

Tiger Hillarp Persson

# Tiger's Modern



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Best regards!!  
Saludos!

Caissa Lovers

First published in Sweden 2005 by Quality Chess Europe AB

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ISBN 91-975243-6-0

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Edited by John Shaw & Jacob Aagaard  
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Cover Design: Carole Dunlop  
Printed in The Netherlands by A-D Druk B.V.



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# Introduction to the Modern Defence

“The reasonable man adapts himself to the world: the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man.”

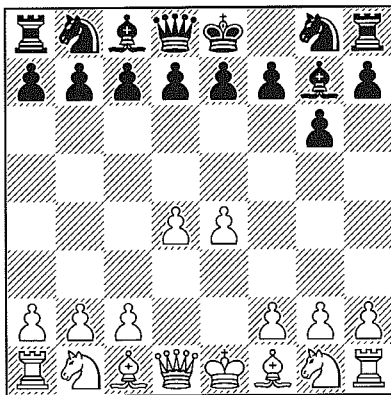
George Bernard Shaw – *Man and Superman*

Ah, looking for Mr Petroff? Sorry, but Petroff has left the building with Mr Lopez. I am the Modern, the Modern Defence. Stop caressing that e-pawn or I will throw you out of this chapter!

I should start with a warning for those of you who have only played classical openings before. The Modern Defence (henceforth referred to as simply the Modern) is something quite different. Even though I have tried to give a few examples of typical positions and structures to strive for, that is far from doing the Modern justice. The Modern is just too complicated and dynamic; what is good in one instance can very well be bad in another. One grandmaster, on hearing I was trying to explain the a6-Modern systems in book form, said: “You will have to explain everything!” and there is some truth to that. Still, I think that is what makes the opening so wonderful.

**So, what is the Modern?**

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♖g7



This is the basic Modern position. Black’s attitude in the Modern is typical of the modern school of thought: Instead of occupying the centre with a pawn or two Black prefers to observe the centre from a distance, develop a few pieces and then strike when White least expects it. The most common continuation here is

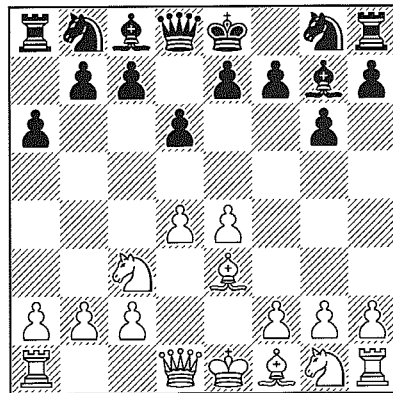
3.♗c3 d6

Now White is faced with a wide choice. To illustrate the system featured in this book, let us say that White plays:

4.♙e3

Now Black can play 4...c6 or enter the Pirc with 4...♗f6, but this book features a different system:

4...a6!



With this move Black plans an expansion on the queenside with b5 followed by ♖b7, ♗d7 and c5, thus cultivating the concept of observing and counterpunching even further than in the other Modern lines (with c6). The only condition for this system to work is that White has played ♗c3 or else b5 will strike thin air and c5 will be easily met by c3.

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### Why the a6-Modern?

The first great advantage of the Modern with a6 is that it gives White almost zero chances of playing for a draw and therefore it is an excellent choice in situations where playing for a win is essential. In these lines there is no exchange-variation or I-am-a-sucker-for-a-draw-variation, or any other way for White to exchange a bunch of pieces on move ten.

The second (big) advantage of the lines recommended in this book is that they are little known and analysed, so even if your opponent knows that you will play the Modern – with this book as your arsenal – you will probably diverge from “theory” first and therefore the element of surprise will be on your side.

### What I have tried to do

Before writing this book I didn't really know a lot of “theory” on the Modern. I just knew some ideas and used the ones best suited for the occasion. However, as I was writing a book I thought it might be wise to look up some of the more accepted theory. What I found came as something of a revelation. Every half an hour I would come across something which made me go “aah!” or “is that so?” or – more often – “I don't believe that!”. I was positively shocked at how many misconceptions exist about this opening! The result is that I often disagree with the opinions of famous players who have annotated a6-Modern games in *Informant*, *ChessBase* and other places. At first I pointed out every such disagreement, but I soon realised that the book would become too polemical and therefore I removed most of these comments. Also I have not pointed out which moves are “theoretical novelties” because there are so many and because the concept of TN's is not very important in this opening.

I have tried to explain the a6-Modern systems in such a way that everyone should be able to understand it, but I have not tried to cover everything about the Modern Defence on these pages. On the contrary this is a very narrow book that deals with only a fraction of the existing

alternatives. Probably some of you will wonder: “But why don't you mention Mr 2650+ against Mr 2600+, somewhere, sometime?” The answer is – if I just have not missed it – that I believe it is not such an important game. I have not tried to write an encyclopaedia on the Modern. This is about the a6-lines and only more where necessary.

Playing these lines is a constant struggle. Occasionally I wake up thinking, “it's crap – I must find something else”, but then, a few mornings later (after some hard work) I wake up thinking “It's alive! It's a miracle!” and so it goes on. Don't let the first of these mornings scare you. If you are not too lazy the other kind of morning is waiting around the corner. As Shaw put it: “...all progress depends on the unreasonable man”.

### A very short history of the a6-Modern

There were many strong GMs and other notable players who used set-ups with a6 in the Modern before me. In the sixties there was Ivkov and Ujtelky, in the seventies Surtles and Keene used a6 in the Classical Pirc, but it was not until the eighties that players like Seirawan, Speelman and McNab developed the ideas further. In the nineties Mikhail Gurevich and Azmaiparashvili were the main champions of the a6 systems, but today there are few who play it regularly at a high level. I believe the reason for this has nothing to do with the objective value of the opening, but rather reflects a general tendency towards choosing more solid and less ambitious set-ups with Black.

You will soon notice that this book to a high degree consists of my own games. That is partly because I know these games better than others and partly because they best illustrate the ideas I promote here: how to walk the a6-Modern road. It is not the only road, but it is mine and I am hoping for some company.

### The Pirc and the Modern with c6 versus the Modern with a6

There are three main ways to play with g6 against 1.e4. Each of these has its advantages and

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disadvantages. One way to compare them is to see how they deal with White's most flexible set-up: 4.♙e3

### Modern with a6

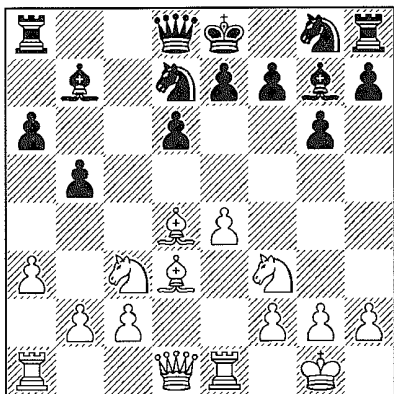
1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.♖c3 d6 4.♙e3 a6!

The idea behind this move is similar to 4...a6 in the Sicilian Najdorf. Black intends to expand on the queenside with b5 and attack the e4-pawn with ♗b7, ♖f6 and maybe b5-b4. There is only one problem with that set-up here: White can meet ♖f6 with e4-e5. Therefore Black must weaken White's control of the e5-square before playing ♖f6. This is done by playing ♗b7, ♖d7 and then c5, intending to exchange the c-pawn for White's d-pawn. In this way Black undermines White's d-pawn, gains control of e5, and then the knight can go to f6 without fearing e4-e5. Note that this idea would be absolutely worthless if White's knight was not on c3 already.

5.♖f3 b5 6.a3?!

This wastes an important tempo. As we shall see in later chapters, it is better for White to protect the e-pawn with ♗d3 and then attack b5 with a2-a4.

6...♗b7 7.♗d3 ♖d7 8.0-0 c5 9.♗e1 cxd4 10.♗xd4



We are following G. Thorhallsson – Hillarp Persson, Icelandic Team Championship 2003.

Black has achieved an excellent dynamic *Sicilian Dragon structure*. Now both 10...♖gf6 and 10...♗xd4 11.♖xd4 ♖gf6 are excellent for Black, but I chose a more ambitious continuation:

10...e5!?

After 10...♖gf6 11.e5 White is able to open the centre when Black's structural advantage is clearly diminished.

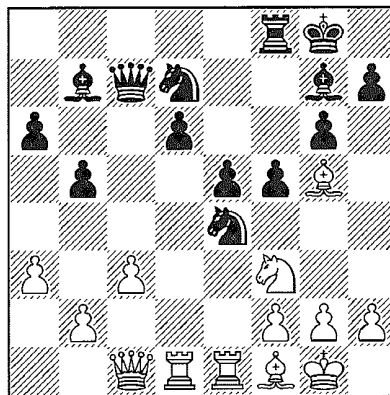
11.♙e3 ♖gf6 12.♗d2 0-0 13.♗ad1 ♗c8

Because I am attacking e4 with both my bishop and knight it is difficult for White to move the d3-bishop and attack my d6-pawn. *It is generally a big advantage to know something about Sicilian structures when playing the Modern with a6!*

14.♙g5 ♗b6 15.♙f1 ♗xc3!

It is also possible to play 15...♗c6, but the text is even stronger.

16.♗xc3 ♖xe4 17.♗e3 ♗c7 18.c3 f5 19.♗c1



And now, instead of playing 19...d5, Black could have played 19...f4 with fantastic compensation for the exchange. This game is a good example of what Black is hoping for and what White should fear. If you would like to learn the finer points of the position after 4...a6 you should look up the Flexible Dragon chapters.

## Tiger's Modern

### Pirc move order

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6

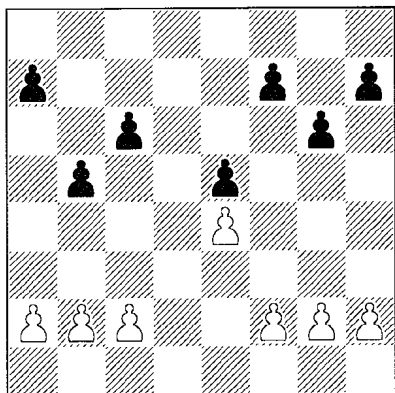
The main advantage of the Pirc compared to the Modern is that here White is forced to protect the e4-pawn and does not have time to play 3.c4 leaving Black with a choice to either play the Averbakh line or the King's Indian.

3.♗c3 g6 4.♙e3

4.♙g5 is much more dangerous here than against the Modern and 4.f4 leaves Black fighting for equality in long theoretical lines.

4...c6

With this move, which is by far the most common in grandmaster practice, Black intends to continue with e7-e5 and – if allowed – b7-b5. This kind of position is similar to the Philidor and is rather solid for Black. On the downside – after the exchange of the d-pawns - the pawn structure becomes symmetrical:

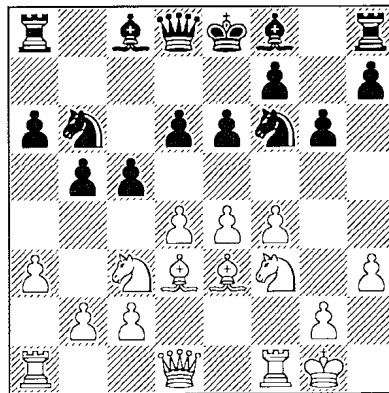


There is nothing especially wrong with this structure, but the weaker player is much more likely to get away with a draw in a symmetrical position than in an unbalanced (Sicilian) position. The system I recommend in this book seldom leads to symmetry and also avoids the vast theoretical bulk of the Sicilian mainland.

5.h3(!) ♗bd7 6.f4

This position is critical for Black.

6...b5 7.a3 a6 8.♗f3 ♗b6 9.♙d3 e6 10.0-0 c5



and Alburtt and Chernin claim that Black is okay and even better after

11.f5 exf5 12.exf5 c4 13.fxg6 hxg6 14.♙e2 ♗bd5 15.♙g5 ♙e7

That could well be true in the final position, but I cannot believe that Black can be fine with such weak dark squares (...e6 and ...d6 in combination with ...c5 leads to the weakening of d6 and f6 since White can play e5 and ♗e4). Both 10.♗e2 and 11.dxc5 are huge improvements, when I find Black's position absolutely horrible.

### Modern with c6

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♙g7 3.♗c3 c6

The idea behind this move order is to continue with d7-d5 and start an immediate attack on White's centre.

4.♙e3

Both 4.♙c4 and 4.f4 are slightly better for White here and after 4.♗f3 Black has to play for a symmetrical structure with e5.

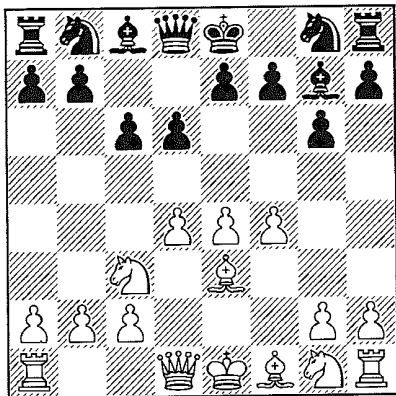
4...d6

The position after 4...d5 5.e5 ♗h6 6.f4 has proven to be rather critical for Black during the last few years and I believe it is about to decline rapidly in popularity.

5.f4!



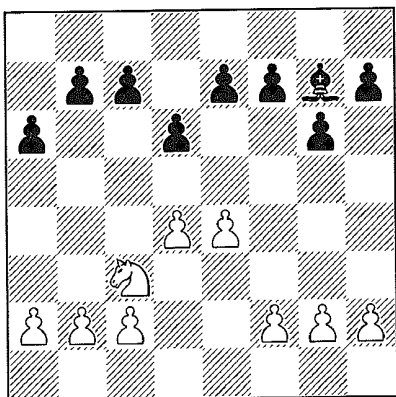
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After this Black has an unpleasant choice between aiming for a Sicilian set-up with a6 and c5 (which will lose a tempo compared to the a6-Modern where c5 is played in one go) or play e5 which is very awkward and difficult to achieve since White has much more space and will soon be ahead in development.

**Conclusions:** If you prefer an unbalanced pawn structure with many dynamic possibilities then you should absolutely choose the a6-lines over the two others. If you do not like to learn lots and lots of sharp theoretical lines you should play the a6-lines. If you do not want to worry about missing the latest novelty, then it's still a6-lines.

### Typical ideas for White in the a6-Modern



Here I will try to explain a few of the general ideas for Black in the a6-system. The basic structure of these lines is something like this:

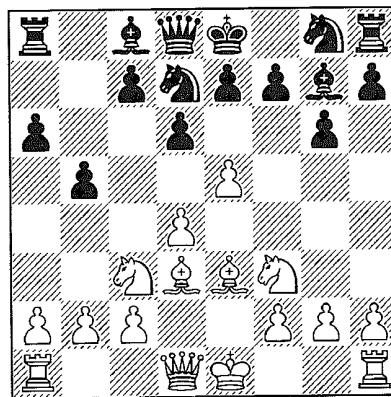
White has a wide range of different set-ups to choose from here but Black sticks to the same scheme again and again: ♖d7, ♗b7, c5 and – when the d4 pawn has move or is exchanged – ♗f6.

### White plays e4-e5

This is White's main threat in the Pirc when Black has developed the knight to f6, but in the Modern-a6 lines Black tries to undermine d4 before developing ♗g8-f6. Therefore it is uncommon that White plays e4-e5 against the Modern (outside of the "Austrian" f4-line).

However if White plays e4-e5 it is important to be aware of the threat e5-e6.

### Levin – Rausis (Game 24)



There are two ways to react to this threat. The first is to play e7-e6 yourself thus stopping White's plan. This leads to a slight weakening of the d6- and f6-squares but is sometimes good anyway. The second is to allow White to play e6, play fxe6 and if White proceeds to attack it with ♗g5 you can always protect it with ♗f8. In general I allow e5-e6 as Black, if in the meantime I can attack the d4-pawn (see Games 1 and 7).

