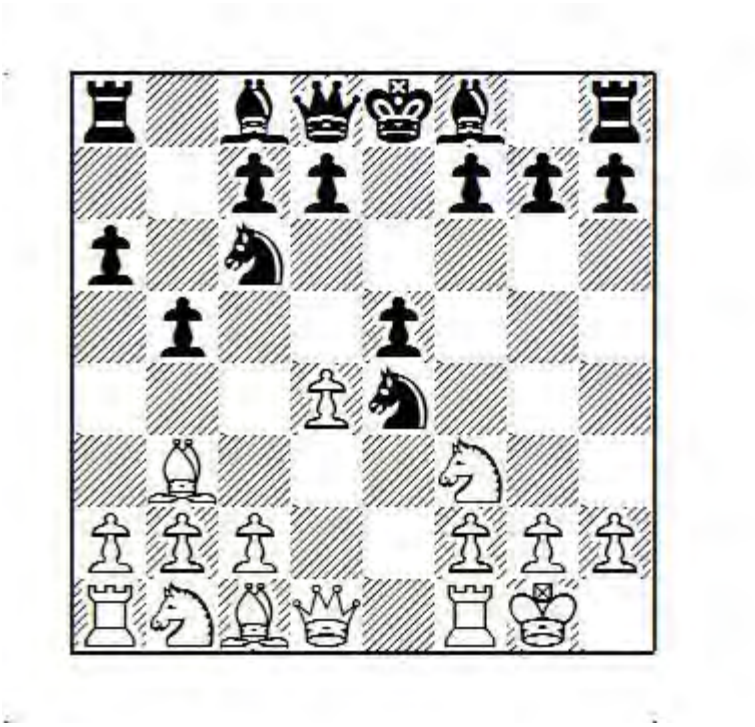
S.Karjakin-G.Prill

Mainz (rapid) 2007

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Nxe4 6 d4 b5!

Learning from the lesson of the previous game, Black hastens to break the pin on c6 and leaves the pawn on d4 well alone.

7 Bb3



7 ... d5

After 7 ... exd4 8 Re1 d5 White has the pretty move 9 Nc3! as played in R.Fischer-P.Trifunovic, Bled 1961. The legendary American player secured the better pawn structure after 9 ... Be6 10 Nxe4 dxe4 11 Rxe4 Be7 12 Bxe6 fxe6 13 Nxd4 0-0 (if 13 ... e5 White breaks the pin with 14 Qh5+ g6 15 Nxc6) 14 Qg4 etc.

Black fares even worse if he takes the knight: 9 ... dxc3 10 Bxd5 Bb7 11 Bxe4 (to answer 11 ... Qxd1 with 12 Bxc6+!) 11 ... Be7 12 Qe2 and the black king will have to stay in the centre, as 12 ... 0-0 loses a piece to 13 Bxc6 and 14 Qxe7. White has a strong initiative, and in R.Dobias-M.Petrik, Sala1992, he won a piece after 12 ... f6 13 bxc3 Kf7? 14 Bxc6 Bxc6 15 Qe6+.

8 dxe5

The best recapture as after 8 Nxe5 Nxe5 9 dxe5 Black can defend the d5-pawn more securely with 9 ... c6. Now Black has to meet the threat of 9 Bxd5.

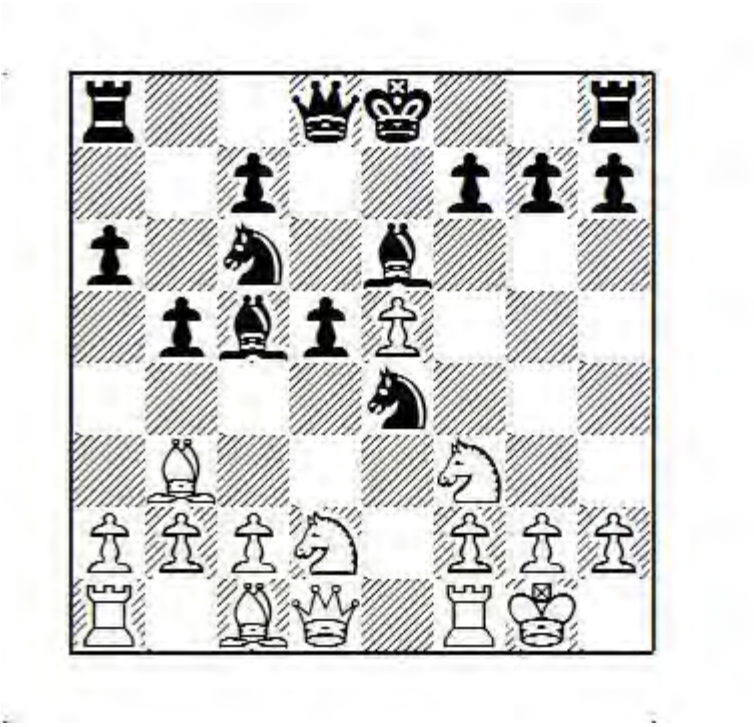
8 ... Be6

The most economical way to defend the d5-pawn as it also develops a piece. Not that the bishop has sworn to remain forever on e6 – if the pressure on d5 lessens it might suddenly become aggressive with ... Bg4, putting the white knight and queen in an awkward pin.

9 Nbd2

White's plan over the next couple of moves is simple enough: he wants to dislodge the black knight from its excellent centre post. Once this is achieved he can try to exploit the structural weakness on the black queenside.

9 ... Bc5



Whatever the demerits of Black's pawn configuration, there is no denying that he has a freer development of his minor pieces than in the Closed Lopez. The absence of the white pawn on d4 allows him to utilize the c5-square as a base for either his bishop or his knight. On the other hand, the thematic advance ... c7-c5 is now blocked by minor pieces on both c5 and c6. Do Black's active pieces pardon him for this sin against the requirements of the pawn structure?

The alternatives 9 ... .Be7 and 9 ... .Nc5 are the subject of the next two games.

10 Qe2!?

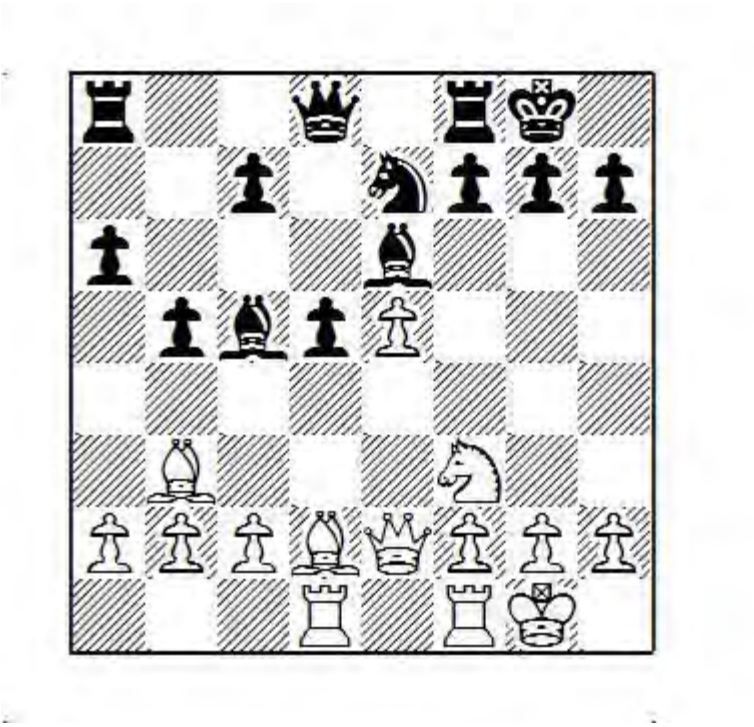
Putting more pressure on the black knight. The queen also clears the way for Rd1 to attack the d5 point.

Instead after 10 c3 0-0 11 Bc2 Black can play the sharp Dilworth Variation: 11 ... Nxf2!? 12 Rxf2 f6 13 exf6 Bxf2+ 14 Kxf2 Qxf6 which seems a pretty decent try for him based on results. 10 Nxe4 dxe4 11 Bxe6 Qxd1 12 Rxd1 fxe6 13 Ng5 0-0 14 Nxe4 Bb6 15 Kf1 Rf5 16 Kf1 Rxe5 also leads to active play for Black, for example in E.Inarkiev-L.Bruzon Batista, Barcelona 2010. Karjakin move aims to keep Black more under control.

10 ... Nxd2 11 Bxd2 0-0 12 Rad1

The correct rook to go to d1 as the other one will be required to bolster the e5-pawn.

12 ... Ne7?



Exercise: Before reading on, can you see how

White exploits this inaccuracy?

12 ... Ne7 is a nervous move. Black's activity is what keeps him alive in the Open: if he goes over to passive defence then the holes in his pawn structure will tell against him.

It was imperative to seek counterplay with 12 ... Bg4!. The pin on f3 is very awkward. Already there is the threat of 13 ... Nd4, when White's kingside pawns will be broken up. The pin also amounts to an indirect attack on the e5-pawn, which can be furthered assailed by ... Re8.

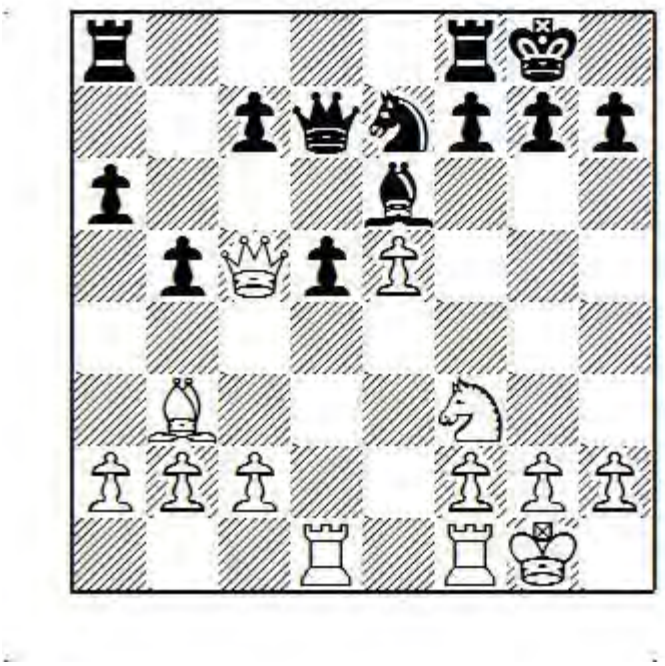
White would have to take immediate action to escape the pin with 13 Qd3! hitting the d5 point. After 13 ... Bxf3 14 Qxf3 Nxe5 15 Qf5! Re8 (instead 15 ... Ng6? is met by 16 Bxd5 attacking a8 and setting up a tactic against c5, and 16 ... Qc8 17 Bxf7+! Rxf7 18 Qxc5 left White a pawn up in V.Bologan-E.Romanov, Sochi 2007) 16 Bg5 Qc8 17 Qxc8 Raxc8, as played in A.Pavlidis-A.Bezgodov, Thessaloniki 2010, the recapture 18 Rxd5 gives White a small edge because of his bishop pair. Still, Black could hope to draw with some precise moves.

Answer: **13 Be3!**

With his previous move Black showed too much anxiety about protecting d5: he added a third defender to the pawn, when he needed to reduce the number to one with 12 ... .Bg4. At the same time he showed no concern whatsoever about holding onto control of the dark squares in the centre. The forced exchange of bishops leaves him with no way to guard the c5- or d4-squares.

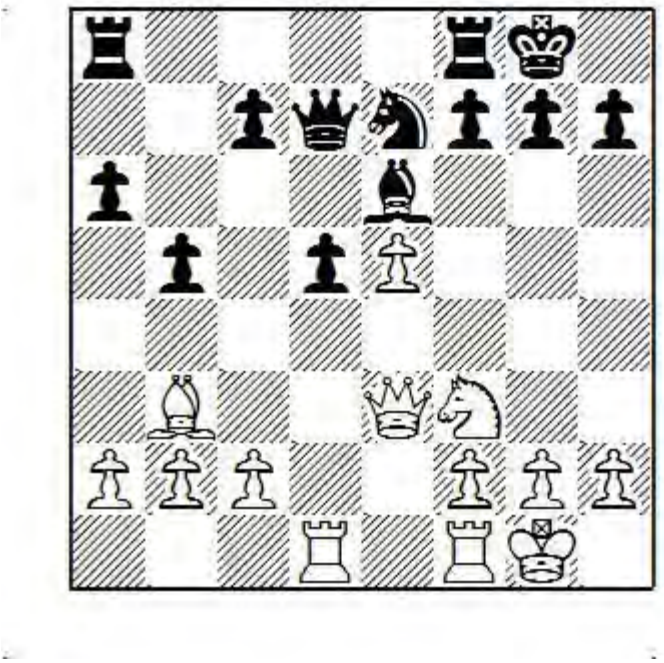
13 ... Bxe3 14 Qxe3 Qd7 15 Qc5

Such a move makes a pleasing impression: Karjakin is revelling in his control of the dark squares. But leaving aside questions of aesthetics, is this a *good* move?



Exercise: Have a think about how play might develop from the diagram position, with Black trying to achieve the liberating ... c7-c5 pawn advance. How useful is it for White to put the queen on c5?

Answer: At first glance it is a no-brainer that 15 Qc5 hinders ... c7-c5 by blocking the c5-square. On the other hand, the queen is already preventing the freeing move by sitting on e3. If Black exerted himself to achieve ... c7-c5 with Rac8, then Qc5 makes sense. But at the moment, there is no positional requirement. Looking more deeply, we see that after 15 Qc5 Black can prepare to challenge the white queen, either with the basic moves ... c7-c6 and then ... Qa7, or somewhat less effectively with ... Ng6 and ... Qe7. Naturally the exchange of queens isn't appealing for White, as Black is then free to advance his pawn to c5 – unless White has managed to keep the blockade on the c5-square with another piece. As we shall see, Karjakin did in fact secure his control over c5, but that was due to the slow play of his opponent.



Exercise: Let's put the white queen back on e3. After 14 ... Qd7 is there a more incisive plan for White in the position?

Answer: If 15 Nd4?! then 15 ... Rac8! 16 c3 c5 17 Nxe6 fxe6 looks very comfortable, perhaps better, for Black. After 15 h3 White can answer 15 ... Rac8?! with 16 Qc5, but 15 ... c6 preparing 16 ... .Qa7 looks secure for Black.

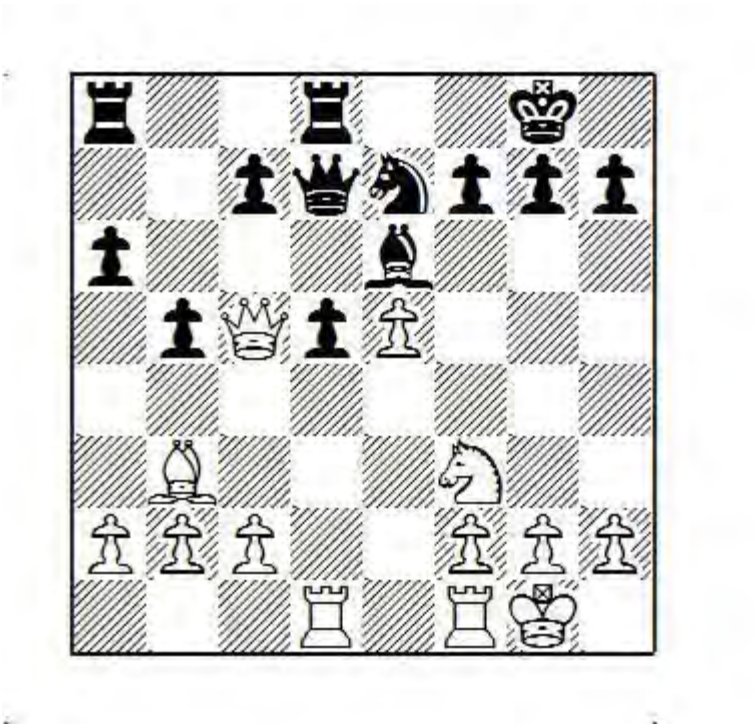
Therefore a radically different approach with 15 c4! appears to be the best plan. After 15 ... bxc4 (see below for 15 ... c6) 16 Bxc4 c6 17 Bd3, White has brought his bishop to life, his rooks can control c5 and attack c6 from the front, and the a6-pawn is isolated. White could consider the plan of Rc1, Rc5 and Ra5 to restrain and attack the pawns.

The technique of besieging pawns in this fashion was perfected by Rubinstein. For example here is his famous game with Salwe at Lodz 1908:

1 d4 d5 2 Nf3 c5 3 c4 e6 4 cxd5 exd5 5 Nc3 Nf6 6 g3 Nc6 7 Bg2 cxd4 8 Nxd4 Qb6 9 Nxc6 bxc6 10 0-0 Be7 11 Na4 Qb5 12 Be3 0-0 13 Rc1 Bg4 14 f3 Be6 15 Bc5 (White wins control of the c5-square step by step) 15 ... Rfe8 16 Rf2 Nd7 17 Bxe7 Rxe7 18 Qd4 Ree8 19 Bf1 Rec8 20 e3 Qb7 21 Nc5 Nxc5 22 Rxc5 Rc7 23 Rfc2 Qb6 24 b4 (so that if 24 ... a5 25 Rxa5!) 24 ... a6 25 Ra5 Rb8 26 a3 Ra7 27 Rxc6 Qxc6 28 Qxa7 Ra8 29 Qc5 Qb7 30 Kf2 h5 31 Be2 g6 32 Qd6 Qc8 33 Rc5 Qb7 34 h4 a5 35 Rc7 Qb8 36 b5 a4 37 b6 Ra5 38 b7 1-0.

Returning to the Karjakin game, after 15 c4 Black could keep his pawns intact with 15 ... c6 (rather than play 15 ... bxc4). Nonetheless, after 16 cxd5 Bxd5 (or 16 ... Nxd5 17 Qc5) 17 Bxd5 Nxd5 18 Qc5 White has secured the c5-square in a far more favourable manner than in the game. The c6-pawn is sickly and can be attacked by the white rooks and queen.

15 ... Rfd8



16 c3

A very natural move that restrains the d5-pawn and gives the bishop access to the c2-square.

Exercise: But is it the most *accurate* move? If not,

can you suggest an improvement? (Remember the fight

for the ... c7-c5 advance discussed above.)

16 ... Ng6!?

Not a bad move, though Black follows it up incorrectly.

White's knight has a beautiful post on d4, whereas Black's bishop on e6 is bad. A possible idea was 16 ... Bg4 to exchange off these pieces after 17 Rd3 Bxf3 18 Rxf3. But there was no need to resort to such measures when Black has the option of 16 ... c6! planning to oust the white queen from c5 with 17 ... Qa7, followed by the freeing advance ... c7-c5. The challenge to the white queen is also possible after the game move – see the note to 18 ... Rb6 – though not as efficiently as with 16 ... c6. It's difficult to see how White can keep more than a minimal advantage against this plan.

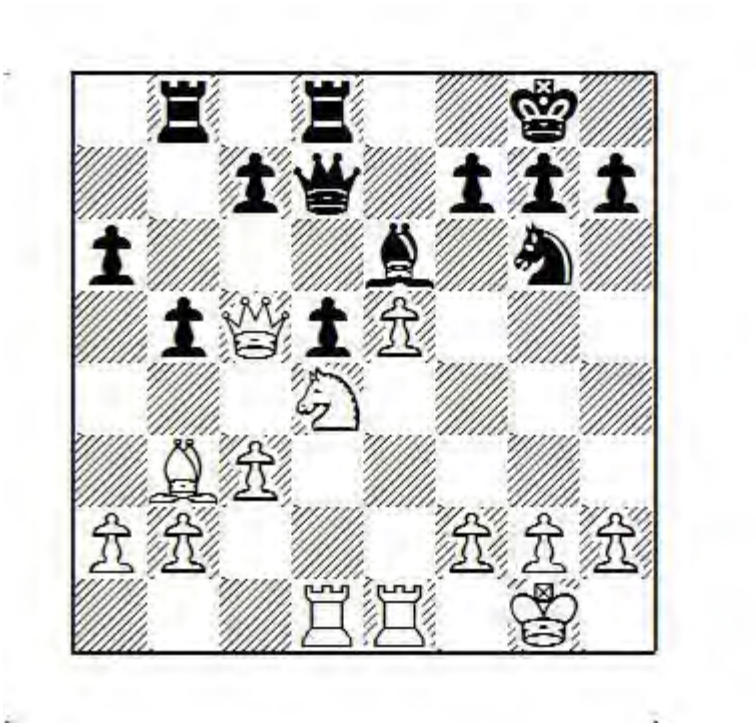
Answer: Let's go back a move and reconsider the value of 16 c3. It is indeed very natural, as it fixes the d5-pawn and gives the white bishop the c2-square. But it is a 'luxury' move – the d5-pawn wasn't going to advance anyway, and the bishop doesn't need the c2-square

yet.

Therefore a better move was 16 Nd4!. This prevents the knight being swapped by 16 ... Bg4. Even more importantly, the 16 ... c6 move, planning 17 ... Qa7, can now be countered by 17 f4 mobilizing the kingside pawns, or more directly by 17 Rd3! Qa7! 18 Rc3 maintaining the bind on c5 (note that 16 c3 blocks off this rook manoeuvre). White could hope to keep some initiative, but considerably less than he would have achieved with 15 c4! rather than 15 Qc5. After the game move 16 c3, White's advantage should dissipate even further.

It's worth remembering that this is a rapidplay game. I wouldn't expect Karjakin to make such an imprecision in a game at a classical time control.

17 Rfe1 Rab8 18 Nd4



Exercise: After reading the comments above,

try to find the best plan for Black.

18 ... Rb6?

Answer: With 18 ... Qe7! 19 Qxe7 Nxe7 Black can achieve 20 ... .c5. This was his big chance to punish White for his inaccurate 16 c3.

19 Bc2 Qe7

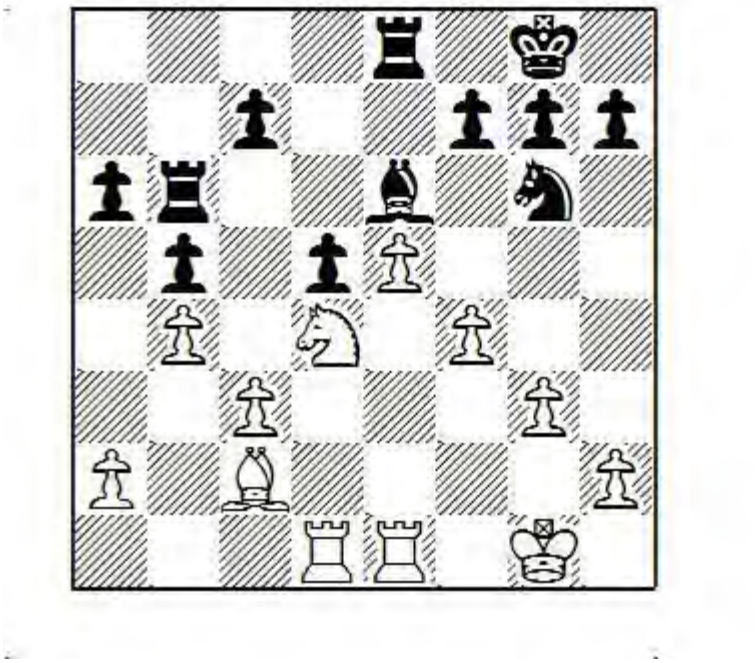
Question: As Tartakower once remarked, 'Chess is the tragedy of one tempo'. Can you see how White can punish his opponent for leaving

it one move too late to oppose the white queen?

Answer: **20 Qxe7 Nxe7 21 b4!**

This preventive move wouldn't have been possible if Black had acted one move earlier.

21 ... Ng6 22 g3! Re8 23 f4



White's mobile kingside pawn majority makes a striking contrast to Black's dead wood on the queenside.

23 ... Bc8 24 a4!

After his early hesitancy Karjakin displays some exemplary strategic chess. Here he increases his dark squared bind as 24 ... .bxa4 25 Bxa4 leaves the black pawns further disfigured.

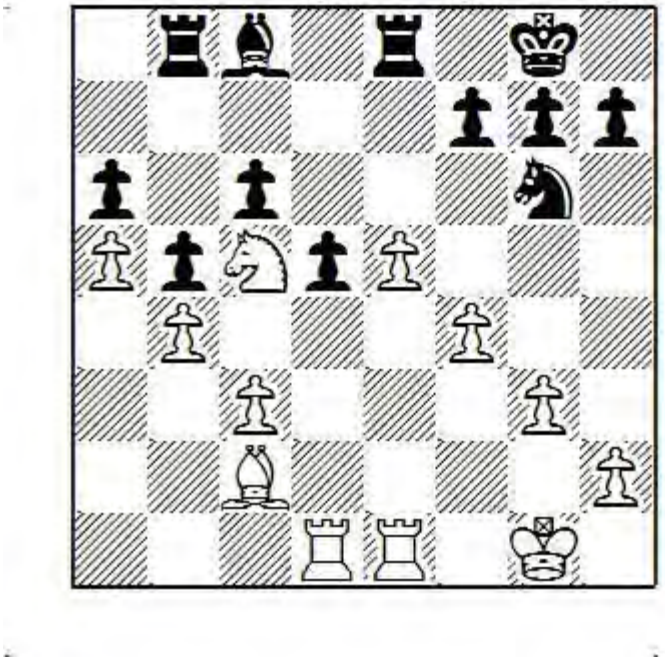
24 ... Bd7 25 a5 Rbb8 26 Nb3!

The knight heads for c5 to rule out ... c7-c5 once and for all.

26 ... c6 27 Nc5

Nimzowitsch was the first to articulate that if a player is deprived of the 'breakout' advance required by his pawn structure – here it is ... c7-c5 for Black – the square that the pawn would have advanced to often becomes a strong outpost for an enemy piece.

27 ... Bc8



Question: Now how can White ensure that his

knight on c5 can never be challenged?

Answer: **28 Bxg6!**

This exchange ensures that Black can never arrange ... Nd7 or ... Ne6 to fight for the c5-square. At the same time Black is deprived of his minor piece that could defend the dark squares.

28 ... hxg6

A textbook example of a 'bad' bishop – one shut in by its own pawns – dominated by an awesome knight.

Question: How do you assess the position for Black: is it bad but

defensible with a lot of grit, very bad but saveable by a Kramnik,

or simply losing? And what is the best plan for White now?

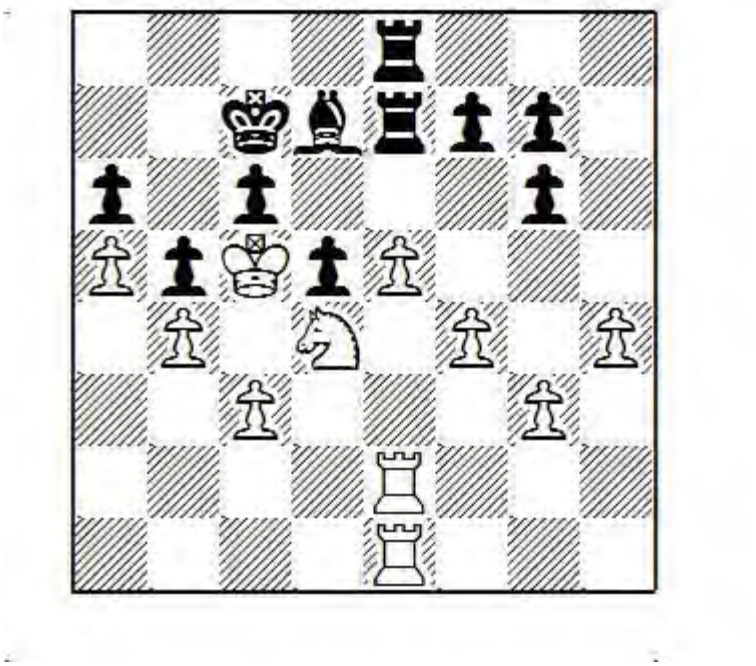
29 Kf2!

Answer: Despite the equal material, not even Capablanca or *Rybka* could save this endgame as Black – it is dead lost. White brings his king to d4 where the threat to infiltrate via c5 will be decisive.

29 ... Ra8 30 Ke3 Kf8 31 Kd4 Ke7 32 Rd2 Kd8 33 Nb3!

A changing of the guard – the white king goes to c5 to threaten to edge further into the black queenside and, with the aid of the knight on d4, tie down the black king and bishop to the defence of c6.

33 ... Kc7 34 Kc5 Bd7 35 Nd4 Re7 36 h4 Rh8 37 Rde2 Rhe8



Here Black resigned after **38 Re3 Rh8?! 39 e6 fxe6 40 Nxe6+ 1-0**, as White will penetrate along the e-file. However, Black could have resisted with 38 ... Be6!.

A more elegant breakthrough was 38 e6! fxe6 39 Re5 followed by 40 Rg5, 41 Re5, 42 Rxg6 etc., gradually eating Black alive on the kingside. If instead 38 ... Bxe6 39 g4! leaves Black defenceless against 40 f5, winning a piece, as 40 ... Kd8 loses to the knight check on c6.

Open Scenario Three: Black plays 9 ... Be7

Game 31

D.Swiercz-D.Vocaturo

Wijk aan Zee 2011

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Nxe4 6 d4 b5 7 Bb3 d5 8 dxe5 Be6 9 Nbd2 Be7

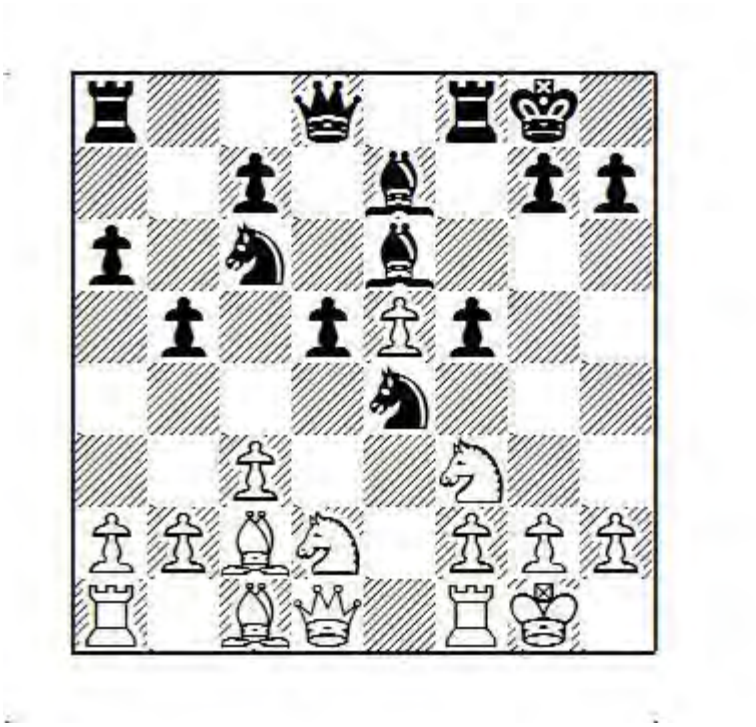
Spurning possible operations on the c5-square, Black quietly completes the development of his kingside and intends to support his knight on e4, if attacked, by ... f7-f5.

10 c3

As his bishop is boxed in on b3, White clears the way to retreat it to c2, so that it can engage the venturesome black knight.

10 ... 0-0 11 Bc2 f5

Standing his ground in the centre. Instead after 11 ... .Nc5 12 Nb3 White has a pleasant game with clear diagonals for both his bishops.



12 Nb3

Question: Surely White should play 12 exf6 en passant,

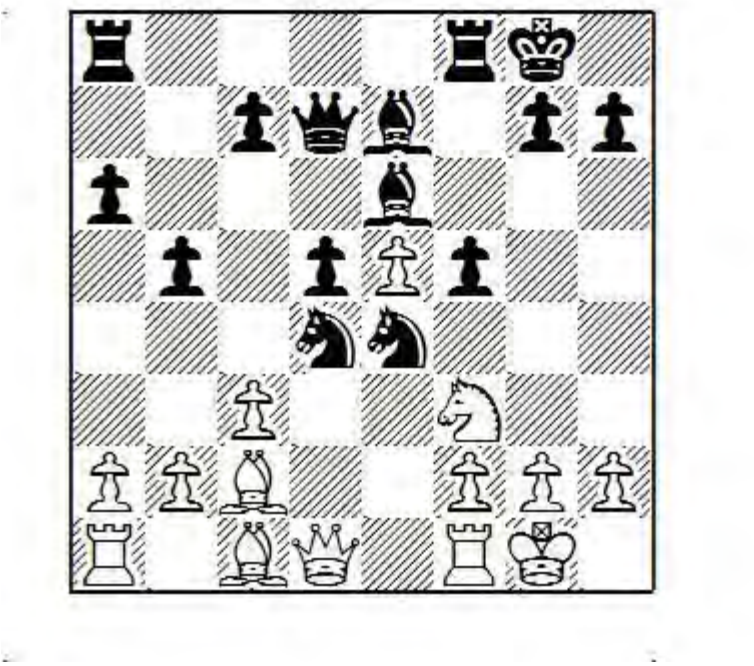
as now the black knight is invincible on e4?

Answer: But that would mean giving up our pawn on e5, the spearhead of our kingside pawn majority. Besides, the black pieces would have a lot more freedom after 12 exf6 Nxf6. No, that would be too high a price to drive back the black knight. It is much better to arrange the move f2-f3 to drive it backwards, whilst maintaining the strong pawn on e5.

12 ... Qd7 13 Nbd4

Here we see a drawback to the 11 ... f5 move: the black bishop on e6 isn't defended by a pawn any longer.

13 ... Nxd4



'I guess we recapture with the pawn here. After 14 cxd4 the pawn on e5 becomes a protected passed pawn. And we can target the backward pawn on c7 by doubling our rooks along the c-file. Whereas after 14 Nxd4 Black gets in the freeing move 14 ... c5.'

Exercise: Do you agree with this statement?

Do you think the recapture with the knight has any merit?

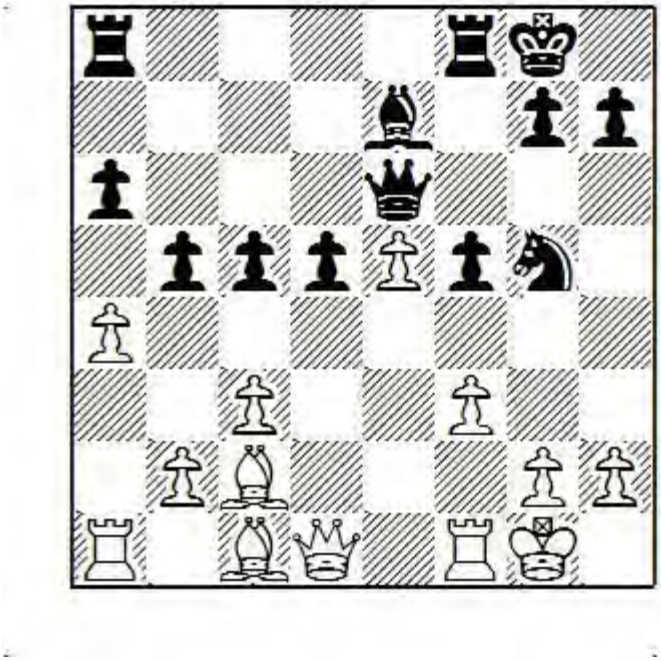
14 Nxd4

Answer: White recaptures with his knight because he wants to clear the way for f2-f3 to evict the black knight from e4. He is happy to allow 14 ... c5 in reply as after the exchange on e6 the black d5-pawn is slightly loose and the f5-pawn can be targeted by the white bishop on c2.

Besides, after 14 cxd4 White has no time to enforce his control over c5. Black can immediately arrange ... c7-c5: 14 cxd4 Rac8! 15 Ne1 c5 16 f3 cxd4 17 fxe4 dxe4 and Black's massive pawn centre gave him very good compensation for the piece in N.Dudukovic-M.Pavlovic, Subotica 2008.

The fact that the recapture 14 Nxd4 is preferable here shows that there are no hard and fast rules when it comes to handling a given pawn structure. The suggestions in this book are meant as guidelines – positional ideas that you need to be aware of, but that don't always meet the strategic and tactical requirements of the actual position in front of you.

14 ... c5 15 Nxe6 Qxe6 16 f3 Ng5 17 a4



17 ... Rad8

Of course if 17 ... .Qxe5? 18 f4 wins a piece.

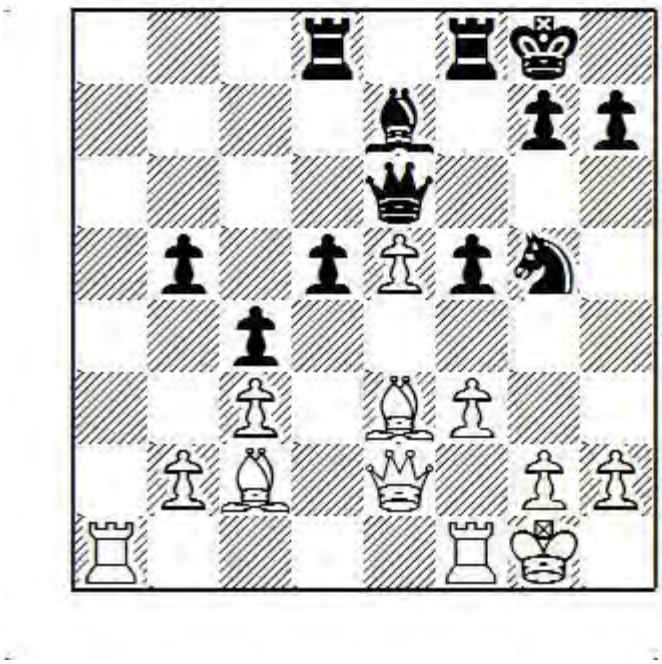
18 axb5 axb5

Despite getting in ... c7-c5 Black hasn't completely equalized. White has the two bishops, the strong pawn on e5 and, temporarily at least, control of the a-file. The black pawns on b5, d5 and f5 are all a little vulnerable, which allows Swiercz to probe for advantage.

19 Qe2 c4

Covering the b5-pawn but giving extra scope to White's dark squared bishop.

20 Be3



20 ... f4

Exercise: What are the good and bad points of this move? Also, could Black get away with 20 ... Qxe5 21 f4 Qe6 22 fxg5 f4, regaining the piece?

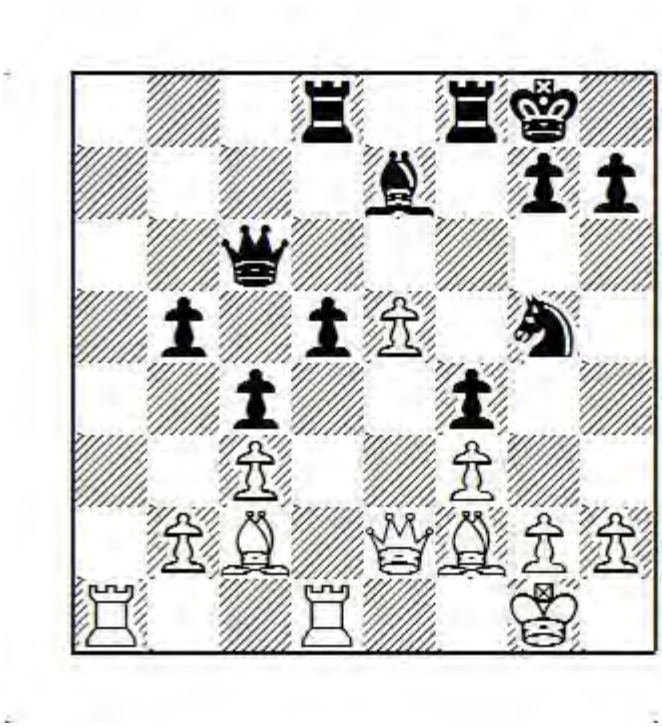
Answer: Firstly, 20 ... Qxe5? 21 f4 Qe6 22 fxg5 f4 leads to disaster for Black after 23 Bxh7+! Kxh7 (or 23 ... Kh8 24 Qh5) 24 Qh5+ Kg8 25 g6 Qxe3+ 26 Kh1 with a quick mate. Every player needs to be aware of this mating pattern with the queen and pawn on g6.

Regarding 20 ... f4, Black intends to play 21 ... Qc6 and 22 ... Ne6, putting the knight on a blockade square. After the immediate 20 ... Qc6, 21 Bxg5 Bxg5 22 f4 is possible, when White has eliminated the knight and reinforced his pawn on e5. However, it is doubtful that Black needed to fear this, as he would remain with a solid position. Besides, White has already spurned the chance to play Bxg5 and f3-f4 at an earlier point.

The drawback to 20 ... f4 is evident – it opens the diagonal of White's bishop on c2, which becomes an attacking force against the black king.

Therefore I think Black should play 20 ... Qc6 or maybe 20 ... b4!? instead of 20 ... f4.

21 Bf2 Qc6 22 Rfd1



22 ... Ne6

Question: 22 ... Ne6 is a routine move. Can you find an alternative

which would have eased the pressure on Black's position?

23 b4!

Answer: A fine preventive move. Black missed the chance to play 22 ... Bc5! which would exchange off bishops and simplify his defensive task. Now he can only regain control of the c5-square by 23 ... cxb3, but then 24 Bxb3 leaves d5 under severe pressure.

23 ... g6?

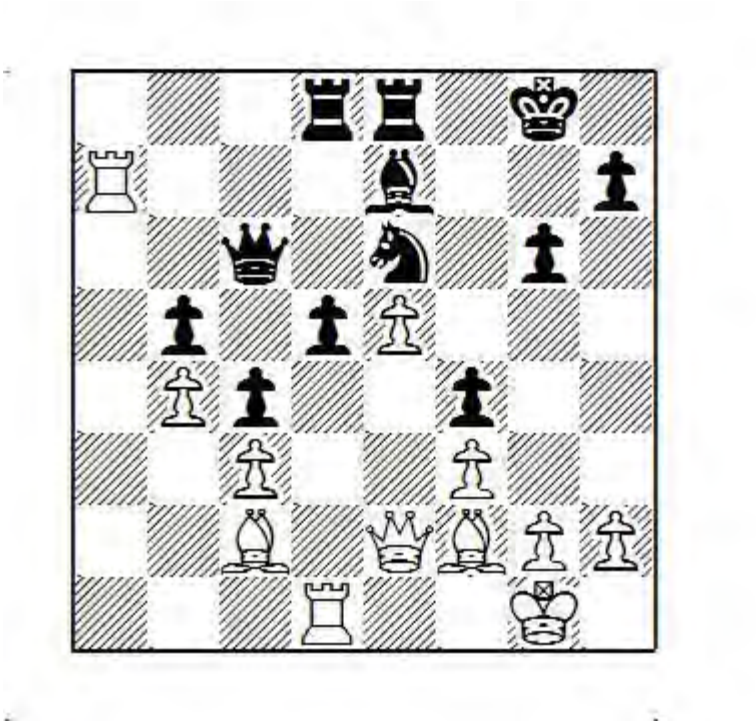
This creates a target on g6 which White exploits in excellent style.

I guess that after 23 ... Ra8 24 Rxa8 Rxa8 Black feared 25 Bf5!? when 25 ... g6 26 Bxe6+ Qxe6 27 Qd2 leaves both d5 and f4 hanging, and 27 ... Qxe5? loses to 28 Re1 Qg5 29 Rxe7 (even simpler is 29 h4) 29 ... Qxe7 30 Qxd5+ forking the black king and rook.

However, 27 ... g5! looks okay for Black as this time it is White who loses if he grabs a pawn: 28 Qxd5? Qxd5 29 Rxd5 Ra1+ and wins a piece. So White has to make do with something like 28 Qd4 when 28 ... Rd8 is solid enough for Black – given the chance he will

manoeuvre with ... Bf8 and ... Bg7 to attack e5. Therefore we can conclude that the plan of 25 Bf5 wouldn't promise White much – the immediate 25 Qd2 looks superior.

24 Ra7 Rfe8



Question: Now how can White begin his kingside attack?

Answer: **25 h4!**

Intending to use the g6-pawn as a 'hinge' to lever open the h-file and b1-h7 diagonal.

25 ... Ra8 26 Rxa8

White relinquishes control of the a-file as he wants to use his other rook to attack along the h-file.

26 ... Rxa8 27 Bb1

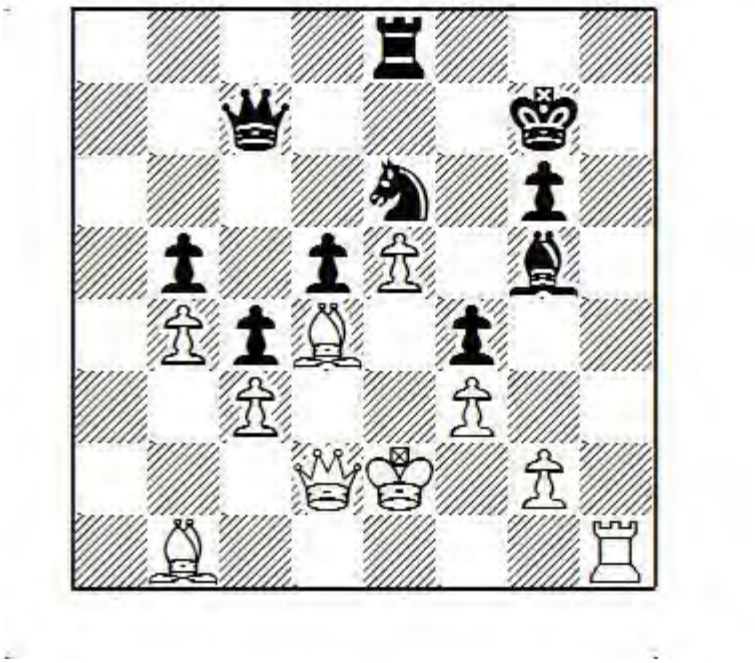
A little patience is required before beginning a kingside attack as if 27 h5? then 27 ... Ra2 is a highly annoying pin. One of the signs of a highly developed positional sense is a willingness to take time out to prevent the opponent playing good moves.

27 ... Kf7 28 h5!

White builds up his initiative on the kingside. With good judgment his king makes a journey to the centre to clear the way for his rook to reach the h-file.

28 ... Rg8 29 Qd2 Rd8 30 Kf1! Bg5 31 Ke2 Qc7 32 Bd4 Re8 33 hxg6+ hxg6 34 Rh1 Kg7?

A blunder often occurs when a player has been under pressure for a long time. Black could still have defended against the attack with 34 ... Nxd4+ 35 cxd4 Qc6.



Exercise: Work out how White can crown his

positional pressure with a combination.

Answer: **35 Bxg6!**

So that if 35 ... Kxg6 there follows 36 Qc2+ Kf7 (or 36 ... Kg7 37 Rh7+ winning the queen) 37 Qf5+ Kg8 38 Qg6+ Ng7 (the rook on e8 drops after 38 ... Kf8 39 Rh8+) 39 Qxg5 and White is a pawn up with a decisive attack.

35 ... Nxd4+

Black tries a desperate counterattack but it leaves his own king denuded of defenders.

36 cxd4 Rxe5+ 37 dxe5 Qxe5+ 38 Kf2 Kxg6 39 Rd1 Be7 40 Qxd5 Qe3+ 41 Kf1 c3 42 Re1 Qa7 43 Qg8+ 1-0

For if 43 ... Kh5 then 44 Re5+ Kh6 45 Re6+ Kh5 46 Qg4 is mate.

Open Scenario Four: Black plays 9 ... Nc5 10 c3 Be7

Game 32

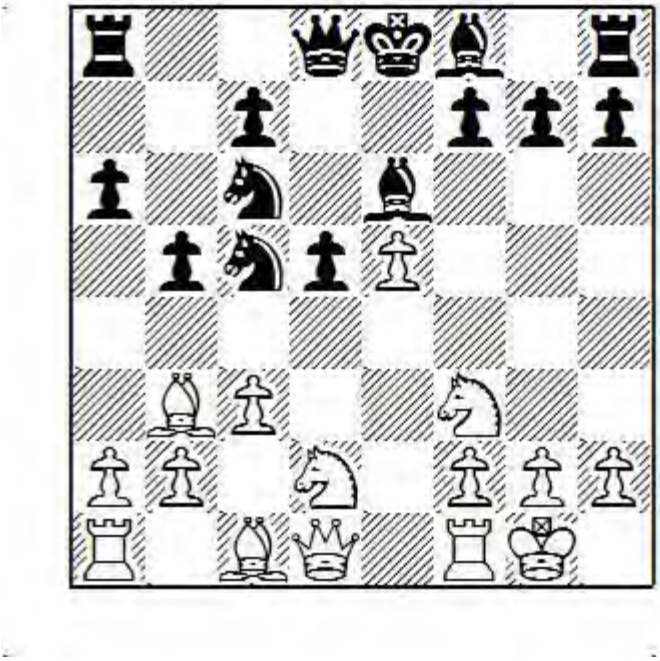
I.Sudakova-E.Fatalibekova

Russian Women's Championship, Orel 2006

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Nxe4 6 d4 b5 7 Bb3 d5 8 dxe5 Be6 9 Nbd2 Nc5

The knight retreats from e4 before being forced away, as it is attracted by the post on e6 which will become available once the bishop goes to g4.

10 c3



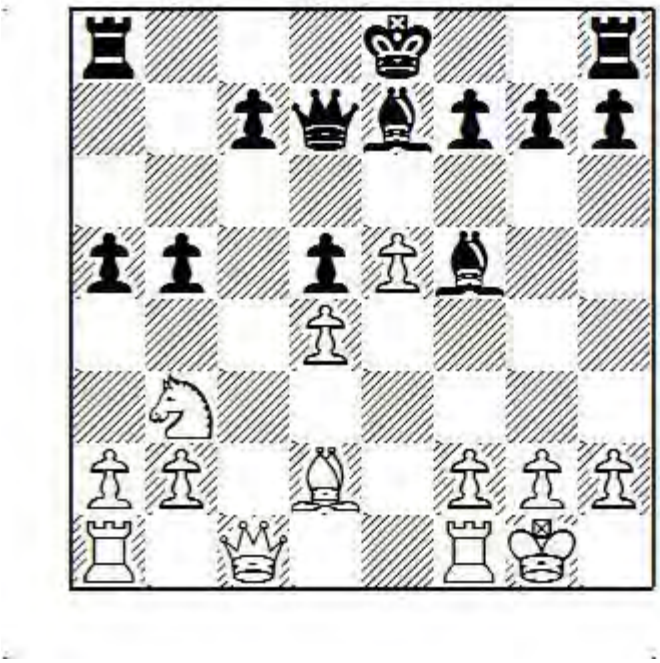
10 ... Be7

In the next game we look at 10 ... d4.

Question: Can't Black get the bishop pair with 10 ... Nxb3?

And besides, what if my opponent pins me at once with 10 ... Bg4?

Answer: Well, 10 ... Nxb3 11 Nxb3 makes it easier for White to gain ascendancy over the dark squares in the centre – you saw the trouble Black got into in the game Karjakin-Prill above when he lost control of c5. It isn't the end of the world for Black, but neither is his bishop pair anything to rejoice over. For example 11 ... Be7 12 Nfd4 Nxd4 13 cxd4 a5 14 Qc2 Qd7 15 Bd2 Bf5 16 Qc1!.

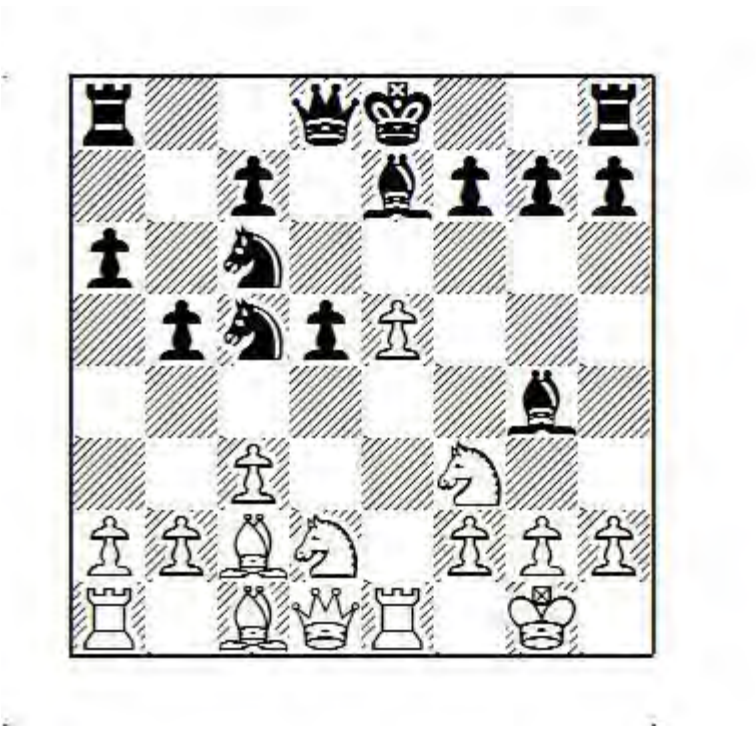


Note how insistent White is that when he plays Nc5 he will be able to recapture with the queen rather than the d4-pawn: 16 ... a4 17 Nc5 Qc6 18 Bb4! (again he is determined that ... Bxc5 won't leave a white pawn on c5; White wants to control c5 and put pressure on c7, not have a pawn blocking his way) 18 ... Qg6 19 Qc3 0-0 20 Rfe1 h5 21 Nd3 Bxd3 22 Bxe7 Rfe8 23 Re3 Be4 24 Rg3 Qe6 25 Bh4 Rac8 26

Qc5 and with the black queenside pawn majority crippled, White was able to begin thinking about advancing his 4-3 majority on the kingside in E.Safarli-I.Sokolov, St Petersburg 2010.

Meanwhile after 10 ... Bg4 the pin can be ignored with 11 Bc2, as 11 ... Nxe5? 12 Qe1! would be terrible for Black: 12 ... f6 13 Nxe5 fxe5 14 Qxe5+ etc. Instead White gets typical 'Lopez' pressure on b5 after 11 ... Ne6 12 Re1 Bc5 13 Nb3 Ba7 14 a4 etc. Or equally 11 ... Qd7 12 Re1 Rd8 (if 12 ... d4 13 h3 d3 –13 ... Bh5 14 Nb3! – 14 hxg4 dxc2 15 Qxc2 Qxg4 16 b4 Ne6 17 Re4 Qh5 18 a4 again attacking b5 in K.Landa-J.Smeets, Fuerth 2002) 13 Nb3 Ne6 14 a4 Bh5 15 axb5 axb5 16 Bd3 Rb8 17 Qe2, as in D.Flores-G.Sagalchik, Buenos Aires 2003.

11 Bc2 Bg4 12 Re1



12 ... Qd7

Question: Why doesn't Black castle rather than move the queen?

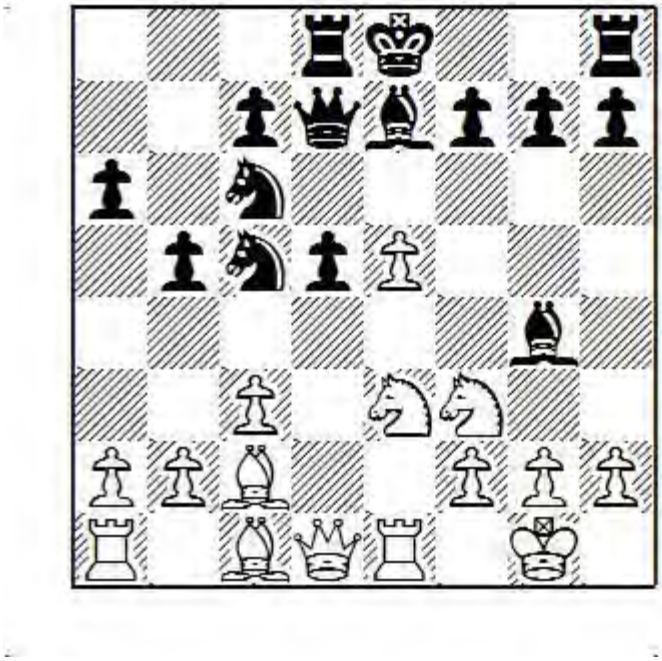
Answer: Black wants to bolster the d5-pawn which has been left under-defended by 11 ... Bg4, and so clears the way for ... Rd8.

After 12 ... 0-0 the white knight can head straight for f5 as in the game, e.g. 12 ... 0-0 13 Nf1 Re8 14 h3 Bh5 15 Ng3 Bg6 16 Nf5 Ne4 17 Nxe7+ Rxe7 18 Bf4 with a useful bishop pair in P.Svidler-U.Adianto, Groningen 1997.

13 Nf1!

The knight manoeuvre from b1 to f1 proves as effective here as in the Closed Lopez. As will be seen, the knight can go to e3 without worrying about the defence of e5.

13 ... Rd8 14 Ne3!



14 ... Bxf3?

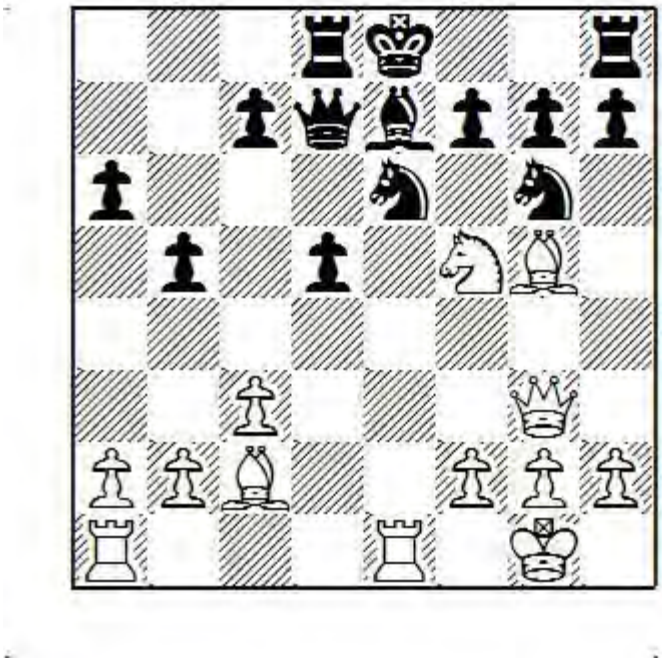
Fatalibekova doesn't realize that the e5-pawn is still taboo. Instead 14 ... Nxe5? 15 Nxe5 loses a piece (I'll let you work out the captures!) but the text is also inadequate as it allows a dangerous attack. Nonetheless, even after 14 ... Bh5 White could put Black under pressure, for example after 15 b4 Ne6 16 Nf5 0-0 17 a4, or even 15 b4 Ne6 16 g4 Bg6 17 Nf5 0-0 18 a4. Note that White can take the liberty of 'weakening' the kingside with g2-g4 as he has a bind on the position and, besides, the pawn supports his knight on an excellent attacking square.

15 Qxf3 Nxe5 16 Qg3 Ng6 17 Nf5 Ne6

Black should try to survive after 17 ... Ne4 18 Bxe4 dxe4 19 Nxg7+ Kf8 20 Bh6 Kg8.

18 Bg5!

A startling and very powerful blow.



Exercise: A tactical puzzle for you to solve! Can you see

the correct reply to the game move 18 ... Bxg5,

and also the alternatives 18 ... 0-0, 18 ... Nxg5 and 18 ... Kf8?

18 ... .Bxg5

Answer: Black loses the exchange after 18 ... 0-0 19 Nxe7+ Nxe7 20 Bxh7+! Kxh7 21 Qh4+ Kg8 22 Bxe7.

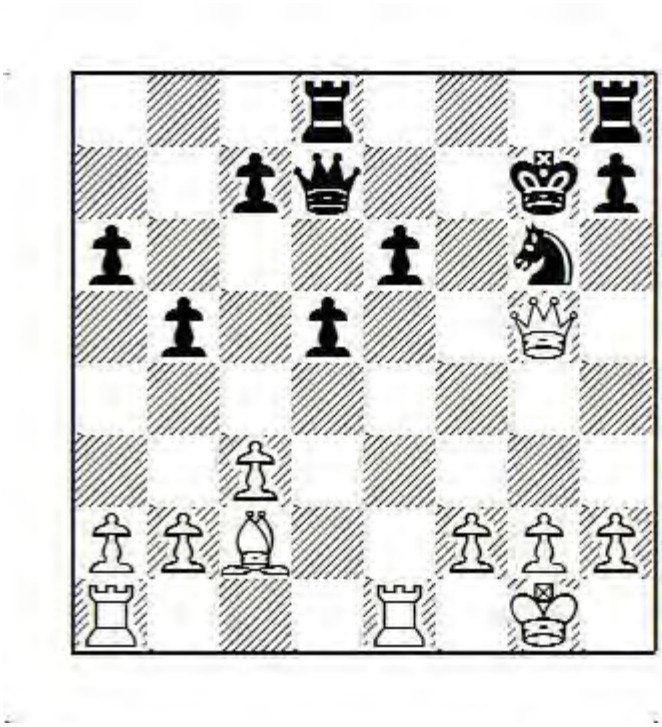
If 18 ... Nxg5 19 Qxg5, Black's position is about to collapse because 19 ... f6 fails to 20 Nxe7! fxg5 (or 20 ... Nxe7 21 Qxg7 Rf8 22 Bf5! Qd6 23 Re6 and wins) 21 Nxg6+ Kf7 22 Ne5+ Kf6 23 Nxd7+ Rxd7 and White is a piece up.

Finally after 18 ... Kf8 the move is 19 Rxe6!, when 19 ... fxe6 20 Bxe7+ Nxe7 21 Qxg7+ or 19 ... Qxe6 20 Bxe7+ Nxe7 21 Qxg7+ Ke8 22 Qxh8+ are both winning for White, which means Black is forced into the horrible scenario 19 ... Bxg5 20 Rxa6 – material is equal but the rook is shut out of the game on h8.

19 Nxg7+!

A deadly zwischenzug before capturing on g5.

19 ... Kf8 20 Nxe6+ fxe6 21 Qxg5 Kg7



Exercise: Try to find the move that causes Black the most discomfort.

The only chance was 21 ... Qe7, though after 22 Qh6+ Kf7 (if 22 ... Qg7 the e6-pawn drops) 23 Re3 Black is facing an irresistible attack.

Answer: **22 h4!**

The threat of 23 h5 forces the black king to move again, unless Black plays 22 ... Qe7 when 23 Qxe7+ Nxe7 24 Rxe6 is a hopeless endgame.

22 ... Kf7 23 Re3 Qe7

Losing at once, but with 24 Rae1 coming Black couldn't hold out for long.

24 Bxg6+ 1-0

Question: Why did Black resign after 24 Bxg6+?

Answer: The black queen is lost after 24 ... hxg6 25 Rf3+ Ke8 26 Qxg6+ Kd7 27 Rf7.

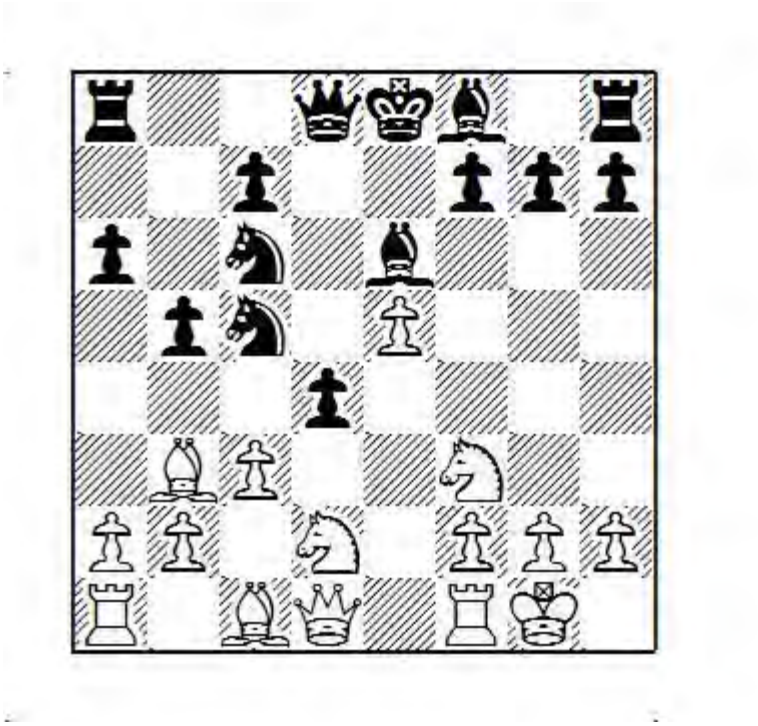
Open Scenario Five: Black plays 9 ... Nc5 10 c3 d4

Game 33

N.Kosintseva-V.Mikhalevski

Biel 2010

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Nxe4 6 d4 b5 7 Bb3 d5 8 dxe5 Be6 9 Nbd2 Nc5 10 c3 d4!?



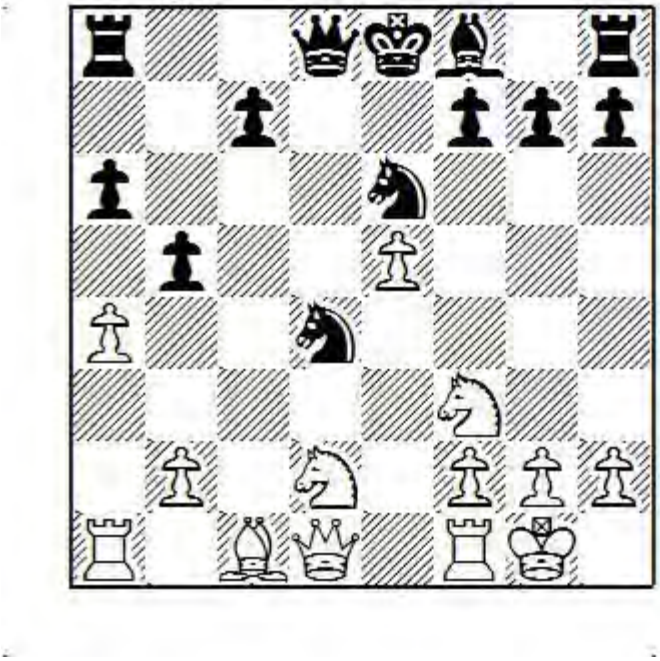
Black tries to free his game by offering an exchange of bishops on e6. An attractive feature for him is that his knight gets to the e6 'blockade' square. But can he hold his queenside together?

11 Bxe6

Instead White can sacrifice a piece here with 11 Ng5!?, a move introduced in the Karpov-Korchnoi World Championship match in Baguio 1978. It leads to huge complications after 11 ... Qxg5 12 Qf3. Way back in 1994, your author managed to find a winning improvement for White in this variation on move 27, but it seems that everything has now been analysed out to a draw by computers. So we'll decline a memory exercise in favour of quiet pressure against pawns.

11 ... Nxe6 12 cxd4 Ncxd4 13 a4!

Like 11 Ng5 in the note above, this pawn stab was used by Karpov against Korchnoi in a World Championship match, this time in Merano in 1981. Black seems tantalizingly close to full equality, but can't quite avoid being saddled with pawn weaknesses.

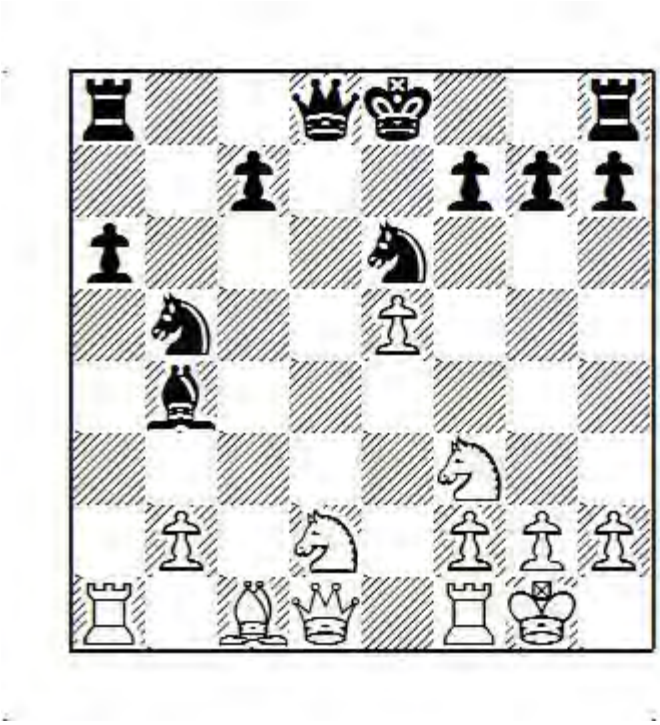


13 ... Bb4

Black hopes to ease the pressure by exchanging off White's knight on d2 before it goes to e4. If instead 13 ... Be7 14 Nxd4 Nxd4 (or 14 ... Qxd4 15 axb5 with an edge) 15 Ne4 0-0 16 axb5 and, as with the game move, Black has to submit to split pawns with 16 ... Nxb5 because 16 ... axb5? drops a piece to 17 Rxa8 Qxa8 18 Qxd4.