If you answer e5 with e6 you should generally continue with dxe5 and if dxe5 then bind White

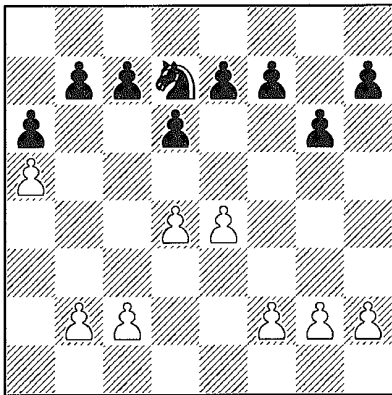
to the defence of the e-pawn. It is generally a good idea to play h6 in this kind of position not to allow White the option of ♖g5 and ♜c4, threatening to jump in on f6.

### White plays d4-d5

This is very uncommon before Black has played e5 or c5. There is only one situation where Black should watch out for d5 (after b5 or b6) and that is if White can play ♜g1-f3-d4 and stop Black from achieving c6. Even then Black can generally play 0-0, ♖e8 and e6, with interesting play.

### White plays a2-a4 before Black plays b5

With this move Black is stopped from playing b5. In most cases Black should answer a4 with b6 not allowing a4-a5, which would benefit White:



If Black plays b5 here then axb6 leaves Black with the unpleasant choice of cxb6, which leaves White with the clearly better pawn structure, or ♜xb6, which is even worse in structural terms. It is only when Black is clearly ahead in development and can attack White's centre that it is not important to stop a5 (see the Flexible Dragon Restrained, Game 28).

### White plays a2-a4 after Black has played b5

Black has three ways to meet this attack on the b-pawn.

a) b4 Hitting ♜c3. This is generally the best way to meet a4. After the knight has moved Black continues either c5 or a5.

b) c6 Defending b5 (only if ♖b7 has been played). This is a common plan in the Pirc, but in the Modern I have only found one instance where it is the best thing to do (Flexible Dragon Unleashed, Game 16).

c) bxa4 This is very ugly, totally ruining Black's pawn structure and yet it is sometimes the best way to deal with a4. In a Sicilian structure it might be better to get rid of the b-pawn rather than having to protect it on b4.

### White plays h2-h4

With this move White intends h4-h5, which would rule out short castling for Black. There are three ways to meet this threat.

a) ♜f6 After this move Black is vulnerable to the e4-e5 push, but if you feel you can get away with it you should do it.

b) h5 This stops h4-h5 for a long time, but weakens the g5 square and makes the e4-e5-e6 idea more dangerous since g6 has been weakened. If you can stop White from launching the e-pawn to e6, then this is often the best option.

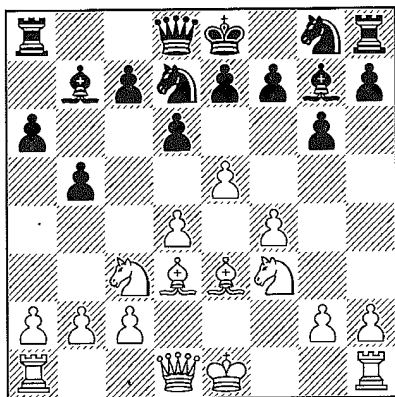
c) h6 Intending to meet h4-h5 with g5. This is generally the best option when White has a knight on f3.

### White plays b2-b4 against b5

This is very uncommon and very seldom good, but it can be quite annoying, as a2-a4 can no longer be met with b4. It is enough to be aware that the idea exists.

## Typical Black counter strikes

Black plays c7-c5



White is threatening  $\text{d}2\text{g}5$  followed by e6.

**8...c5!**

Allowing White the opportunity to carry out his plan, but he will have to pay the price of the destruction of his centre.

**9.d2g5?!**

It was better to play  $9.\text{d}2\text{e}4$ .

**9...cxd4! 10.e6 f5!**

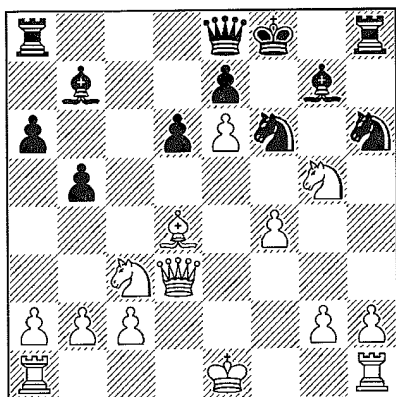
A typical manoeuvre in this kind of position.

**11.gxf5**

Black is clearly better after  $11.\text{d}2\text{f}7 \text{c}7\text{b}6$   
 $12.\text{d}2\text{h}8 \text{d}2\text{c}5$ .

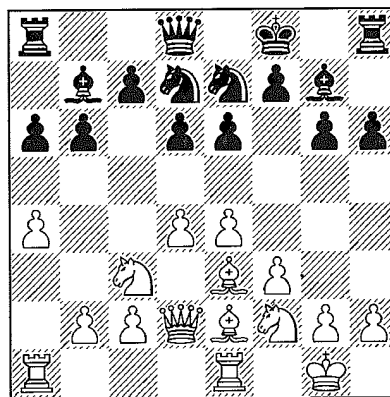
**11...d2df6 12.gxf5+ hxg6 13.c7d3 d2h6**

**14.c7xg6+ d2f8 15.gxf5d4 c7e8 16.c7d3**



So far we have followed San Segundo – Hillarp Persson, Elista Olympiad 1998, and now I could have gained a big advantage with  $16...b4$   $17.\text{d}2\text{e}2$   $\text{c}7\text{b}5$ . (See also the notes to the ninth move in Game 5.)

Black plays d6-d5



This position is from analysis of the game Couso – Åkesson, Swedish Championship 2001 (Game 38).

**12...d5!**

This is good here for two reasons: after  $13.\text{e}5?! \text{c}5$  White is unable to defend his centre in an acceptable way and after  $14.\text{exd}5 \text{exd}5!$  Black is ready to play  $\text{d}2\text{f}5$  and  $\text{c}5$  and there is little White can do to stop this since his pieces are stepping on each other's toes.

**13.gxf1 d2g8**

Preparing to play  $\text{c}5$  without having to worry about  $\text{g}2\text{e}3\text{-f}4\text{-d}6$ .

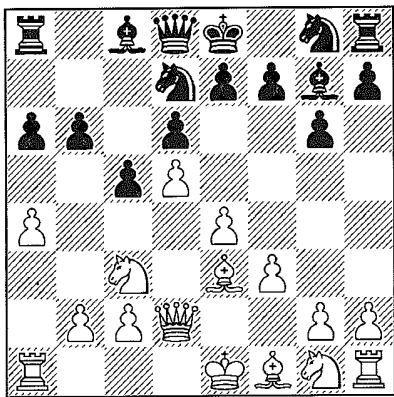
**14.d2g4**

What else can White play?

**14...h5! 15.d2h6+ d2f8**

And the white knight is in trouble on h6. In general, it is fine to play  $\text{d}2\text{d}5$  if you can follow up with  $\text{c}5$  when White plays  $\text{e}5$ .

**Black plays f7-f5**



White has just played **8.d5** and threatens to play  $\text{♖g1-h3-f2}$  when Black is left without counterplay because it is almost impossible to achieve either b5 or e6.

**8...♗e5!**

Stopping White from going  $\text{♗h3}$ .

**9.h3**

Threatening to play f4 on the next move.

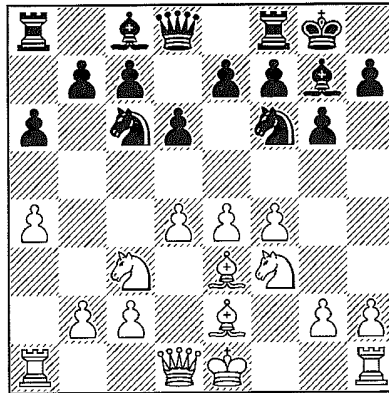
**9...f5!!**

Without this move Black is positionally lost. For instance  $8...♗g6$   $9.f4$   $♗ed7$   $10.♗f3$  and Black has no counterplay whatsoever. Now Black can put the knight on f7 where it is not in the way of the other pieces and at the same time White's centre is under attack.

**10.f4 ♗f7 11.exf5 ♗xf5 12.g4**

And in Sion Castro – Hillarp Persson, Mondariz 1995 (Game 22), Black could have achieved a good game with  $12...♗c8$ .

**Black plays e7-e5**



There is nothing wrong with  $8...b6$  followed by e6 in this position, but it is also possible to break up the white centre immediately:

**8...e5! 9.fxe5 dxe5 10.dxe5**

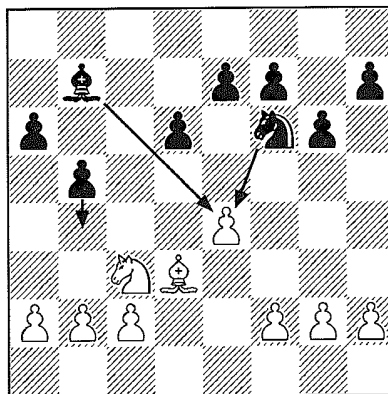
After  $10.d5$   $♗e7$  Black continues  $\text{♗f6-e8-d6}$ , h6 and f5 with a reasonable position.

**10...♗g4 11.♗xd8 ♗xd8 12.♗c5 ♗e8 13.♗d5 ♗e6 14.♗a3 ♗d7**

And Black was doing fine in Mendoza – Hillarp Persson, Yerevan Olympiad 1996.

**Standard structures**

It is a good idea to be familiar with the different structures of the a6-Modern. The basic structure that Black strives for is approximately this:



In this position Black has achieved an excellent Sicilian structure with pressure against the e4-pawn. White has to do something about b5-b5 winning the e4-pawn, but then Black can either play e5 and d5, opening up the centre for his bishops, or play ♖a8-c8xc3 and ♕xe4 in similar style to the Sicilian.

Another common structure is when White has attacked b5 with a4 and Black plays b4. This structure is further discussed in the Flexible Dragon Restrained chapter.

In Game 32 in the Classical chapter White meets c5 with d5, continues with a4 in order to weaken Black's control of the c4-square and then carries out the manoeuvre ♖c3-b1-d2-c4. This is rather uncommon, but it is important to see the danger in advance or Black might end up in a horrible bind since – after ♖c4 – it is almost impossible to play c6 and break up the centre.

In the Hippopotamus chapter Black plays e6 and ♕e7 and White has two ways to try to break down Black's defence: d4-d5 and e4-e5. After d4-d5 Black should generally close the centre with e5 and play on the kingside, but this is only true as long as the b-pawn is still on b7 or b6. If the b-pawn is on b5 it is important to be able to play c6 and open the centre before White can break up Black's queenside with b4 and a4!

Finally, I have concocted a few "rules of thumb" to keep in mind when playing the a6-Modern lines:

Do not play b5-b4 unprovoked unless you have good reasons for it (winning a pawn for instance).

After b5 it is more important to achieve ♖d7 and c5 than it is to play ♕b7.

Do not hurry to develop the g8-knight. After ♖f6 you are more vulnerable to ♕e3, ♖d2 and ♕h6, and e4-e5.

Do not hurry to castle, especially if White can still castle long. As long as the black king stays in the centre White cannot launch all his kingside pawns counting on check and mate.

Do not mix b5 and e5 (although there are exceptions to this rule).

Do not play e6 unless it is necessary: it weakens the dark squares on d6 and f6.

If you play b5 the bishop should not go to g4.

Sometimes you will get the chance to play ♕xc3 followed by ♕xc4, winning a pawn. Although it is risky to swap the dark-squared bishop in this way, there is nothing in general that can be said against it. You have to assess every position as unique.

Finally: Blow up White's centre.

And now a few "rules of thumb" for White:

Do not be nervous about b7-b5: it is both an asset and a weakness for Black.

If you allow b7-b5, do not fear b5-b4. Just keep the c4-pawn protected and do not play a3.

Do not throw your central pawns forward unless it is part of a clear plan.

Think prophylactically. Black's position is like a tightly-coiled spring, so you must be prepared for anything.

Do not forget your centre.

I wish you good hunting with the Modern.

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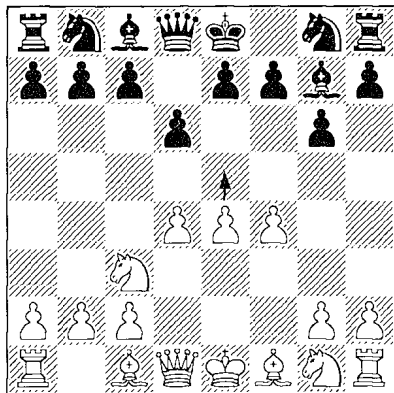
# Chapter 1

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## f4 – Austrian Style

When learning a new opening I believe the best strategy is to look at the most critical stuff first.

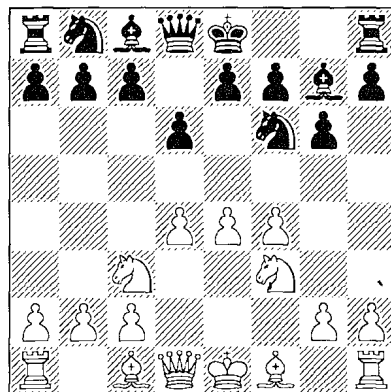
1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♖g7 3.♘c3 d6 4.f4



This is by far the most brutal way to meet the Modern. Aggressive guys like Jonny Hector and Nick De Firmian plays this every time they get the chance. So what's the idea? Well, I guess you've heard of something called the "centre". Actually, if Black does not find a way to strike back at those Three Musketeers, he will find himself nicely wrapped and ready for the trashcan by move fifteen. So, what to do? First of all, I find it illogical to put the knight on f6 since that is exactly what White is hoping for. (With this opinion I plead allegiance to a very small minority indeed – I will not bore you with statistics – and now we proceed to ignore 9/10 of the current theory in this position by going...)  
4...a6!

To fully appreciate this beautiful and provocative move one has to compare it to the alternatives! The main line here is to enter the Pirc by playing:  
4...♘f6

But we're not! Why, you might ask? Because after  
5.♘f3



Black can choose between many different lines where White generally keeps a small plus. Most f4-players return to the scene of the crime again and again, so they know their theory after 4...♘f6 pretty well. One famous book on the Pirc/Modern spends almost eighty pages on lines with 4...♘f6 and a mere three pages on the 4...a6-lines this chapter will concentrate on. Play 4...♘f6 against a hardened f4-player and you will face a long, uphill struggle even though, objectively speaking, Black has reasonable chances to equalize. In the a6-lines your opponent will find the ground less solid.

Another line we are more or less going to ignore is:  
4...c6!?

A move that can be used in two different ways:

1) Black continues with b5, ♖d7, a6/b4 and c5, a similar idea to the one advocated in this chapter, but comparatively worse. To achieve c6-c5 Black must play either b4 or a6, so that the b5-pawn is not just hanging. The former option weakens the light squares and the latter transposes to an a6-setup where Black has wasted a tempo on c6. If White plays a4 early in the game then 4...c6 has some advantages over 4...a6, but I will explain that later.

2) After 5.♗f3 Black launches a direct attack on the d-pawn with 5...♙g4 followed by ♖b6. This might seem alluring, but the position after 6.♙e3 ♖b6 7.♗d2 ♙xf3 8.gxf3 has sadly turned out to be very passive for Black.

I find these other options less interesting and have, with one exception, stayed true to 4...a6 during my 12-year adventure with the Modern.