Alternatively 13 ... Bc5 14 Ne4 Bb6 15 Nfg5! gives White a dangerous initiative, for example 15 ... Nxg5? (a poor reply, but even so 15 ... 0-0 16 Qd3! threatening 17 Nf6+ then mate on h7, is unpleasant for Black; or equally 15 ... Qd5 16 Re1! 0-0 17 Qd3) 16 Bxg5 Qd7 17 axb5 Qxb5 18 Re1 0-0? (a classic case of 'castling into it'; he had to try 18 ... Ne6) 19 Nf6+! Kh8 (if 20 ... gxf6 21 Bxf6 Qd7 22 Re4 when there is no good defence to the killer check on g4) 20 Qh5 Qd3 21 Re4 1-0 in N.De Firmian-I.Timmermans, Copenhagen 2002.

14 axb5 Nxb5

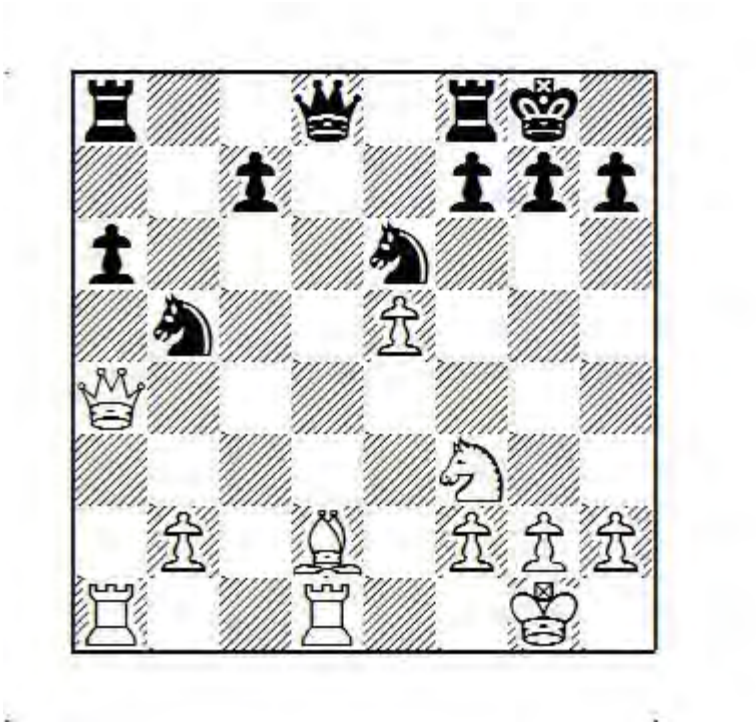


Question: That's one ugly recapture! Why does Black avoid

14 ... axb5, which keeps his pawns intact?

Answer: Of course there has to be a serious reason why Grandmasters reject 14 ... axb5. After 15 Rxa8 Qxa8 16 Nxd4 Nxd4 17 Qg4! Black is facing disaster as he can't defend both d4 and g7 – if 17 ... Ne6 it is the bishop on b4 that drops off.

15 Qa4 Bxd2 16 Bxd2 0-0 17 Rfd1



Exercise: Try to assess this position. Does White have

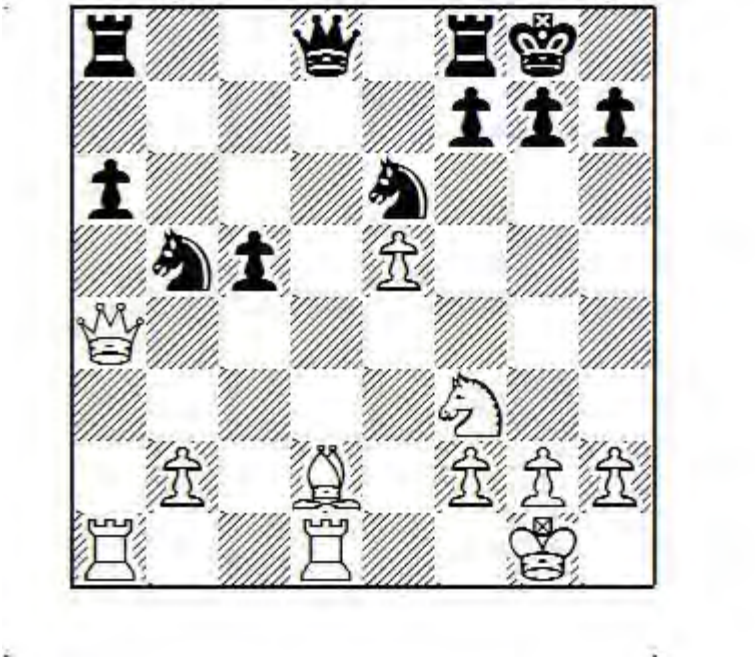
the advantage? If White does, how big is it?

Answer: Nadezhda Kosintseva has the initiative, which is a plus in itself – she is threatening to win the exchange with 18 Bb4. She has been the first to control the only open file on the board with her rook. Structurally speaking, her pawn on b2 is harder to attack than the black pawns on a6 and c7 (or c5, after Black's next move). White still has a healthy kingside pawn majority. And finally her bishop is also the best minor piece on the board. Judging from this assessment it might sound as if White has a crushing position. But none of the listed plus points is hugely significant in itself.

Fans of the Open Variation might argue that White's bishop isn't the best minor piece as Black has an excellent blockade knight on e6, and they might also point out that simplification has eased Black's defence.

Nonetheless I wouldn't enjoy having to defend the black side of this position. GM Mikhalevski is a great expert on the Open Variation but he has struggled in a couple of games to prove Black is okay here.

17 ... c5



Exercise: Try to work out the good and bad points of this move.

Answer: Black meets the threat of 18 Bb4 and asserts control over the d4-square. The idea of ... Nbd4, after preparation, is introduced, recentralizing the knight. The action of the white bishop is further circumscribed, its own pawn on e5 already shutting it in.

The bad points are that the pawn is somewhat easier for White to attack on c5 than c7, and a weakness has been left on the d6-square. This hole in the black centre becomes more significant after Black's next move.

18 Be3

White immediately aims his bishop at the weak pawn and deters the plan of ... Nbd4.

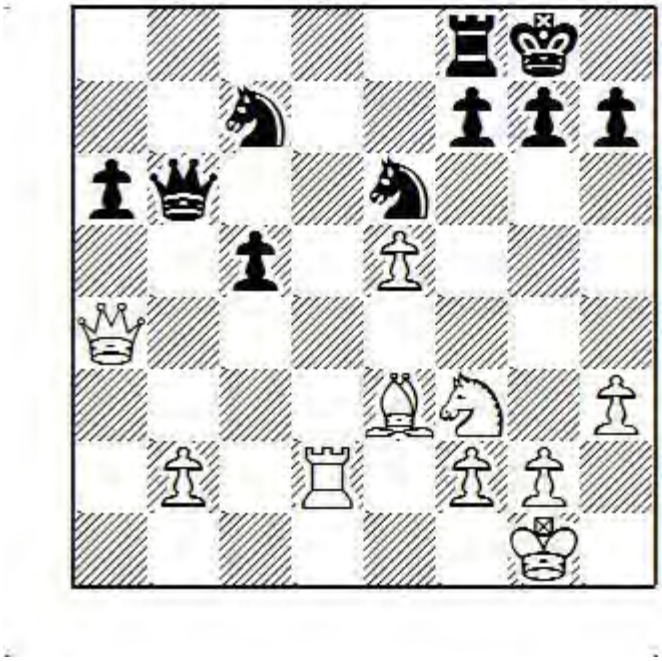
18 ... Qb6

In an earlier game Mikhalevski had tried 18 ... Qe7 when there followed 19 Qe4 (White's play would make Nimzowitsch proud, as he engages in over-protection of the e5-pawn) 19 ... h6 20 h4 Rfe8 21 Re1 (at first glance an odd move, but the intention is to prevent Black from breaking out of the bind with ... Nbd4, as after a multiple exchange on d4, the rook on e1 will safely defend the e5-pawn against the black queen and rook) 21 ... Kh8 22 Ra4 Qd7 23 Rea1 and Black was under pressure in D.Jakovenko-V.Mikhalevski, Novi Sad 2009, though he did hold on for a very creditable draw against a player rated 2742.

19 h3 Nbc7

Black defends a6 as a prelude to offering an exchange of rooks along the d-file. White can't respond with 20 Rd6 as b2 is hanging.

20 Rd2 Rad8 21 Rad1 Rxd2 22 Rxd2



22 ... Qb5

Question: Why not the natural 22 ... Rd8 to complete the rook swap?

Answer: Black can't complete his plan of exchanging with 22 ... Rd8 as 23 Rxd8+ Nxd8 24 Qd7! is decisive – 24 ... Qb8 25 Bxc5 or 24 ... Nde6 25 Ng5! and Black has no good way to defend f7 as taking the knight allows a back rank mate.

23 Qc2

So that 23 ... Rd8 would now drop the c5-pawn.

23 ... h6 24 Nh4

An attempt to attack on the kingside that is a great success after Black's poor reply. Instead White would have a small edge after 24 b3 – fixing the pawn on c5 – 24 ... Rb8 25 Rd3 a5 26 Nd2 etc.

24 ... Qb4?

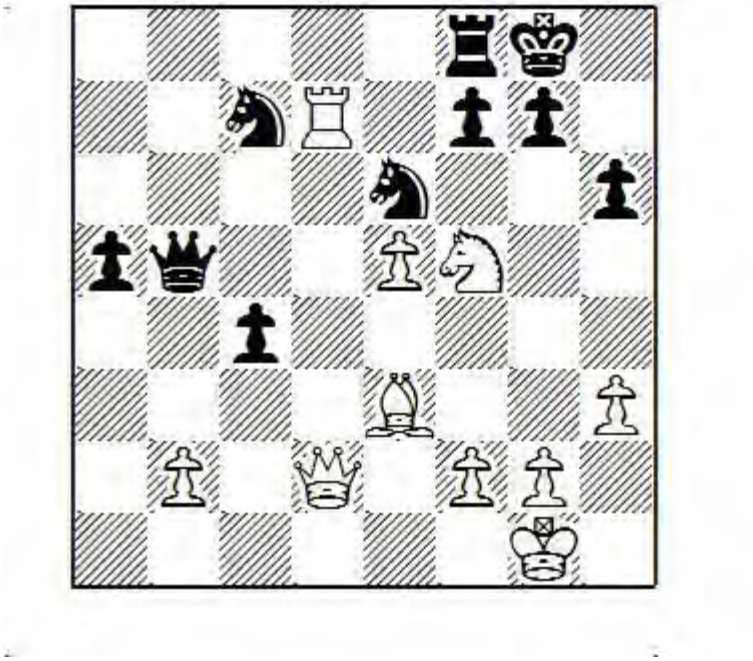
Black would be very close to equality after 24 ... c4 – uncovering an attack on e5 and with ideas of 24 ... Nd5 – 25 Nf5 (or 25 Qe4 Rd8) 25 ... Qxe5 26 Ne7+ Kh8 27 Qxc4 Re8.

The queen move not only lets the white knight into f5 with impunity, it also allows the white rook to go to d7.

25 Nf5

Mikhalevski has missed his chance, allowing a powerful attack on his king. It's almost never a good sign for Black in the Ruy Lopez if White's knight can sit unchallenged on the f5-square.

25 ... a5 26 Rd7 Qb5 27 Qd2 c4



Exercise: Can you find and White's winning breakthrough?

Answer: **28 Nxg7!**

It was possible to utilize the kingside pawn majority with 28 f4, with ideas of 29 Ne7+ and 30 f5, but the temporary sacrifice on g7 is crushing.

28 ... Kxg7

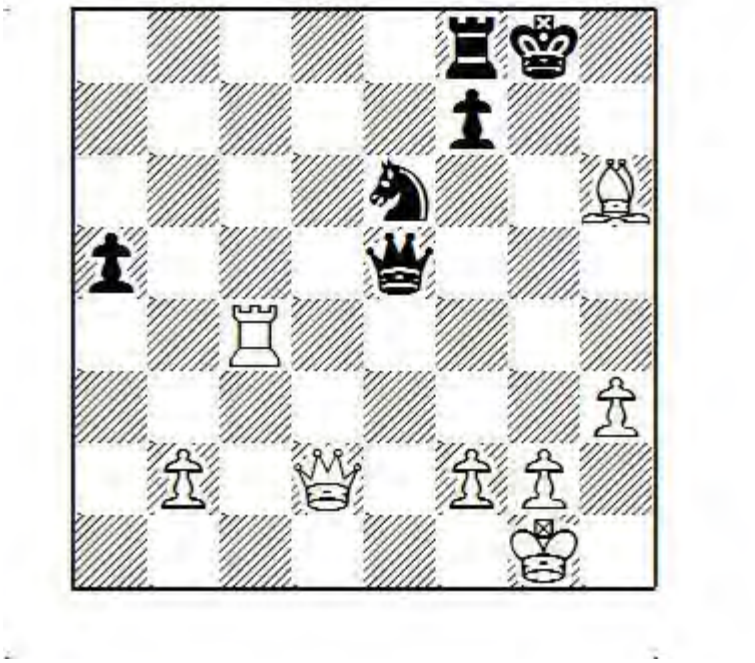
Or 28 ... .Nxg7 29 Rxc7.

29 Bxh6+ Kg8 30 Rxc7

A sensible decision – White is going to be two pawns up with a crushing game as 30 ... Nxc7 31 Qg5+ mates.

After 30 Bxf8 Kxf8? 31 Qd6+ Kg7 32 Qe7! Black has no good way to defend f7 and will soon get mated, but the resource 30 ... c3! 31 bxc3 Kxf8 32 Qd6+ Kg8 33 Qe7 Qb1+ 34 Kh2 Qf5 would allow Black to hang on.

30 ... Qxe5 31 Rxc4



And despite Black's gritty resistance the material advantage proved too much:

31 ... Rd8 32 Qc1 Qe2 33 Rc8 Rxc8 34 Qxc8+ Kh7 35 Qc1 Qd3 36 Be3 a4 37 Kh2 Qd6+ 38 Kg1 Qd3 39 Kh2 Qd6+ 40 g3 Qd3 41 Qc6 Qb3 42 Qe4+ Kg8 43 Qe5 Qd1 44 h4 Qg4 45 Qb5 Kh7 46 Qd5 Kg8 47 h5 Qb4 48 Qa8+ Kh7 49 Qe8 Qb7 50 h6 Qf3 51 Qxa4 Ng5 52 Qf4 Qh5+ 53 Kg2 1-0

Chapter Five

Gambit Lines

In the final chapter of this book we'll look at four diverse gambit lines for Black and one avoidance measure versus the Marshall Attack for White:

1. The Schliemann Defence: 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 f5.

2. The Steinitz Deferred, Siesta Variation: 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 d6 5 c3 f5.

3. The Gajewski Gambit in the Chigorin: 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 Na5 10 Bc2 d5.

4. The Marshall Attack: 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 0-0 8 c3 d5.

5. The Anti-Marshall with 8 h3: 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 0-0 8 h3.

The common theme in these gambits is the deflection or elimination of White's e4-pawn, which allows the black pieces more freedom than they normally achieve at an early stage in the Ruy Lopez. Their increased energy won't necessarily express itself in an immediate 'do-or-die' counterattack. As we shall see in the Marshall Attack, for example, Black's dynamism can be maintained into the endgame, preventing White from exploiting his extra pawn.

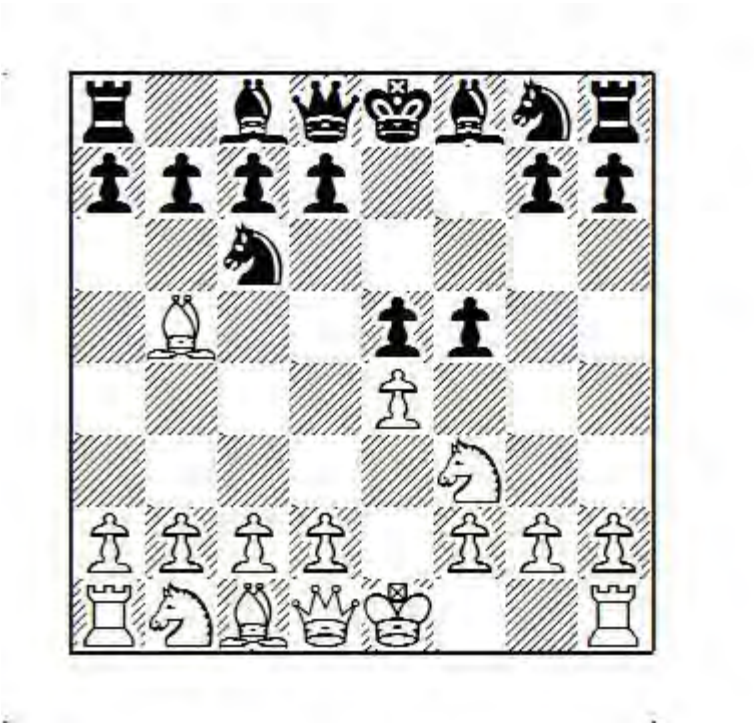
So let's get down to business. The Schliemann Defence needs the most attention as it comes right at the beginning of the Ruy Lopez – there's no way to avoid it.

The Schliemann Defence

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 f5

We have already examined 4 d3!? in Chapter One, and if you are happy with that then you can skip the coverage of 4 Nc3 here.

In the Schliemann, Black in effect says to his opponent: 'You have placed your bishop on the wrong diagonal. Because it is on b5 rather than c4 I can play a King's Gambit with the black pieces!' Such reasoning was probably more convincing back in 1847 when Jaenisch pioneered this defence. Nonetheless, it is alive and kicking more than 150 years later.



It certainly doesn't lack ambition. Without any preparation, Black challenges the e4-pawn. He is willing to loosen his pawn structure, and even toy with his king's safety, in order to increase the energy of his pieces. In other words, it is quite 'modern' in its aims.

There is no definite refutation, and Radjabov has played it with success at the highest level. Playing like this requires an adventurous spirit combined with some hard knowledge of theory.

For our first game we'll choose a battle of the Kates: Katerina Nemcova, of the Czech Republic, a WGM, versus Kateryna Lahno of the Ukraine, a full GM.

Game 34

K.Lahno-K.Nemcova

European Women's Championship, Plovdiv 2008

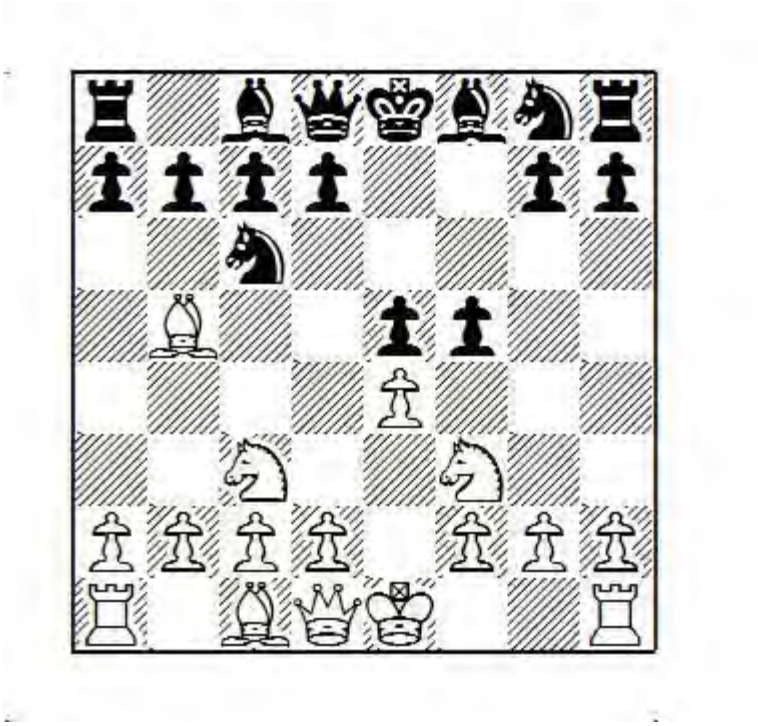
1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 f5

If Black intends to attack e4, it isn't a good idea to interpose 3 ... a6 4 Ba4 as after 4 ... f5 5 d4! is a good reply. For example 5 ... exd4 6 e5 followed by 7 0-0 and 8 c3 with a strong initiative. In contrast after 3 ... f5 4 d4?! fxe4 5 Nxe5 Nxe5 6 dxe5 Black has 6 ... c6! attacking the white bishop, when if 7 Be2 Qa5+ and 8 ... Qxe5 wins an important centre pawn.

4 Nc3

The most popular response. It allows Black to build a big centre, but White aims to cut it down to size with the help of some sharp tactics.

Another possibility is 4 d3 (see Chapter One), but let's not take the pawn with 4 exf5? as Black gains the initiative with 4 ... .e4, disturbing our knight on f3.



4 ... fxe4

The elimination of the e4-pawn is the whole point of Black's last move.

We don't need to worry too much about other options for Black. For example if 4 ... Nd4 5 Bc4 when 5 ... fxe4? 6 Nxd4 exd4 7 Qh5+ is already winning for White. Against 4 ... Nf6 5 exf5 is a good moment to accept the pawn, as 5 ... e4 6 Ng5 can be followed by d2-d3, breaking up the black centre, while after 5 ... Bc5 6 0-0 0-0 the fork trick 7 Nxe5! achieves the same end after 7 ... Nxe5 8 d4, when White regains the piece. Or if 7 ... Nd4, the calm 8 Nf3! c6 9 Nxd4 Bxd4 10 Ba4 leaves White with two extra pawns and facing no danger.

Question: Okay, but after 4 ... fxe4 I don't like the way

my e-pawn has vanished and my knight can be

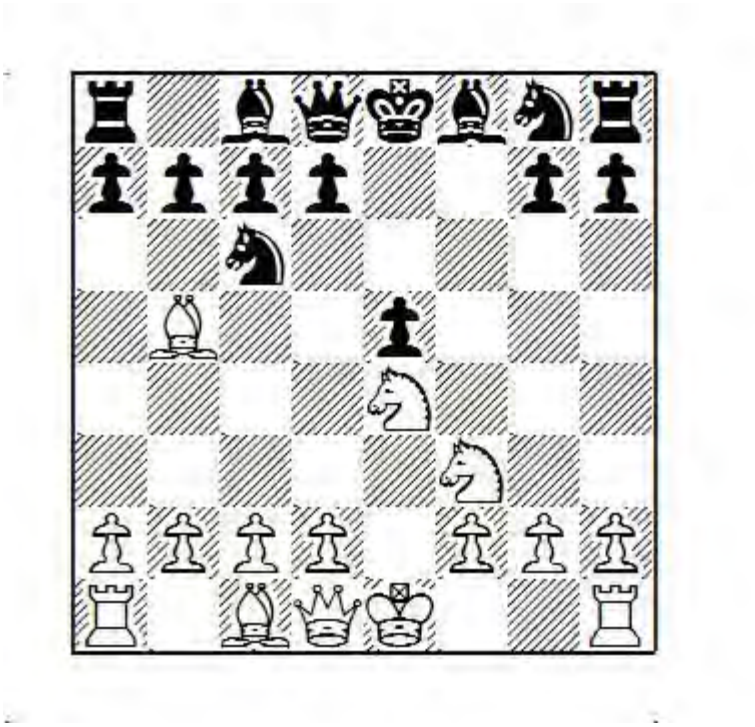
kicked from the centre. It looks all wrong to me.

Answer: I guess we've been looking at too many games with a closed pawn centre! Generally speaking in the Ruy Lopez, the downfall of the e4-pawn is a cause of celebration for Black, and a source of regret for White.

But here things have happened very fast – the black king is still in the centre and his defences have been weakened by the removal of the f7-pawn. Does Black really have time to construct a pawn centre and also get the king to safety? Aren't the active white pieces going to land a blow somewhere? Let's see how the theory unfolds.

5 Nxe4

The knight takes up an impressive centre post. It has to be challenged by the black pieces – but how?



5 ... Nf6!?

This is the most popular move at the time of writing. The ambitious alternative 5 ... d5, which is examined in games that follow, has never been refuted, but armed with the necessary theory White can avoid all the traps to reach a slight, if unexciting advantage in the middlegame.

6 Qe2!?

Lahno defends her knight and keeps up pressure on the black centre.

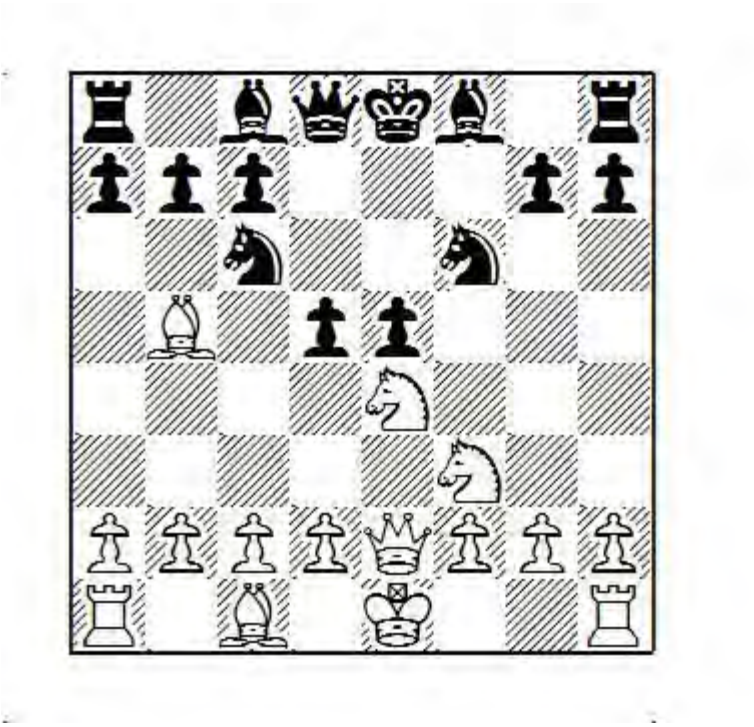
Question: Why not 6 Nxf6+ and 7 Qe2 –

doesn't that come to the same thing?

Answer: Be patient! The next game will answer this question.

6 ... d5

Black has no other good way to shake off White's centre pressure. Still, building a broad pawn centre was the whole point of dislodging the white pawn from e4.



7 Nxf6+

Question: Doesn't this strengthen the black centre

after she recaptures with the pawn?

Answer: Black does temporarily get a broad centre, but she won't be able to keep it intact. You could say that a centre is only as powerful as the pieces that are supporting it. That's why White is playing energetically to force a crisis before Black is able to complete her development.

7 ... gxf6!

The only way to hold onto e5. After 7 ... Qxf6 8 Qxe5+ Black is just a pawn down.

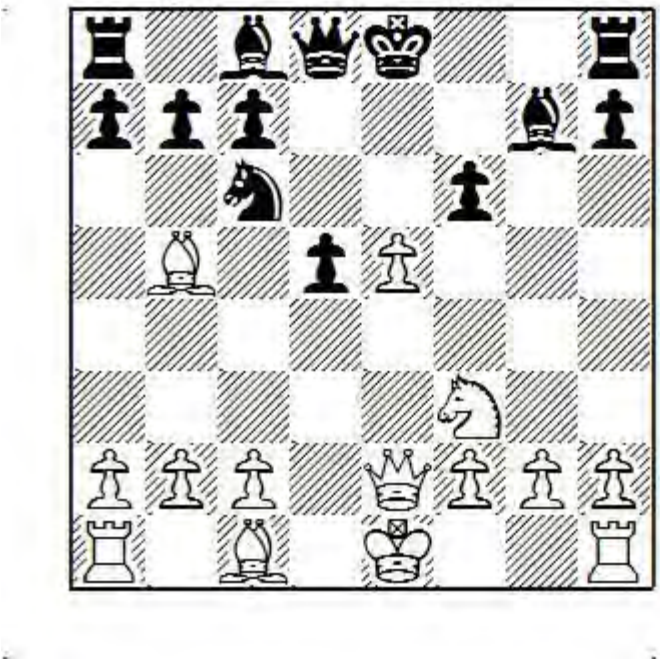
8 d4!

The key move. If now 8 ... e4 9 Nh4, when besides suffering the weakening of her centre pawns (ideally she wants to keep them on d5 and e5) Black is menaced by a queen check on h5.

8 ... Bg7

At first glance this looks like a mistake, but Black is planning a temporary pawn sacrifice to catch up in development and evacuate the king from the centre.

9 dxe5



Exercise: See if you can guess Black's dynamic reply.

White appears to have triumphed, as the black centre is broken up and she has won a pawn after 9 ... fxe5 10 Nxe5. But ...

Answer: **9 ... 0-0!**

Black breaks the pin on c6 and removes the king from the firing line.

10 Bxc6

If instead 10 exf6 then 10 ... Qxf6 gives Black good play for the pawn.

10 ... bxc6

Question: How should White prevent 11 ... fxe5,

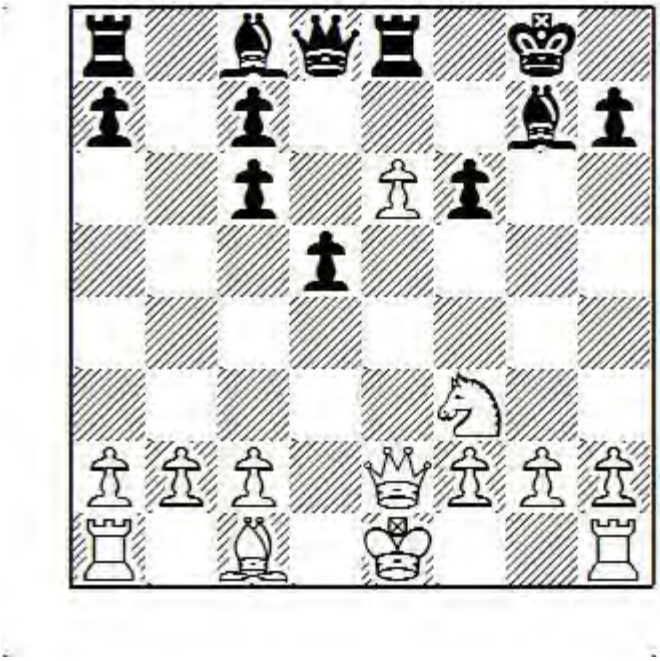
when Black energizes her pieces and pawns?

Answer: **11 e6!**

An excellent positional move. Instead after 11 exf6 Qxf6 intending ... Bg4 and then ... Rae8 Black is splendidly active. Permissible is 11 0-0 by White, as long as she answers 11 ... Re8 by 12 e6 returning to the main game.

Going back a move, instead of 10 Bxc6, 10 e6!? at once is sometimes played, when Black can reply 10 ... Ne5 with complications.

11 ... Re8



Black will regain the pawn, but remains with her bishop shut in on g7 and a fractured kingside.

12 0-0

Now it is White's turn to whisk away the king to avoid a pin on the e-file.

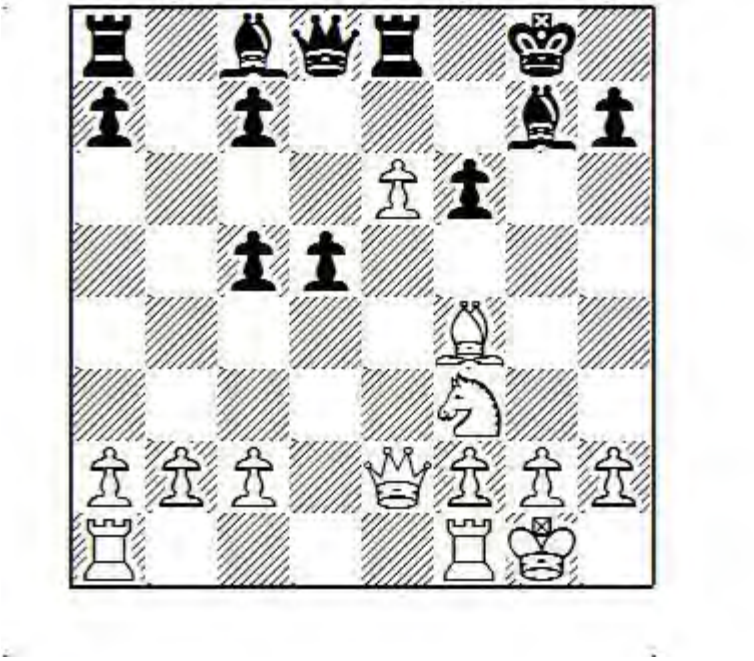
12 ... c5

Question: Why is it useful for Black to have control of the d4-square?

Answer: After the immediate 12 ... Rxe6 13 Qd3 White has the strong idea of 14 Nd4 followed at an appropriate moment by Nf5, putting the knight on the outpost square in front of the isolated f6-pawn. Black would have no wish to be forced into the exchange Bxf5 as after Qxf5 her dynamism has dwindled – whereas the static pawn weaknesses remain.

After 12 ... .Rxe6 13 Qd3 Black could still play 13 ... c5, but Nemcova has another reason in mind to delay the capture on e6.

13 Bf4



Exercise: Black has two obvious ways to take on e6, but can you

find an imaginative way to arrange the capture by a third black piece?

(Hint: it will take a three-move manoeuvre!)