After

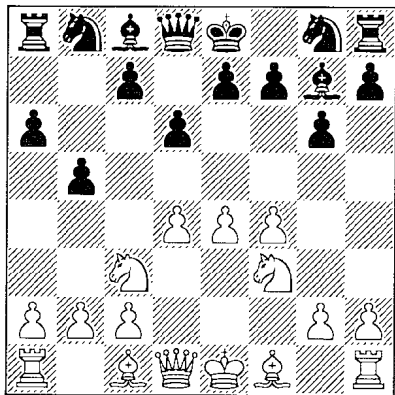
4...a6

play generally continues

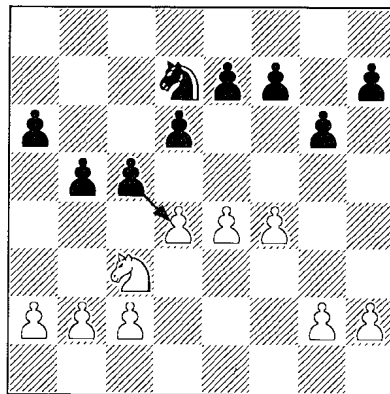
5.♗f3

This is by far the most logical and common move, but 5.a4 and 5.♙e3, with the idea ♙f1-e2-f3, are also played rather frequently.

5...b5!



This looks even more provocative than Black's last move, but it has its intrinsic logic: it prepares ♙b7 when b5-b4, winning the e4-pawn, is threatened. The next step is to cripple White's centre by playing ♗d7 followed by c5



so that when the d4-pawn is exchanged or moves to d5, Black gets control of the e5-square and can play ♗f6 without worrying about e4-e5. In effect, Black intends to enter a Sicilian structure with a double fianchetto and knights on f6/d7, follow up with ♖c8 and then strike at White's centre.

White, on the other hand, has a much wider choice:

**♗f3, ♙d3 and e4-e5 followed by ♗g5, trying to force c5-e6** (Games 1, 2 and 7):

This plan is critical but Black has two plausible replies: either play c5 and cxd4 meeting e5-e6 with f5 (Games 1 and 7) or answer ♗g5 with ♗h6 (Game 2): Both ways lead to unbalanced positions where both players have to take risks.

**♗f3, ♙d3 and e4-e5-e6 followed by ♗g5** (comments to eight and ninth move in Games 1 and 7):

I am not worried about this idea. If Black has already played c7-c5 then ♗g5 can be met with ♙xd4 and ♙xc3†, and otherwise ♗g5 can be met by ♗f8, generally speaking.

**f3 and e5, followed by d3-e4** (Games 3, 4 and 5):

This is a popular plan that should be taken seriously. 9.d3 (Game 3) is not to be feared. Much more critical is 9.0-0 (Game 4) when Black is forced to play an exchange sacrifice, or 7...b7 rather than 7...c5. The line featured in Game 5 is also very complicated and I recommend 9...xe4 10.h4 h6 rather than 9...c8 when White seems to keep some advantage.

**f3 and e5, followed by exd6** (Game 6):

To me giving up the centre like this looks rather ridiculous and there is nothing in Game 6 to make me change my mind.

**f3, d3, e2 and e5** (Game 7):

This idea is not very effective if Black plays d7 and c5 before b7, but even if Black spends time on b7 there seems to be nothing wrong with the position.

**f3, d3, e3, and 0-0** (Game 8):

Black gets a comfortable game here.

**f3, d3, e3 and e2** (Game 9):

This was my biggest headache for some time, but I think that Black can get a reasonable game with either 6...d7 and c5, or with 8...b4 and finally with 14...d8 in the main line.

**f1-e2-f3 intending to exchange the b7-bishop** (Games 10, 11 and 12):

This has become quite popular since Morozevich won a few games with this idea in the late nineties. Games 10 and 11 deal with Black's best answers to this plan while Game 12 is included in order to warn the reader not to follow the accepted theory in this line (or any a6-Modern line really). So instead of 6...b4 I recommend 6...d7, intending to meet e5 with e6 and f3 with e5. Black gets a good game in both cases.

**f3, d3, followed by a2-a4, attacking b5** (Game 13):

In this line White intends to build a strong position behind the centre before starting the action with e5 or f5. It is one of the most dangerous lines and Black has to play precisely to avoid a really bad position. The main game features 8...e6, but both 8...a5 and 8...b7 followed by g6 might be better.

**5.a4, stopping b7-b5** (Games 14 and 15):

In Game 14 Black could have equalised comfortably with 10...b7. The position after 5...b6 6.f4 in Game 15 should really be avoided. The best move is 5...f6, as seen in the chapter on the Flexible Dragon Restrained.

For those who would like a complete overview of this chapter I recommend that you look at the end of it.

## Game 1

### Ghannoum – Hillarp Persson

Internacional de Sants 2004

**1.e4 g6 2.d4 g7 3.d3 d6 4.f4 a6! 5.f3**

After the extremely uncommon, but not bad, 5.d4 I recommend 5...e6 6.a4 e7 7.e5 d7 followed by b7 or d6-d5/c7-c5.

**5...b5!**

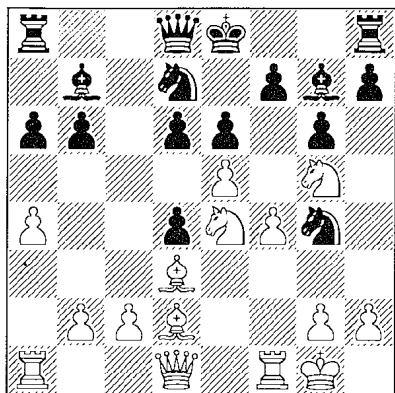
I cannot recommend 5...d7 because of 6.a4! b6 7.d4! when we have a structure similar to that in Turov – Hillarp (Game 15), but with important differences: White has not played d3 and d2, which makes him much better placed to punish Black for being too meek. Lars Thiede has tried 5...d7 6.a4 e6!?, but I do not like this position after, for example, 7.a5. Generally I try to avoid playing e7-e6 for as long as possible. There are two reasons for this:

1) If White plays e4-e5 it will be much more difficult for Black to get in the thematic c7-c5 since the dark squares – especially d6 – are weak:



## Anand – Hillarp Persson

Benidorm 2003



Position after 13. dce4

In this position there was nothing I could do to protect myself against dxd6, but generally speaking things should never get quite this bad as long as you play either e6 or c5, and do not mix them too early on.

2) There are quite a few strong players who answer e4-e5 with e7-e6, as they prefer to stop White from playing c5-e6. I try to avoid e7-e6 altogether, but it is indeed better to play it after, rather than before, White has played e4-e5. The reason for this is that White then no longer has the option f4-f5, which can be quite annoying for Black.

**6. d3 d7!**

For no good reason this is less common than 6... b7, when I believe 7.a4 (see Game 13) gives White the advantage.

**7. e5!?**

This leads to very complicated play and is very dangerous for both sides. After 7.0 0 c5 8.dxc5 dxc5 9. e3 Black should avoid 9... dxd3 10.cxd3 with a slight advantage to White. Instead 9... b7! is fine and leads to Game 7.

**7...c5!**

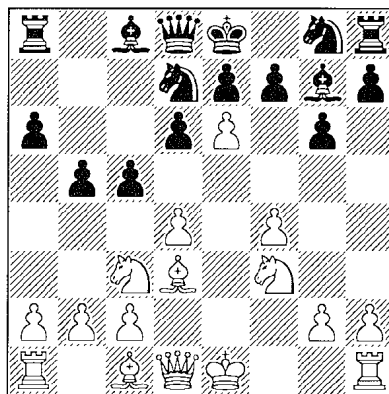
It is not too late to play 7... b7 (see comment in Game 4), but 7...c5 is much more fun! A third

alternative is the quite common (and bad) 7...e6. I believe this move should never be played unless White has done something "slow" like a3 or h3 and possibly after e3. But even then I would not recommend it.

Here 7...e6 is just bad because the standard reaction 8.a4! b4 9. e4 leaves Black wondering what to do. In Bareev – Lauticr, Cap d'Agde 2002, play continued 9...d5 10. d2 c5 11.dxc5 with a slight advantage to White. Still, I do not understand why Bareev did not simply play 11.c3! with a clear advantage.

**8. d5!**

White has another I am-coming-for-you-now move in 8.e6!?, which Dan Östergaard played against me in the Swedish Team Championship 1993/94:



The game continued:

8...fxe6 9. d5 e4!

The alternative 9... d8 10.dxc5 e7 (Not 10...dxc5? 11. d7! e7? 12. e6 when White wins the queen) is ugly and hardly recommendable.

10. dxe6

White gains nothing by 10. e4 b8 and 10. d7! e3 11.bxc3 d8 12. d8 e8 13. f3 b8 14. g3 d6 is very unclear.

10... e3 11.bxc3 b6 12. f3 e7? 13. g3 d8 14. d8 e8 15. f5! gx5 16. e5

and I was duly routed. Afterwards I discovered

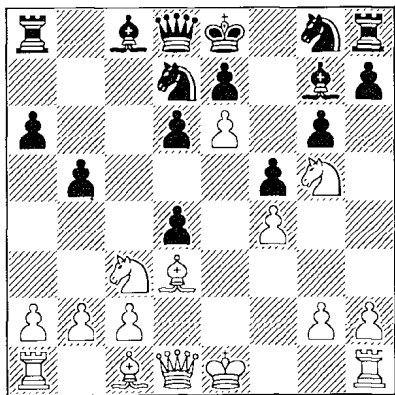
that 12...d5! 13.♖xd5 ♘b7 14.♗g7† ♔d8 15.♖f7 ♗g6 would have given me the advantage.

### 8...cxd4!?

This is extremely sharp. The more solid 8...♗h6 is seen in the next game.

### 9.e6 f5!

I have used this idea (meeting e6 with f5, sacrificing the d7-knight) three times, scoring 2½/3 against two GMs and this dangerous Canadian guy. In Game 7 we see the same idea in a position where the moves ♖e2 and ♘b7 have been inserted and in Game 5, commenting on the 9th move, we encounter it once again with the moves ♘e3 and ♘b7 inserted. In these two other games f7-f5 gives Black a nice game, but here I am not so sure. White has some really nasty threats here and ♘b7, as in the two other games, seems to be a more important move for Black than ♖e2 or ♘e3 is for White. You play this variation at your own risk.



### 10.♗d5!?

There are three alternatives:

a) 10.exd7† ♘xd7 11.♗b1 (neither 11.♗d5 h6 nor 11.♗e2 e5 impress) 11...e5 12.0-0 ♗c7 and White has some problems disentangling his pieces. I believe this is the critical line, but it has yet to be tried in practice.

b) 10.♘xf5! Now Black defends successfully with 10...♗df6! 11.♘e4 (11.♘g6†?! hxc6 12.♖d3 ♗f8 13.♖xc6 ♖e8 is excellent for

Black.) 11...d5! 12.♗f7 ♖a5 13.♖xd4 ♘xe6 14.♗g5 (14.♘xd5 ♘xd5 15.b4 ♖c7 16.♗xd5 ♖c6 is better for Black.) 14...♗h5 15.♖c3 ♘xc3† 16.bxc3 ♗g6 17.♘g6† hxc6 18.♗xe6 ♖c8 with an unclear mess.

c) 10.♖f3?! dxc3 11.b3 ♗b6 12.♖c6† ♗f8 13.♗f/ ♘d7! 14.♗xd8 ♘xc6 15.♗xc6 ♗f6 with a clear advantage for Black.

I was only really worried about line a.

### 10...♗c5 11.♗f7

Black is fine after 11.♘xf5 ♘b7 12.♗f7 ♖b8 13.♗xh8 ♘xd5 14.♗xc6 hxc6 15.♘g6† ♗d8!.

### 11...♘xc6 12.♗xd8 ♘xd5

It is not everybody's cup of tea to play a position like this, but "objectively" I believe I am fine here. I control the centre and my pieces will soon find active squares. On the other hand, White faces a scenario quite opposite from Black's. If only he could get in a2-a4 or exchange a few pieces... Yeah, try me!

### 13.0-0 ♖xd8 14.b3

Another interesting possibility is 14.♘e2! with the double idea of exchanging Black's strong d5-bishop and playing c2-c3. Black's best answer seems to be 14...e6 when 15.♘f3 ♗e7 16.♖e1 0-0 17.♘d2 ♖fe8 is indeed unclear.

### 14...♗h6!?

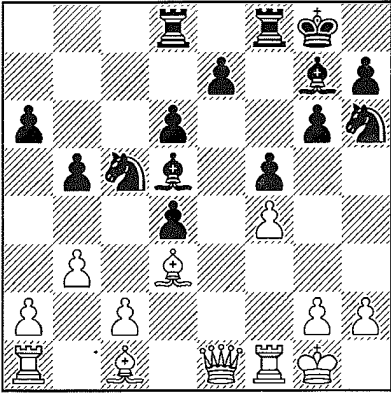
A more logical move is 14...♗f6 when I was afraid of 15.♘b2 e5 16.a4 bxa4 17.b4 ♗xd3 18.♖xd3. But with the advantage of hindsight I now believe 18...0-0 19.♖xa6 ♖c8 is all right for Black.

### 15.♖e1!?

After this move I even prefer Black's position. Better was 15.♖e1 when I am not sure how to prove compensation for Black.

### 15...0-0!??

(See diagram next page.)



This is not necessary, but I did not think twice about giving up material that day. 15...♖c8 is stronger.

**16.a4?!**

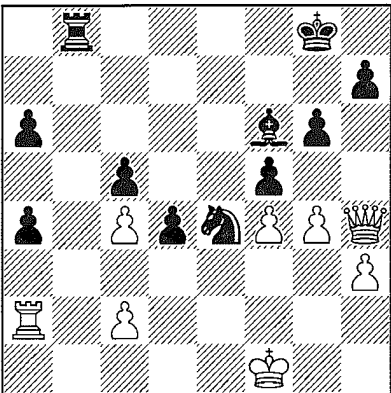
White should try 16.♙e7 ♜f8 17.♙h4 ♘g4 18.♙e1 when the case is still open.

**16...bxa4 17.♙c4? ♙xc4 18.bxc4 ♘g4?!**

The game is turning into something of a comedy of errors. 18...♜f8! followed by ♜c8 and ♘e4 keeps an advantage for Black.

**19.h3 ♘f6 20.♙xe7 ♘fe4 21.♙b2 ♙d7 22.♙h4 ♙b7 23.♙a2 ♜fb8 24.♙a3 ♙b1 25.♙xc5 ♜xf1†**

A safer and better option was 25...♙f6 26.♙xf6 ♘xf6 27.♙xd4 ♘h5 28.♙xa4 ♘xf4 29.♙xb1 ♙xb1† 30.♘h2 ♘e6 with an extra pawn for Black in the endgame. Now the game should be a draw. **26.♘xf1 dxc5?! 27.g4! ♙f6**



**28.♙e1?**

White blunders (in my time trouble). 28.g5 ♙b1† 29.♘g2 ♙d8 30.♙xa4 a5 31.♙a3 ♙c1 32.♙b3 ♙xc2† 33.♘g1 ♙c1† 34.♘g2 h5!! 35.♙b8 a4 36.♙xd8† ♘f7 37.♙d7† ♘f8 38.♙d8† 38...♘e7 39.♙g8 ♘f7 40.♙d8 a3 (40...♙a1 41.♙d5! and Black is forced into a perpetual because of the threat ♙xf5†.) 41.♙a8 d3 42.♙a7† ♘e8 43.♙a8† ♘e7 44.♙a7 with a draw since it is dangerous for Black to try to cross the d-file: 44...♘d6?! 45.♙xa3 d2 46.♙d3† ♘c6 47.♙xd2 ♘xd2 48.♙g3 ♘xc4 49.♙f3† ♘b6 50.♙a8! and it might already be too late to save the game.

**28...♙b1 29.♙xa4 ♙xc1† 30.♘xe1 ♙h4† 31.♘f1 ♙g3**

**0-1**

Was that too strong for you? Well, some days I feel that way too. Especially the line beginning with 10.exd7† needs to be taken seriously and I cannot guarantee that White is not capable of improving on my analysis somewhere. It might prove to be lucky that Black has an alternative to 8...cxd4 in the reliable 8...♘h6, as seen in the next game.

## Game 2

### Yemelin – Chepukaitis

St Petersburg 2001

The Black player in this game is primarily famous for being a strong blitz-player, but I think he should also get a lot of credit for developing the a6-Modern lines.

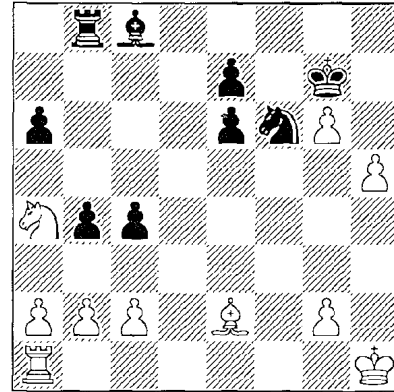
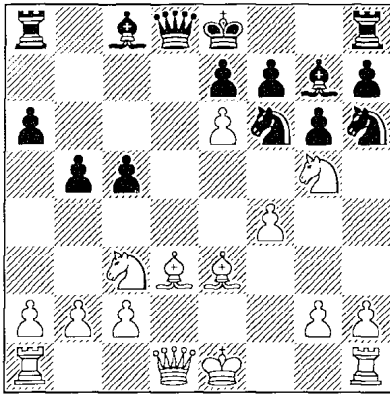
**1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♙g7 3.♘c3 d6 4.f4 a6 5.♘f3 b5 6.♙d3 ♘d7 7.e5 c5 8.♘g5 ♘h6?!**

**9.e6**

Later Yemelin tried to improve with 9.♙f3 against Mehmedovic, in Neum 2002. The game continued 9...♙b8 (9...cxd4!? is messy) 10.e6 ♘f6 11.dxc5 fxc6 12.cxd6 exd6 13.0-0 0-0 14.♘ce4 ♘xe4 15.♙xe4 and now, instead of 15...e5 as in the game, I think 15...♘f5 must be slightly better for Black.

**9...♘f6 10.dxc5 dxc5 11.♙e3**

I prefer Black after 11. ♖f3 ♙xe6 12. ♗xc6 fxe6 13. ♖c6† ♗f7 14. ♖xc5 ♖c8 15. ♖a7 ♗d6 and 11. exf7† ♗xf7 12. ♖f3 ♙d7 13. ♗xf7 ♗xf7 also looks nice.



11... ♖c7?

Black blunders in an excellent position. He would have been better after 11... ♙xe6 12. ♗xc6 fxe6 13. ♙xc5 ♗d5 when Black's coordination more than compensates for his weaker pawn structure.

12. ♖f3! ♖b8

Not 12... ♙b7? 13. exf7† ♗xf7 14. ♗c6 when Black is absolutely paralysed.

13. f5 fxe6 14. fxg6 0-0 15. ♗xh7 ♗xh7 16. ♖h3 ♗f6 17. ♙xh6 c4 18. 0-0 ♙xh6 19. ♖xh6 ♖c5† 20. ♗h1 ♖h5 21. ♖xh5 ♗xh5 22. ♖xf8† ♗xf8 23. ♙e2

White should be clearly better, or even winning, considering his potentially passed pawns on the kingside. Still, it is not so easy. Black controls the centre and is active on the queenside. I have had quite a few of these positions with Black and it often ends like in this game.

23... ♗f6 24. h4!

If Black is allowed to play ♗g8-g7xg6 then White is even slightly worse.

24... ♗g7 25. h5 b4 26. ♗a4?

From winning to worse in one move. After 26. ♗d1! ♖b5 27. g4 ♖g5 28. ♗f2 White is able to protect his g-pawn and Black would have to rely on divine intervention of the third kind.

26... ♖b5! 27. g4 ♖g5! 28. ♖g1 e5! 29. ♖g3?

This is cooperative, but 29. ♗b6 ♙xg4 30. ♙xg4 ♗xg4 followed by ♖xh5† is also difficult for White.

29... ♗xh5 30. ♖e3 ♗f6 31. ♗c5 a5 32. ♗h2 e4 33. ♗xe4 ♖e5 34. ♙f3 ♙xg4 35. ♗xf6

Maybe White lost on time or possibly he regarded the variation 35... ♖xe3 36. ♗e8† ♗xg6 37. ♙xg4 c3 38. b3 ♖d3!! as hopeless for him. Anyway...

0-1

Black's 11th move was really horrible, losing a pawn, but I think 11... ♙xe6 is a considerable improvement. Maybe I was wrong to give 8. ♗g5 an exclamation mark in Game 1?

In the next game White refrains from ♗g5.

### Game 3

Forster Bacrot

Bermuda 1999

1. e4 g6 2. d4 ♙g7 3. ♗c3 d6 4. f4 a6 5. ♗f3 b5 6. ♙d3

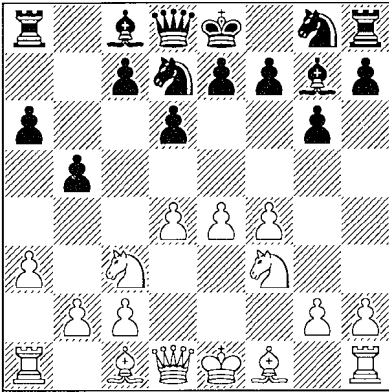
In the game Berelovich – Svidler, Azov 1996, White tried an interesting idea:

6. a3!?

This is far from critical and, being a devoted a6-fan, I feel rather provoked by such a passive

move. I would even go so far as to call it a waste of a tempo, but at the same time it is an integral part of a cunning plan.

6... ♖d7



7. ♕e2

It is only in combination with this move that 6.a3 makes sense. In Nolsoe – Hillarp Persson, Faroe Islands 1996, play continued: 7. ♕e3 ♖b7 8. ♕e2 ♜c8! 9. 0-0 c5 10. dxc5 ♖xc5 11. ♕d4 and Black should have played 11... ♗f6 and not 11... ♕xd4 12. ♗xd4 ♗f6, which led to roughly even chances.

7... ♖b7?!

I prefer 7... c5 8. d5 ♗b6 followed by ♗f6, 0-0 and e6 with a better position for Black.

8. 0-0

Without 6.a3 this would not have been possible here because of b5-b4 followed by ♖b7xe4.

8... c5!?

Svidler is bold and does not mind walking into virtually the only position where White can make some use of his meek 6th and 7th moves. Both 8... c6 and 8... ♗gf6 9. c5 ♗d5 are interesting.

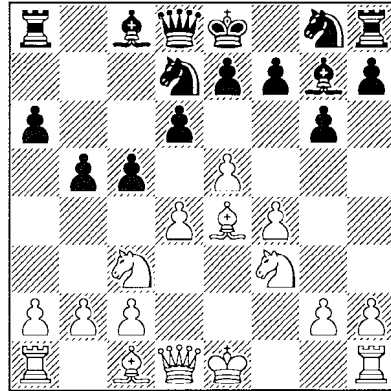
9. d5!

Now 6.a3 and 7. ♕e2 make perfect sense. a3 makes b4 less attractive and ♕e2 is not in the way of the queen so that 9... ♗gf6 can be met by 10. e5!. Still Black is OK.

9... ♗c7 10. ♖h1 ♗gf6 11. e5!

and the game became very unclear. I cannot pretend to give a precise verdict here.

6... ♗d7 7. e5 c5! 8. ♕e4!?



This is a very dangerous move especially if White continues with 9. 0-0 as seen in the next game.

8... ♗b8 9. ♕e3

This position, which often arises by different move orders, is not as critical as 9. 0-0 (see next game).

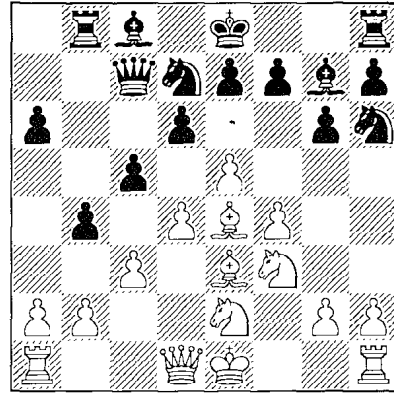
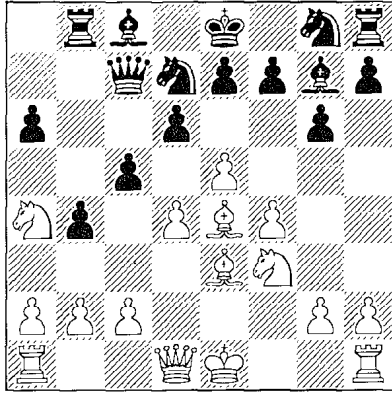
9... b4!

In Hoffmann – Ree, Netherlands 2001, there followed 9... ♗h6?! 10. dxc5! b4 11. ♗e2?! ♗g4 12. ♕g1 dxe5 with an unclear position. Unfortunately 11. ♗d5! ♗xc5 12. ♕xc5 dxc5 13. ♗e2 leaves Black with a mummified ♕g7 and weak c4-square, where White sooner or later is going to plant a most charming knight. Ouch, it is going to hurt!

10. ♗e2

In Sadvakasov – Nyback, Bled (ol) 2002, White chose an alternative square for the knight: 10. ♗a4!? ♗c7!

(See diagram next page.)



It is important for Black always to be able to answer  $dxc5$  with  $dxe5$ . Now, for example,  $11.dxc5 dxe5 12.fxc5 \text{d}xc5 13.0-0 \text{d}g4 14.\text{d}f4 e5$  is rather messy, but probably fine for Black. And  $12.c6 \text{d}df6$  is advantageous for Black. If Black plays  $10...\text{d}h6$  instead of  $10...\text{c}c7$  then  $11.dxc5 dxe5 12.c6 \text{d}df6 13.\text{c}xd8 \text{c}xd8 14.\text{d}a7$  is problematic for him.  $14...\text{a}a8$  loses to  $15.c7 \text{f}$  and  $14...\text{b}b5 15.\text{d}d3$  gives White a clear advantage.

$11.\text{d}g5 \text{d}h6$

This is one standard reaction to  $\text{d}g5$ , planning to meet  $e5$ - $e6$  with  $\text{d}f6$ .

$12.dxc5?!$

A small step towards catastrophe. After  $12.e6 \text{d}f6 13.dxc5 fxe6$  both sides have their chances.

$12...dxc5 13.0-0 0-0 14.\text{d}h1?$

My silicon companion recommends  $14.\text{c}c3 \text{d}f6 15.fxe5 \text{d}hg4 16.\text{d}f4 \text{d}xc5$ , but I would still place my dough on Black in this position.

$14...\text{d}f6 15.\text{d}f3 exf4 16.\text{d}g1 \text{d}f5$

Black's position is overwhelming. Back to the main game...

**$10...\text{d}h6?!$**

I recommend the move order  $10...\text{c}c7$  (threatening  $11...cxd4$  followed by  $...dxe5$ )  $11.c3 \text{d}h6$

Now  $12.dxc5$  can be answered with  $12...\text{d}xc5$  and thus avoid a symmetrical position where the e-pawns are still on the board (do not go there). In van Beers – Hillarp Persson, Bled (ol) 2002, play continued:

$12.h3?!$

After this move Black is walking on the sunny side of the street. Better is  $12.0-0$  since it is not clear what Black gains from  $12...\text{d}g4 13.\text{d}c1$ , though  $13...\text{b}b7$  should be fine.

$12...\text{b}b7!$

It is more important to fight for control of the central light squares than it is to castle. In my dreams I get my queen to  $e4$  and knights to  $f5$  and  $c4$ .

$13.\text{d}g3?!$

I prefer Black after  $13.\text{d}xb7 \text{c}xb7 14.0-0 \text{d}f5 15.\text{d}f2 bxc3 16.bxc3 0-0$ , but it is more a question of taste than an objective judgement (I know, I am sick, sick, sick...). Now Black gets at least an equal game.

$13...bxc3 14.bxc3 \text{d}xc4 15.\text{d}xc4 \text{c}c6! 16.\text{c}d3$

Black is better after  $16.d5?!$   $\text{c}b5 17.\text{c}e2 \text{d}f5 18.exd6 \text{d}f6!$  and  $16.\text{d}g3 0-0 17.0-0 \text{d}b6$  is about equal.

$16...\text{d}f5 17.\text{d}f2 \text{b}b2 18.\text{d}fd2$

No better is  $18.d5 \text{c}a4! 19.g4 dxe5 20.gxf5 gxf5 21.\text{d}xc5 \text{d}xc5 22.\text{d}xc5 e4 23.\text{c}e3 \text{c}c2$  when Black has more than enough compensation for the piece.

18...♙h6? 19.♖c4!

and White took hold of the initiative. Instead of 18...♙h6 I should have played 18...cxd4 19.cxd4 ♙h6! 20.d5 ♖a4 when White has two reasonable looking alternatives, which after closer scrutiny prove not to be reasonable at all:

a) 21.g4 ♙xf4 22.gxf5 ♖xe5 23.♗c3 ♖c2 24.♗b3 ♗xb3 25.axb3 ♖d3† 26.♙e2 ♖xf2 27.♙xf2 gxf5 and Black has a winning attack.

b) 21.♖c1 0-0 22.g4 ♙xf4 23.gxf5 ♖xe5 24.♗c3 ♗b5 and White's position is a wreck.

### 11.h3?!

The reason I recommend 10...♗c7 is because I believe White can gain the upper hand here with 11.dxc5! dxc5 12.h3 ♗c7 13.0-0-0 14.♗e1 when Black has no good pawn breaks and the knight is badly restricted on h6. Black can try to mix things up with 11...dxe5, but White has the initiative after 12.c6 ♖f6 13.♗xd8† ♙xd8 14.♙a7.

### 11...0-0 12.c3

After 12.0-0 ♗c7 13.c3 bxc3 14.bxc3 ♖b6 15.dxc5 dxc5 (I prefer 15...♖c4!? 16.cxd6 exd6 17.♙d4 ♖f5 with a promising position.) 16.♖g3 ♙e6 (16...f5!? must be played here or on the next move.) 17.♗c2 ♙c4?! 18.♖fd1 ♖fd8 19.♖d2 ♙b5 20.a4 White was clearly better in V. Gurevich – Shchekachev, Cappelle la Grande 1997. Black played too passively and did not take advantage of the dynamic possibilities in the position.

### 12...♖b6?!

Safer is 12...♗c7 with a transposition to van Beers – Hillarp Persson (10...♗c7).

### 13.♙f2?!

I have not been able to find anything convincing for Black after 13.dxc5! ♖c4 14.♗d4. Both 14...d5 15.♙b1 and 14...♖xe3 15.♗xe3 bxc3 16.b3! seem to give White an advantage.

### 13...bxc3 14.bxc3 ♖c4

Black has managed to establish a foothold on the c4-square and should be fine. Now it is time to solve the problem of the passive knight on h6.

### 15.0-0 ♗c7

I would hurry to get my knight into the game when I had the chance: 15...♖f5 16.♗c1 ♙b7 17.♙xb7 ♖xb7 18.g4 ♖b2 looks really nice for Black, but may not be to everybody's taste. Still, if you do not like playing such a line, maybe the Modern is not right for you – with either colour. That might be something of a problem.

### 16.♖b1 ♙d7

The following manoeuvre does not convince me. It is too slow and Black forgets about his ♖h6.

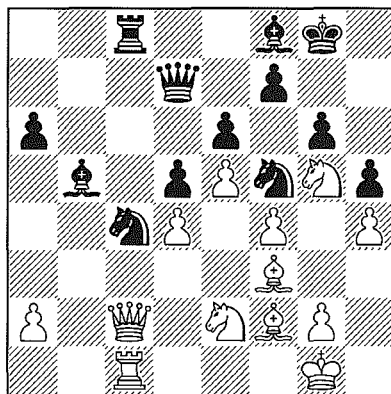
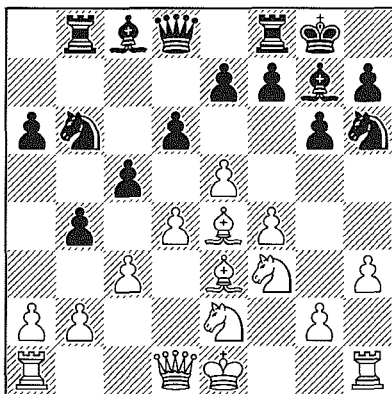
### 17.♖xb8 ♖xb8 18.♗d3 ♙b5 19.♗c2 ♗d7 20.♖g5?