13 Bf4 takes advantage of the gaps in the black centre to put the bishop on an active square where it can't be attacked by a black pawn. The pressure on the c7-pawn is also significant. An interesting alternative was 13 Qb5!? when Black should defend c5 with 13 ... Bf8.

Answer: **13 ... Rb8!?**

An admirable lesson in how to activate your worst placed piece. The black rook intends to join the ensemble of other black pieces in the centre via b6 and e6.

14 b3

Black has gained a useful move for her rook's journey as White can't allow the b2-pawn to fall.

14 ... Rb6

Question: Now what is the best way for White to try

to exploit Black's weakened queenside pawns?

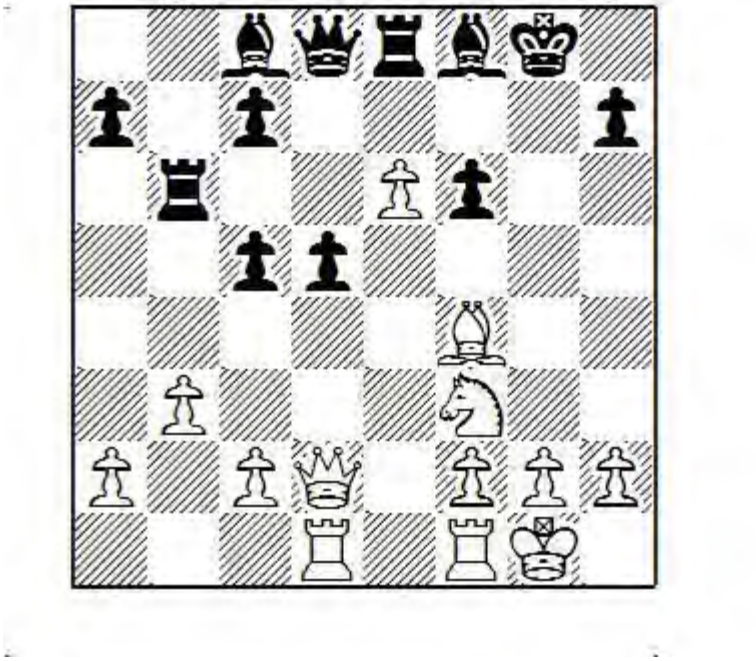
Answer: **15 Qd2!**

Black's rook manoeuvre has the drawback that the a7-pawn has been left undefended. Therefore Qa5! will attack a7 and c5 and, in the event of ... Rbxe6, the c7-pawn in unison with the bishop on f4.

15 ... Bf8

Black defends the c5-pawn. 15 ... Rbxe6 16 Qa5 Qe7 17 Bxc7 Ra6 18 Rfe1 Rxa5 19 Rxe7 Rxe7 20 Bxa5 would leave White a pawn up in the endgame, though the two bishops would give Black considerable power of resistance.

16 Rad1



Question: How should Black meet the threat to d5?

The pressure on the black centre leads to a rather panicky reaction by Black:

16 ... Bxe6?

Answer: It only takes one 'obvious' move to ruin a position. The bishop capture is totally inconsistent with putting the rook on b6. Also weak are 16 ... d4, when 17 c3 undermines the centre pawn, and 16 ... c6 which shuts out the rook on b6. But the position looks unclear after 16 ... Bb7, for example 17 Nh4 Rbxe6 18 Nf5 Qd7 etc.

17 Rfe1

Nemcova's choice of 16 ... Bxe6? means that she has a rook on b6 and a bishop on e6 rather than, after 16 ... Bb7 and 17 ... Rbxe6, a rook on e6 and a bishop on b7. Can you see that this represents a loss of coordination by the black pieces? It becomes even clearer after Black's next move:

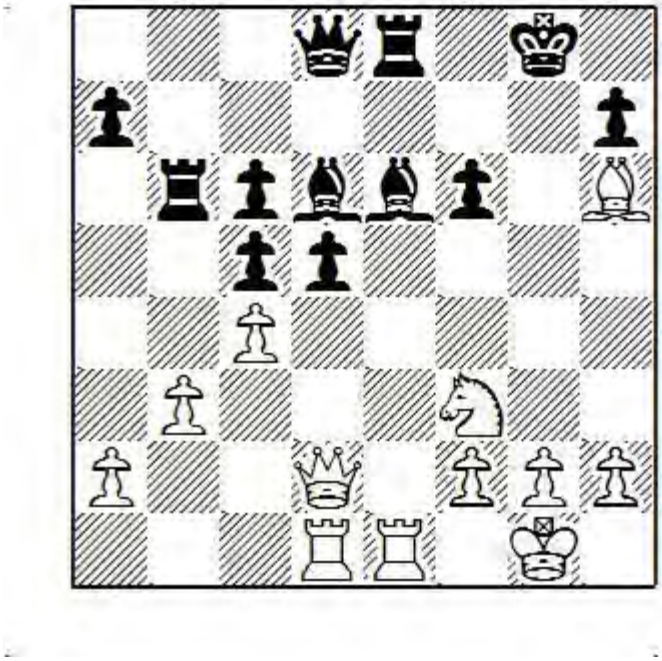
17 ... c6

Black feels obliged to stabilize the d5-pawn, but what a miserable outcome to the grand hopes of centralizing the rook with ... Rbxe6!

18 Bh6!

Offering an unwelcome exchange of bishops which would leave the dark squares weak around the black king. Besides, the c5-pawn would become more fragile once deprived of its defender.

18 ... Bd6 19 c4



19 ... Bf7

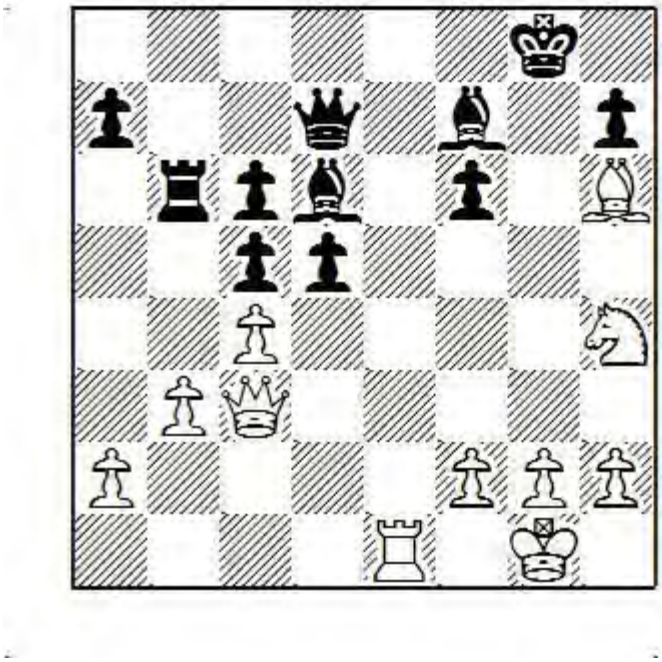
Question: I don't understand these moves. Why can't Black play

19 ... d4 with a protected passed pawn in the centre?

Answer: After 19 ... d4 any counterplay that Black might have achieved through pressure on c4 is gone. Her two bishops are lame, and it would be rather unpleasant having to endure White's probing with say 20 Qd3 followed by 21 Nd2 and 22 Ne4.

Perhaps the best move was 19 ... Rb7, to bring the rook back into the game. Black might have feared the sacrifice 20 Rxe6!? Rxe6 21 cxd5 cxd5 22 Qxd5 though 22 ... Qc8 seems to hold for Black. In any case, provoking a crisis of this sort was preferable to being slowly ground down in the game.

20 Nh4 Rxe1+ 21 Rxe1 Qd7 22 Qc3!



Exercise: Work out what happens after 22 ... Be5.

White's task after 22 Qc3 is to get the queen involved in the attack on the enemy king. The g3-, g4- and g5-squares are all barred to her, but Lahno finds an admirable way to gradually infiltrate the defence.

22 ... Qd8

The black queen is obliged to defend the f6-pawn.

Answer: If 22 ... Be5? there follows 23 Rxe5 fxe5 24 Qg3+ Bg6 25 Nxg6 hxg6 26 Qxg6+ Kh8 27 Bg5! and there is no defence to 28 Bf6+ winning the queen or mating. Notice how the rook on b6 is a useless bystander whilst all this is going on.

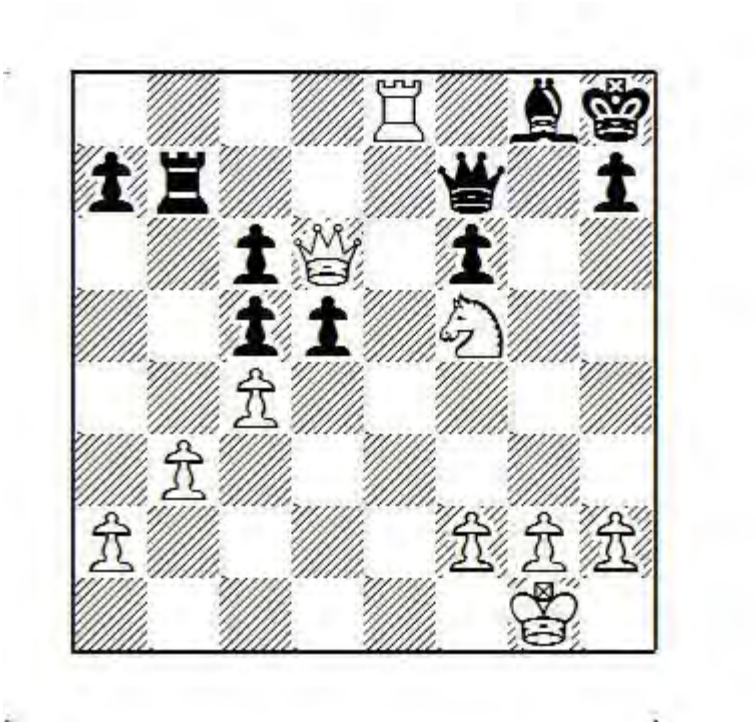
23 Qf3 Kh8 24 Qg4 Bf8 25 Bxf8 Qxf8 26 Qf4 Bg8 27 Re8!

A pretty infiltration. It's mate in one if Black takes the rook.

27 ... Qf7 28 Qd6 Rb7

Black's rook manoeuvre to b6 proved a catastrophe because Black lost heart before completing it. It isn't enough to have a good idea – you need to carry it out to a finish if at all possible.

29 Nf5!



The knight reaches its 'Lopez' f5-square in some style. Black has no way to oust it as her own minor piece is completely dominated. If 29 ... Qxe8 30 Qxf6+ and mate next move.

29 ... Qg6

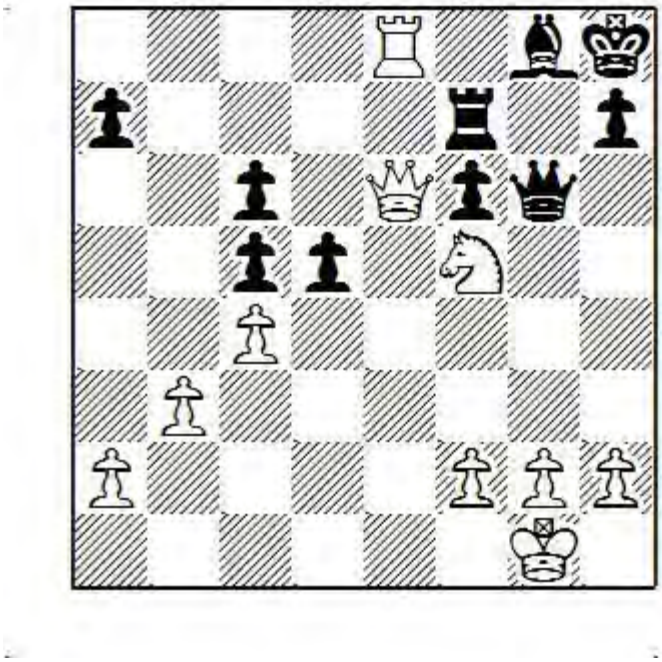
White mustn't become so obsessed in the attack on the black king that she forgets about her own king. Nemcova is hoping to catch her opponent in a cruel trap: 30 Ne7, planning the brilliant finish 30 ... Qxe8 31 Qxf6 mate, is a howler because of 30 ... Qb1 and it is White who is mated.

30 Qe6!

Lahno calmly defends her knight and strengthens the pin on g8.

30 ... Rf7

Black defends f6 to avoid being put into a fatal pin after say 30 ... d4 31 Rxg8+ Qxg8 32 Qxf6+ Rg7, but now the black pieces fall prey to the white knight.



31 Rxg8+!

A neat concluding combination. Whichever way Black recaptures there is a decisive fork.

31 ... Qxg8

The lesser evil, as 31 ... Kxg8 32 Ne7+ wins the queen.

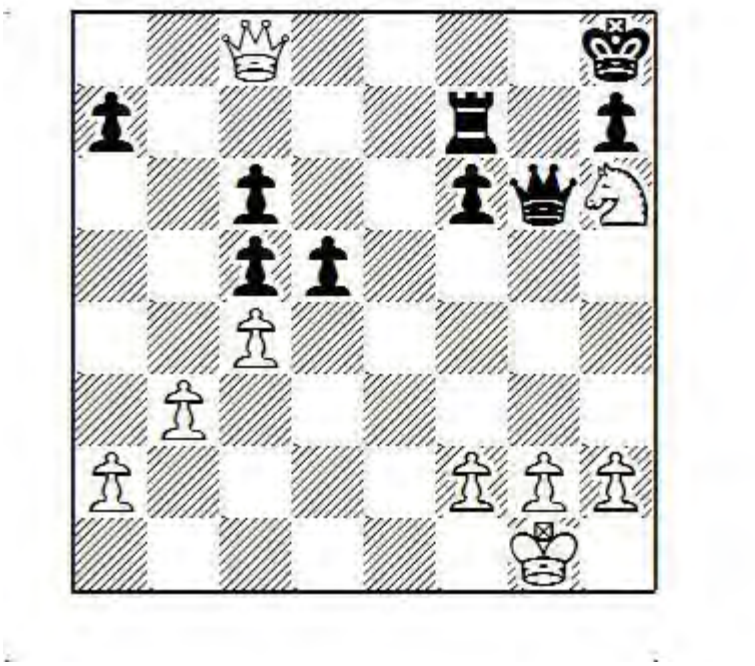
32 Nh6

The knight strikes the decisive blow from its outpost square.

32 ... Qg6

Hoping to fight on after 33 Nxf7+ Kg7 when the mating threat on b1 wins time to recapture on f7.

33 Qc8+! 1-0



After 33 ... Kg7 the knight once more returns to its outpost square ands wins the queen with 34 Nf5+. I guess you can live quite happily with the move order 6 Qe2 and 7 Nxf6+ but I can't resist showing you the curious consequences of inverting the move order with 6 Nxf6+ and 7 Qe2.

Game 35

R.Mainka-P.Zelbel

Dortmund 2010

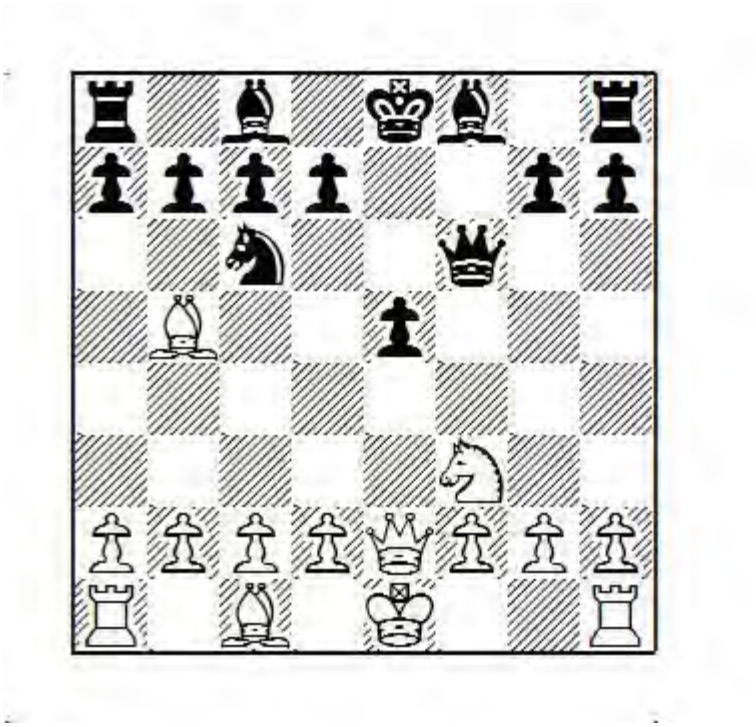
1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 f5 4 Nc3 fxe4 5 Nxe4 Nf6 6 Nxf6+

This immediate exchange is the choice of some world-class players.

6...Qxf6

Black takes the chance to recapture with the queen.

7 Qe2



If now 7 ... .d6 8 d4 is very awkward for Black. So he gambits a pawn with:

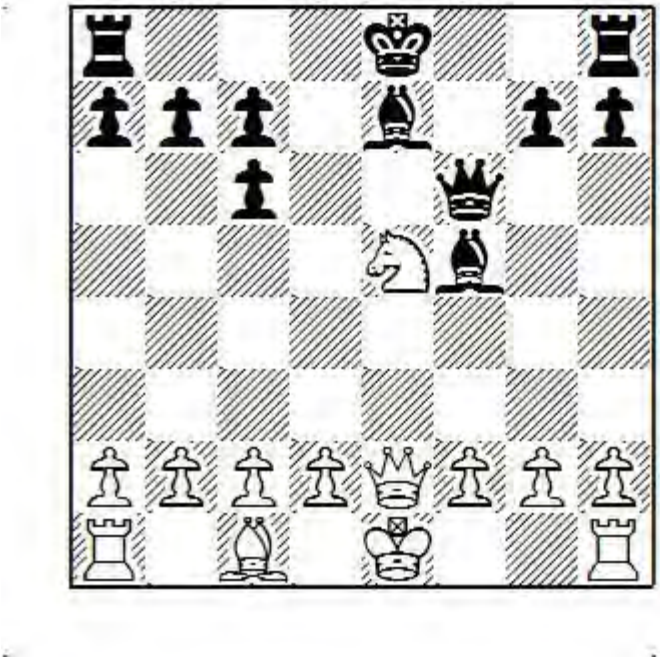
7 ... Be7! 8 Bxc6 dxc6

Possibly the recapture 8 ... bxc6!?, as played by Radjabov, is more accurate. For example 9 Nxe5 Qe6! (so that White would lose a piece to 10 ... d6 if he castled) 10 Nf3 Qxe2+ 11 Kxe2 c5! (clearing the a8-h1 diagonal for his bishop) 12 Re1 Bb7 13 Kf1 Bxf3 14 gxf3 Rf8 15 Kg2 Rf5 16 d3 d5 17 f4 Rf7 (not wishing to be bullied into straightening out White's pawns by 18 Re5; besides the rook has done its duty on f5 now that Bg5 is no longer possible for White) 18 Re5 0-0-0 19 Rb1 c6 20 Bd2 Bd6 21 Re6 Kd7 and White's weaknesses on the f-file meant he was unable to gain any real advantage from his extra pawn. In S.Karjakin-T.Radjabov, Medias 2011, a draw was agreed after 22 Rbe1 Rdf8 23 R1e2 Rf6 24 Rxf6 Rxf6 25 Be3 Re6 26 Kf3 d4 27 Bd2 Rxe2 28 Kxe2 Ke6 29 Kf3 Kf5 30 h3 ½-½.

9 Nxe5

No better is 9 Qxe5?! Bg4! 10 Qxf6 Bxf6, when Black's bishops give him strong compensation for the pawn. At the very worst he will be able to break up the white kingside pawns with ... Bxf3, g2xf3, with negligible winning chances for White.

9 ... Bf5



10 d3

Going two squares might have encouraged Black to break up the centre after 10 d4 0-0-0!? 11 Be3 with 11 ... c5. Simply 10 0-0!? looks the most challenging move, though Black managed to hold the balance after 10 ... 0-0 11 d4 Bd6 12 f4 Rae8 13 Be3 Be6 14 Rae1 Qf5 15 a3 Qe4 16 Rf2 Bd5 etc. in J.Lopez Martinez-T.Nyback, Rijeka 2010.

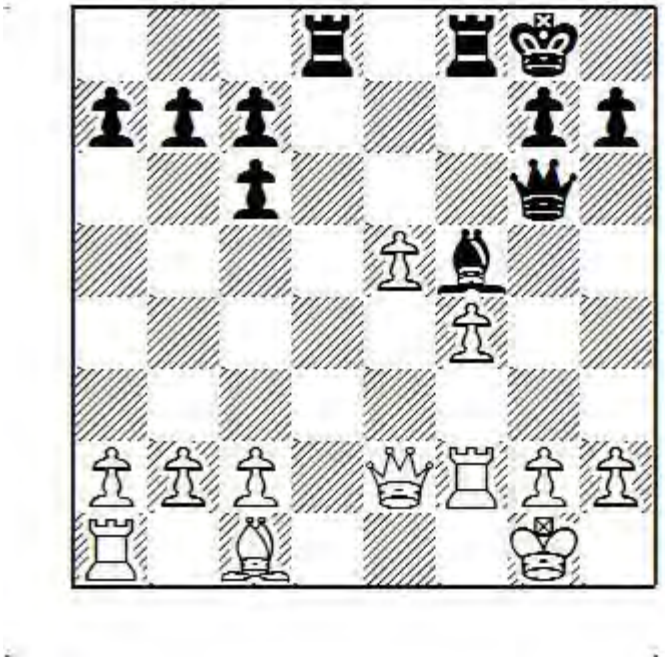
10 ... 0-0 11 0-0 Rae8 12 f4 Bd6 13 d4

White has stabilized his knight on e5 and kept his pawn. But now comes a thunderclap:

13 ... Bxe5! 14 dxe5

It's best to keep the f-file blocked as 14 fxe5 Qg6 attacks c2 when 15 c3? Bd3 is bad, while if 15 Rf2 Be4!? 16 Bf4 Bxc2! is fine for Black.

14 ... Qg6 15 Rf2 Rd8



Question: At first glance it appears that Black is a

protected passed pawn down for nothing. What is the

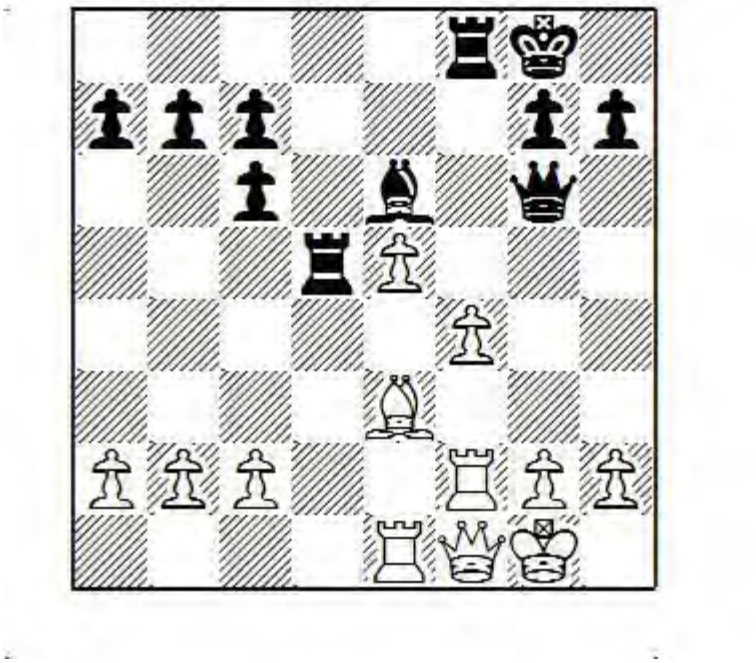
nature of his compensation? Is it enough to be okay?

Answer: Black is actually very comfortable here. He has a bind on the light squares in the centre which is accentuated by the opposite-coloured bishops. The pawns on e5 and f4 may look impressive, and indeed are defensively strong; but they are also immobile and lack vitality. The pawns are shutting in White's bishop, which can't attack anything. Meanwhile, Black has been the first to get a rook to the d-file – note the difference between the white rook on f2, which is forced to defend the c2-pawn, and the black rook which has seized control of the d-file.

16 Be3 Rd5 17 Re1 Be6

Just making sure White can't do anything to break out with 18 e6.

18 Qf1



Now 18 ... Rfd8, doubling rooks on the d-file, is prevented due to 19 f5.

Question: How can Black ensure that White doesn't engineer

a kingside pawn advance (after say Kh1 and h2-h3) with

g2-g4 and f4-f5, when his kingside pawns regain their energy?

Answer: **18 ... h5!**

Completing the light square blockade. White is never going to be allowed to play g2-g4 in a favourable manner.

19 b3 a6 20 c4 Rdd8 21 Bc5 Rf7 22 Rd1 ½-½

Black was happy to draw. He might have tried 22 ... Rxd1 23 Qxd1 Kh7 intending to soften up White's light squares further with ... h4-h3.

Although intellectually speaking I'm fully aware of the power of a blockade on a light-square complex, I still find it hard to accept emotionally that Black can play like this, just handing his opponent a big passed pawn. White certainly has chances for advantage after 6 Nxf6+ and 7 Qe2, but it doesn't make the system unplayable for Black.

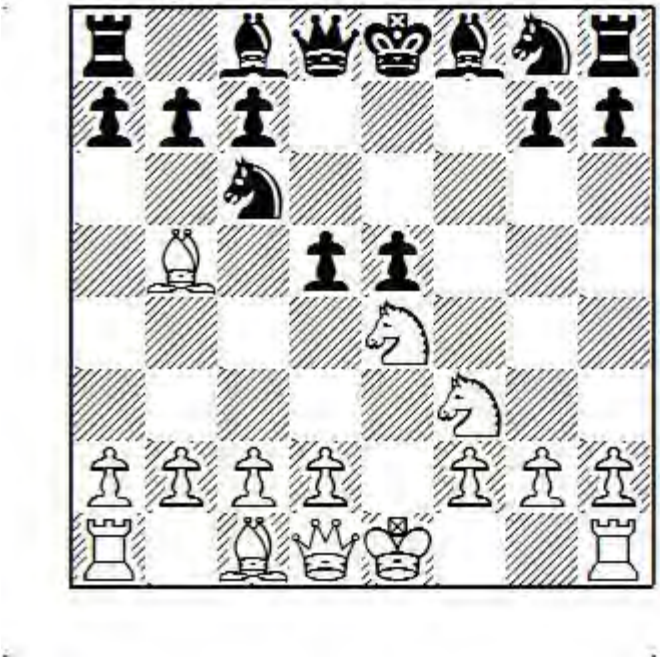
Now we should turn to the highly aggressive mainline with 5 ... d5.

Game 36

P.Wolff-A.Karpatchev

New York 1997

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 f5 4 Nc3 fxe4 5 Nxe4 d5



Black takes up the challenge. We saw 5 ... Nf6 in the previous games.

6 Nxe5

After 6 Ng3!? it would be hard for Black to consolidate his hold on e5, but offering the knight on e4 in order to smash the black centre is the consistent move.

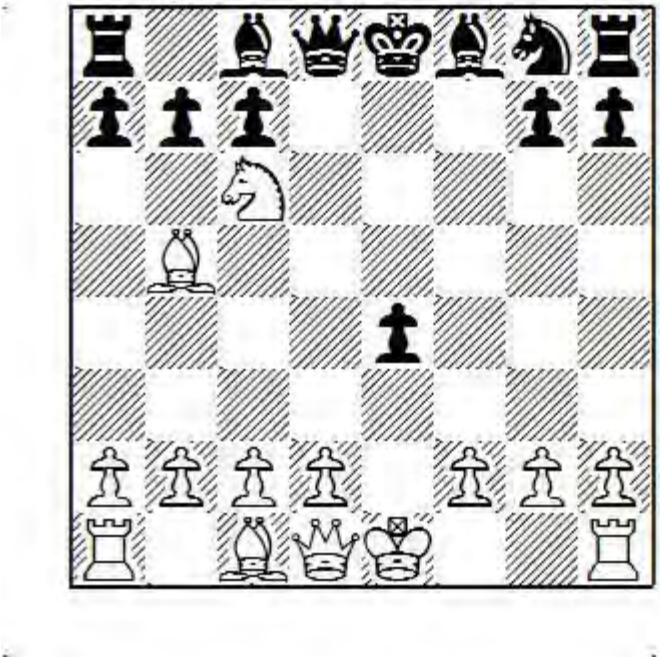
6 ... dxe4

Black must accept or else he is left a pawn down and facing a big attack.

Question: But what happens after 6 ... Qe7?

Answer: Simply 7 d4 dxe4 8 Nxc6 leaves Black busted as recapturing on c6 loses the rook on a8.

7 Nxc6



7 ... Qg5!

The alternative 7 ... Qd5 is discussed in the next game.

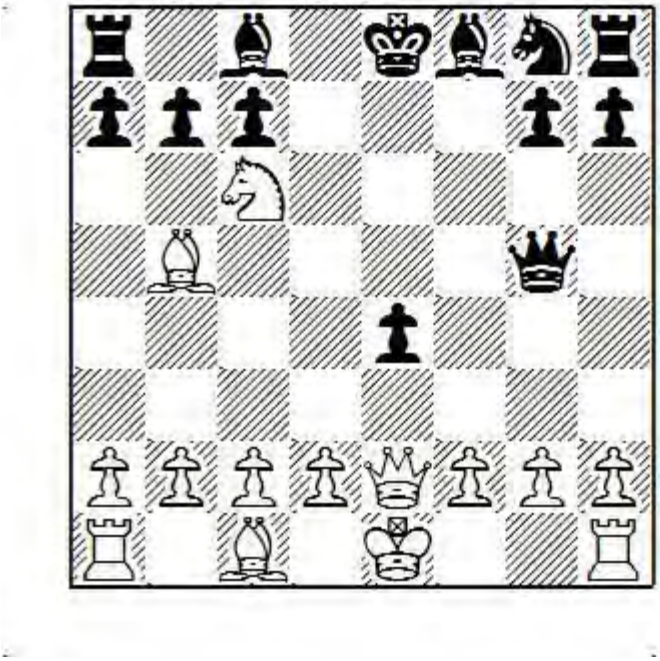
It might seem strange that Black can leave open a discovered check on his king and not be immediately punished. However, we should remember that this is a well tested opening variation. Theory doesn't consist solely of natural or logical moves – Black's queen move is playable because concrete analysis has proved that it is playable, not because of any abstract principle. In most games in this book, we can get a long way to finding strong moves by following logic and common sense. However, gambit positions in particular tend to lead to an obscure fight, meaning that we have to rely on our prior knowledge of theory rather than a general understanding of opening strategy.

Bad for Black is 7 ... bxc6 8 Bxc6+ Bd7 9 Qh5+! (if Black leaves this check open it is often a strong move for White in the Schliemann) 9 ... Ke7 (if 9 ... g6 10 Qe5+ when the rook on h8 is under attack as well) 10 Qe5+ Be6 11 Bxa8 Qxa8 12 Qxc7+ when White has a rook and three pawns for two pieces and the black king is denuded.

After the game move White is a pawn up, but he has a knight and bishop hanging and also has to worry about ... Qxg2 smashing up his kingside and trapping the rook on h1. Black is hoping for a panicky reaction such as 8 Nd4+ c6 (this pawn move is almost always the way to answer the discovered check as it hits the white bishop) 9 Bf1, when White has defended everything but retarded his development and so left Black with a strong initiative for his pawn after 9 ... Qe5.

8 Qe2!

White's most powerful piece enters a trial of strength with her black counterpart. She defends her bishop on b5 and attacks the pawn on e4. If now 8 ... bxc6 then 9 Bxc6+ picks up the rook on a8.



Exercise: Find a way to refute 8 ... Qxg2, which

would defend e4 whilst attacking h1.

Answer: If 8 ... Qxg2 White gets in first with the queen check we discussed above: 9 Qh5+! g6 10 Qe5+ and Black has no good moves: for example 10 ... Kf7 11 Bc4+ or 10 ... Kd7 11 Nb8+ Kd8 12 Qe8 mate, while 10 ... Ne7 11 Nxe7+ tears him apart.

8 ... Nf6

Black sensibly develops and guards both the e4-pawn and the h5-square against the white queen.

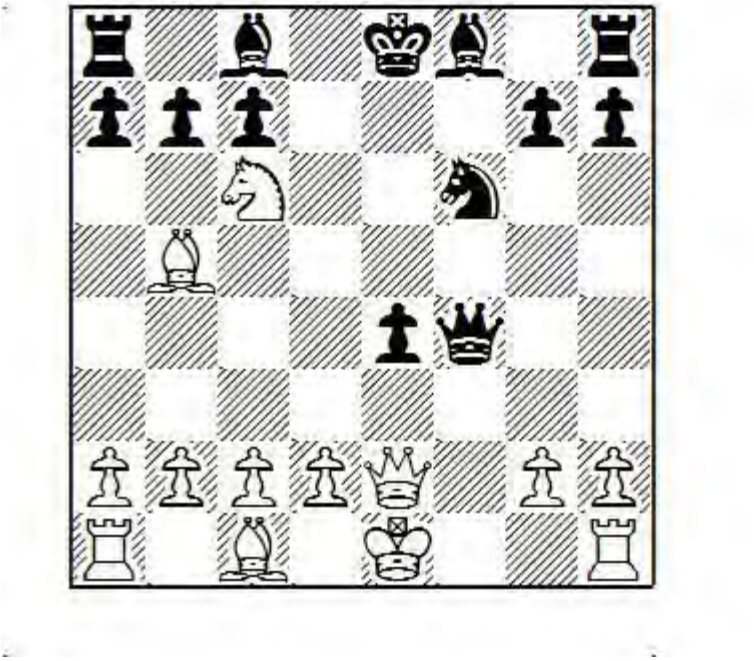
Question: Now besides the attack on g2, can you see another strong threat facing White? What is the best way for him to escape the danger?

9 f4!

Answer: After 9 0-0? Black could play 9 ... a6! 10 Ba4 Bd7 when the white knight is pinned – this was Black's second threat. The game move returns the extra pawn to prevent this and guard g2. At the same time the way is open to further harass the black queen.