It was time for 20.dxc5 with a complicated position. 20...dxe5 21.fxe5 ♖xe5 22.♖xe5 ♙xe5 23.♖d1 ♗c7 24.♖d4 and both sides have their trumps.

### 20...♖f5

Black has a nice grip on the light squares and White has to do something quickly, or else his position is just slowly going to deteriorate.

### 21.♖e1 e6 22.♙f3 cxd4 23.cxd4 ♖c8 24.♖c1 d5 25.h4 h6 26.♖h3 h5 27.♖g5 ♙f8



Deterioration complete. White's position is no more.

28.♖d1 ♘b2 29.♗d2 ♘d3 30.♞xc8 ♜xc8  
 31.♘g3 ♘xg3 32.♙xg3 ♜c4 33.♗e3 ♙a3  
 34.♙xh5 g5 35.♗f3 ♜xd4† 36.♙h2 ♙c5  
 37.♗xh5 ♗g1† 38.♙h3 ♗h1† 39.♙g4 ♘f2!†  
 40.♙xf2 ♗xg2†  
 0-1

The most critical line in this game is 10...♗c7  
 11.c3 ♘h6 12.0-0 when 12...♘g4 13.♙c1 ♙b7  
 is unclear.

In the next game Black is forced to walk a fine (and fun) line:

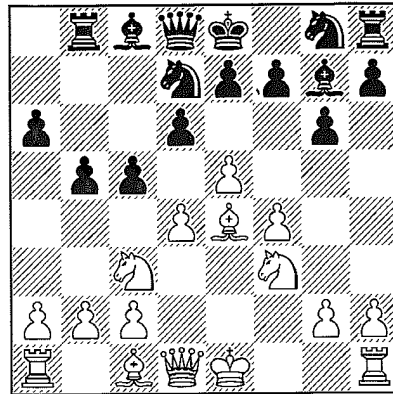
**Game 4**  
**Malmdin – Hillarp Persson**  
 Sandviken 2004

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♙g7 3.♘c3 d6 4.f4 a6 5.♘f3 b5  
 6.♙d3 ♘d7 7.e5 c5

The alternative is 7...♙b7, when White has many, many alternatives:

- a) 8.0-0 c5 and there are several branches:
  - a1) 9.♙e4 is seen in the comment to move 8 in Game 6 and is the main reason why I generally play c5 before ♙b7.
  - a2) 9.♘g5 ♗b6! 10.♗e2 ♘h6 (also interesting is 10...dxe5) 11.e6 ♙xd4† 12.♙h1 ♘f6 13.exf7† ♘xf7 14.f5 ♘e5 15.♙e4 ♙xc3 16.♙xb7 ♗xb7 17.bxc3 gxf5 18.♙f4 and now, instead of playing 18...♘c4 as in Zelcic – Sznapiak, Biel 1991, Black should play 18...♘g6 with the better chances.
  - b) 8.♙e4 This idea is not as good as when Black has already played c5: 8...♗c8 9.♗e2 and now – instead of 9...e6 which I played against Grischuk in the Calvia Olympiad 2004 – Black should play 8...♘h6 with a good game.
  - c) 8.a4 c5!? (8...b4 9.♘e4 ♘h6 is more comfortable for White) 9.axb5 cxd4 or 9.dxc5 b4! 10.♙e4 ♘xc5 11.♙xb7 ♘xb7 is unclear.
  - d) 8.♙e3 c5 9.♙e4 leads to Game 5.

8.♙e4 ♗b8



**9.0-0!**

I believe this is the most dangerous move here. Another possibility is 9.dxc5 when 9...♘xc5 10.♙c6† ♙d7 11.♙xd7† ♗xd7 12.♙e3 ♗c6?! 13.♗d5 ♗c8 14.0-0-0 gave White a small but enduring advantage in Smeets – Tikkanen, Kochin 2004. Instead of 12...♗c6 Black should have played 12...♘e6 or 12...♗c8 followed by ♘h6, in both cases with a nice position for Black.

**9...cxd4!**

This is a real die-hard-move and – I do agree – a risky one. After 9...b4 10.♘e2 we have a position similar to the one in Forster – Bacrot, with the difference that White has played 0-0 instead of ♙e3. I believe this should benefit White, but it is not clear how: 10...♗c7 11.c3 ♘h6 12.cxb4?! (12.♘g3 bxc3 13.bxc3 ♘b6 is fine for Black.) 12...♗xb4 13.♘c3 ♙b7 14.a3 ♗b6 15.♙xb7 ♗xb7 16.♘d5 ♗c6 and Black is alive.

Considering the shaky state of 9...b4 I recommend the main line.

**10.♘xd4 dxe5**

This is more or less forced since 10...♙b7?! 11.♙xb7! ♗xb7 12.e6 fxe6 13.♘xe6 ♗b6† 14.♙h1 ♙xc3 15.bxc3 ♘gf6 16.a4 is awkward for Black. The first couple of times I played this variation I was totally unaware of the game Yusupov – Forster (see comment to move 16) and that says quite a lot about my attitude to this opening. Though I am showing you lots and lots

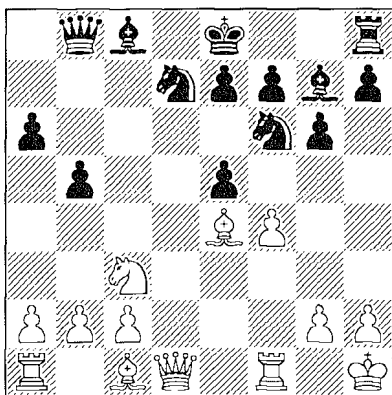


of theory here, the truth is: If you pick up the general ideas, you will not need it.

### 11. ♖c6 ♜b6† 12. ♖h1 ♜gf6

Another interesting possibility is 12...b4!? 13. ♖xb8 ♜xb8 14. ♖d5 c6 15. ♖e3 ♜gf6 16. ♖c6 0-0 17. ♖xd7 ♖xd7 with a complicated position where the bishop pair seems to compensate for Black's small material deficit.

### 13. ♖xb8 ♜xb8



### 14. ♜xe5

Jacob Aagaard, for some reason that I cannot quite figure out, avoided this against me in the Sigeman & Co. tournament in Malmo/Copenhagen 2004. [Editor's note: Because I had no clue what I was doing...] Instead he played 14. ♖c6?! 0-0 15. ♜e2 c6 16. g3 b4 17. ♖e4 ♖h5 (17... ♖d5!?) 18. ♖g5 exf4 19. gxf4 and now, instead of 19...h6, I should have played 19...a5! with the idea ♜b6 and ♖a6, etc.

### 14... ♖xe5

I believe this is stronger than 14... ♖xe4 15. ♖xe4 ♜xe5 (Not 15... ♖xe5 16. ♖f4 0-0 17. ♜e1 with a clear edge for White.) 16. ♜e1 (16. ♖g5!?) 16...0-0 17. ♖c3 ♜c5 18. ♖e3 ♜f5 19. ♖d5 ♜e8, when White had the advantage in van der Weide – Shchekachev, La Fere 2003.

### 15. ♖f4 0-0

In my dreams I am allowed to continue with ♖h5, exchange ♖f4 and then play ♖c4, when White is quite miserable. Therefore...

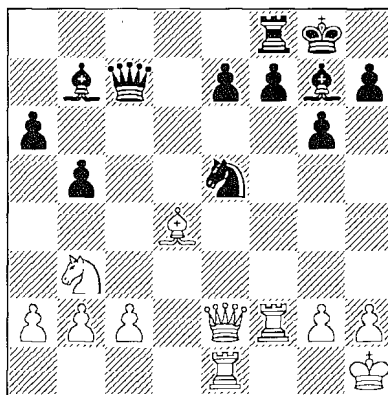
### 16. ♖f3!

...stopping 16... ♖h5 and preparing to take advantage of the bind on the h2-b8 diagonal. When I played 15...0-0 for the first time against Karjakin in Benidorm 2003 he did not use much time to find this strong move. In a much earlier game, Yusupov-Forster, Switzerland 1999, White played differently:

### 16. ♜e2!? ♖xe4

I think the f4-bishop should be exchanged if one can get away with it, which seems to be the case here. 16... ♖h5! 17. ♖d5 ♖xf4! 18. ♖xe7† (Black is OK after 18. ♜xf4 ♜e8 or 18. ♖xf4 ♖g4.) 18... ♖h8 19. ♜xf4 ♖c6 (threatening ♜d6) 20. ♜d1 and now both 20... ♜e8 and 20... ♖c4 lead to interesting positions where Black is not worse.

17. ♖xe4 ♜b6 18. ♜ae1 ♜c6 19. ♖d2 ♖b7 20. ♜f2 ♜c5 21. ♖b3 ♜b6 22. ♖e3 ♜c7 23. ♖d4



White has a pretty comfortable advantage here, but I give the rest of the game because it illustrates well that Black is not without chances in such positions.

23... ♜d8 24. h3 ♜d5 25. c3 a5 26. ♜e3 e6 27. ♜f4 a4 28. ♖c1 g5! 29. ♜xg5 ♖g6 30. ♜g4!

Now it gets really messy, so maybe 30. ♜e3 was both a safer and a better option. I cannot pretend to understand everything that is going on here.

30...h5 31.♖e2 ♘f4

Black could actually sac a second exchange with 31...♙xd4 32.cxd4 when White has to defend accurately to fend off Black's well-coordinated pieces.

32.♖e3 e5 33.♗b6 ♖c6 34.♙g1 ♗d6!

Something has gone very wrong for White. The bishop is under attack and ♙g6 is a terrible threat.

35.♙a7 ♙g6 36.♖f3?

White could have fought on with 36.♔h2 ♘xg2 37.♖c5, but Black stays clearly on top after 37...♖e4. Now it is all over:

36... ♖c8 37.♖e3 ♘xh3 38.♗d2 ♘xg1 39.♔xg1 ♙h6

0-1

A very impressive game by Forster that shows how dangerous the threats along the a8-h1 diagonal can become if White does not take care. Now back to our main game:

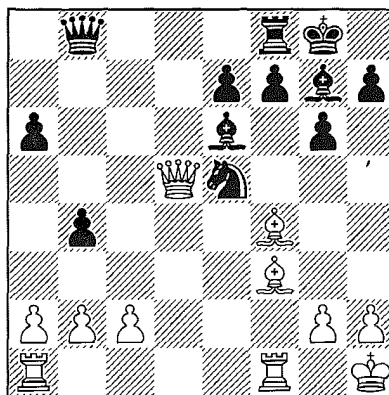
**16...b4!**

This is my improvement on Karjakin – Hillarp Persson, Benidorm 2003, when I was shredded by my young opponent after 16...e6? 17.♖e2 ♘fd7 18.♗ad1 ♖b6 19.♘e4 ♘xf3 20.♖xf3 e5 21.♗g5 f5 22.♘d6 ♘c5 23.♗e3 ♖c7 24.♗xc5 ♖xc5 25.♖b3† and I could not find a single reason not to resign, so I did...

**17.♘d5**

I am inclined to believe 17.♖e2! is a stronger move here, when 17...♘h5 is bad because of 18.♗xe5 ♖xe5 19.♘d5 e6 20.♘xb4 ♖xb2 21.♗ab1 ♘f4 22.♖e4 ♖d4 23.♘c6 with a huge advantage for White (courtesy of my silicon friend). A better chance for Black seems to be 17...♘fd7 18.♘d5 ♗e8 and now White's best bid to keep up the pressure is 19.a3! bxa3 20.bxa3 (20.♗xa3 ♖xb2 21.♗b3 ♖d4 seems OK for Black.) 20...e6 21.♗ab1 ♖d6 22.♘b4 when White has the advantage. If you do not like this you'd better have a good look at Yusupov – Forster, or avoid this line altogether by playing 6...♗b7, 9...b4 or 12...b4.

**17...♘xd5 18.♖xd5 ♗e6!**



**19.♖e4**

Another possibility is 19.♖c5 ♖b5 20.♖xe7 (Black has a really good game after 20.♖xb5 axb5 when White has problems defending his queenside.) 20...♗e8. Now White has three alternatives:

a) 21.♖h4 ♘xf3 22.♗xf3 ♗xb2 23.♗e1 ♗xa2 and if White cannot do something nasty against Black's king (and I do not think he can) he is worse.

b) 21.♖c7 ♗c8!? 22.♖d6 ♘xf3 (22...♘c4!? 23.♖e7 ♘xb2 24.♗fe1 ♖f5 is also interesting.) 23.♗xf3 ♗xb2 24.♗b1 ♖e2 25.♖xb4 ♗d5 26.♗g3 ♗xc2 with compensation for Black.

c) 21.♖g5 ♘xf3 22.♖xb5 axb5 23.♗xf3 ♗xb2 when only Black has winning chances.

**19...♗f5 20.♖e2 ♖b5 21.♖xb5**

After 21.♗ae1 ♘xf3 22.♖xb5 axb5 23.♗xf3 ♗xb2 24.♗xe7 ♗a8 25.♗h6 ♗g7 26.♗xg7 ♘xg7 the position is approximately equal.

**21...axb5**

I like this position for Black. White's queenside pawns are weak and immobile, while Black can use his kingside majority to intimidate the white king.

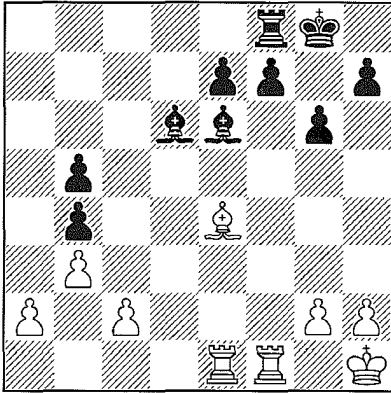
**22.♗xe5?**

It was better to play 22.♗ae1. Now White keeps his material advantage, but he has no good plan and can only wait for Black to transform his kingside into a mudslide.

22...♙xe5 23.♞ae1 ♘d6 24.♙e4?!

A better chance was 24.♞e2 ♘d7 25.g4! to stop Black from playing h7-h5-h4.

24...♙e6!? 25.b3?



This freezes White's queenside and leaves him with absolutely zero counterplay. If now 25...♘d7 followed by h5, f5, h4, g5, etc, I believe Black is close to winning. In the rest of the game we both played inaccurately and it is of little interest here. I won on move 73.

It seems that Black has excellent play after 17.♘d5, so the evaluation depends on how Black is doing after 17.♞e2 ♘fd7 18.♘d5 ♞e8 19.a3.

The next game features ♙e4 after Black has played ♙b7:

### Game 5

**Mortensen – Hillarp Persson**

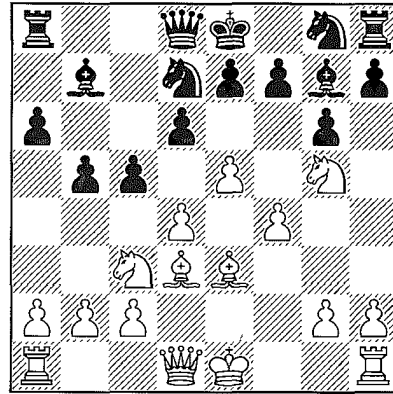
Danish Team Championship 2003

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♙g7 3.♘c3 d6 4.f4 a6 5.♘f3 b5  
6.♙d3 ♘d7 7.♙e3 ♙b7 8.e5!? c5

Those who do not feel comfortable with this can try 8...e6, which I would not even mention unless White had already played ♙e3 and e5. If Black plays e6 before White has played e5 then f4-f5 is generally very dangerous for Black. Also possible is 8...♘h6, intending c5 on the next move.

9.♙e4

White's early development of the bishop to e3 makes the plan with ♘g5 followed by e4-e5-e6 less attractive here. In the Chess Olympiad in Elista 1998, Pablo San Segundo still tried this plan against me:  
9.♘g5?!



9...cxd4! 10.e6 f5!

Necessary, but strong.

11.♙xf5

My binary Sancho Panza is quite peckish and suggests 11.♘f7(?) ♞a5 12.♘xh8 ♘c5 13.♙xd4 ♙xd4 14.♙xb5† axb5 15.♞xd4, but a few moves later I make it choke on 15...b4! 16.♞g7 ♘xe6 17.♞xg8† ♔d7 18.♞xh7 bxc3 19.0-0 cxb2 when White is defenceless. There are ways for White to diverge, but I do not think it will change the final verdict.

11...♘df6! 12.♙xg6† hxg6 13.♞d3! ♘h6!?

Maybe 13...♞h6 is even stronger!?

14.♞xg6† ♔f8 15.♙xd4 ♞e8 16.♞d3

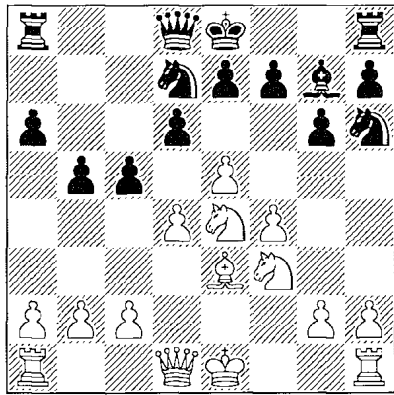
This position is given as "unclear" in *Informant* 73.

16...♞h5?!

In the wake of this move my opponent managed to whip up a few complications that kept me from winning the game. Had I instead played 16...b4! 17.♘e2 ♞b5! it would have been impossible for White to find such complications. The exchange of queens leaves the white pawns irremediably weak.

9...♞c8

Considering that this move leads to a position where White has a small advantage it is worth trying 9...♙xc4!? 10.♘xc4 ♖h6 instead. White has three options:



a) 11.exd6? is the weakest option, when 11...♗f5 12.♙f2 cxd6 13.0-0 0-0 14.dxc5 dxc5 15.♘xc5 (15.g4 ♖e8 16.♘xc5 ♗xc5 17.♙xc5 ♖c8 and White's position is crumbling) 15...♘xc5 16.♙xc5 ♙xb2 17.♖b1 ♖xd1 18.♖fxd1 ♖fc8 19.♖d5 ♙f6 is advantageous for Black.

b) 11.dxc5 ♗g4! has been played a few times:

b1) 12.♖d2 dxe5 13.c6 ♗df6 (13...♗f8!?) 14.♗xf6† ♙xf6 15.fxe5 ♗xc5 looks fine for Black.

b2) 12.♖e2 dxe5 13.0-0-0 (13.c6 ♗b8 14.fxc5 ♗xc6 is good for Black) 13...♖c7 14.fxc5 ♗gxe5? 15.♙f4, and White had a clear advantage in B. Lalic – Polzin, Dresden 1998. In *Informant* 73 Lalic recommends 14...♗dxe5, which he considers to be equal. I see no reason to disagree with this judgement.

b3) 12.♙g1 dxc5 13.h3 (13.c6 ♗df6 is unclear) 13...♗h6 14.c6 ♗f6 15.♖xd8† ♖xd8 16.♗xf6† cxf6 17.c7?! ♖c8 18.♙b6 ♗d7! was fine for Black in Cuijpers – Chernin, Germany 2001. White can probably improve on move 17, but I see no reason why Black cannot improve even earlier: 13...♗gf6! 14.♗xf6† exf6 15.c6 ♗f8 Compared with the position above I believe Black is slightly better placed. The knight on f8 will be very happy

on e6 and the analysis could go on for a long time. I prefer to stop it here and establish: White has to get something out of his c6 pawn or there is trouble ahead.

c) 11.c6 fxc6 12.♗cg5 ♗f5! 13.♖c2 and now 13...♗f8 intending h6 and cxd4 looks fine for Black.

**10.♙xb7**

In Pavasovic – Touzanc, Leipzig 2002, there followed 10.♗g5 ♗b6? 11.dxc5 dxc5 12.♙xc5 and Black miraculously managed to last for almost thirty more moves. Instead of 10...♗b6 Black should try 10...b4 11.♖f3 ♖b8! 12.♙xb7 ♖xb7 13.♗e2 h6 14.♖xb7 ♖xb7 15.♗f3 cxd4 16.♙xd4 dxc5 17.fxc5 f6! with chances for both sides. Rather less appealing is 11...♙xc4 12.♗cxc4 h6? 13.♗xf7! ♗xf7 14.f5! when Black will suffer.

**10...♖xb7 11.dxc5 dxe5?!**

Black has a static position after 11...dxc5?! 12.a4 b4 13.♖d5 ♖b8 14.♖xb7 ♖xb7 15.♗e4. Black should in general prepare to meet dxc5 with dxe5, unless the e-pawns are already exchanged.

**12.♖d5 ♖xd5 13.♗xd5 ♖c8 14.♗b6!**

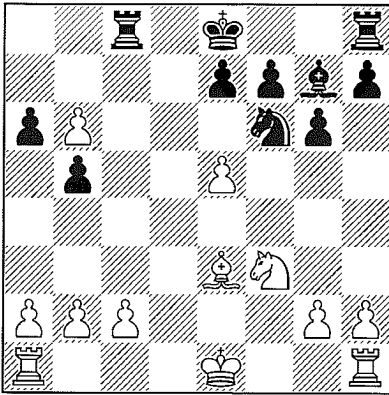
After 14.fxe5 Black must play precisely: 14...♗xc5! 15.♙xc5 (15.♗b6 ♖c6 16.♖d1 ♗h6 17.♗d5 ♗f5 18.♙xc5 ♖xc5 19.c3 h5, with mutual chances.) 15...♖xc5 16.0-0-0 (16.♖d1 ♖xc2 17.♗b4 ♖c8 18.♗xa6 ♗h6 is unclear.) 16...e6 17.♗b4 a5 18.♗d3 ♖c4 19.c3 ♗c7 20.♗d4 b4 21.♗b5 0-0 with chances for both sides. These lines are not forced and should be taken with a grain of salt. Anyway, I slightly prefer the Black side, to be the one who attacks that weak e-pawn.

**14...♗xb6 15.cxb6 ♗f6!**

I do not believe Black has time to play 15...e4, when 16.♗d4, with the idea 0-0-0 and ♗d4-b3-a5 in combination with the threat a2-a4, seems to put Black in trouble. In Grischuk – Bacrot, Dubai 2002, play continued 16.♗c5?! ♙xc5? (16...♗f6 17.a4 ♗d5 18.♗d2 b4 19.a5 f6 is unclear.) 17.fxe5 e6 18.♙c5 ♗e7 19.♙d6 ♖xc2 20.b7 ♗c6 21.0-0 with a winning advantage for White.

**16.0-0-0!**

After this Black has no problems. More critical is 16.fxc5! when Black has to walk a fine line:



a) 16...♘g4? 17.♙d4 and White is in total control.

b) Equally bad is 16...♘d7?! 17.♙d4! (threatening e5-e6) 17...0-0 18.c3 ♖b8 19.a4 ♘xb6 20.axb5 axb5 21.♙a7 with a clear advantage for White.

c) 16...♘d5! 17.♙d4 and there are three different roads to choose from:

c1) 17...♖b8? 18.a4 ♘xb6 19.axb5 axb5 20.♙xb6 ♖xb6 21.♙a8† ♔d7 22.♙a7† ♕e6 (22...♕e8 23.♕f2) 23.♘g5† ♕f5 24.♘xf7 is miserable for Black.

c2) 17...♙xc2? 18.b7 0-0 19.♙a7 and the b7-pawn makes a touchdown.

c3) 17...0-0! 18.a4 (After 18.c3 ♖b8 19.a4 ♘xb6 20.axb5 axb5 21.♙a7 ♘d5 22.♕f2 f6 Black is doing fine.) 18...♙xc2 19.axb5 axb5 20.0-0 and there are still some problems for Black to solve, though they do not seem insurmountable.

All in all, White seems to keep a slight advantage even if Black plays the best moves, which is the reason I recommend 9...♙xe4.

### 16...♘g4 17.♙he1!

My opponent is famous for his aggressive style and here he presses the *chaos button*. I would have preferred 17.b7 ♖b8 18.♙b6 0-0 19.fxe5 ♙xb7 20.♙d4 f6 with an approximately equal position.

### 17...♘xe3 18.♙xe3 ♙h6 19.♙a3

The position is rather messy after 19.b7 ♖b8 20.♙c3 ♙xf4† 21.♕b1 0-0 22.♙d7, though 22...e4! 23.♘d4 ♙e5 looks promising for Black. I

cannot see how White is going to use his b-pawn. Still, this is dangerous and needs to be analysed.

19...♙xf4† 20.♕b1 e4 21.♘d4 ♙d8 22.c3 e5?!

I could have gained a clear advantage with 22...♙xh2, but now we enter the unclear-mode again.

23.♙e1 0-0 24.♙xe4 ♙xh2 25.♘f3 f5 26.♙b4?!

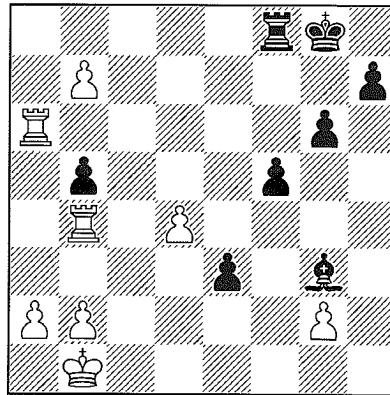
Or 26.♙e2 ♙f4 27.♙xa6 ♙f6 when the black central pawns are ready to roll. Still, this would have been better since now Black's e-pawn is difficult to stop.

26...♙g3 27.♙xa6 e4 28.♘d4 e3 29.b7 ♙xd4

Not 29...♙fe8?! 30.♙a8 ♙b8 31.♙b5 e2 32.♘xe2 ♙xe2 33.a4 when White's pawns are faster.

### 30.cxd4

More stubborn was 30.♙xd4 e2 31.♙e6 e1♙† 32.♙xe1 ♙xe1 33.♙b4 ♙g3 34.♙xb5 h5 when Black has to find the best moves to win.



30...♕f7! 31.d5 e2 32.♙e6 ♙c8 33.♕c2 e1♙ 34.♙xe1 ♙xe1 35.♙xb5 ♙b8 36.a4 ♙e2† 37.♕d3 ♙xg2 38.a5

This makes things easy for me. Better was 38.b4, which would have forced me to find 38...♙g3†! 39.♕c4 (39.♕e2 ♙b3 40.a5 h5 41.a6 h4 42.♙c5 h3 43.♙c8 h2 44.♙xb8 h1♙ 45.♙f8† ♕g7 wins easily for Black.) 39...♙g4† 40.♕c5 (40.♕b3 f4 and the white king is too far away.) 40...f4 41.♙a5 ♕e7 42.♙a8 ♙d6† 43.♕d4 f3† 44.♕e3 ♙xb4 and Black wins. The rest of the game is just a question of technique.

38...h5 39.b4 h4 40.♞c5 h3 41.♞c8 h2 42.♞xb8 h1 ♖ 43.♞f8† ♜xf8 44.b8 ♖† ♜g7 45.♞e5† ♜h7 46.♞e7†?! ♜h6 47.d6 ♖d1† 48.♜c4 ♞c2† 49.♜b5 ♖d5† 50.♜b6 ♞c6† 51.♜a7 ♖d4† 52.♜b7 ♞xd6 53.♜c7 ♞d5

0-1

I recommend 9...♞xe4 10.♜xc4 ♜h6 rather than 9...♞c8, but even if White plays the critical 16.fxe5 it seems that Black has reasonable chances to equalize after 16...♜d5 17.♞d4 0-0. Now we leave the ♞d3-e4 stuff behind and see what happens if White plays e4-e5xd6:

**Game 6**

**Schlosser – Chernin**

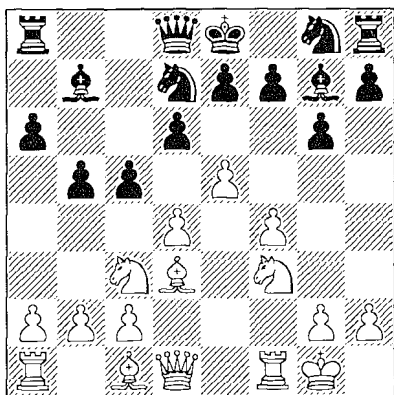
Yerevan Olympiad 1996

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♞g7 3.♜c3 d6 4.f4 a6 5.♜f3 b5 6.♞d3 ♜d7 7.e5

Why is 7.0-0 so seldom played? After 7...c5 8.dxc5 ♜xc5 9.♞e3! (After other moves Black has time to continue ♞b7 and answer ♞e3 with ♞c8.) 9...♞b7 10.♞xc5 dxc5 11.e5 ♖b6 we transpose to Game 8.

**7...c5 8.exd6?!**

There is no law against ugly moves, but it does not feel right to build up a strong centre, just to push the e-pawn and then exchange it on d6. What was the meaning of it all then? With the moves 0-0 and ♞b7 thrown in, White can play ♞e4 and then the exd6 idea is somewhat better:



This position came about in Bareev – Pekarek, Dortmund 1990, when White played:

9.♞e4!

This leads to the same position as after (a1) 9.♞e4, in the comments to 7...♞b7, Game 4.

9...♞xe4 10.♜xc4 cxd4 11.exd6

This is thought to be the best move here, but I am not too scared. After 11.e6 fxe6 12.♜eg5 ♜f8 13.♜xd4 ♖d7 14.♞c3 h6 15.♜gf3 ♜f6 16.♖d3 White had some compensation for the pawn in Martinovic – Sznapiak, Vrnjacka Banja 1981. I think 13...♞c8 is a slight improvement.

11...♖b6 12.f5

In *Informant* 49 Bareev indicates that White has a huge advantage here. I do not think so. After 12.♜e5 ♞a7 13.♜xd7 ♞xd7 14.f5 ♜f6 15.♜xf6† ♞xf6 16.dxc7 ♞xe7 17.♖f3 g5 the position was balanced in Grischuk – Milov, Torshavn 2000.

12...gxf5 13.♜g3 e6 14.a4?!

Bareev gives 14.♖e1! 0-0-0 15.a4 b4 16.a5 ♖xd6 17.♞a4 with a “big advantage for White”. There is nothing wrong with the final evaluation, but then, what kind of a move is 14...0-0-0? A clear improvement is 14...♞c5! defending against ♜xf5 and preparing ♜gf6. I cannot see a clear advantage for White here, “unclear” seems more likely.

14...♜gf6! 15.♜xf5!?

Bareev gives 15.axb5 0-0 “=”, but I would rather be Black here.

15...exf5 16.♜h4 0-0 17.♜xf5 ♞ac8! 18.♞a3 ♞e5?

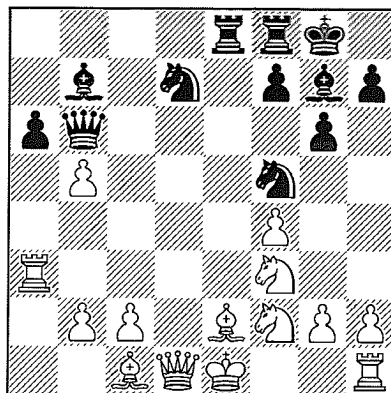
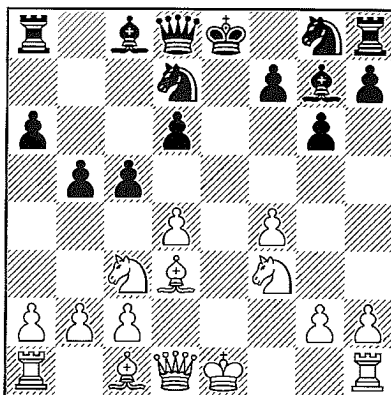
Bareev gives a long line proving that 18...♜h8 was better and should have won the game for Black.