9 ... Qxf4

After 9 ... Qh4+ 10 g3 Qh3 11 Ne5+ c6 12 Bc4 Black is struggling to find compensation for his material. For example 12 ... Bc5 is well met by 13 c3! when after 13 ... Bf5 14 d4 exd3 15 Nxd3+ Be7 16 Bd2 0-0-0 17 0-0-0 Ne4 18 Nf2 Nxf2 19 Qxf2 White was a sound pawn up in D.Tan-A.Hynes, British League 2004.



Question: It's time for the white knight to retreat from c6. Ideally it would like to go to e5, but is there a tactical problem with that move?

10 Ne5+ c6

Now White has two pieces en prise, but ...

11 d4!

Answer: There is no problem with the horse going to e5 as White is able to defend it with gain of time by attacking the black queen. Thus it is cemented on a centre square and the bishop on c1 can enter the fray. Notice that if White hadn't seen that he could play 11 d4 he wouldn't have put his knight on a fine square. That is why you need a tactical eye as well as positional understanding to play good strategical chess.

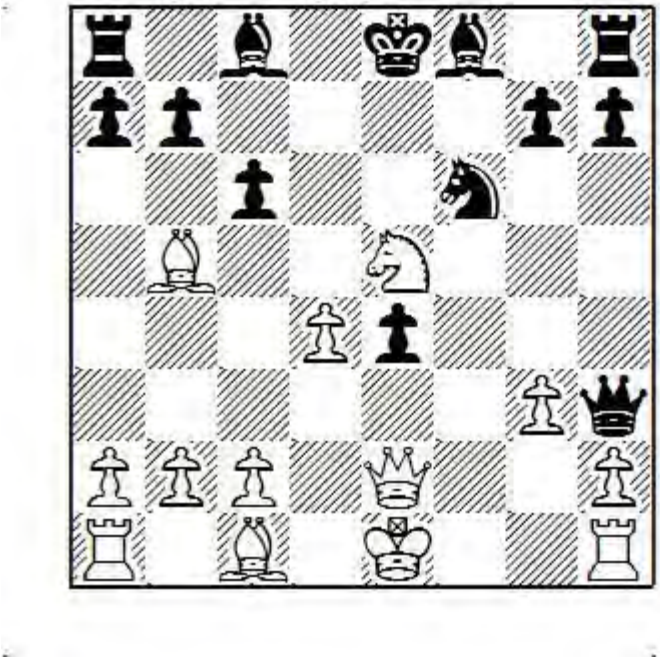
11 ... Qh4+

The black queen runs away and by checking wins access to the h3-square.

12 g3

Again Black has no time to carry out a threat as his queen is attacked by a pesky pawn.

12 ... Qh3



13 Bc4

There should be no return trip to c6 as 14 Nxc6 fails to a tactic discussed earlier – 14 ... a6 15 Ba4 Bd7, pinning the knight.

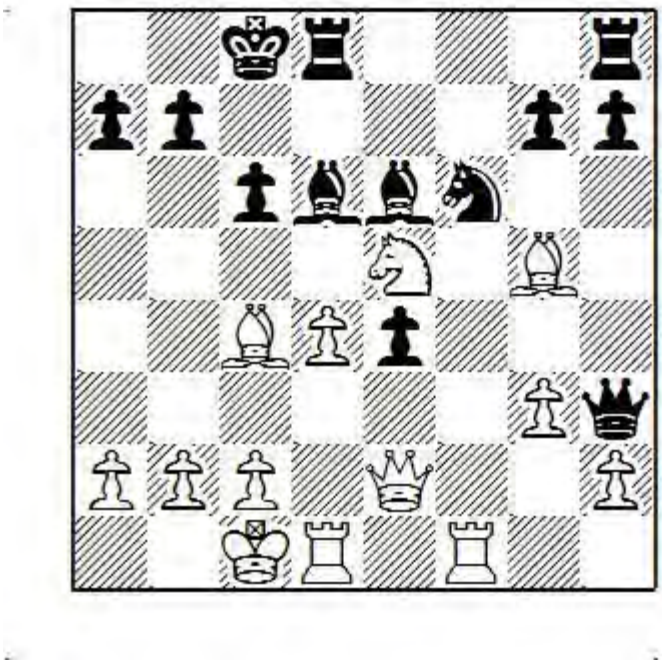
13 ... Be6

Covering the f7-square. The tactics are gradually subsiding and White has a slight edge during to the vulnerable pawn on e4.

14 Bg5

Also worthy of attention is 14 Bf4!? supporting the centre. As we shall see, the attack on f6 doesn't have as much bite as it first appears.

10 ... 0-0-0 15 0-0-0 Bd6 16 Rhf1



Question: Can't Black now play 16 ... Bxe5 17 dxe5 Rxd1+

18 Rxd1 Bg4, winning the exchange?

Answer: Yes, but he loses the game after 19 Qf2 Bxd1 (or 19 ... e3 20 Qxe3 Bxd1 21 exf6 when the threats include 22 Be6+ winning the queen) 20 exf6 gxf6 21 Qxf6 Re8 22 Qd6 with a decisive advantage as saving the bishop with say 22 ... Bh5 allows a quick mate after 23 Bf4.

16 ... Rhe8!?

A cutting-edge position in the Schliemann. Black simply ignores the attack on f6, as he believes a sequence of exchanges will lead to a defensible endgame. This is the way it proved in the game M.Carlsen,-L.Nisipeanu, Medias 2010: 17 Bxf6 gxf6 18 Rxf6 Bxe5 19 Rxe6 Rxe6 20 Bxe6+ Qxe6 21 dxe5 Qh6+ 22 Rd2 Rxd2 23 Qxd2 e3 24 Qe2 Qg5 25 Kd1 Kc7 26 Qd3 Qh5+ 27 Kc1 Qh6 28 Kd1 Qh5+ 29 Ke1 Qxh2 30 Qd6+ Kc8 31 Qf8+ Kc7 32 Qe7+ Kc8 ½-½

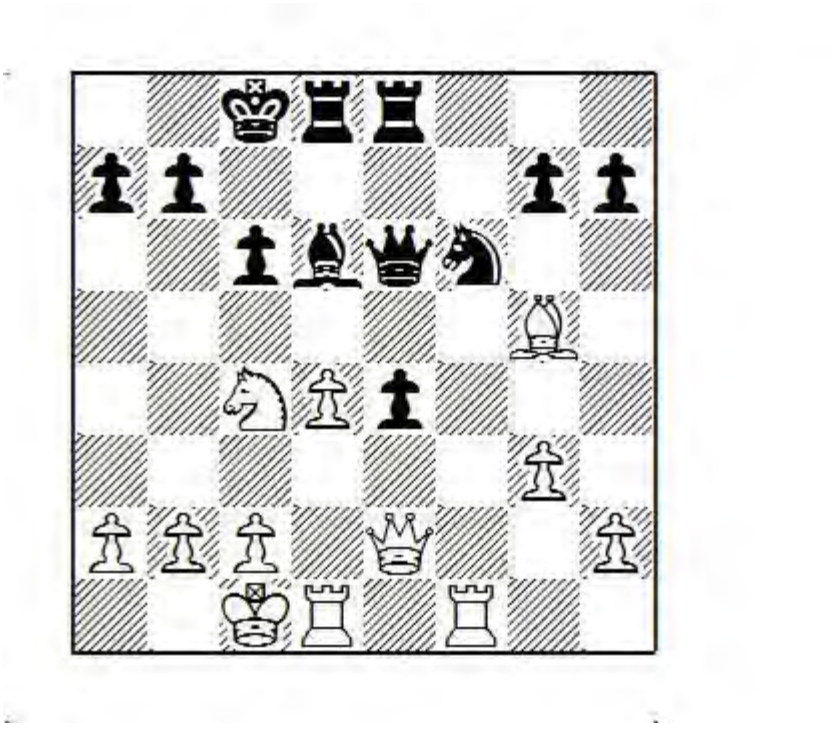
A great achievement by Nisipeanu, as drawing with Black against Magnus Carlsen is one of the hardest things in chess. But the aims of opening preparation in top-class chess are often different from the requirements of ordinary players (and I include myself in the mass of such players). Is it really worth learning all that theory as Black for the dubious pleasure of showing in your next club or tournament game that you can hold a draw a pawn down in a queen and pawn endgame?

Taking the sequence in the Carlsen game, I would recommend (instead of 18 Rxf6) the more modest 18 Bxe6+ Qxe6 19 Nc4 Bc7 20 Kb1, in the style of our main game. White can then put his knight on e3 and try to exploit Black's weaknesses along the f-file – the backward pawn and the hole on f5. Or, having played Ne3, he could try for a centre breakthrough with c2-c4 and d4-d5. The game remains lively with, as they say, chances for both sides. I expect Carlsen would have played something like this if he hadn't been surprised by Black's opening and so tempted into what was ultimately a drawn endgame.

17 Bxe6+

Wolff spurns the chance to grab the pawn.

17 ... Qxe6 18 Nc4



18 ... Bc7

Question: What do you think of this bishop retreat?

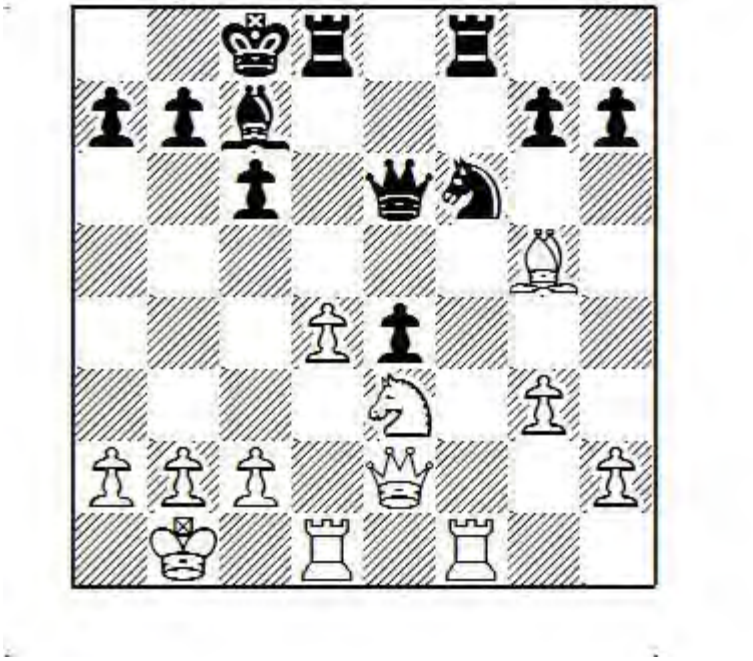
Answer: It appears to be an error of judgment. With 18 ... Be7! Black would break the pin on f6 and give himself much better chances to equalize. White's best reply might be 19 c3 to stabilize d4, seeing that 19 ... b5? is then bad for Black after 20 Ne5 Qxa2 21 Nxc6.

19 Kb1 Rf8 20 Ne3

Putting the knight on an ideal blockade square. If Black had put his bishop on e7 he would have been able to challenge the horse with ... Nd5 now, as there would be no pin on f6.

Question: In view of this reasoning, what should White play

next move to cement his knight on e3?



20 ... Rd7

Better is 20 ... Kb8. Leaving the rook on f8 undefended doesn't do Black any favours.

Answer: **21 c4!**

White not only prevents his knight from ever being opposed by ... Nd5, he also mobilizes his queenside pawn majority.

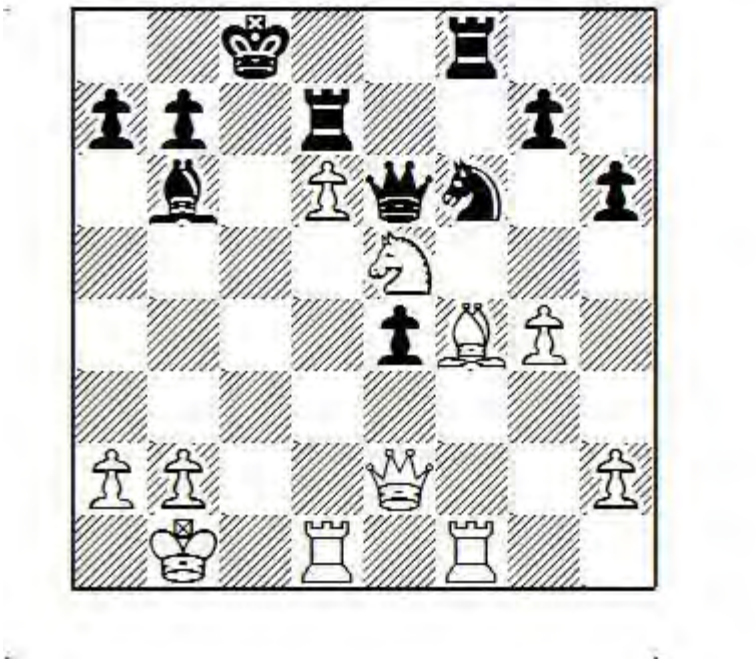
21 ... h6

Now 21 ... Kb8 was imperative, though 22 d5 remains a strong reply.

22 d5!

Notice how this pawn is an attacking weapon thanks to the superior coordination of the white pieces, in particular the wonderful knight on e3. In contrast, the black pieces are hampered in their defence by the pin along the f-file.

22 ... cxd5 23 cxd5 Qe5 24 Bf4 Qh5 25 g4 Qf7 26 d6 Bb6 27 Nc4 Qe6 28 Ne5



Exercise: Try to work out a win for White after 28 ... Rdd8.

28 ... Rfd8

Answer: If 28 ... Rdd8 the white pawn continues its glorious advance with 29 d7+!. If 29 ... Kb8 then 30 Rd6! is the best of many winning moves as 30 ... Qxd6 31 Nc6+ wins the queen, while 30 ... Qe7 31 Ng6 decides. So Black must capture the pawn, leading to the winning combination 29 ... Nxd7 30 Nxd7 Rxd7 31 Rc1+ Kd8 (Black ends up a rook down upon 31 ... Bc7 32 Bxc7 Rxf1 33 Qxf1 Rxc7 34 Qf8+ Kd7 35 Qxg7+) 32 Bg5+! (the hardest move to see) 32 ... Ke8 (or f8 drops) 33 Rc8+ Bd8 34 Rxf8+ Kxf8 35 Bxd8 and White is a piece up.

Giving up the exchange is of course hopeless. The game concluded:

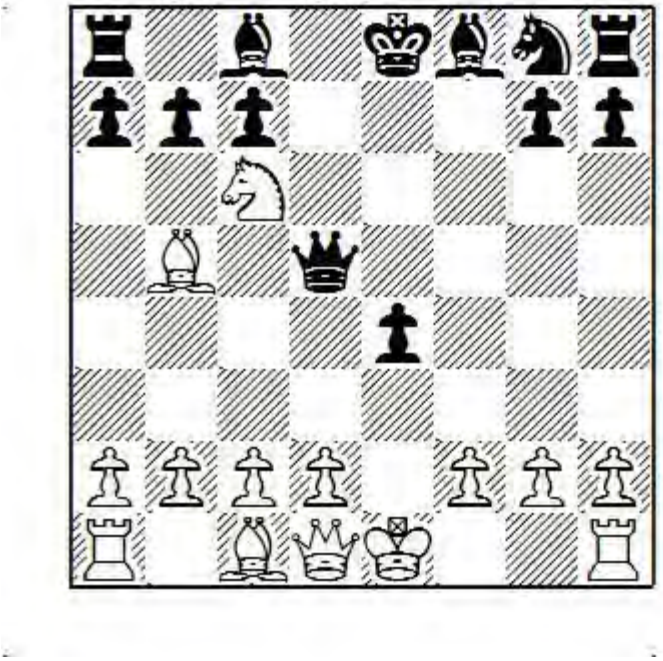
29 Nxd7 Rxd7 30 h3 Kb8 31 Be3 Bd8 32 Qb5 Ne8 33 Rf8 Bf6 34 Qf5 1-0

Game 37

A.Ivanov-H.Terrie

New England 2000

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 f5 4 Nc3 fxe4 5 Nxe4 d5 6 Nxe5 dxe4 7 Nxc6 Qd5



Exercise: You might like to compare this queen move with

the alternative 7 ... Qg5. What are its good and bad points?

Answer: Similarly to 7 ... Qg5, Black guards against a check on h5 and attacks the white bishop on b5. As a bonus, the e4-pawn is defended and 8 ... dxc6 is a real threat. On the other hand, the white pawn on g2 isn't attacked. And with his next move, White is able to defend the bishop with gain of time:

8 c4

It would be wrong to assume that this pawn stab is all good for White. Provoking 8 c4 was a reason for playing 7 ... Qd5 in the first place. Pawns can't ever go backwards, and after ...

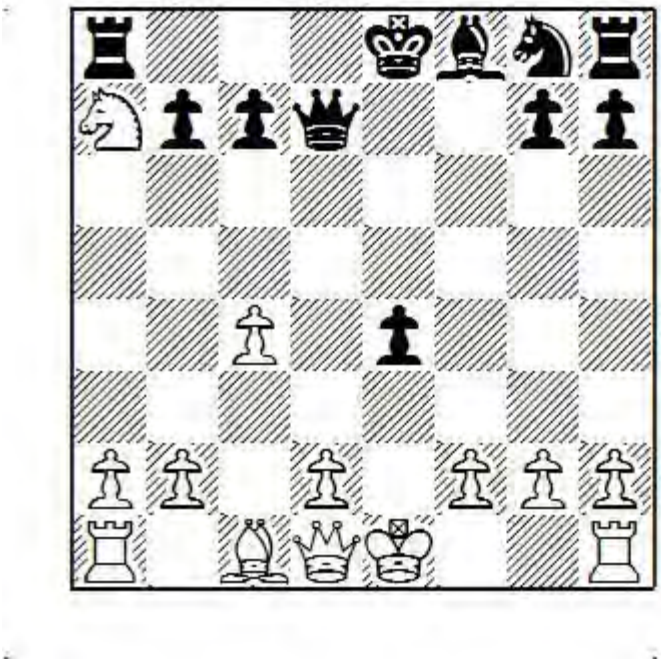
8 ... Qd6

... White is left with weaknesses on the d-file, and his bishop on b5 is cut off from retreating along the b5-f1 diagonal.

9 Nxa7+

The most economical way to meet the attack on the knight. White wins a second pawn and is ready to meet 9 ... c6 with 10 Nxc8.

9 ... Bd7 10 Bxd7+ Qxd7

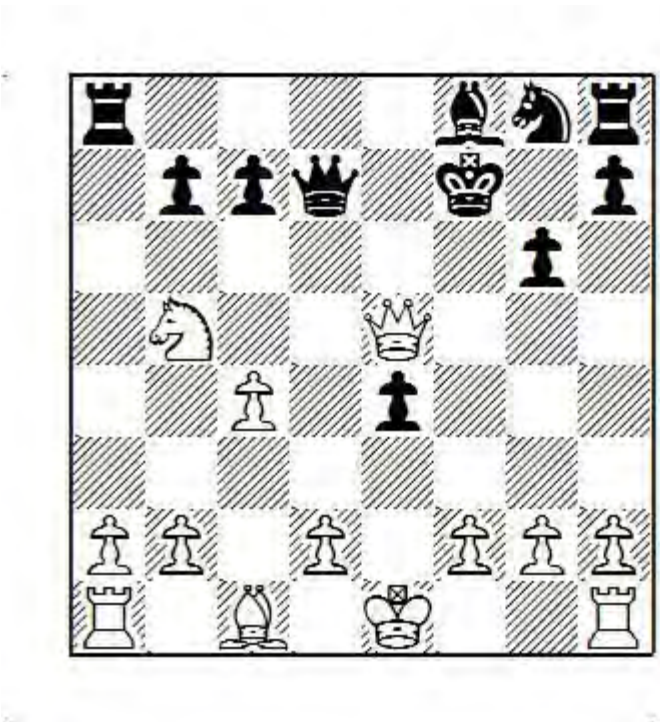


Question: Now what is the most incisive move for White?

Answer: **11 Qh5+!**

As we said above, White should always consider this check if Black leaves it open. If Black is left in peace with 11 Nb5, he has time to build up an initiative with 11 ... Nf6. For example 12 0-0 c6 13 Nc3 Bc5 followed by 14 ... 0-0, with ideas of attack against f2 based on ... Ng4 etc. White would have his extra pawns, but it wouldn't be easy to prevent the black assault.

11 ... g6 12 Qe5+ Kf7 13 Nb5



Question: Why not take the rook on h8?

Answer: Indeed, it is very tempting to plunder more material. However, there are technical difficulties in extricating the queen as it can be shut in by ... Nf6 and then cornered by a subsequent ... Re8 and ... Bg7. Black continues to offer the rook as bait and so we shall discuss it again at move 15, which theory regards as the best moment to accept the offer.

13 ... c6 14 Qd4!

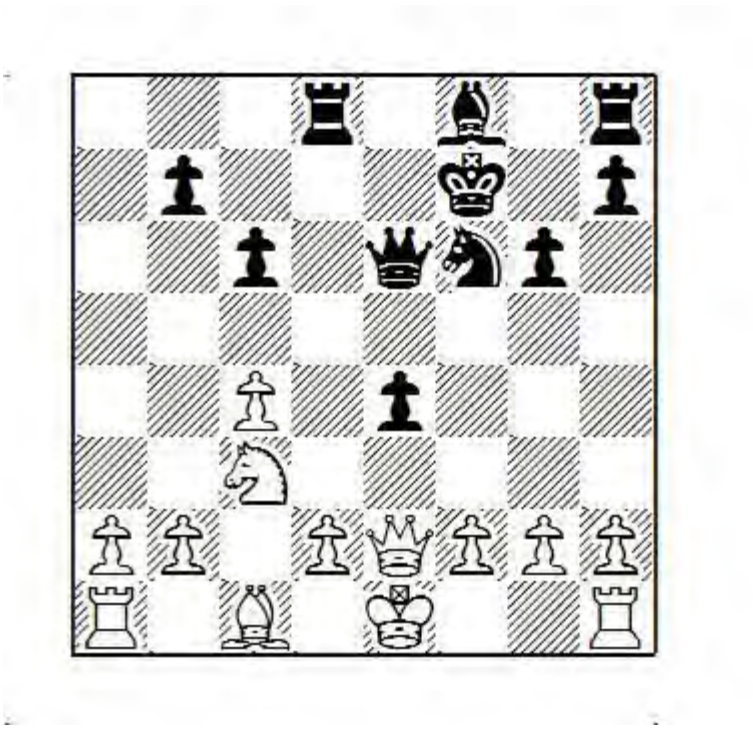
A useful move as it drives the enemy queen to an inferior square. Of course Black has no wish to exchange queens as he is two pawns down.

14 ... Qe7 15 Nc3

An established line runs 15 Qxh8 Nf6 16 b3! (the white bishop joins in the fight to free the white queen) 16 ... Rd8 17 Bb2 Bg7 18 Ba3! (now we see why it was a good idea to drive the black queen to e7, as White wins time to get his knight to d6) 18 ... Qd7 19 Nd6+ Ke6 20 Qxd8 Qxd8 21 Nxb7 Qc7 22 Nc5+ Kf7 (or 22 ... Kf5!? as in M.Mueller-D.Pirrot, St Ingbert 2001).

White has a huge material advantage – two rooks and three pawns for the queen – but it isn't that easy. Black still has attacking chances and the white rooks have no open lines. Rather than let Black have his fun, I prefer Alexander Ivanov's careful approach. White's queen and knight slip back behind their own lines, after which he can try to exploit his extra pawns. It isn't easy, but White gradually grinds out the win.

15 ... Rd8 17 Qe2 Qe6



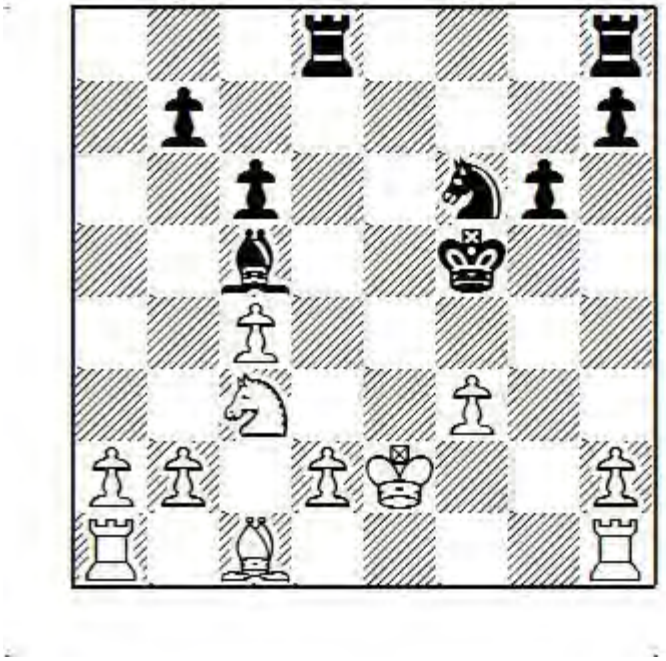
Question: How can White loosen Black's grip on the centre?

Answer: **18 f3!**

White is willing to accept further weaknesses in his pawn structure in order to free his pieces and exchange queens.

18 ... exf3 19 Qxe6+ Kxe6 20 gxf3 Bc5 21 Ke2 Kf5

Now Black is ready to play 22 ... Rhe8+, chasing away the white king, followed by 23 ... Rd3 with a rampant initiative.



Question: Can you see an excellent positional move that keeps

the wolves from White's door?

Answer: **22 d3!**

Ivanov creates an invincible base on e4 for his knight, which shields the king and holds the black pieces at bay long enough for the white pieces to be developed. Notice how this is a logical culmination of the strategy begun with 18 f3 to clear away the black e4-pawn.

Black's attack gradually ran out of steam:

22 ... Nh5 23 Ne4 Rhe8 24 a3 Bd4 25 Ra2!

The white rook is cleverly edged into the game via the second rank.

25 ... Be5 26 b4 Bf4 27 Be3 Bxe3 28 Kxe3 Nf4 29 Rd1 Nd5+ 30 cxd5 cxd5 31 Rc2 dxe4 32 fxe4+ 1-0

The Steinitz Deferred: Siesta Variation

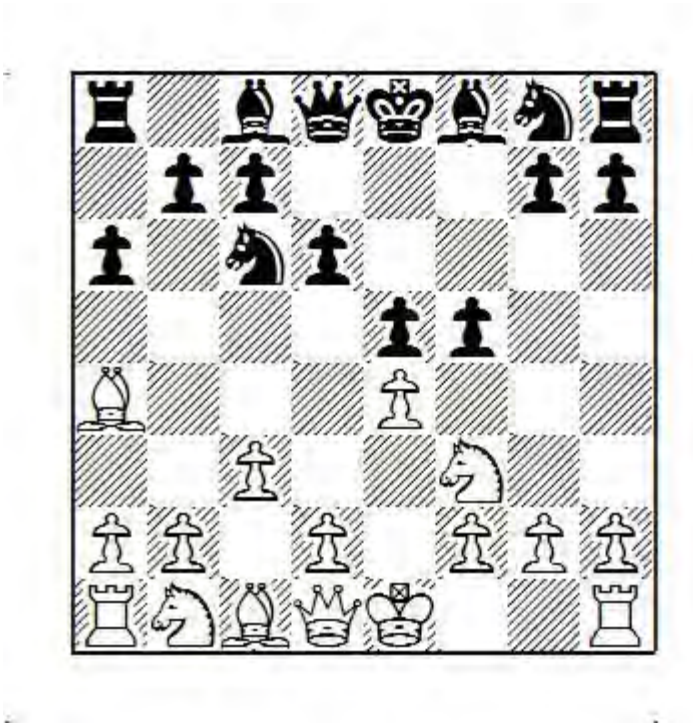
Game 38

A.Grischuk-E.Najer

FIDE World Cup, Khanty-Mansiysk 2007

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 d6 5 c3 f5

The Siesta Variation. Black attacks the e4 point in Schliemann style. The positional justification, however, is more akin to that in the Marshall Attack: Black feels he can play a little extravagantly as White's slow move 5 c3 has not only failed to develop a piece but also taken away the c3-square from the knight on b1.



Question: Couldn't we play 5 0-0 first to avoid this gambit?

Answer: Yes, but then you might have to reckon with the equally annoying 5 0-0 Bg4 6 h3 h5!?. There's no escape from gambit play against a determined opponent here. But never mind, as we shall see you can beat him at his own game by sacrificing a piece.

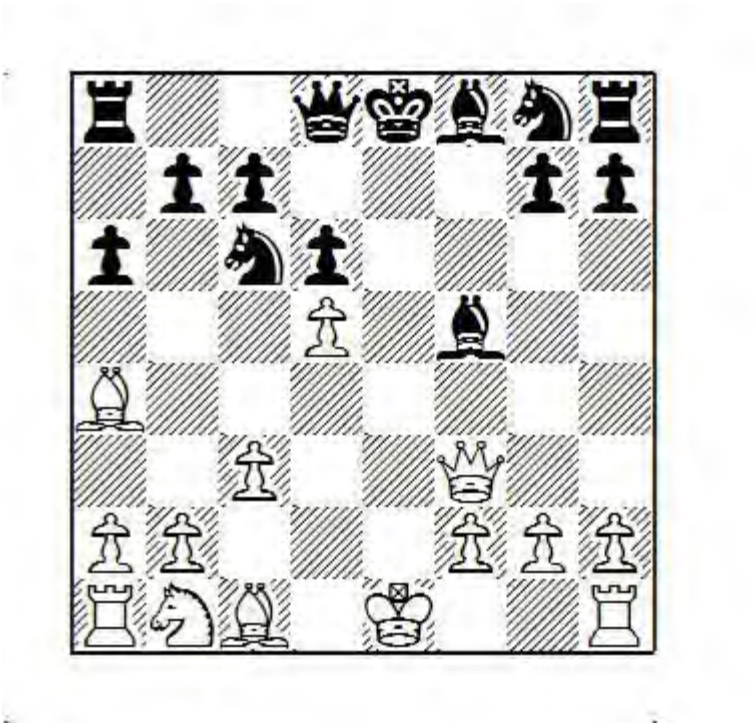
6 exf5 Bxf5 7 d4!

Traditionally, the usual continuation is 7 0-0 Bd3, but Kasparov has demonstrated that White doesn't need to let his d2-pawn be blocked in by the black bishop.

7 ... e4 8 d5

If White retreats his knight from f3 he would lose the chance to attack.

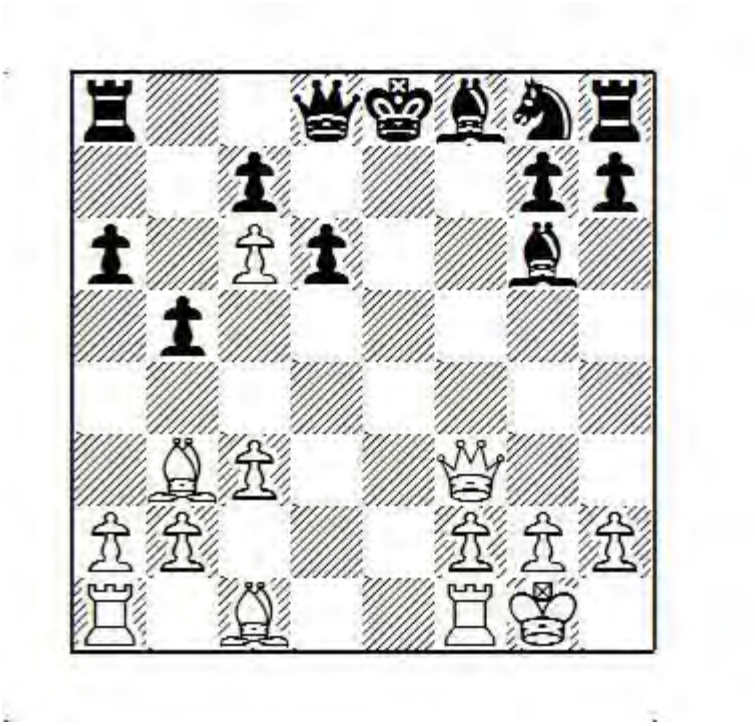
8 ... exf3 9 Qxf3!



Question: Can't Black win a piece here with 9 ... Bxb1 10 dxc6 b5?

9 ... Qe7+

Answer: Yes, but don't forget we are following Kasparov's preparation as White, so there's bound to be some pretty potent compensation. In fact after 11 Bb3 Bg6 12 0-0 Black's king is trapped in the centre, and there is no way to unwind his game.

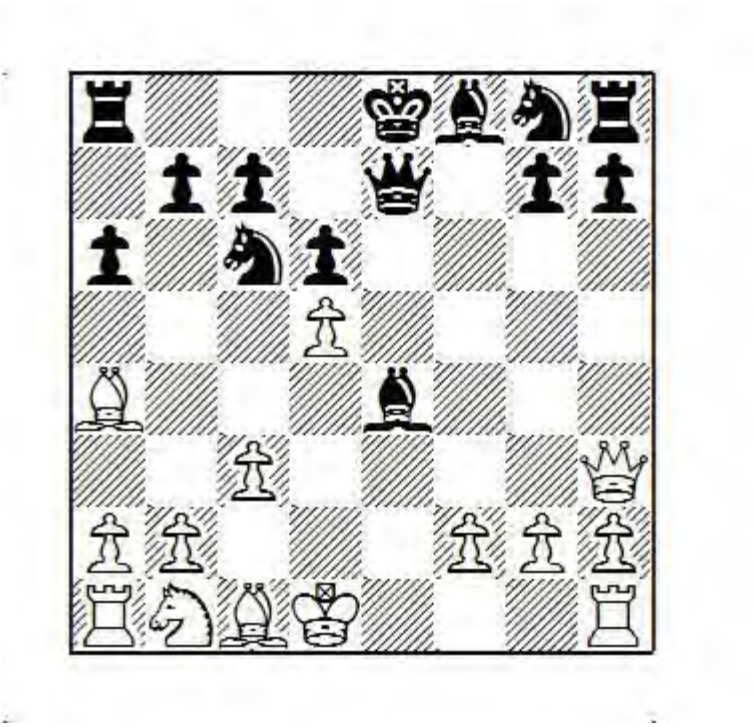


For example 12 ... Nf6 13 Bh6! (a clever way to prevent the developing 13 ... Be7 as 14 Bxg7 would follow; meanwhile after 13 ... gxh6 14 Rfe1+ Be7 15 Qxf6 Rf8 16 Qg7 Black would have ho defence against White doubling rooks along the e-file) 13 ... d5 14 Rfe1+ Be4 15 Rad1 Be7 (after 15 ... .Qe7 16 Qh3 gxh6 17 f3 and 18 fxe4 White's attack is unrelenting) 16 Rxe4! dxe4 17 Rxd8+ Bxd8 18 Qg3 gxh6 19 Qe5+ Be7 20 Qxc7 Rd8 21 Qb7 Nd5 22 c7 Nxc7 23 Qxc7 and White has got his material back with a continuing initiative. The game A.Karklins-D.Nance, Chicago 1989, saw a lot of black pawns drop before an unexpected mating finish: 23 ... Rd6 24 Qb8+ Rd8 25 Qe5 Rf8 26 Qh5+ Kd7 27 Qxh6 Rf6 28 Qxh7 Rdf8 29 Qxe4 Rxf2 30 Qb7+ Ke8 31 Qc8+ Bd8 32 Qc6+ 1-0.