19.♞g3

and White had some compensation.

**8...exd6!**

I would instinctively have played 8...cxd4!?, which is also fine. Both 9.♜e4?! f5! 10.♜f2 ♜c5 and 9.♜d5 ♞a7! with the idea ♜c5 are fine for Black. Chernin’s choice is perhaps even better.



### 9. dxe4?

The best thing that can be said for this move is that it attacks the d6-pawn, but after that I am lost for words. Better is 9.0-0!? dxe7 10.f5 e6 11. dxe4 though after 11... b6 Black is doing very well and I wonder: what happened to White's centre?

### 9... b6 10. dxc5 dxc5 11. a4?!

In *ChessBase Magazine* Dolmatov gives 11. e2!? dxf6 12. d6+ e7 13. dxc8+ Bxc8 14.0-0 Bhe8 followed by an "unclear" symbol. I think Black is slightly better.

### 11... d6! 12. axb5 0-0 13. e2!

White defends against Bxe8, prepares to castle short, and opens a line for the queen.

### 13... c4!

White is not allowed to castle.

### 14. Ba3

After 14. d6 Black has a pleasant choice between 14... b5 and Dolmatov's 14... a7.

### 14... d5 15. dxc4

According to Dolmatov Black is winning after 15. g4 Be8. It took me some time to understand this judgement, but in the end I found that I agree: 16. gxf5 Bxe4 17. fxg6 hxg6 18. d5 e6 19. Bxd7 Bd8 and White has no good defence against 20... Bde8.

### 15... e6 16. dxf2

White loses the queen after 16. Bxd7 Bxd8.

### 16... Bae8+ 17. e2

### 17... dxf6?!

Possibly 17... Bxf3 18. Bxf3 Bxe2+ 19. dxe2 d4+ 20. e1 Bxb5+ is stronger, when 21. Bd3 dxc5 is very dangerous for White.

### 18.0-0 d4 19. dxe5?

I do not see how White will be finished off after 19. bxa6 since 19... Bxf3 20. Bxf3 e4 21. c3 dxf2 22. B1xf2 e2+ 23. Bxf2 Be7 leaves White with an extra three pawns for the exchange.

### 19... dxe5 20. fxe5 axb5 21. e1

Black wins the exchange after 21. e3 b4 22. Bb3 e6 23. Be1 e4, and White has nothing to show for it.

### 21... b4 22. Bb3 Bxe5 23. e3?

Dolmatov ends one variation after another with "winning advantage for Black", but it seems like a bunch of fairy tales for romantically disposed chess players. Closer to the truth is that Chernin finally, after many inspired moves, has a clear advantage, which just turned into a really big one. Better was 23. d3 when the game is far from over.

### 23... e6 24. d3 dxe3 25. dxe3 Bxe3 26. d2?

This equals throwing in the towel. More resistant was 26. b3 when White's position is ugly, but not yet lost.

### 26... b3 27. e4 Bxh3 28. exh3 d6 29. Bf3 Bd8

### 0-1

A hard blow for the exd6 plan, which can now safely be discarded to the garbage dump. It is worth noting that if the centre opens up

there is no need for Black to count pawns: the fianchettoed bishops, together with the knights, will create a central draught strong enough to make White feel ill.

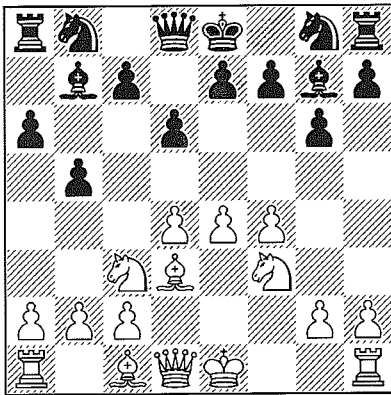
In the next game my opponent tries to blow me off the board, but my position proves to be surprisingly resilient:

### Game 7

De Firmian – Hillarp Persson

Copenhagen 1996

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♘g7 3.♖c3 d6 4.f4 a6 5.♗f3 b5  
6.♙d3 ♙b7!?



With time I have abandoned this move order since I believe it is imperative to strike with c7-c5 as quickly as possible. After 6...♗d7! 7.♞e2 it is possible to rejoin this game with 7...♙b7, but 7...c5 8.e5 cxd4 9.♙e4 dxc3! or 9...♞b8 10.♗xd4 dxe5! are both interesting and probably better.

7.♞e2 ♗d7 8.e5

Another interesting alternative is 8.♙e3! leading to Game 9.

8...c5!?

Also playable is 8...♗h6! as in Sax – Vokac, Pardubice 1994, which continued 9.♗e4 0-0 10.c3 c5 11.e6 f5! 12.exd7 c4 13.♙c2 fxe4 14.♙xe4 ♙xe4 15.♞xe4 ♞xd7 and White had to fight for

the draw. I believe there should be an improvement for White, but I am not sure where.

9.♗g5

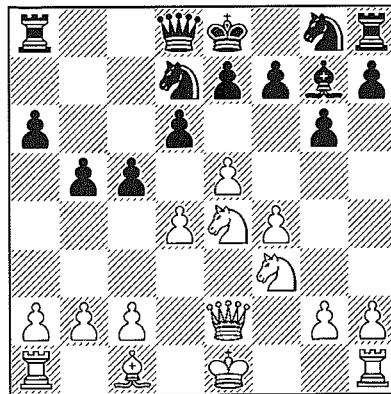
White has three main alternatives here:

a) 9.e6 fxe6 10.♗g5 ♞b6? 11.♞xe6 0-0-0 12.♗d5 ♙xd5 13.♞xd5 ♙xd4 14.c3 ♙f6 15.♗e6 and White was in control in Sigurjonsson – Sznapiak, Tbilisi 1974. An obvious improvement is 10...♗f8! when 11.dxc5 ♞c7 is unclear. I would also consider 10...♙xd4!?

b) In Hartman – Gausel, Gothenburg 1998, there followed:

9.♙e4 ♙xe4 10.♗xe4

Commenting in *ChessBase Magazine* Yudasin gives 10.♞xe4 cxd4 (10...e6!? 11.exd6 ♗gf6 is interesting) 11.♗d5 ♞c8! 12.exd6 e6 with the idea ♗c5. OK, but why not 12...♗c5 immediately? It wins for Black. White should of course play 11.♗xd4 though Black is just better after 11...dxe5 12.♗c6 ♗df6. The f4-pawn is the single lonely pillar remaining from an ancient centre.



10...cxd4 11.exd6

Now it would be a mistake to play 11...e6! because of 12.♗e5! ♗xe5 (Yudasin gives 12...♗gf6 13.0-0 ♞b6 with a slight advantage for Black, but this is wrong since 13.♗xf7! wins on the spot.) 13.fxe5 ♙xe5 14.0-0 and White has enough compensation to last for this game and one more.



11...♖h6

A typical move in this kind of structure. Black is not worried about 12.dxe7 ♖xe7 13.♗d6† ♕f8 when White has to enter a worse endgame.

12.a4!

This is the only move! If Black is allowed to castle and play ♗f5, then White will have to fight a cold draught down the e- and c-files. Yudasin gives 12.dxe7 ♖xe7 13.♗d2 0-0 14.0-0-0 (14.0-0 ♖fe8 15.♖fe1 ♗c5 is clearly better for Black, but still preferable.) 14...♖fe8 15.♖he1 with unclear play. Well, how to put it? Wrong again! After 15...f5 16.♗g3 ♖f7 Black is winning due to the double threat of ♖xa2/♖xe2.

12...0-0 13.axb5 exd6 14.0-0

Not 14.♗xd6? ♖c7 15.♗e4 ♖fe8 when White has no defence against 16...f5 winning the knight.

14...axb5

With an unclear game that Black managed to win. Yudasin has no comment to offer on Black's last move, but it is actually a mistake. After 14...♖e8! 15.♖d3 d5 followed by ♗c5 Black is clearly on top.

c) A third alternative that has not been played so far is 9.exd6, which is not as bad as it is ugly. Now:

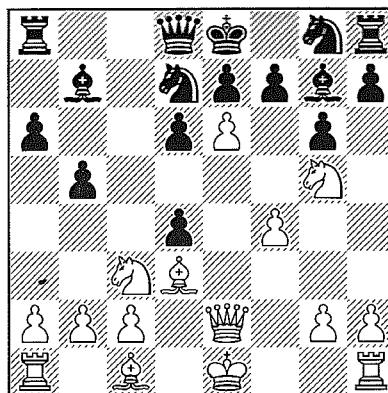
c1) After 9...♖b6!? 10.dxc5 (10.♗e5 ♖d8 does not change much) 10...♗xc5 11.♖xe7 ♗xe7 12.♗e3 0-0 Black's active pieces compensate well for the pawn minus.

c2) The gambler should go for 9...cxd4 10.♗e4 e6! (10...♖b6?! 11.a4! bxa4 12.0-0 ♖c8 13.♗e5! is unpleasant. It is not a good omen when White is attacking on both flanks.) 11.♗e5! ♗d5! 12.a4 bxa4 13.0-0 ♗xe5 14.fxex5 ♗xe5 when any result is possible...

9...cxd4!

I believe Black has no reason to avoid the complications arising in this game. After 9...♖a5?! 10.♗d2 things are bad for Black and 9...♗h6? 10.e6 ♗f6 11.exf7† ♗xf7 12.♗e6 is even worse.

10.e6



10...f5!

The only move. 10...f6? 11.♗xh7! ♖a5 12.♖g4 is better for White.

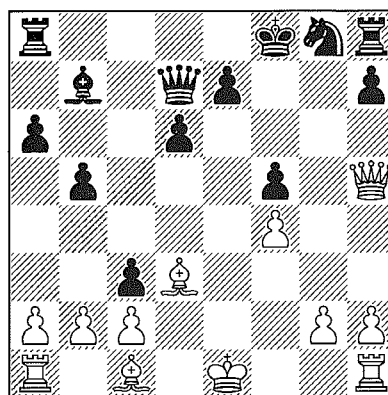
11.exd7†!

The only move – again – since 11.♗xf5? ♗df6! 12.♗e4 d5 loses a piece and 11.♗f7?! ♖a5 12.a3! dxc3 14.b4 ♖c7 15.♗xh8 ♗f8! 16.♗f7 ♖c6/♖c8 is clearly better for Black.

11...♖xd7 12.♗d1

Nick's move is good enough but White has other tempting possibilities here:

a) 12.♗e6?! dxc3 13.♗xg7† ♕f7 14.♗xf5 gxf5 15.♖h5† ♕f8



Black has the advantage: ♗b7 and ♗g8(f6) cooperate excellently and control the light squares. The c1-bishop, on the other hand, has no life.

b) 12. ♖xb5! is the most dangerous alternative. After 12...axb5 13. ♙xb5 ♙c6 White has a choice:

b1) 14. ♖c4 ♙xb5 15. ♖f7† ♖d8 16. ♖xg7 ♖c6! 17. ♖xh8 ♖c4 18. ♖f2 ♖e2† 19. ♖g3 ♖g4† leads to a perpetual.

b2) 14. ♙xc6 ♖xc6 15. ♖e6 ♙f6 16. 0-0 ♖c8 17. ♖f2 ♖f7 is unclear since the d4-pawn tears White's position in two.

b3) The best is 14. ♙c4! when Black has to play very precisely. 14...♖h6! 15. 0-0 ♙f6 16. ♖e6 ♖g4 17. ♖e1 ♖a7 and Black achieves excellent counterplay.

**12...e5 13.fxe5**

The position is so complicated that I have trouble even presenting an opinion of what is the best move here. After 13.c4 h6 14. ♖h3 b4 my impression is that Black has enough compensation. White can also try 13.c3, when 13...e4 14.cxd4 ♖e7 15. ♙b1 h6 16. ♖h3 ♖c6! 17. ♙e3 ♖xd4 18. ♖f2 ♖e6 is incredibly unclear. Computer programs are generally partial to White's position, but I dare to bet part of my honour that Black is all right here.

**13...dxe5 14.a4!**

White must open up the position to give his bishop some air.

Playing 14. 0-0 is a bit like screaming next to a sign saying AVALANCHE AREA: 14...h6! 15. ♖h3 (15. ♙f4? loses to 15...♖e7 16. ♙xb5† axb5 17. ♖xb5† ♖d7 18. ♖xd7† ♖xd7) 15...♖e7 16.c3 c4 17. ♙b1 d3 18. ♖e1 g5...aaarghhh!

A better alternative is 14.c3 when 14...♖e7 15.cxd4 h6 16. ♖h3 ♖xd4 17. ♙e3 ♖h4† 18. ♖f1 0-0 leaves Black with enough compensation.

**14...h6! 15. ♖f3**

The last chance to play for a win was 15. ♖h3 when Black has to play accurately to keep the position balanced. 15...bxa4! 16.c3 ♖e7 17.cxd4 ♖xd4 and again it is a mess. Now things turn out rather forced.

**15...e4 16.axb5 ♖e7 17.bxa6 ♙c6 18. ♙c4 exf3 19.gxf3 ♙d5 20. ♙xd5?!**

Here Nick could have forced a draw with 20. ♙b5, but he had other things in mind.

**20...♖xd5 21. ♖f2 0-0?!**

This looks like the obvious move, but is in fact a mistake. I should have played 21...♖f7! when 22. 0-0 ♖he8 looks similar to the game but is a much better version. For example 23. ♖e1 is not possible due to 23...♖c6 followed by ...♖xe1† and ...♖xf3. I believe Black is slightly better here since White has problems with his king and coordinating the flanks.

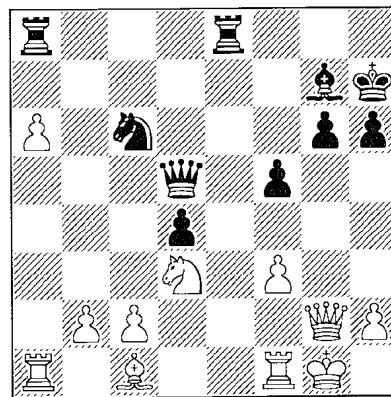
**22. 0-0 ♖c6 23. ♖d3 ♖fe8?!**

I still have compensation for the pawn, but there is no margin for lazy moves like this one. 23...♖c4! was better. I see nothing strong for White after 24.b3 ♖b5 25. ♖e6† ♖h7 26. ♖c4 ♖xc4 27.bxc4 ♖f7, so Black should be a little better.

**24. ♖g2**

Now White is slightly better. The knight on d3 would have put a smile on Nimzowitsch face

**24...♖h7!**



An oversight, but maybe still the best move! I remember making my move, standing up, taking a circular walk in the hall and then, as I closed the circle, I got a nasty shock. Nick's queen was staring at me from g6 and my g6-pawn was gone. I sat down. Didn't I just protect that guy??

**25. ♖xg6† ♖xg6 26. ♖f4†**

Obviously I had missed that one.

**26...♖f7 27. ♖xd5**

Commenting in *New in Chess* Tisdall assumed that I had entered this position of my own free

will, rather than playing 24...g5 or 24...♖d6, but this is not true. I am not that mad.

27...♞e2 28.♞f2 ♞e1† 29.♞f1 ♞e2 30.♞f2 ♞e1† 31.♔g2 d3!

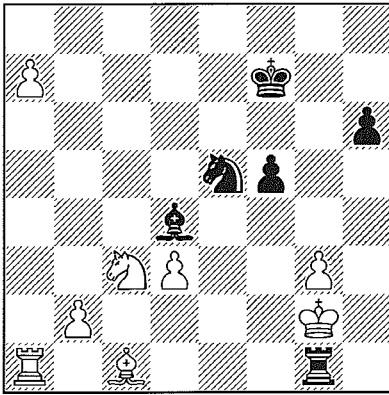
I – for one – do not think I have enough compensation for three pawns, but this last pawn bought me considerably more tricks than the first two did.