10 Kd1

It is vital that White clear the e-file for his rook, as he needs the help of the pin on that file to recoup his material.

10 ... Be4 11 Qh3



Notice how in retreating to safety the white queen makes sure that the black king can't slip away from the centre by castling queenside.

11 ... Bxd5?!

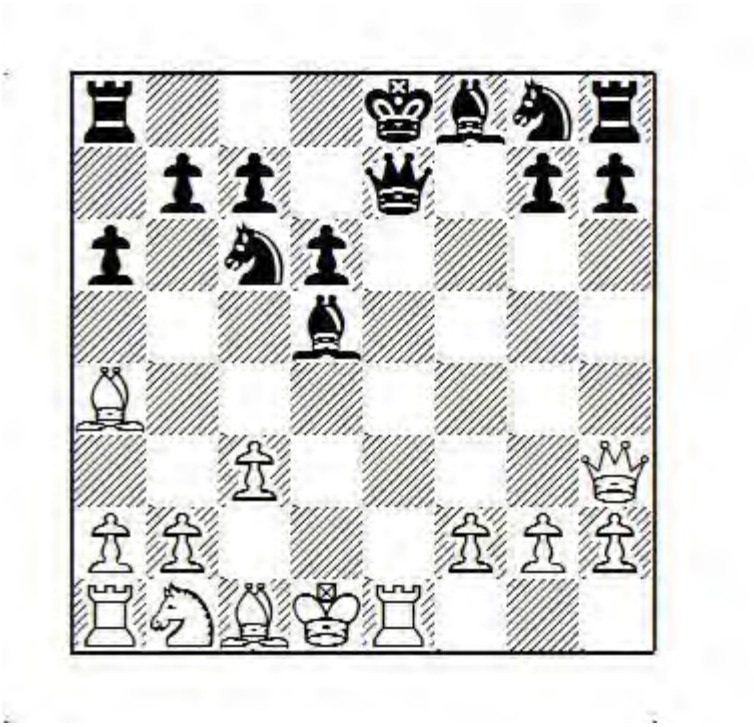
Obvious but insufficient. If instead 11 ... b5 12 dxc6 bxa4 13 Re1 Nf6 14 f3 etc, getting back his piece in similar style to the game continuation.

Critical is 11 ... Qf7!? 12 dxc6 Bxc6 13 Re1+ Be7 14 Bxc6+ bxc6 15 Nd2 Nf6 16 Nf3 0-0 17 Ng5 Qd5+. This was played in G.Kasparov-J.Lautier, Lyon 1994, and now instead of 18 Bd2?! h6! when White couldn't play 19 Ne6 because of 19 ... Ne4!, Tony Kosten on Chesspublishing.com suggests 18 Kc2!?, giving the variation 18 ... Rae8 19 Bd2 h6 20 Ne6 Ne4 21 Qd3 Qxe6 22 Rxe4 Qf7 23 Rae1 when White has solid control of the position.

White tried to improve after 11 ... Qf7 12 dxc6 Bxc6 with the bishop retreat 13 Bb3 in the game M.Manik-D.Prasenjit, New Delhi 2010. He soon got a winning position: 13 ... d5?! (see the alternative below) 14 Nd2 (rather sneakily, White refrains from giving a check on e1 because he wants to give Black the chance to put his bishop on a plausible but bad square) 14 ... Bd6 (falling for the bait; Black should make do with the modest 14 ... Nf6 15 Re1+ Be7) 15 Re1+ Ne7 16 Ne4! 0-0? (completely missing the main threat, though Black is already in dire trouble as at best his centre will be smashed by Nxd6+) 17 Ng5 Qf5 18 g4! Qg6 19 Bc2 (now the queen is pinned against a mate on h7; Black really ought to call it a day here) 19 ... Qxc2+ 20 Kxc2 Rxf2+ 21 Bd2 h6 22 Ne6 Ng6 23 Qe3 Rxh2 24 Qd4 1-0.

That's all well and good for White, but returning to the position after 13 Bb3, it seems Black can get away with 13 ... Qxf2!. For example 14 Bxg8 Be7! (but not 14 ... Rxg8 15 Qe6+) and in view of the attack on g2 White has to try 15 Bc4 Bxg2 16 Rf1 Bxf1 17 Bxf1 but it is hardly a winning attempt.

12 Re1



The pin will ensure that White regains the piece with the better chances in either the middlegame or the endgame.

Question: But how do we know this? Is there any way of telling

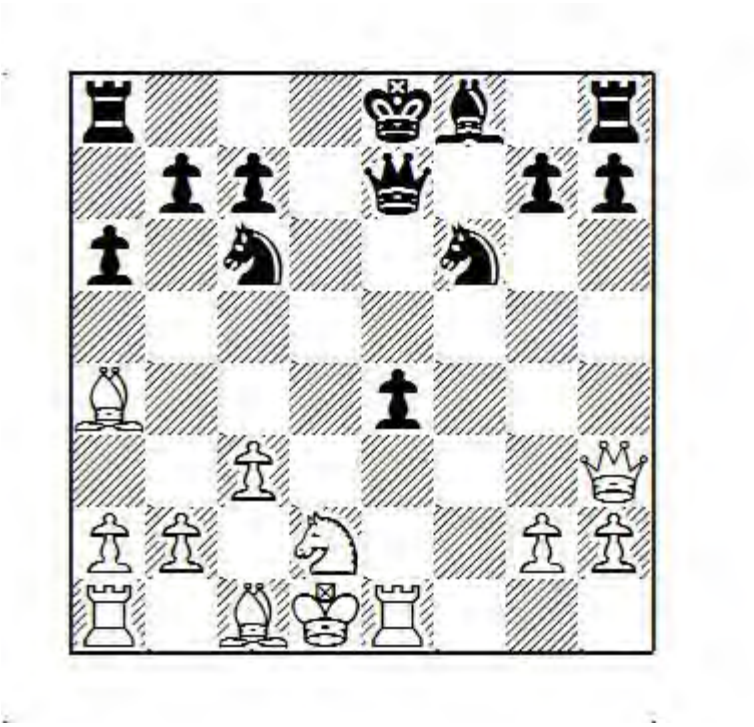
whether a sacrifice will work besides calculating variations?

Answer: If you want to know the positional justification for White's sacrifices, you need look no further than the pin on the e-file, Black's inability to castle queenside, the 'stalemated' black bishop on f8 and the entombed, and therefore irrelevant, rook on h8. As a consequence of these features, White has an advantage in firepower where it matters – along the e-file. It would be odd indeed if Black could slip out of his troubles, though it's sensible to check at least a couple of variations to verify that this is the case.

12 ... Be4 13 Nd2 d5 14 f3

This little pawn will demolish the black barriers on the e-file.

14 ... Nf6 15 fxe4 dxe4



Question: Now how do we continue the attack?

Answer: **16 Nxe4!**

I hope you weren't feeling too relieved at regaining the piece, as White has to give up another knight if he wants to get full value from the e-file.

16 ... Nxe4

Grischuk knows that the black knight will fall sooner or later as it is doubly pinned against the black queen and king. He doesn't need to hurry to regain the piece.

17 Bxc6+ bxc6 18 Kc2 Kf7 19 Qf5+ Qf6 20 Qxe4 Qg6

Millions of promising attacks on the chessboard have been thwarted by a well timed exchange of queens, but this lifeline won't prove strong enough to save Black.

21 Bf4 Bd6 22 Bxd6 cxd6 23 Rf1+ Kg8 24 Rae1

The inevitable exchange of queens will ensure that Black survives a mating attack, but the endgame will be horrible for him due to his weak pawns on the queenside and the awful position of his rook shut in on h8. Inevitably between strong players, Black can only free himself at the cost of a pawn, which Grischuk's technique smoothly converts into a win. The remaining moves were:

24 ... Rf8 25 Rxf8+ Kxf8 26 Kd2 Qxe4 27 Rxe4 Kf7 28 Rb4 Ke6 29 Rb6 Rf8 30 Ke2 Rf5 31 Rxc6 Re5+ 32 Kd3 Rd5+ 33 Ke3 Re5+ 34 Kd3 Rd5+ 35 Kc2 Rf5 36 Rxa6 Rf2+ 37 Kb3 Rxg2 38 Ra7 h5 39 h4 Rg4 40 a4 g6 41 a5 Rxh4 42 a6 Rf4 43 Rg7 Kd5 44 a7 Rf8 45 Ka4 Kc5 46 Ka5 1-0

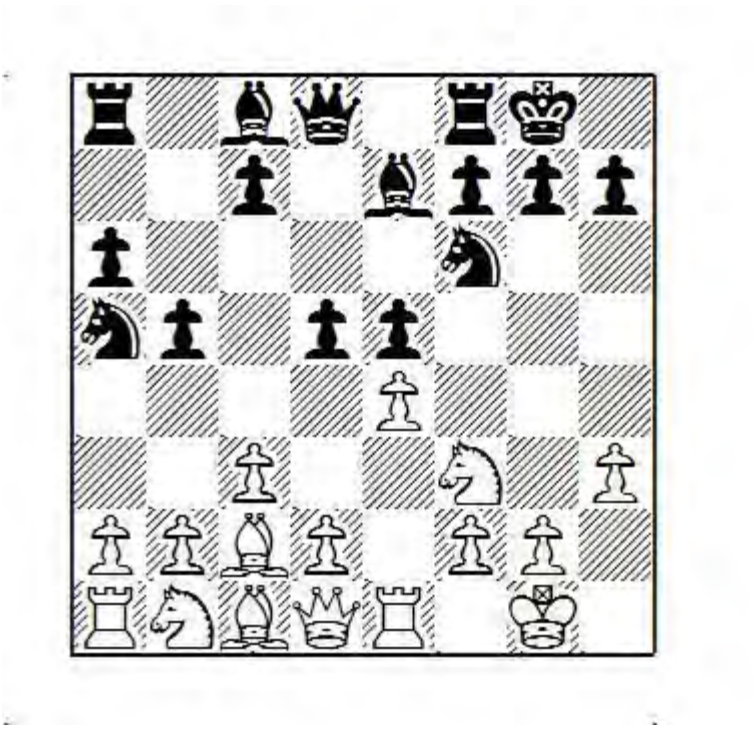
The Gajewski Gambit in the Chigorin

This arises after the moves 1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 Na5 10 Bc2 d5. Almost exactly a hundred years after the death of Chigorin, this latecomer to his show was apparently played for the first time in the game V.Kuznetsov-G.Gajewski, Pardubice 2007. It has since been named 'the Gajewski Gambit' after its pioneer, the Polish GM Grzegorz Gajewski.

Game 39

P.Negi-K.Dragun

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 Na5 10 Bc2 d5!?



Question: It seems incredible that with his knight offside on a5 Black can still generate sufficient counterplay to justify a pawn sacrifice.

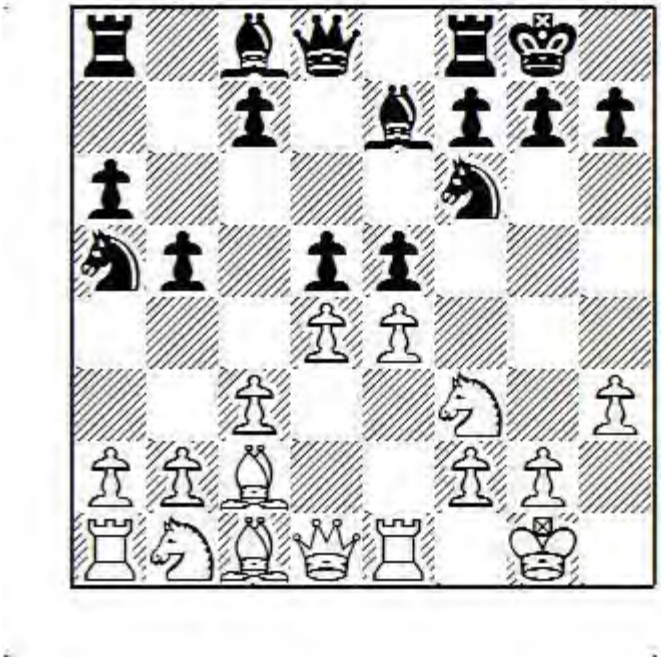
Answer: I agree it is surprising. I guess that's why there are no examples of the gambit being played before the 21st century. But as will also be seen in the discussion of the Marshall Attack, this gambit isn't really about mating the white king (though it can happen of course against inferior play). It is the inherent *drawing* capacity of the resulting pawn structure and the propensity for opposite-coloured bishops to appear that justify the sacrifice, at least from a theory point of view. That's why I think White should cut across this drawing scenario with his next move.

11 d4!

In my opinion the best response. Rather than grab a pawn and hand Black the initiative, White wants to attack himself. Above all he wants to prove that the black knight is badly placed on a5.

Instead the move order 11 Nxe5 dxe4 12 d4, reaching the main game, gives Black an extra option as he can simplify with 12 ... exd3, whereas after 11 d4 dxe4 12 Nxe5, there is no en passant capture.

Alternatively 11 exd5 e4 12 Bxe4 (White is facing an attack after 12 Ng5 Nxd5 13 Nxe4 f5! 14 Ng3 f4 15 Ne4 f3) 12 ... Nxe4 13 Rxe4 Bb7 14 d4 Re8 15 Nbd2 Qxd5 etc. gives the type of scenario discussed above – Black has a long-term initiative for his pawn that is characteristic of the Marshall Attack. He has two strong bishops and an easy development. Even if things go wrong for Black he can still hope to get a draw due to the likelihood of opposite-coloured bishops appearing on the board and the extreme difficulty White faces in turning his extra pawn into a strong passed pawn.

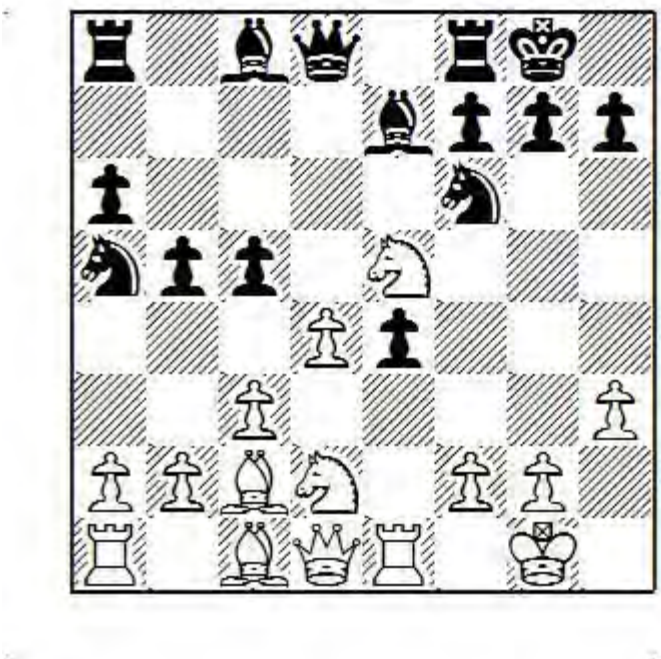


11 ... dxe4

Black has an inferior version of the Open Variation after 11 ... exd4? 12 e5 Ne4 13 cxd4 as White has achieved the desirable transfer of his pawn from c3 to d4. Besides, having the knight on a5 doesn't help him.

Much more common is 11 ... Nxe4, when play might continue 12 Nxe5 f6 13 Nf3 Nc4. Black gets to put both his knights on active squares, and can support the one on e4 with moves like ... Bb7 and ... f6-f5. On the other hand, there is a certain fragility about his set-up which White can try to exploit with careful play. For example 14 Nbd2 f5 (the natural move, but now a hole appears on the e5-square) 15 Nxc4 bxc4 16 Bf4 g5 17 Bh2 Rb8 18 Ne5 Rb6 (Black drops material after 18 ... Rxb2 19 Nc6 Qd7 20 Nxe7+ Qxe7 21 f3) 19 f3 Nd6 20 b3 and having expelled the knight from e4, White was able to double rooks there and also probe Black's loose pawns in E.Safarli-R.Prasanna, Delhi 2010.

12 Nxe5 c5 13 Nd2



Question: Why does White leave his d4-pawn undefended?

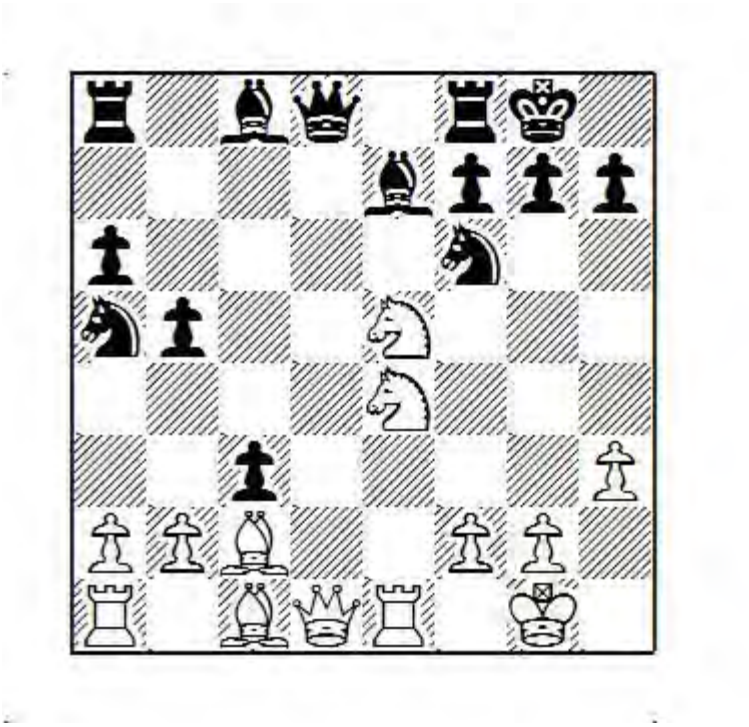
Answer: Maintaining a pawn centre isn't part of White's plans. He wants to develop rapidly and open lines – hence he is happy to swap his d4-pawn for the e4-pawn.

Note that 13 dxc5 Bxc5 14 b4 Bd6 proves to be nothing for White.

13 ... cxd4 14 Nxe4

Conquering the e4-square means that the e-file is opened, making the white rook on e1 stronger. It also opens the b1-h7 line of attack for White's bishop on c2 and brings the white knight to an aggressive square.

14 ... dxc3



Question: It seems like this move rains on White's parade as

the exchange of queens would negate his attacking chances.

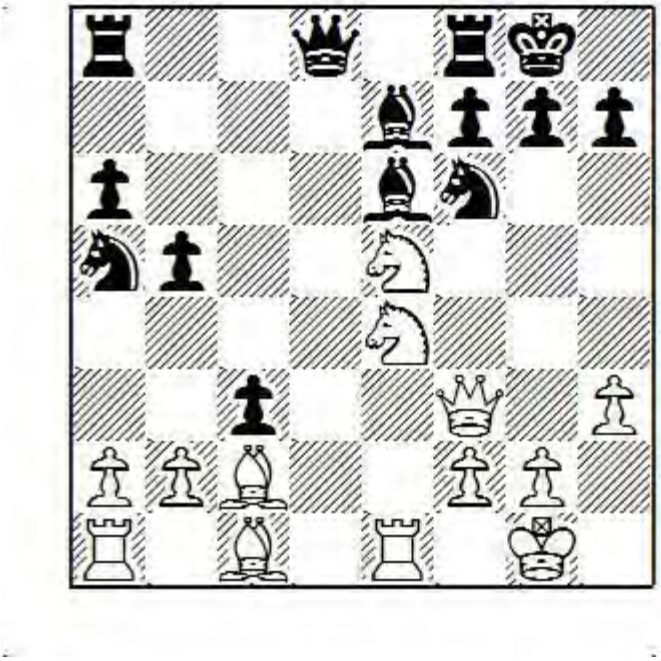
Or perhaps he can do better than the recapture on c3?

Answer: Exactly. There was another good point to 14 Nxe4: it freed the f3-square for the white queen:

15 Qf3!

White is more than happy to offer the b2-pawn, as 15 ... cxb2 16 Bxb2 followed by 17 Rae1 would mean that every white piece is involved in the attack.

15 ... Be6?



Exercise: Can you see a way to upset the black defences on

the kingside? (Hint: look at the whole board!)

We shall return to this position in the next game and examine 15 ... Bb7 which offers a lot more resistance.

Answer: **16 b4!**

A very strong blow. The black knight is driven from a5 after which White can exploit the c6-square to set up a fatal pin on f6.

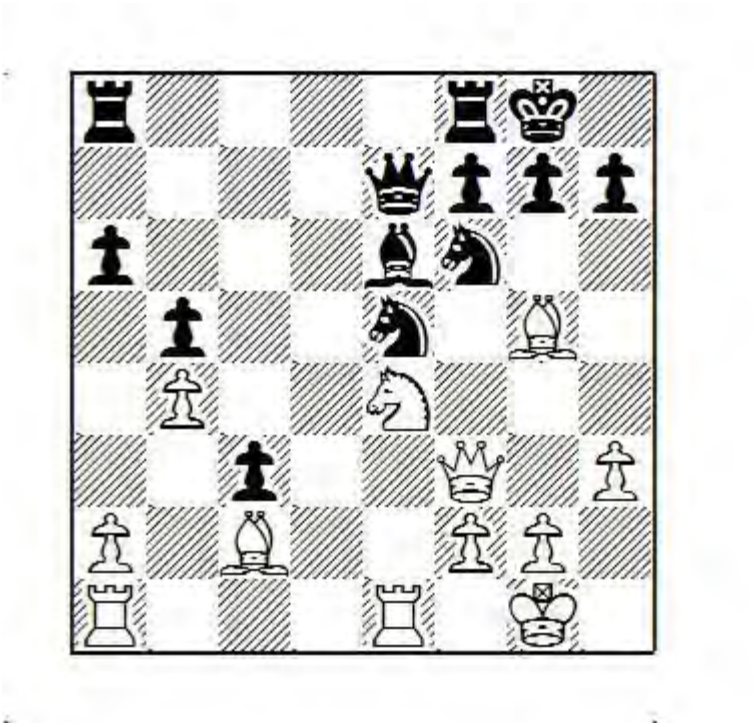
Question: But how do you intend to reply to 16 ... Bxb4, grabbing the pawn?

16 ... Nc4

Answer: I hope you aren't immersed in the complications after 16 ... .Bxb4 17 Bg5 Be7 18 Rad1, as White has the simple 17 Nxf6+ Qxf6 18 Qe4! winning a piece as both b4 and h7 are attacked.

17 Nc6 Qd7 18 Nxe7+ Qxe7 19 Bg5 Ne5

Black hopes to buy off White by sacrificing the exchange upon 20 Qxc3? Nxe4 21 Bxe4 Qxg5 22 Bxa8.



Exercise: Negi finds a much more incisive continuation,

forcing Black to resign in four moves – can you?

Answer: **20 Nxf6+ gxf6**

Or 20 ... Qxf6 21 Qh5! winning.

21 Rxe5! fxg5 22 Qh5! f5

The threat to h7 has to be blocked, but here we see the point of Negi's combination.

23 Rxe6! Qxe6 24 Bb3 1-0

Game 40

M.Kravtsiv-A.Brkic

World Junior Championship, Gaziantep 2008

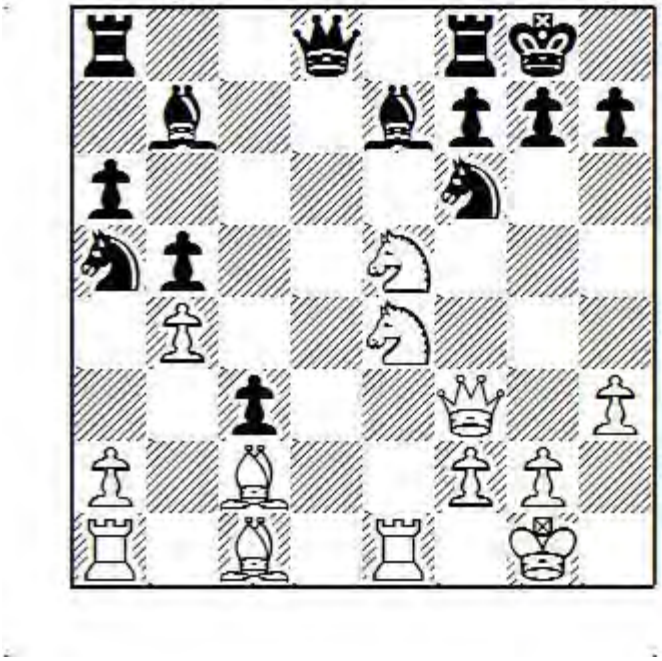
1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 d6 8 c3 0-0 9 h3 Na5 10 Bc2 d5 11 d4 dxe4 12 Nxe5 c5 13 Nd2 cxd4 14 Nxe4 dxc3 15 Qf3

So far the game has followed Negi-Dragun above. Now Black pinned the knight on e4-and guarded the c6-square with:

15 ... Bb7!

This makes a lot of sense as White's invasion with Nc6 was the killer in the Negi game.

16 b4!



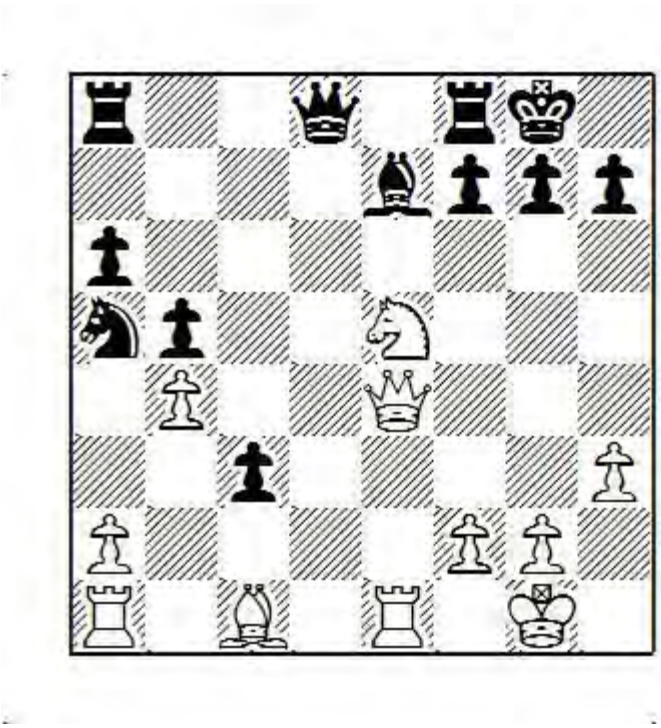
Question: The attack on a5 is still the key idea. But can you

see what happens after 16 ... Bxb4 this time?

16 ... Nxe4

Answer: If 16 ... Bxb4? then 17 Bg5 Be7 18 Nxf6+ Bxf6 19 Qf5! wins for White as Black must give up the bishop on f6 with 19 ... g6 to ward off mate. A more sophisticated form of the combination occurs upon 17 ... Bxe4 (instead of 17 ... Be7) 18 Bxe4 when saving the rook with 18 ... Rc8 allows 19 Ng4 Be7 20 Nxf6+ Bxf6 21 Qf5!.

17 Bxe4 Bxe4 18 Qxe4



Exercise: A long forcing sequence is about to begin – try to anticipate the exchange of blows. The big question is: can Black avoid losing a piece in view of 18 ... Nc4 19 Nc6, when e7 drops?

Answer: **18 ... f5!**

Did you find this move? It's the only way for Black to avoid disaster.

19 Qb1!

The queen keeps b4 defended and renews the idea of 19 ... Nc4 20 Nc6.

19 ... c2!

Trying to entice White into 29 Qxc2? Bxb4 when Black has escaped.

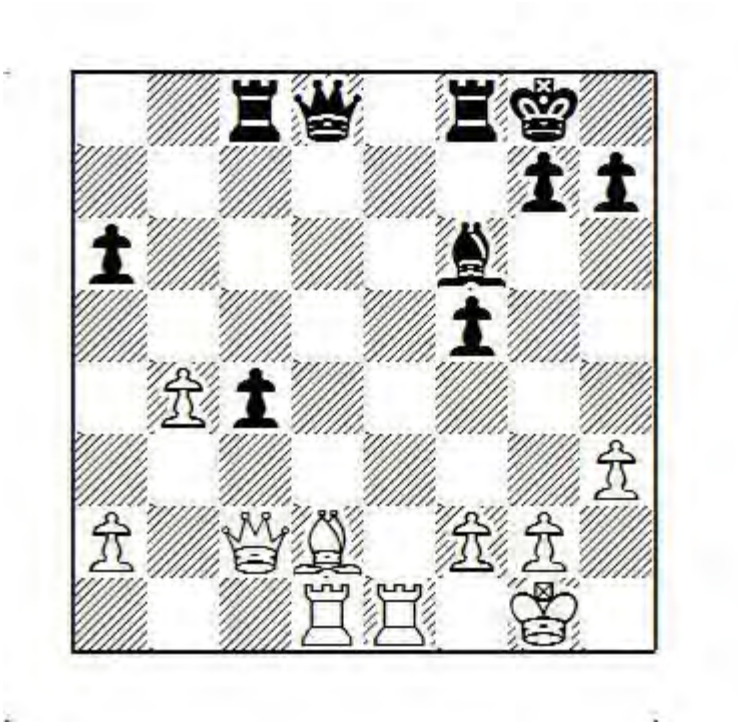
20 Qb2!

Tit for tat: the white queen refuses to budge from the defence of b4.

20 ... Nc4!

It turns out that the black knight gets to c4 with an attack on the white queen. So Black has avoided losing a piece. But no matter, White can try to win the endgame.

21 Nxc4 bxc4 22 Qxc2 Rc8 23 Bd2 Bf6 24 Rad1



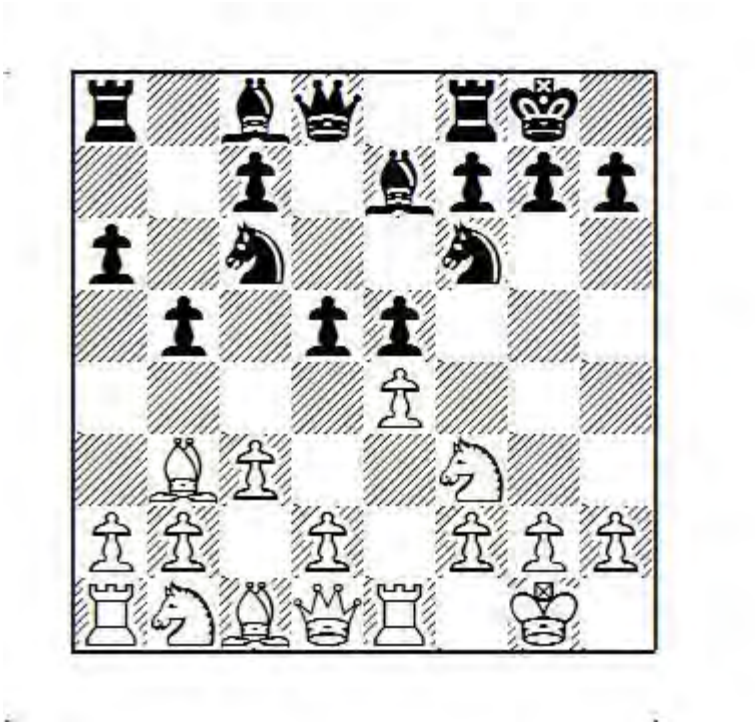
You might have noticed that efficient play by White against the gambits in this chapter leads almost invariably to positions where Black is saddled with a weak pawn or a loose pawn structure. Even the attacking energy displayed by White in this game has boiled down to 'merely' a better endgame after Black found the good defensive move 15 ... .Bb7. Still, White definitely has the edge here because of the weakness of the c4-pawn, and can probe away to increase it. Brkic is uncomfortable and tries to force matters by putting his queen on d3, evidently as he fears the pawn being blocked on c4 with 25 Bc3 etc. This gives White the chance to win a pawn after which he eventually ground put a win. The remaining moves were:

24 ... Qd3 25 Qxd3 cxd3 26 Re6 Kf7 27 Rxa6 Ra8 28 Rxa8 Rxa8 29 Be3 Ra3 30 b5 Be5 31 g3 Ke6 32 b6 Kd7 33 Bc5 Rc3 34 Bb4 Rc2 35 Rxd3+ Kc6 36 a4 Rb2 37 Bd2 Rxb6 38 Ra3 Kb7 39 a5 Rb1+ 40 Kg2 Ka6 41 Bc3 Bd6 42 Ra2 g6 43 Rd2 Bc5 44 Rd5 Ba7 45 Rd6+ Kb5 46 Rd7 Ka6 47 Rxh7 Rc1 48 Bd2 1-0

The Marshall Attack

This celebrated gambit arises in the Closed Lopez mainline after the moves:

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 0-0 8 c3 d5



This line was introduced by the US Champion Frank Marshall in a game against Jose Capablanca, the future World Champion, at a tournament in New York in 1918. One can only speculate at the boost it would have given the gambit if Marshall had triumphed with his admirable idea, but he lost a famous encounter where the Cuban genius calmly rebuffed Black's attack. After that the gambit was neglected for a long time, and only really returned to the top table of international chess when it was used as a *drawing* weapon by Spassky in the 1960s.

Since then the Marshall Attack has become a hugely complicated opening variation with a mountain of theory attached to it. It would be unwise to imagine it can be mastered by studying a couple of games and relying on general principles. The question also arises as to why the reader would *want* to learn 25 moves or more of theory in order most likely to end up in a drawn endgame? Below I've presented repertoire options for White so that the reader can decide for himself or herself whether to give it a go.

Game 41

V.Anand- L.Aronian

Wijk aan Zee 2011

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 0-0

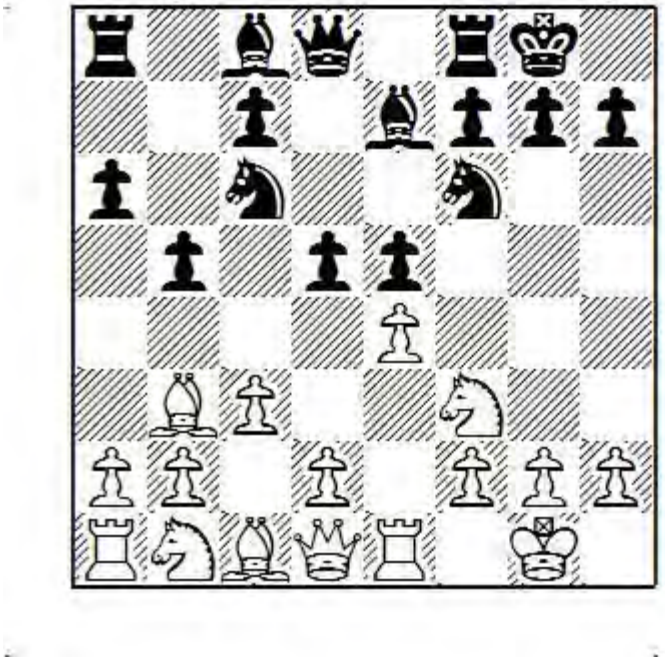
Black's avoidance of 7 ... d6 is the first sign that he might be intending the Marshall Attack. Of course he could be bluffing, either to gain a bit of time on the clock whilst White muses about whether to permit the Marshall, or perhaps he hopes his opponent will be scared and so play a less critical sideline instead of 8 c3.

If instead 7 ... Bb7, it makes sense to strengthen the barrier against the black bishop with 8 d3! in the style of games discussed in the first chapter. For example 8 ... 0-0 9 Nbd2 h6 10 Nf1 Re8 11 a3 Bf8 12 Ne3 with a typical edge for White.

8 c3

The moment of truth. Now 8 ... d6 brings us back to the Closed mainline, but it turns out that Aronian wasn't bluffing:

8 ... d5!



The Marshall Attack is born.

Question: But why the exclamation mark?

Answer: At the highest level of chess, where a draw with Black is seen as a good result, the Marshall is an excellent choice of opening. It is extremely difficult, even for Anand, to exploit the extra pawn against a great positional expert and resolute defender such as Aronian.

9 exd5

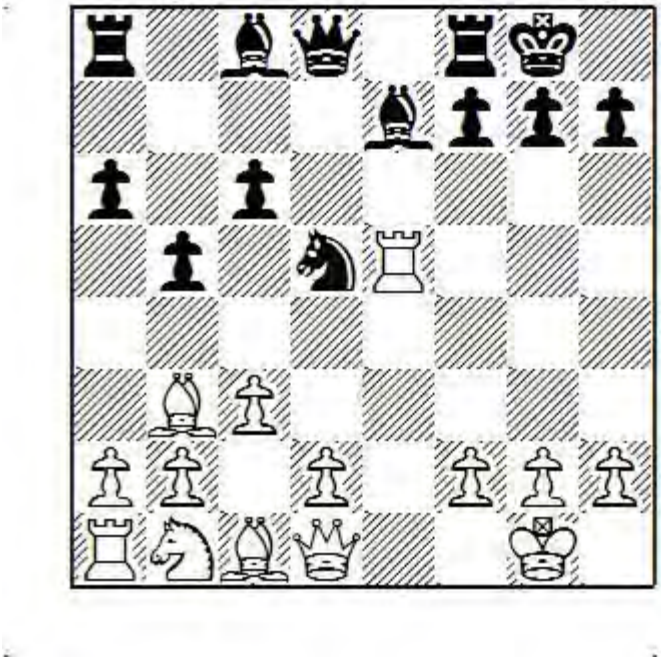
White has little choice but to accept the pawn as otherwise Black has completely freed his game without being punished.

9 ... Nxd5

9 ... e4?! is inferior, for example 10 dxc6 exf3 11 d4! (refusing to fall behind in development) 11 ... fxg2 12 Qf3 Be6 13 Bf4 and White is better.

10 Nxe5 Nxe5 11 Rxe5 c6!

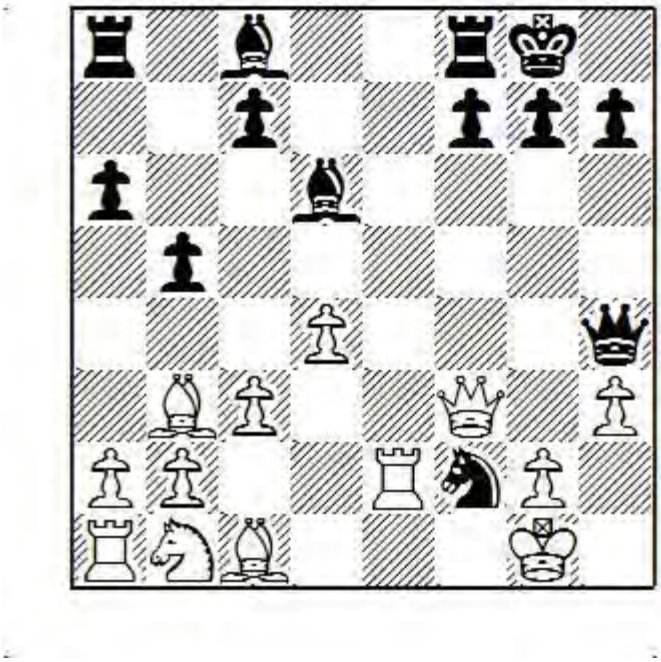
The best move. The black knight is kept on a centre square from which it can't easily be evicted. It also obstructs the white bishop on b3.



Question: But why exactly in this so important?

Answer: It is the little pawn move 11 ... c6! which introduces all the scenarios of a drawn endgame. If Black couldn't fall back on this saving positional resource the Marshall would have died out long ago at elite level, as against best play Black can't checkmate the white king nor get his pawn back.

An attempt to mate the white king with a headlong attack was Frank Marshall's original idea, but Capablanca was unruffled: 11 ... Nf6 12 Re1 (transposing is 12 d4 Bd6 13 Re1 Ng4 14 h3 Qh4 15 Qf3!) 12 ... Bd6 13 h3 Ng4 14 Qf3! (the queen is a tower of strength on this square, attacking a8 and f7 and defending f2 and the kingside in general) 14 ... Qh4 15 d4 Nxf2 16 Re2! (here 16 Bd2! looks good as well)



16 ... Bg4 17 hxg4 Bh2+ 18 Kf1 Bg3 19 Rxf2 Qh1+ 20 Ke2 Bxf2 (if 20 ... Qxc1 then 21 Qxg3 Qxb2+ 22 Nd2! Qxa1 23 Rxf7! Rxf7 24 Bxf7+ and since 24 ... Kxf7 loses the rook on a8 to 25 Qf3+, Black is busted after 24 ... Kh8 25 Qxc7 etc.) 21 Bd2 Bh4 22 Qh3 Rae8+ 23 Kd3 Qf1+ 24 Kc2 Bf2, and having escaped with his king White unwound his queenside and launched a decisive counterattack: 25 Qf3 Qg1 26 Bd5 c5 27 dxc5 Bxc5 28 b4 Bd6 29 a4 a5 30 axb5 axb4 31 Ra6 bxc3 32 Nxc3 Bb4 33 b6 Bxc3 34 Bxc3 h6 35 b7 Re3 36 Bxf7+ 1-0, J.Capablanca-F.Marshall, New York 1918. Capablanca hadn't played a serious game of chess for almost two years before facing the first

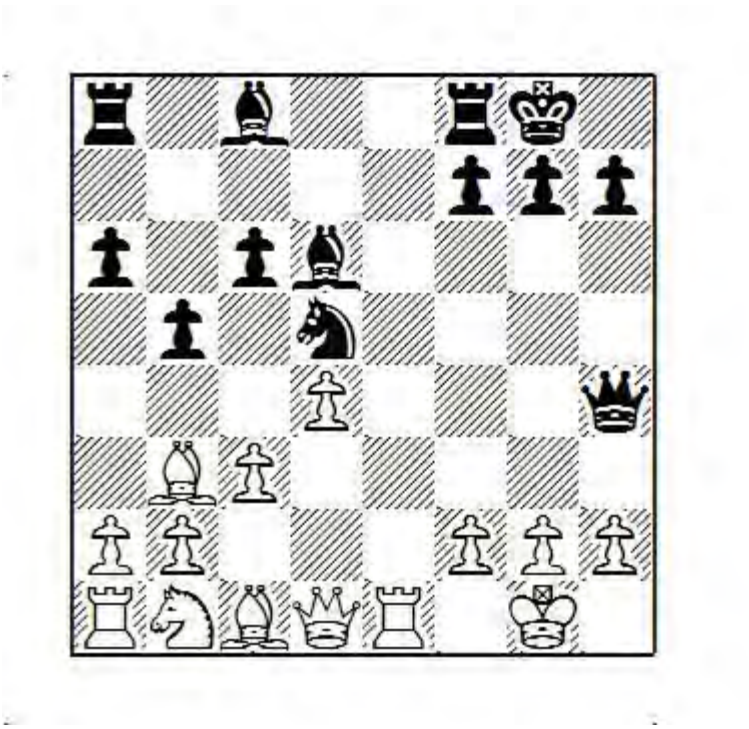
ever Marshall Attack in round one of the Manhattan tournament. And yet he won in great style. It's feats like this that makes your author regard Capablanca as the greatest player of all time.

Meanwhile violent attempts by Black starting with 11 ... Bb7 also fail, for example 12 d4 Bf6 (or 12 ... Qd7 13 Nd2 Nf4 14 Ne4 Nxg2 15 Kxg2 Bf6 16 Qf3! refuting Black's sacrifice) 13 Re1 Re8 14 Nd2 b4 15 c4 Nf4 16 d5 Nd3 17 Rxe8+ Qxe8 18 Bc2. Black's attack is beaten off as 18 ... Nxb2 19 Bxb2 Bxb2 allows 20 Bxh7+! when White remains a pawn up after 20 ... Kxh7 21 Qc2+ Kg8 22 Qxb2.

12 d4

The natural move, though the alternative 12 d3!? is also interesting.

12 ... Bd6 13 Re1 Qh4



Having pushed back the white rook, Black forces a weakening of the white kingside.

Question: How should the threat to h2 be met?

Answer: **14 g3!**

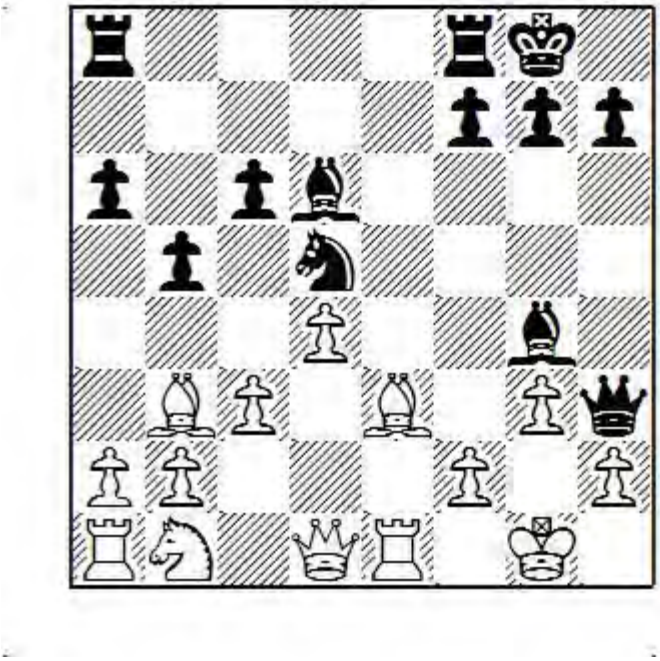
Establishing a solid triangle of pawns to limit the scope of Black's bishop on d6 is essential. If instead 14 h3 Black could already sacrifice with 14 ... Bxh3! 15 gxh3 Qxh3 when White will escape with a draw at the very best.

14 ... Qh3 15 Be3

We'll focus on Anand's move, though White has worthy alternatives in 15 Qe2!? intending 16 Qf1 to challenge the black queen, and 15 Re4!? when play might continue 15 ... g5! (a bizarre looking move, but it stops 16 Rh4, and is playable because 16 Bxg5? would drop material after 16 ... .Qf5) 16 Qf1 Qh5 17 Nd2 Bf5 18 f3! Nf6 19 Qg2. White shows his willingness to give up the exchange to gain a strong centre after 19 ... Bxe4 20 fxe4, and Black sensibly declines the offer leading to well analysed lines after 19 ... Qg6 20 Re3 Rae8.

15 ... Bg4

Black develops his bishop with gain of time by hitting the white queen.



Question: White has only one move not to lose on the spot. Can you see it?

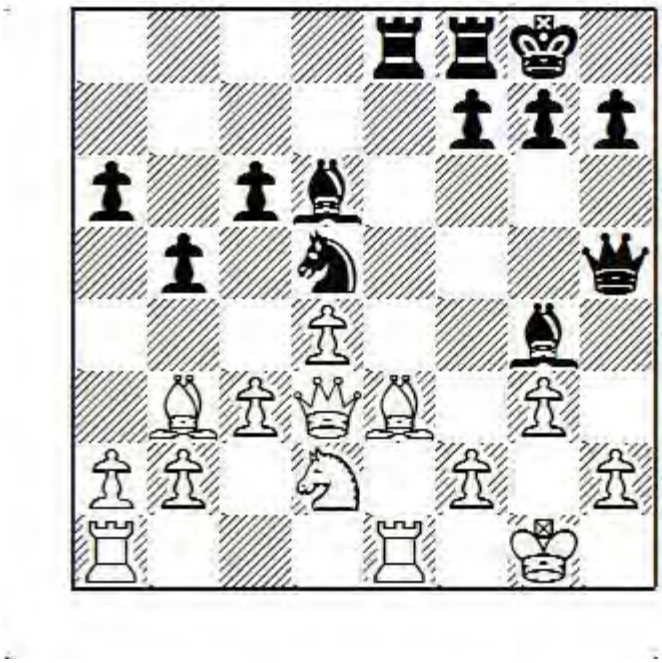
Answer: **16 Qd3**

The queen needs to be able to retreat to f1 to guard the g2-square, as after a move such as 17 Qc2 the reply 17 ... Bf3 forces mate. Instead 16 f3 allows the white kingside to be ripped to pieces by 16 ... Bxg3!.

16 ... Rae8

Black now has a fine development and initiative to compensate for his pawn.

17 Nd2 Qh5



Question: Why does Black retreat the queen to h5 rather than

build up an attack with 17 ... f5 or 17 ... Re6?

Answer: The alternative 17 ... f5 is the subject of the next game. As we shall soon see, Aronian isn't intending to start a kingside attack by flinging forwards his f-pawn. He trusts in the energy of his pieces to keep the balance, and to keep them in good shape he improves the position of his queen without waiting to be pushed back by 18 Qf1 Qh5.

Similar to the present game is 17 ... Re6 18 a4 Qh5 19 axb5 axb5 20 Qf1 Rfe8, but Aronian doesn't want his rook pinned against d5, and so puts it on e7 next move.

18 Qf1 Re7 19 a4 Rfe8

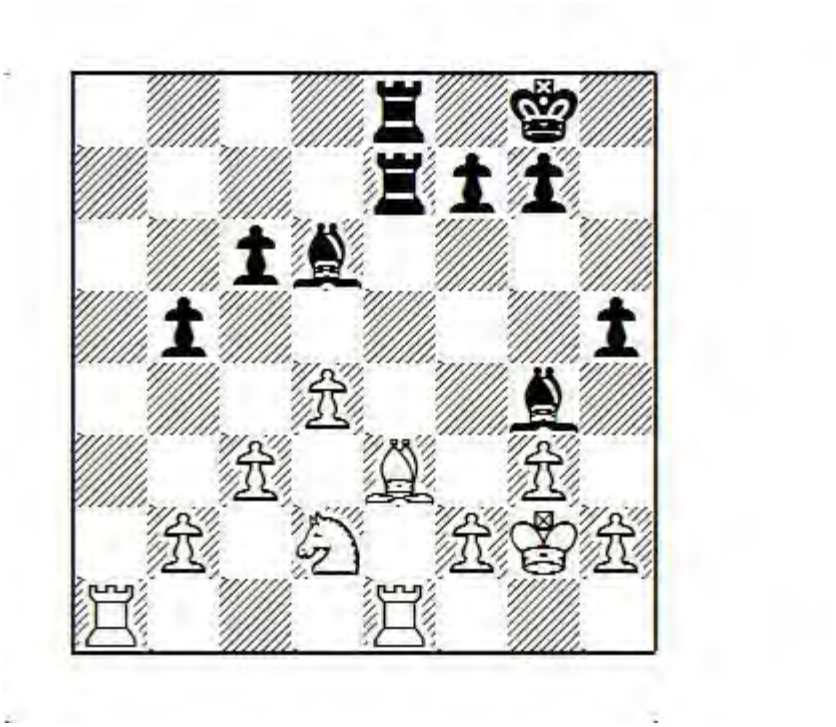
Doubling rooks has increased the pressure on e3, which obliges Anand to give up his 'good' bishop for the black knight.

20 axb5 axb5 21 Bxd5 Qxd5 22 Qg2

The black queen is very active, so this second exchange makes sense.

22 ... Qxg2+ 23 Kxg2 h5!

Aronian intends to build a solid fortress on the kingside, with his king at its centre on g6.



Exercise: Perhaps you might spend some time thinking about this position. Why is White's extra pawn so hard to exploit in the Marshall endgame?

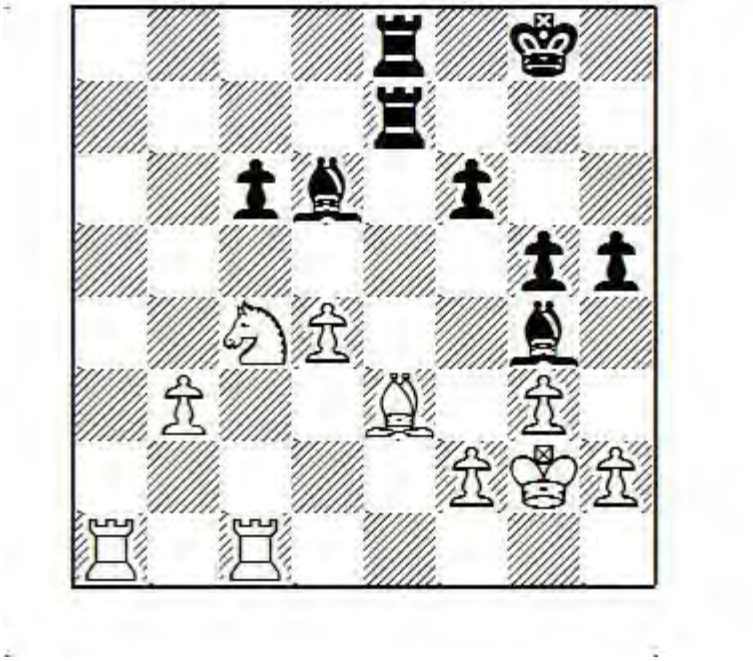
Answer: It is a mixture of pawn structure, light-square weaknesses in White's camp and opposite-coloured bishops.

The exchange 21 Bxd5 Qxd5 has left White weak on the light squares. Black has the two bishops, which give him good counterplay in the endgame. If White neutralizes the black bishop pair this is likely to lead to opposite-coloured bishops, again with a lack of winning chances.

But it is the pawn structure a2, b2, c3 and d4 for White versus a6, b5 and c6 that makes the endgame so peculiarly drawish. White has a 4-3 majority, but it isn't working – it is a static clump of pawns.

The feeble mass of white pawns will become a target as soon as it tries to advance onto the light squares. And even if the white pawns break through the bind, multiple exchanges would leave White with a sickly passed pawn on d4 that would be virtually impossible to get to the queening square.

24 Rec1 f6 25 b3 g5 26 c4 bxc4 27 Nxc4



Question: Why didn't he recapture on c4 with the pawn?

Answer: After 27 bxc4 White's only way to exploit the extra pawn would be to engineer a d4-d5 advance, but that would leave him with a weak pawn on d5. Therefore Anand prefers to give his knight and rook on c1 more scope with 27 Nxc4.

27 ... Bc7 28 Na5 Bxa5 29 Rxa5 Bd7

One pawn isn't enough to win in the opposite-coloured bishop endgame.

30 b4 Rb8 31 Rc4 Kf7 32 Kf1 Kg6 33 Ke2 Bg4+ 34 Kd2 ½-½

Question: Why did Anand give up his winning attempt?

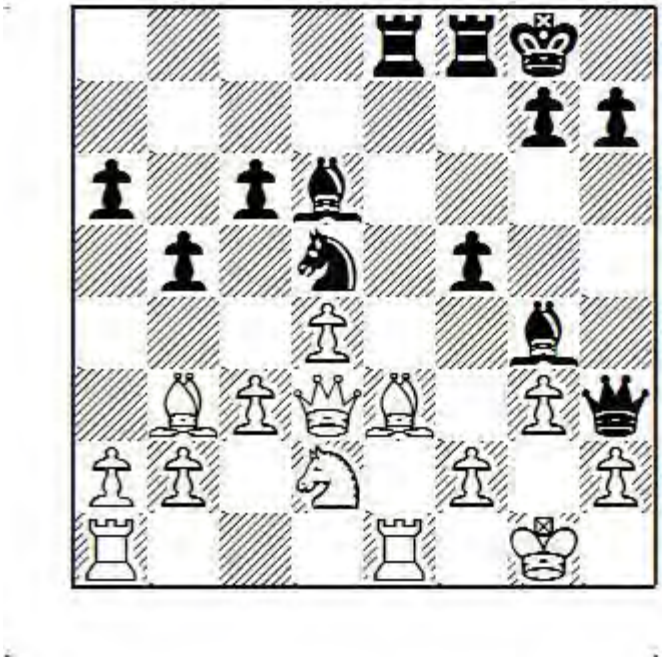
Answer: Black can put the bishop on d5 via f3, play ... Reb7, and then he has a blockade on the light squares. There's no way for White to even dream of creating a passed pawn.

Game 42

S.Citak- L.Vajda

Budapest 2007

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 0-0 8 c3 d5 9 exd5 Nxd5 10 Nxe5 Nxe5 11 Rxe5 c6 12 d4 Bd6 13 Re1 Qh4 14 g3 Qh3 15 Be3 Bg4 16 Qd3 Rae8 17 Nd2 f5



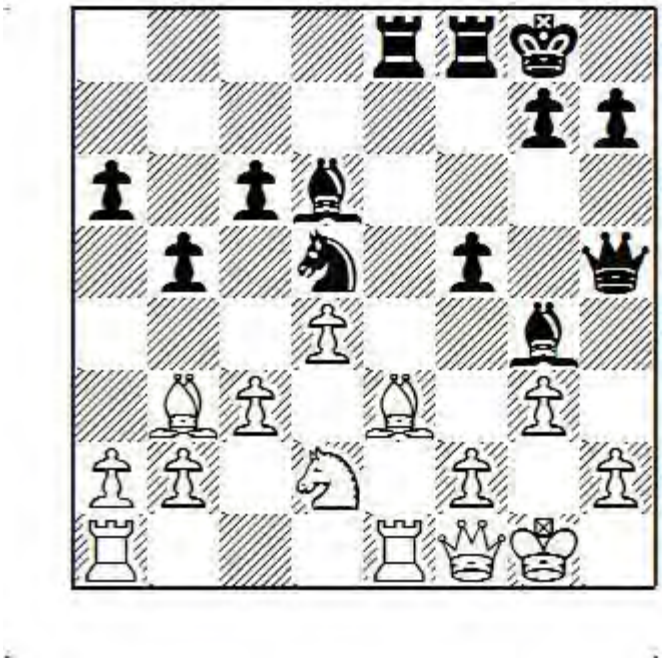
A more ambitious move than 17 ... Qh5. Black intends to utilize his kingside pawns to create attacking chances against the white king.

18 Qf1

White evacuates the queen straightaway as 18 a4? allows 18 ... f4 with a lethal breakthrough after 19 gxf4 Bxf4 etc. (19 Bxf4 Bxf4 wins a piece due to the pin on the g3-pawn).

18 ... Qh5

Avoiding the exchange of queens is a vital facet of Black's play.



Question: Now how should White meet the threat to his kingside?

Answer: **19 f4!**

An absolutely vital move in this type of set-up. The black f-pawn has to be stopped in its tracks or it will wreak havoc with 19 ... f4. As a rule of thumb, if White is ever obliged to exchange pawns with g3xf4 in the Marshall he is in trouble. The g3 barrier needs to remain in place to block an attack down the g-file by the black rooks or against h2 by the black bishop on d6.

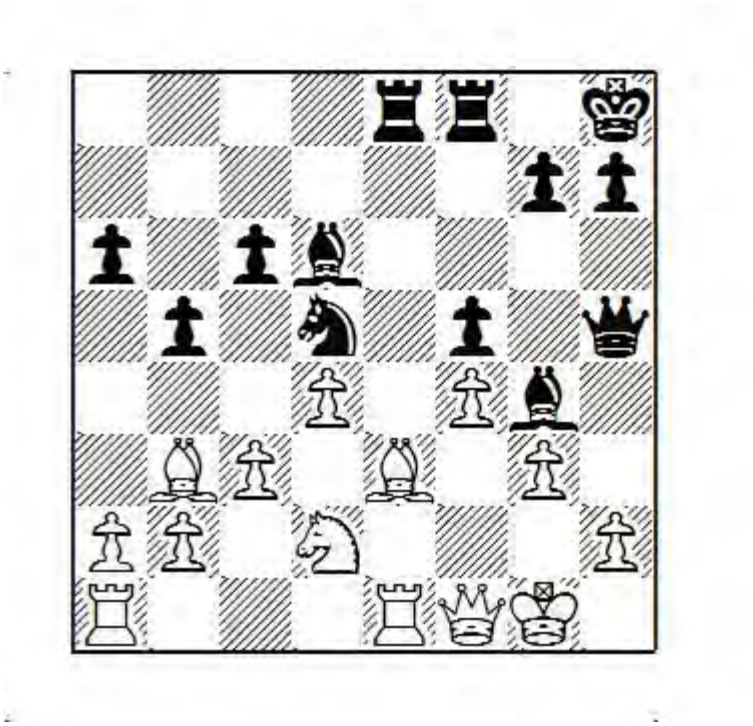
Question: On the other hand, there are clear drawbacks to

the 19 f4 move. Can you see any of them?

Answer: White's bishop on e3 is blocked in by its own pawns on both d4 and f4. How is it ever going to attack anything? Secondly, White's hold on the light squares in the centre has been impaired – he can no longer control e4 with a pawn. After White exchanges on d5 the hole on e4 becomes even more significant.

19 ... Kh8!

A quiet move with a lot of power. Breaking the pin on d5 means that the bishop on e3 is now hanging. Meanwhile the g8-square is made available for a black rook to support a breakthrough with ... g7-g5.



20 Bxd5

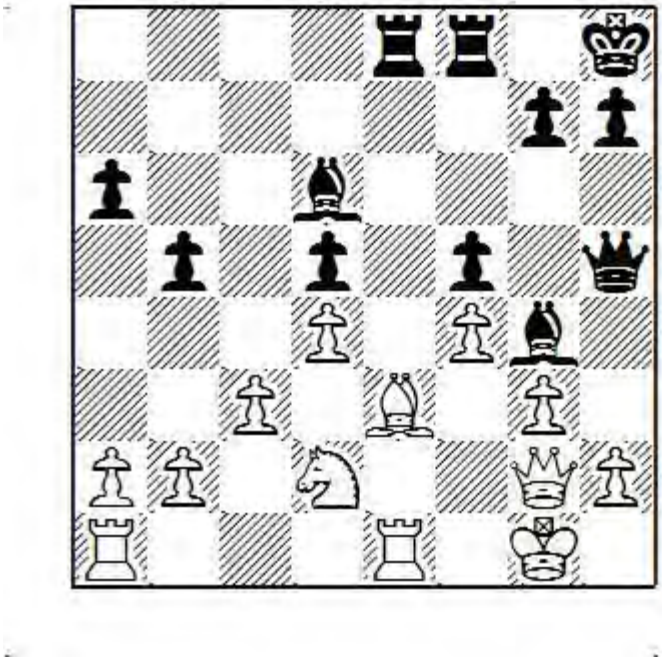
Not an appealing move for anyone who loves his light squares. Nonetheless, as with 19 f4, there was little choice: White can't wait passively for the looming attack on his king. Thus if 19 Bf2 Black can already break up the white defences with 19 ... Nxf4 20 gxf4 Bxf4 hitting d2 and threatening mate on h2.

20 ... cxd5 21 Qg2

Still, it's not all bad news for White: the d5-pawn is hanging and the retreat 21 ... Qf7 isn't part of Black's plans.

Question: But couldn't White attack the b5-pawn instead?

Answer: Yes, I would prefer 21 a4!? to demolish the black queenside. Then the game might continue 21 ... bxa4 22 Rxa4 g5 23 Raa1! (instead 23 fxg5 allows Black a dangerous breakthrough with 23 ... f4! 24 gxf4 Rxe3! 25 Rxe3 Bxf4). Now Black can keep the tension with a move like 23 ... Re6 or 23 ... h6. He has to be prepared to jettison the pawn on a6 or g5 in the pursuit of his attack. Naturally, a computer program isn't going to like Black's position much, but it is by no means easy for White to hold things together on the kingside.



21 ... Rf6!?

Vajda solves the problem of how to defend his d5-pawn: he simply let's White take it!

Question: How would you assess the possibility of 21 ... .Re4!? here?

Answer: After 22 Nxe4 fxe4 Black is serious material down – the exchange and a pawn. On the other hand he has increased his ascendancy over the light squares and gained the f3-square for his bishop. It is also important that the white rooks are deprived of open files.

Topalov once tried the sacrifice against Anand. After 21 ... Re4, 22 h4 h6 23 Nxe4 fxe4 24 Rf1 Rf6 25 a4 Rg6 26 axb5 axb5 27 f5 (returning a pawn to clear the f4-square for his bishop and the f-file for the rook) 27 ... Bxf5 28 Bf4 led to balanced chances in a hard tactical fight in V.Anand-V.Topalov Las Palmas 1993.

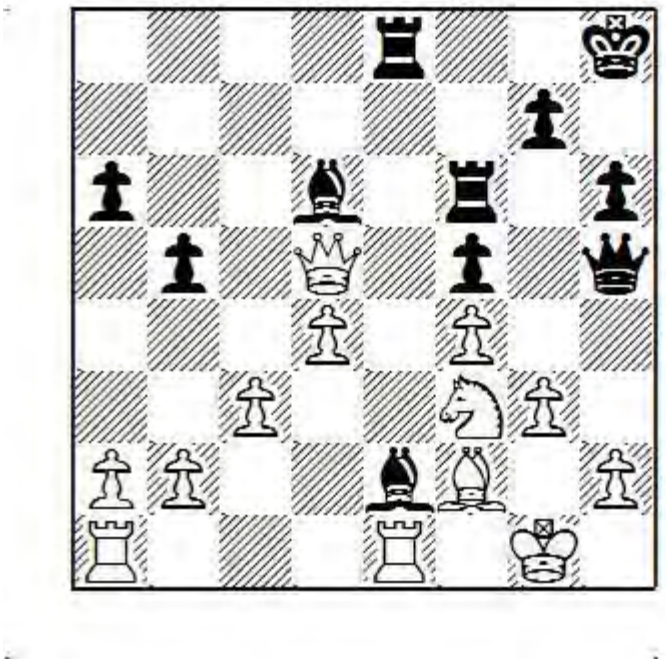
22 Qxd5

White has to capture the pawn or else his whole strategy has no point.

22 ... Be2! 23 Bf2 h6

Two pawns down, Black can calmly build up his attack. White can't quite shake off the pressure, for example 24 a4 bxa4 25 Rxa4 and Black can choose between direct aggression along the e-file with 25 ... Bd3 26 Raa1 Re2 or continue his kingside build-up with 25 ... g5. Instead there came a howler that spoilt an interesting game:

24 Nf3??



Question: Why the question marks?

Answer: **24 ... Bxf3! 25 Rxe8+ Bf8! 0-1**

But not 25 ... Kh7 26 Qg8+ Kg6 27 Re3!. Now White resigned as after 26 Qd8 Qh3! 27 Rxf8+ Rxf8 28 Qxf8+ Kh7 he can only avert mate on g2 by giving up his queen on f5.

Blunders of the 24 Nf3 kind often occur in the Marshall. White gets tired of calculating his opponent's threats, sees an 'easy' way to escape the pressure ... and has to resign.

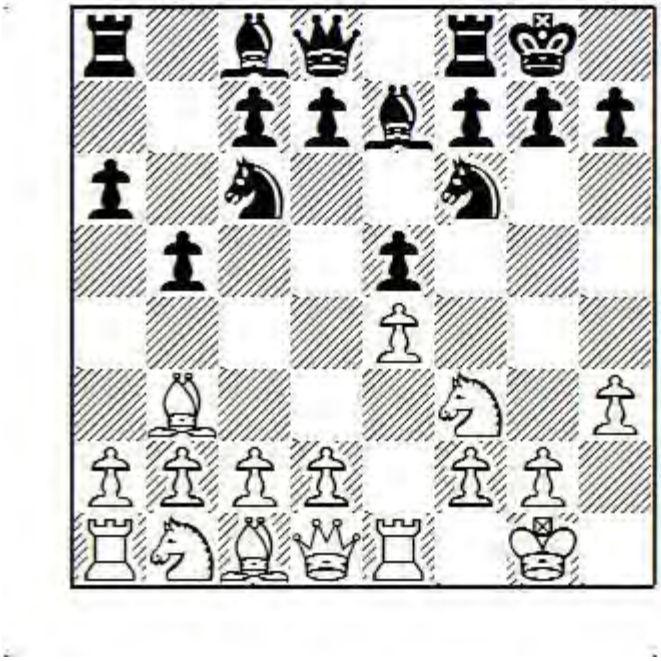
The Anti-Marshall with 8 h3

Having read the stuff above on the Marshall, you might share my doubts on allowing Black's pawn sacrifice. Indeed, why enter a variation which requires reams of book learning, that hands the initiative to the opponent, and, should you survive the attack, still gives few winning chances in the endgame? It makes no sense for the ordinary player, and elite players such as Carlsen and Kasparov have also preferred to avoid the Marshall.

Here we'll take a look at one of the respectable 'Anti-Marshall' lines in the Closed Lopez: **1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 0-0 8 h3** *(see diagram overleaf)*.

Because Black has played 7 ... 0-0 rather than the 7 ... d6, we play 8 h3! rather than 8 c3. If now 8 ... d6 we simply transpose back into the normal lines of Chapter Two with 9 c3! having sidestepped the Marshall. In that case we see a nice 'ambidextrous' quality to 8 h3: it is useful both in a fast moving gambit centre (should Black play 8 ... d5) and equally useful in the positional struggle that occurs after 8 ... d6 9 c3 – as we know it denies the black bishop the g4-square and so makes the 10 d4 advance more secure.

In this section we'll examine what happens if Black insists on ... d7-d5 anyway or else tries to prove 8 h3 is imprecise by playing 8 ... Bb7, a more active move than 8 ... d6, which is in effect saying 'I never intended to put my bishop on g4, so your 8 h3 is a waste of time.'

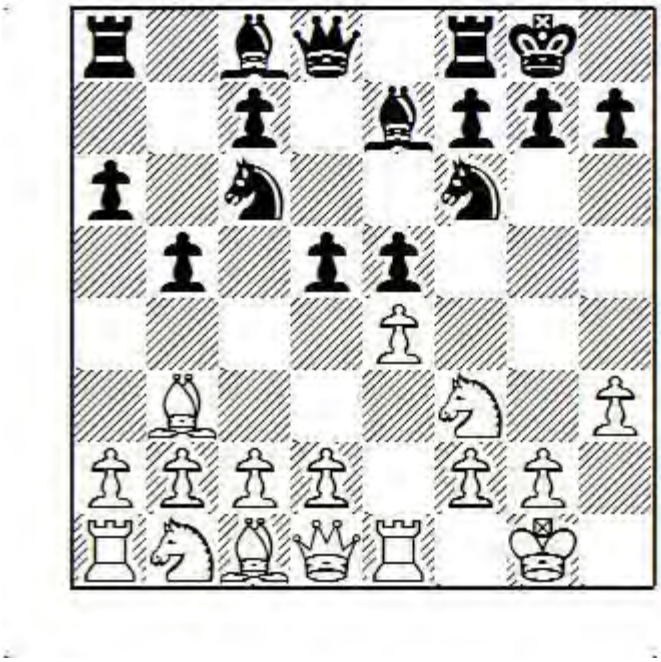


Game 43

S.Kudrin-E.Gumrukcuoglu

Kusadasi 1990

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 0-0 8 h3 d5



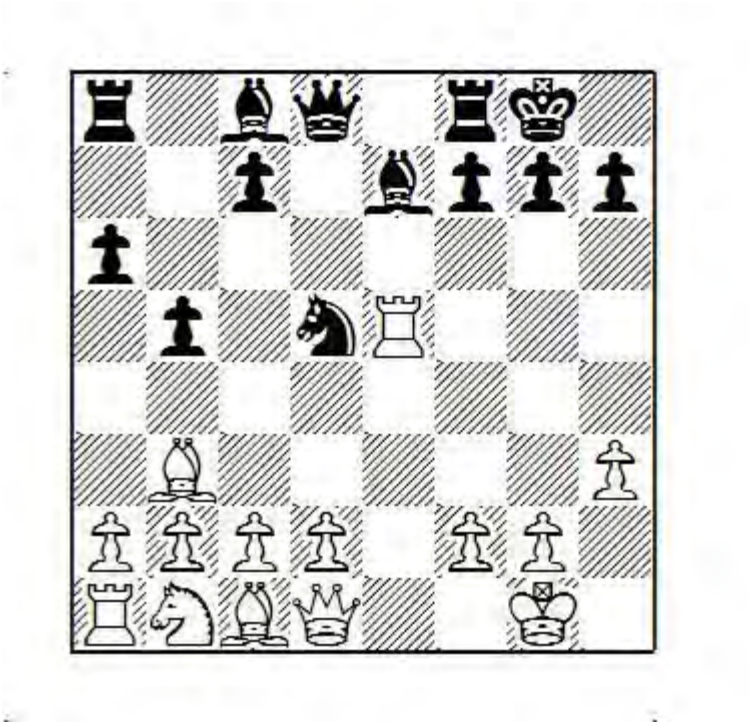
Question: Why do you think this pawn offer is less attractive here

for Black than in the Marshall after 8 c3 d5?

Answer: The move 8 c3 is designed for a slow positional struggle, with the emphasis on establishing a pawn centre with d2-d4. It takes no account of the needs of the knight on b1, which is denied its best square. This doesn't matter too much as long as things stay quiet, but the knight is ill equipped to respond to the sudden explosion in the centre that occurs in the Marshall with 8 ... d5!. It is the 'wrong-footing' of White's opening deployment – he has prepared for a slow game, and ended up in a tactical slugfest – that makes the Marshall so effective. He doesn't suffer this discomfort after 8 h3 d5.

9 exd5 Nxd5 10 Nxe5 Nxe5 11 Rxe5

The move h2-h3 proves useful in that a typical 'Marshall' ... Qh4 lunge by Black won't gain time by attacking h2. The black knight is also denied a safe attacking square on g4. Nonetheless, the chief virtue of 8 h3 is the avoidance of 8 c3, so that the c3-square is kept free for the white knight.



11 ... Nf6

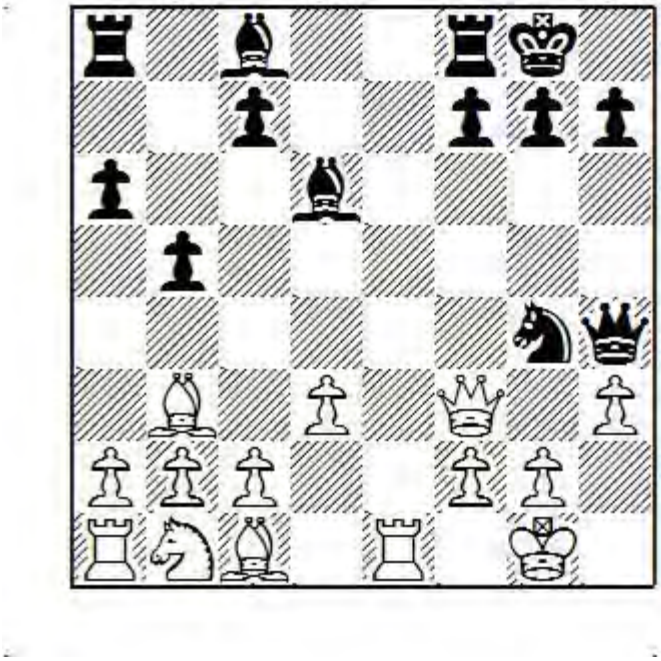
After 11 ... c6 White can choose between 12 d4, 12 Bxd5 or – my preference –12 d3!?. As long as White avoids saddling himself with the 'non-move' 12 c3, he is in effect a tempo up on the Marshall mainline – or we might say a tempo and a half as he has avoided c2-c3 in favour of a developing move, and also got in the useful move h2-h3. After 12 d3 White can continue Nd2 and Nf3 or Nf1, getting his knight involved in the kingside struggle. Compare this with how the knight is almost stalemated on b1 in the Marshall mainline after 8 c3.

12 d3 Bd6 13 Re1 Ng4? 14 Qf3!

An excellent square for the queen. White doesn't need to get involved with the complexities of 14 hxg4 Qh4.

14 ... Qh4

So that if 15 Qxa8? Qxf2+ and mate next move, but White has a surprise prepared.



Question: Can you see White's next move.

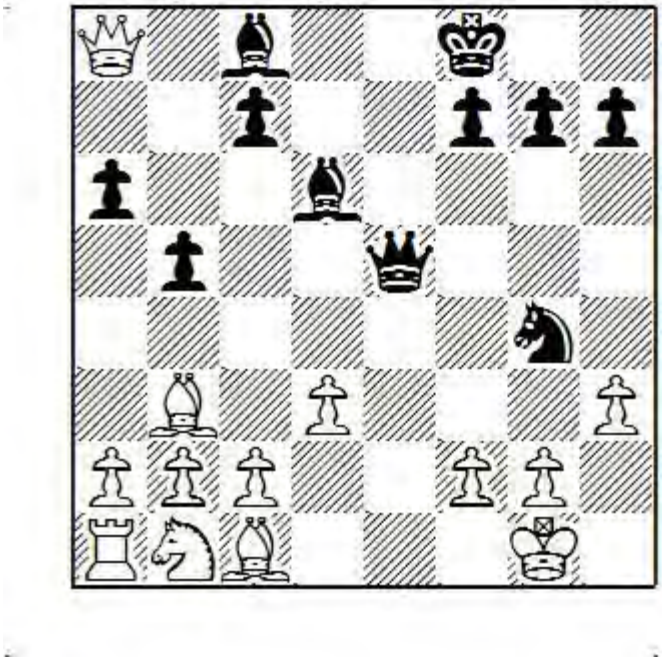
Answer: **15 Re8!**

With threats including 16 Qxf7+, which is also the mating response if Black takes the rook, or 16 Rxf8+ followed by 17 Qxf7+, to say nothing of the hanging black rook on a8 and knight on g4!

15 ... Qh5

If 15 ... Bb7 16 Rxf8+ Rxf8 simply 17 Qxg4 wins, as 17 ... Re8 threatening mate on e1 is easily countered by 18 Bd2. Notice if White had played c2-c3 rather than d2-d3 it would be harder to meet Black's threats.

16 Rxf8+ Kxf8 17 Qxa8 Qe5



Black's last hope is now 18 Qxc8+ Ke7 19 Qxg4?? Qe1 mate. Once again, try putting the white pawns on c3 and d2. Now it is much harder to find a defence against the black attack, despite White's huge material advantage.

18 Bd2! Qh2+

The check turns out to be harmless.

19 Kf1 Qh1+ 20 Ke2 Nh2 21 Nc3!

Making full use of the absence of the c2-c3 move.

21 ... Qxa1 and Black resigned.

Question: It is mate in two moves. Can you see it?

Answer: A queen check on c8 then a knight mate on d5 does the business.

Game 44

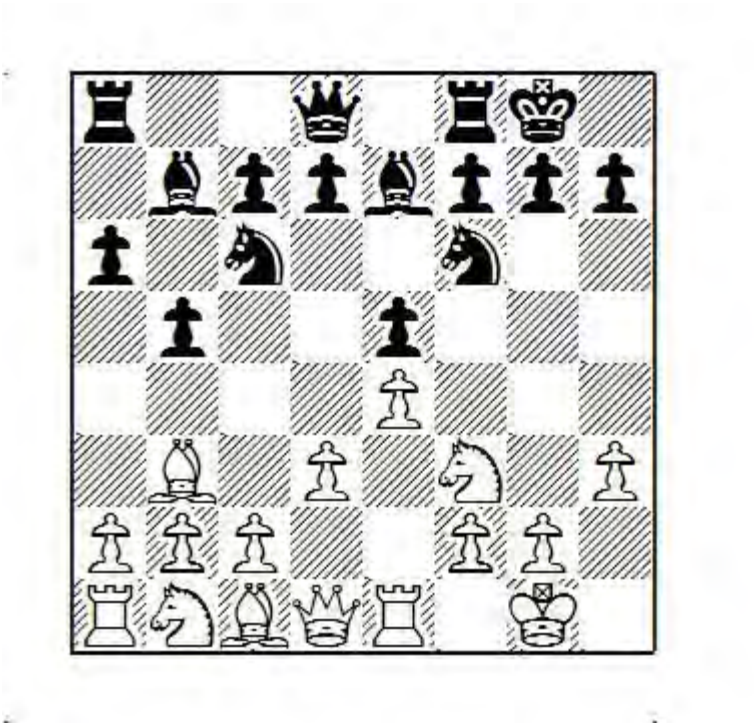
V.Gashimov-V.Ivanchuk

FIDE Grand Prix, Astrakhan 2010

1 e4 e5 2 Nf3 Nc6 3 Bb5 a6 4 Ba4 Nf6 5 0-0 Be7 6 Re1 b5 7 Bb3 0-0 8 h3!

If you love making strategic plans that build on a slight space advantage, then choose 8 h3. If you love studying long theoretical lines, and don't mind handing over the initiative to Black for many moves, then you might enjoy being a pawn up in the Marshall after 8 c3 d5.

8 ... Bb7 9 d3!



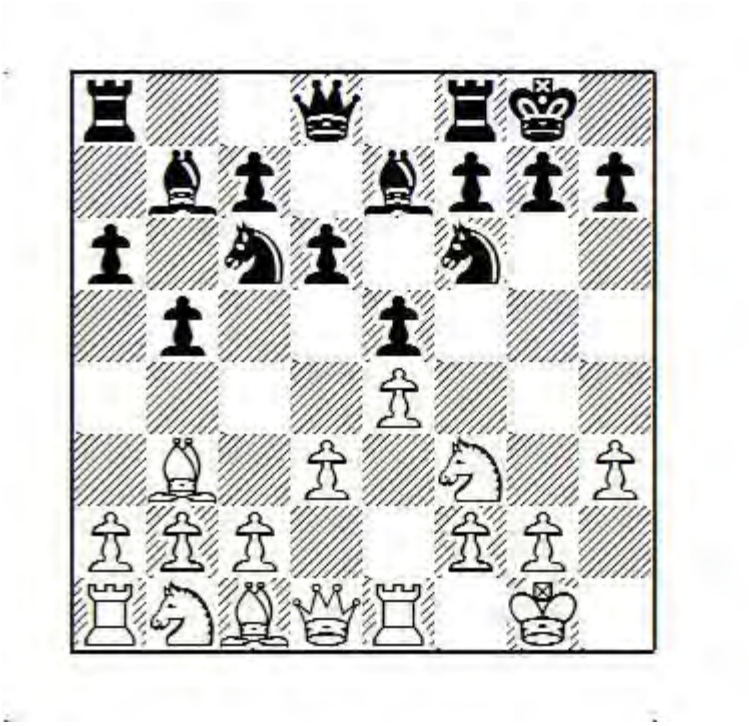
It isn't too late for Black to play a Marshall after 9 c3 d5!. After 10 exd5 Nxd5 11 Nxe5? (White should forget trying for an advantage; it is better to play 11 d4 exd4 12 cxd4 just to be okay) 11 ... Nxe5 12 Rxe5 Nf4! White is in big trouble as not only is g2 attacked, there is also the positional threat of 12 ... Nd3 blocking the advance of the d2-pawn, when it is difficult to see how the white queenside pieces will ever be developed.

White's 9 d3! supports e4 and refuses to fall behind in development. He wants to play a quiet manoeuvring game – and try to prove that the black bishop is badly placed on b7.

9 ... d6

Here was Black's last chance to play in Marshall style with 9 ... d5. However, I was impressed by White's play in S.Karjakin-A.Onischuk, Khanty-Mansiysk 2010: 10 exd5 Nxd5 11 Nxe5 Nd4!?. Black tries to take advantage of the absence of c2-c3 by utilizing the d4-square. If now 12 Nc3 then 12 ... Nb4, so Karjakin first developed with 12 Bd2! after which Black hadn't got a particularly useful move while he 'waited' for White to give him the chance to play ... Nb4. There followed 12 ... c5 13 Nc3 Nxb3 14 axb3 Nb4 15 Ne4 f5 16 Ng3 Qd5 17 Nf3 Qd7 18 Ne5 Qd5 19 Nf3 Qd7 20 Bxb4 cxb4 21 d4 Rac8 22 Qd3 and White had the better of it.

With the game move Ivanchuk submits to a typical Closed structure.



Exercise: What are the drawbacks of the bishop being on b7?

Can you suggest a plan for White to exploit this? (Hint: what

squares have been weakened by the bishop going to b7?)

And what should be White's immediate concern?

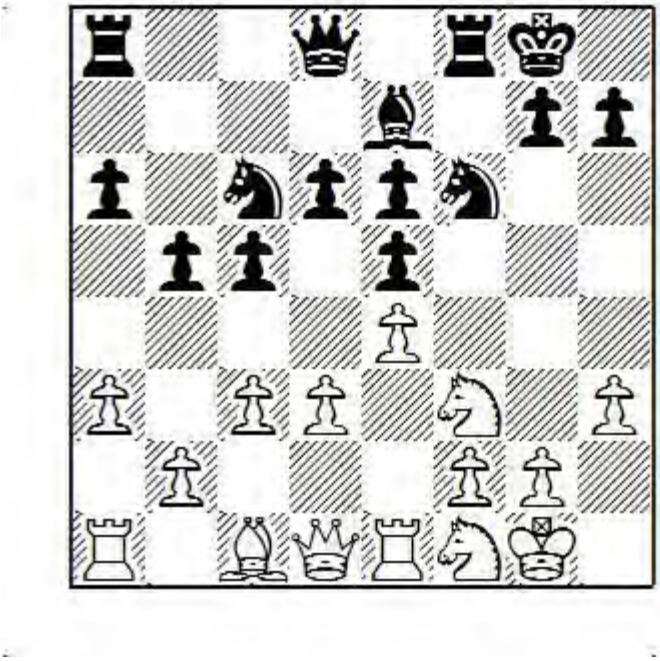
10 a3!?

Answer: White's priority is to make a hole on a2 for his bishop before it can be liquidated by 10 ... Na5 and 11 ... Nxb3. Instead 10 a4!? would lead to the Carlsen-Topalov and McDonald-Savage games in Chapter One, but with the moves Re1 and h3 (for White) and ... Bb7 (for Black) inserted. However, for the time being Gashimov is planning to keep things quiet on the queenside.

If you have studied Chapter One you are probably familiar with some of the ideas in this type of pawn centre. The black bishop on b7 is not only boxed in by the pawn on e4, it has also abandoned the defence of the f5-square by moving away from the c8-h3 diagonal. White's traditional manoeuvre of the knight from b1 to g3 is therefore especially attractive as the knight will threaten to occupy f5.

10 ... Nb8

It was also possible to adopt a Chigorin approach with 10 ... Na5, for example 11 Ba2 c5 12 Nbd2 Nc6 13 Nf1 Bc8 (the bishop returns to its original square as Black wants to challenge the strong white bishop on a2) 14 c3 Be6 15 Bxe6 fxe6.

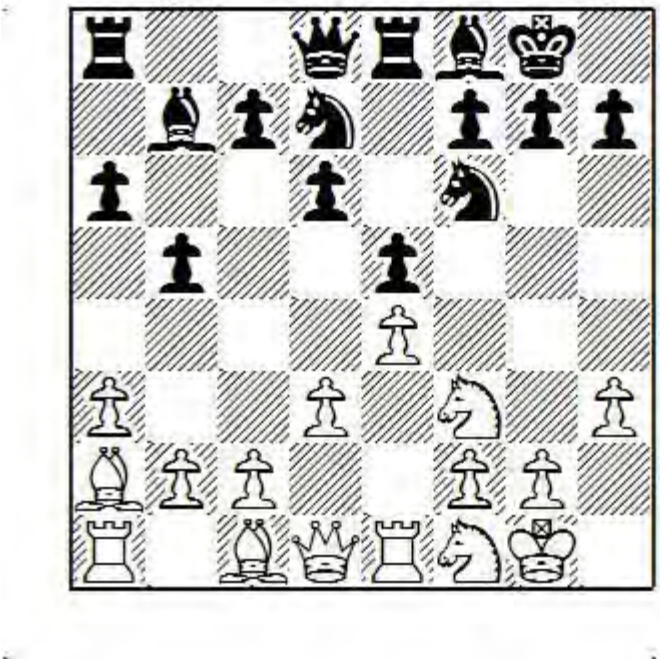


Question: Doesn't this exchange favour Black because his pawn

now covers the d5- and f5-squares, and his rook has the open f-file?

Answer: In fact the f-file proves pretty irrelevant and the black centre is a rather unwieldy mass, a target rather than a source of strength. With 16 b4 White is able to start nibbling away at it. The game G.Kamsky-E.Bacrot, Jermuk 2009, continued 16 ... d5 (looking for counterplay by exposing the pawn on d3 to attack) 17 Ng3 dxe4 18 Nxe4 Nxe4 19 Rxe4 Qd5 20 Qe2 Rad8 21 Ne1 Qb3 22 Qa2 Qxa2? (not 22 ... .Qxc3? 23 Bd2 winning the queen, but it was better for her to go back with 22 ... Qd5! when White wouldn't be able to exchange queens as it would straighten out the black pawns) 23 Rxa2 Rd5 24 Kf1 Nb8 25 Ke2 Nd7 and having secured the d3-pawn with his king, White was able to start probing the black pawns with 26 Nf3 etc.

11 Nbd2 Nbd7 12 Nf1 Re8 13 Ba2 Bf8



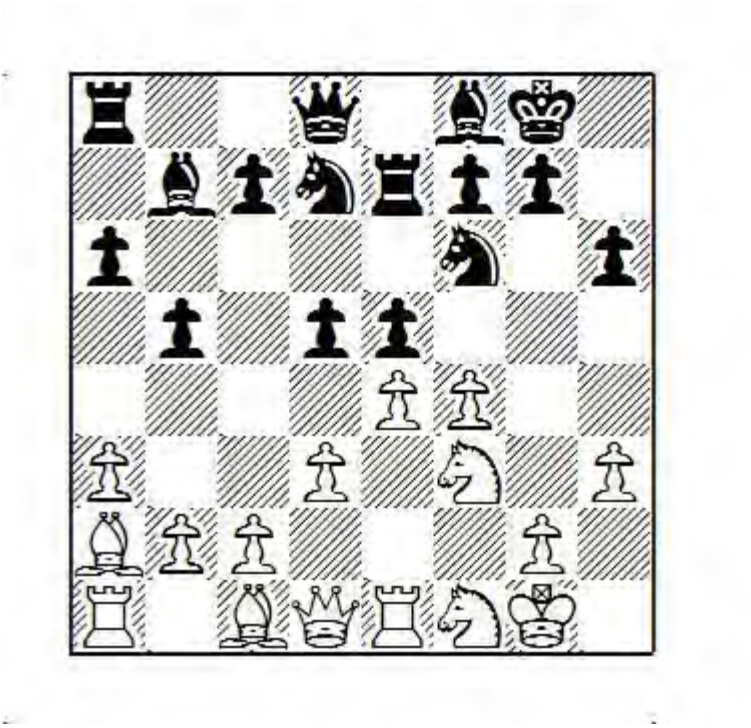
Both sides have been redeploying their pieces: White has brought his queen's knight to f1, whilst Black has moved his horse from c6 via b8 to d7. The white bishop has been tucked away on a2, the black bishop on f8. After all this manoeuvring behind the lines, Gashimov

suddenly decided on a sharp plan:

14 Ng5!?

By attacking f7 White clears the way for his f-pawn with gain of time.

14 ... Re7 15 f4 h6 16 Nf3 d5



Question: How would you assess Ivanchuk's move?

Answer: It is too ambitious and deserves a question mark. Ivanchuk wants to punish White for his kingside foray by counterattacking in the centre, but he ends up losing control of his vital e5 strongpoint. As I've remarked earlier in relation to his game with Topalov, the Ukrainian Grandmaster is a brilliant chess player, but his tendency to try to extract as much as possible from any position can sometimes rebound on him.

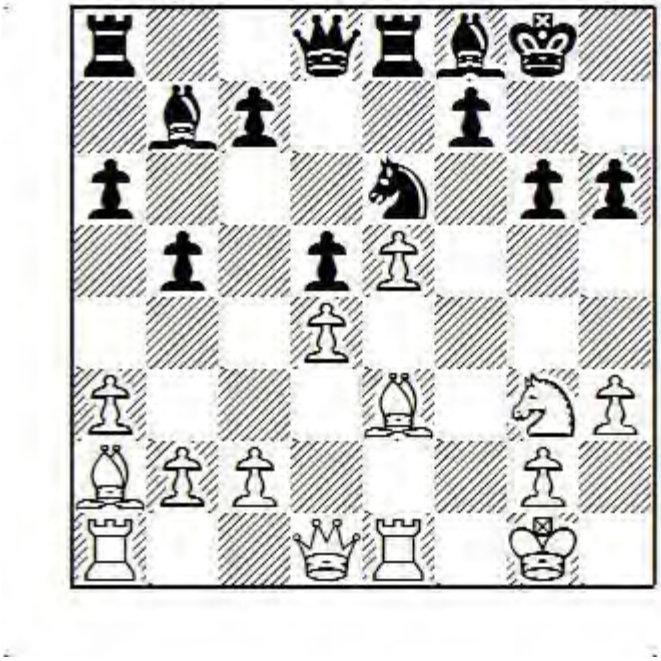
The simple 16 ... c5 has been recommended, when Black remains solid, though White can build up with 17 Ng3 etc.

17 fxe5 Nxe5 18 Nxe5 Rxe5 19 Bf4 Re8 20 e5

One of the things we have learnt from the games in this book is that Black shouldn't give away the e5-square unless he has a good reason for it. Here White is allowed to drive the black knight from f6 and cement a pawn on e5 – strong indicators that he will be able to start a direct attack on the black king.

20 ... Nh7 21 d4 Ng5 22 Ng3 Ne6 23 Be3 g6

Nonetheless, things don't appear too bad for Black. The white knight has been kept out of f5 and the black kingside will be strengthened by the fianchetto on g7. Black also has a knight well placed on the blockade square in front of the e5-pawn. White has already spent his pawn thrust f4-f5 and has no more pawns to use as levers against the black kingside.



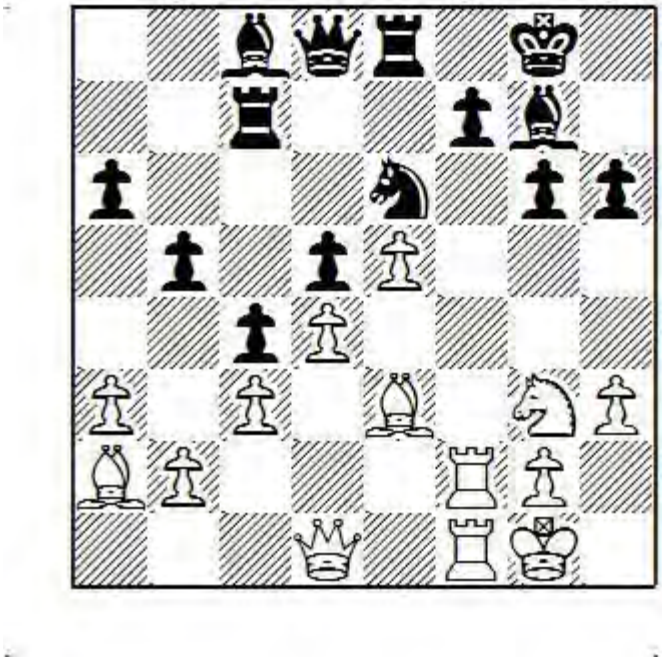
Question: So why does Ivanchuk end up resigning in another 13 moves? What is the nature of White's advantage?

Answer: The point is that Black has no way to gain counterplay or break White's bind on the kingside. Step by step, White is able to increase the pressure on the f7-, g6- and h6-pawns by bringing his pieces into action, and Black can do nothing to prevent or even distract him. In other words, the black position has no *energy*.

24 Rf1 Bg7 25 c3 c5 26 Qg4

First of all White mobilizes his heavy pieces, bringing the rooks into action along the f-file.

26 ... Rc8 27 Rf2 Rc7 28 Raf1 Bc8 29 Qd1 c4



Exercise: Try to find a way to bring more resources

to White's kingside campaign.

The possibility of 30 dxc5, uncovering an attack on d5, persuades Black to close the centre with ... c4, but now there is no hope at all of counterplay.

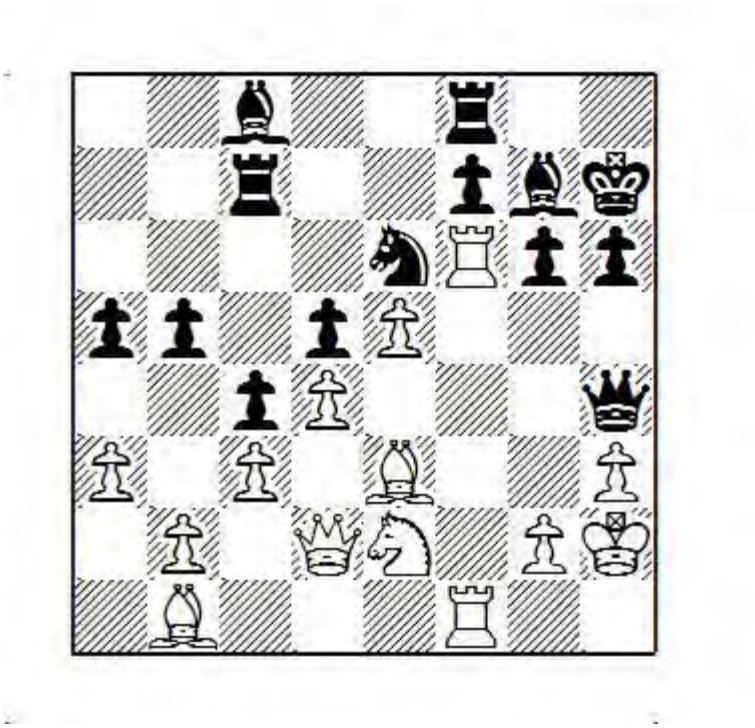
Answer: **30 Bb1!**

With ideas of Qd2 to attack h6, when even if ... Kh7 didn't drop f7 it could be powerfully answered by Nh5! followed by Nf6+ or Nxg7. Unless Black defends h6 with his queen, he will be forced to weaken his already fragile kingside pawn structure to save the pawn.

30 ... Qh4 31 Kh2 a5 32 Ne2 Rf8 33 Qd2 Kh7

Defending h6 again so that the black queen is able to retreat, but Gashimov has already prepared a snare:

34 Rf6!



Question: What happens if Black takes the rook?

34 ... Re7

Answer: The black queen would soon be crowded out of safe squares after 34 ... Bxf6 35 Rxf6, for example 35 ... Re8 (what else?) 36 Ng1! (threatening to trap the queen with 37 Nf3 and 38 g4) 36 ... Ng5 37 Rf4 Qh5 38 Qe1! and Black has no good answer to 39 Rh4.

35 R6f4 Nxf4 36 Rxf4 1-0

The black queen is lost after 36 ... Qh5 37 Ng3 Qg5 38 h4.

With this majestic positional/attacking game I'll bid you farewell. I hope you have similarly inspired performances in the Ruy Lopez!

Index of Complete Games

Adams.M-Georgiev.V, Novi Sad 2009

Adams.M-Howell.D, London Classic 2010

Adams.M-Koneru.H, Merida 2008

Adams.M-Torre.E, Bled Olympiad 2002

Anand.V-Aronian.L, Wijk aan Zee 2011

Anand.V-Tkachiev.V, Moscow (blitz) 2009

Areshchenko.A-Matta.V, Gurgon 2009

Ashwin.J-Gokhale.C, Singapore 2009

Berg.E-Rudd.J, Liverpool 2007

Carlsen.M-Beliavsky.A, Wijk aan Zee 2006

Carlsen.M-Tallaksen.G, Gausdal 2005

Carlsen.M-Topalov.V, Nanjing 2010

Caruana.F-Eljanov.P, Russian Team Championship, Olginka 2011

Citak.S-Vajda.L, Budapest 2007

Davies.No-Adams.M, Edmonton 2009

Deep Blue-Kasparov.G, Man vs Machine, New York 1997

Edouard.R-Susterman.A, Illes Medes 2007

Gashimov.V-Ivanchuk.V, FIDE Grand Prix, Astrakhan 2010

Gashimov.V-Kramnik.V, Monaco (rapid) 2011

Grischuk.A-Najer.E, FIDE World Cup, Khanty-Mansiysk 2007

Hübner.R-Nunn.J, Brussels 1986

Ivanov.A-Terrie.H, New England 2000

Karjakin.S-Prill.G, Mainz (rapid) 2007

Kosintseva.N-Mikhalevski.V, Biel 2010

Kravtsiv.M-Brkic.A, World Junior Championship, Gaziantep 2008

Kudrin.S-Gumrukcuoglu.E, Kusadasi 1990

Lahno.K-Nemcova.K, European Women's Championship, Plovdiv 2008

Leko.P-Caruana.F, Wijk aan Zee 2010

Mainka.R-Zelbel.P, Dortmund 2010

Martin Perez.J-Pena Dieguez.M, Dos Hermanas 2004

McDonald.N-Savage.B, British League (4NCL) 2011

Naiditsch.A-Efimenko.Z, Poikovsky 2009

Negi.P-Dragun.K, Cappelle la Grande 2010

Nepomniachtchi.I-Bruzon Batista.L, Capablanca Memorial, Havana 2010

Nijboer.F-Vedder.R, Vlissingen 2003

Shirov.A-Fedorchuk.S, FIDE World Cup, Khanty-Mansiysk 2009

Smeets.J-Carlsen.M, Wijk aan Zee 2011

Steinitz.W-Blackburne.J, London 1876

Stellwagen.D-Gagunashvili.M, Vlissingen 2004

Sudakova.I-Fatalibekova.E, Russian Women's Championship, Orel 2006

Swiercz.D-Vocaturo.D, Wijk aan Zee 2011

Topalov.V-Ivanchuk.V, Monaco (rapid) 2011

Topalov.V-Van der Sterren.P, Antwerp 1997

Wolff.P-Karpatchev.A, New York 1997