32.cxd3

I spent my time dreaming of 32.c3 ♙e5 33.f4?! ♞g8† 34.♔f3? ♙d4 when White finds himself in big trouble. After his last move Nick's worst problem was his lack of time.

32...♙d4 33.♞c2 ♞g8† 34.♔h3 ♞f1 35.♞g2! ♞xf3† 36.♞g3 ♞gxg3† 37.hxg3 ♞f1! 38.♖c3! ♖e5! 39.a7 ♞h1† 40.♔g2 ♞g1† 41.♔h3 ♞h1† 42.♔g2 ♞g1†

After the time trouble Nick found himself disappointed with the course of the game and on pure emotion decided to avoid the repetition. Grateful though I am, I don't think this was wise.



43.♔h2?? ♖f3† 44.♔h3 ♞h1† 45.♔g2 ♞h2†

White is mated by ♞f2† on the next move.

0-1

The effect of this game (and a few others) was that for a short time in 1996 I was known as the “lucky guy”. In terms of the game finish I plead guilty to being lucky, but there was nothing lucky about the opening. Indeed, Black would have been slightly better after 23...♞c4.

In the next game White follows a policy of “development first” and does not play e5:

### Game 8

Stefansson – Hillarp Persson

Gausdal 1996

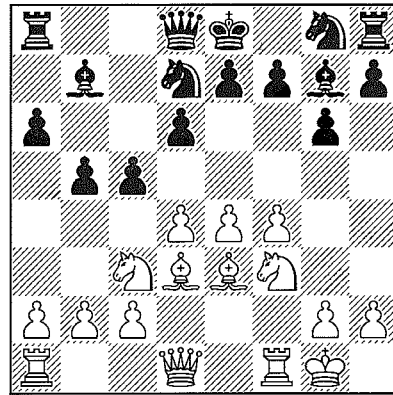
1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♙g7 3.♖c3 d6 4.f4 a6 5.♖f3 b5 6.♙d3 ♖d7 7.♙e3

A different move order is 7.0-0 c5 8.dxc5 (8.♙e3?! ♖gf6 is good for Black) 8...♖xc5 9.♙e3 ♙b7 leading back to our main game.

7...♙b7 8.0-0

8.♙e3 is seen in the next game.

8...c5



9.dxc5!

The game Hertneck – Bilek, Kecskemet 1990, took another route with 9.♔h1 c4 10.♙e2 b4 11.♖a4 ♙xe4 12.♙xc4 ♖gf6 13.a3 ♞c8?! 14.♙b3 bxa3 15.♞xa3 with a slight advantage for White. I would have preferred sacrificing a pawn rather than playing 14...bxa3, or why not 13...a5 when Black has a harmonious position.

After 9.e5 b4 10.♙e4 (other moves are met by cxd4 winning the e5-pawn) 10...♞c8 Black gets an improved version of Game 3.

9...♖xc5 10.♙xc5!

On 10.a3 I planned to pick up a pawn with 10...♙xc3 11.bxc3 ♙xe4. The g7-bishop should not be treated as if it is an actual member of the

Catholic (or any other) church. If you do not need it, get rid of it! Generally speaking I am happy if I can reach a Sicilian Dragon structure. In such positions the double fianchetto ensures Black excellent chances.

**10...dxc5**

It is also possible to play 10...♙xc3 11.bxc3 dxc5, a line of action that is necessary when White has played the queen to e2 rather than having castled, as seen in the next game. In that game White would have been able to take on e4 with the queen on move 13.

**11.e5**

This kind of structure is generally slightly better for White, but here Black has just enough resources to hold the balance.

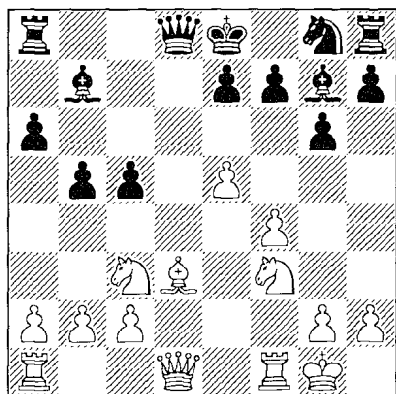
**11...♖b6! 12.♙e4 ♙xc4 13.♗xe4 ♖h6!**

In Modern lines you have to rid yourself of all prejudice against a knight on the rim. From h6 the knight can use f5 as a transit point before it moves on. After 13...e6?! Black has to watch out for the ♗f3-g5-e4-f6/d6 manoeuvre.

**14.c4 0-0 15.♞c1**

If White is to improve on this game it is either here or on the previous move that the improvement should be sought.

**15...♞ad8 16.♞c2**



**16...f6!**

In *ChessBase Magazine* Tisdall writes: "This move guarantees that Black will activate his slumbering

forces on the kingside." White is better developed and centralised and will have the better position if Black is not able to open up the centre.

**17.♗c3 fxe5 18.♗xe5?!**

This is superficially active, but hands over the initiative to me. Better was 18.♗d5 ♖b7 19.fxe5 with a balanced position.

**18...♗f5 19.cxb5?!**

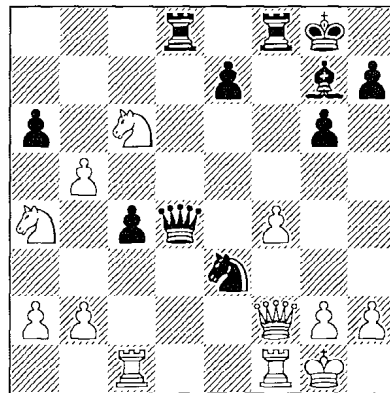
The white centre has crumbled and both 19.♗h1 ♗d4 and 19.♗d5?! ♖d6, followed by e7-c6 and ♗d4, lead to better positions for Black. Hannes probably missed something somewhere around here. I, on the other hand, did not miss anything. Not that I saw anything either... I just had faith in my resources.

**19...c4! 20.♞f2 ♗e3! 21.♗a4?**

The losing mistake in a slightly worse position. Hannes could have fought on with 21.♗c6!? axb5! 22.♗xd8 ♖xd8 23.♞cd1 (White loses quickly after both 23.♗xb5 ♗xf1 24.♞xf1 ♞f5 and 23.♞fe1? ♗g4.) 23...♗xd1 24.♞xd1 when Black keeps the initiative after 24...♞a5 or 24...♞b8.

**21...♞d4! 22.♗c6**

Even worse is 22.♗f3 ♗xf1! when White is left with 23.♗xd4 ♙xd4 losing the exchange.



**22...♗xf1 23.♗xd8 ♞xf4 24.♞xd4 ♙xd4+ 25.♗h1 ♞f5 26.♗c6?**

Black wins after both 26.h3 axb5 27.♗c3 ♗g3+ 28.♗h2 ♞f1 29.♞xf1 ♗xf1+ 30.♗h1 ♙xc3

31.bxc3 b4 and 26.g3 ♜f2 27.♞xf1 ♞xf1 † 28.♙g2 ♞f2 †, but now the end is even more abrupt.

26...♘g3 †

0-1

White needs to either find an improvement somewhere around move 14, or else find a better variation.

In the next game White plays a very dangerous idea, combining the set-ups of the previous two games:

### Game 9

Ramesh – Hillarp Persson

Amsterdam 2000

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♘g7 3.♘c3 d6 4.♙e3 a6 5.f4

This is now a very common move order.

5...b5 6.♘f3 ♙b7!

When Black has played ♙e3 and ♘f3 before ♙d3, there is no reason not to play ♙b7 before ♘d7, as the threat of b5-b4 forces White to play ♙d3 anyway. Actually it might be slightly more accurate to play 6...♙b7.

A third possibility is 6...b4!? intending ♘f6 and ♙b7.

7.♙d3 ♘d7 8.♞c2

Gershon – Morozevich, Zagan 1997, continued:

8.♞d2?! c5 9.dxc5

Worse is 9.a4?! c4 10.♙e2 b4 11.♘d1 ♙xc4 12.0-0 a5 (12...d5!) 13.♙xc4 when instead of playing 13...d5?! Black could have kept a slightly better position with 13...♘gf6 in Stefanova – Petrovic, Jahorina 2003.

9...♘xc5 10.♙xc5?!

After this move White ends up in a worse position. Instead after 10.0-0-0 b4?! (10...♞a5 11.♙xc5 ♙xc3 12.♞xc3 ♞xc3 13.bxc3 dxc5 is about equal) 11.♘d5 ♙xd5 12.exd5 ♘f6 the position was unclear in Peptan – Stefanova, Batumi 1999.

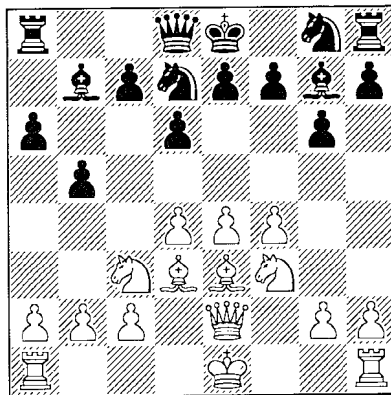
10...dxc5 11.e5 ♞c7

Morozevich has enough confidence in his position to make a calm move. I prefer 11...♙xf3!

12.gxf3 c4 13.♙e4 ♞xd2 † 14.♞xd2 0-0-0 † followed by e6. For once Mr Siliconbrain and I agree that Black is a bit better here.

12.♞e3 ♘h6 13.♘e4

With approximately equal chances.



### 8...c5

This move is fine, but leads to a position where Black has little chance of winning the game and so some might argue: why not just play the Petroff or the Rubinstein variation of the French? For those who find the main line disappointing, I have analysed a few other alternatives:

a) 8...e6 and White has to choose between three moves:

a1) 9.0-0! and Black has to decide where to develop the g8-knight:

a11) 9...♘gf6 10.e5! ♘d5 11.♘xd5 ♙xd5 12.a4! b4 13.♘g5 leads to a clear advantage for White.

a12) 9...♘e7 10.f5! cxf5 11.cxf5 0-0 12.fxg6 hxg6 13.♞ae1 White is about to launch a very strong attack on the kingside.

a2) 9.f5 is less exact since Black can play 9...♘gf6! resulting in a position that seems okay for Black. e.g. 10.0-0 0-0 11.fxe6 fxe6 and Black has enough pressure on White's centre to compensate for White's somewhat freer game.

a3) 9.e5 ♘e7 looks like what Black is hoping for, even though White is still slightly better here.

b) 8...♘gf6?! 9.e5 ♘d5 10.♘xd5! (10.e6?! fxe6

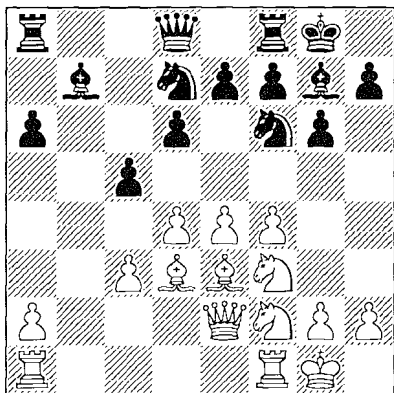
11.♘g5 ♘f8 12.♙xb5† c6 is unclear) 10...♙xd5 11.♘g5 was clearly better for White in T. Ernst – Hillarp Persson, Swedish Championship 2003, and 11.a4 0–0 12.0–0 c6 13.♘g5! would have been even stronger.

c) 8...b4!? This is an exception to the do-not-play-b4-unless-White-plays-a4 rule, but it may well be the best chance to mix things up. After 9.♘d1 ♘gf6! White has two major options:

c1) 10.♙d2 and now 10...c5! is critical and seems to work out well:

c11) 11.e5 ♘d5 12.c6 (12.exd6 cxd4 13.dxe7 ♙xe7 14.♙xe7† ♘xe7 and 12.c3 bxc3 13.bxc3 0–0 are fine for Black.) 12...fxe6 13.♘g5 ♙xd4 (13...♘f8 14.dxc5 dxc5 15.0–0 ♙b6 16.♘h1 with unclear play.) 14.♘xh7 (14.♘xe6 ♙a5 15.a3) 14...♘f8 15.♘xf8 ♘xf8 16.♙xg6 ♙c8 and, however strange it might seem, I am not too worried about this kind of position. Black's control of the centre makes up for the slight draught around his king.

c12) 11.c3! bxc3 12.bxc3 0–0 13.0–0 (13.e5 ♘d5 14.e6 cxd4 15.cxd4 fxe6 is fine for Black)



This position is critical for the whole line. First of all, I would not like to play ...e6 since it weakens the dark squares and invites e5, ♘d1-f2-e4. One interesting possibility is 13...♘e8!? intending 14.e5 ♘c7. Another is 13...d5!? 14.e5 ♘e4 when it seems that Black is doing fine after the following options: 15.♘e3 e6, 15.♘f2 f5 and

15.♙xe4 dxe4 16.♘g5 cxd4 17.cxd4 ♘b6. This all needs testing, of course.

c2) 10.♘f2 c5! (I think 10...0–0?! 11.e5! ♘d5 12.e6 fxc6 13.♘g5 is bad for Black.) and the line divides:

c21) 11.dxc5?! 0–0!? (11...♘xc5 12.♙xc5 dxc5 13.0–0–0 ♙c7! 14.e5 ♘d5 15.g3 0–0 is also fine) 12.cxd6 exd6 13.0–0 ♙e8 14.♙d4 ♘xe4! 15.♙xe4 (15.♘xe4 ♙xd4†) 15...♙xd4 16.♘xd4 ♙xe4 17.♘xe4 d5 looks all right for Black.

c22) 11.c3 11...bxc3 12.bxc3 0–0 (After 12...♙a5?! 13.0–0 ♙xc3 14.♙ab1 ♙c6 15.♙fc1 ♙a5 16.e5 it will be a miracle if Black survives.) 13.0–0 and now Black has to do something about the e5-e6 threat: 13...♘e8! 14.♙ab1 ♙c8 15.♙b2 ♘c7 16.♙fb1 ♙c6 and, even if White is slightly better here, Black is still solid and has plenty of dynamic possibilities.

**9.dxc5 ♘xc5**

After 9...dxc5 10.e5! Black's position has lost its dynamic potential, the queenside pawns are weak and the kingside pieces are not participating in the central struggle. It is obvious that White has a clear advantage.

**10.♙xc5!**

After 10.0–0 Black should avoid 10...b4?! (10...♙xc3?! 11.bxc3 ♘xe4 12.♙d4 ♘ef6 13.c4 and White has a strong initiative.) 11.♘d5 ♙xd5 12.exd5 ♙xb2 13.♙ab1 ♙c3 14.♙d4 when Black will find it difficult to stop White from achieving the ♘f3-d4-c6 manoeuvre with dire consequences. The best move is 10...♙c8! intending to continue with ♘f6 and 0–0, with excellent chances.

**10...♙xc3†!**

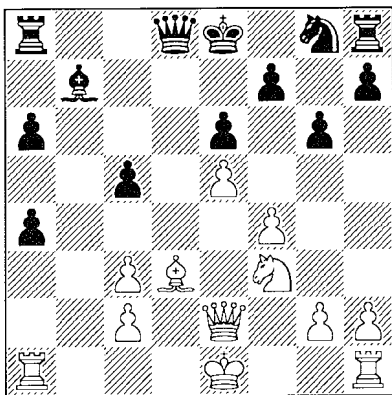
After 10...dxc5?! 11.e5 ♙b6 12.♙e4! Black is obviously worse. If you compare this position to Stefansson – Hillarp Persson (Game 8) after 12.♙c4, it might seem very similar, but in fact the difference is huge. In that game play continued 12...♙xe4 13.♘xe4 ♘h6 with unclear play, but here 12...♙xe4 is met by 13.♙xe4! ♙d8 14.a4 b4 15.♘d5 with a huge advantage for White.

**11.bxc3 dxc5 12.e5**

Defending against c4 and stopping Black from completing his development with ♘f6.

**12...♖h6**

It may be worth trying 12...e6!? 13.a4 and since 13...c4?! 14.♙c4, followed by ♖d4, is horrible for Black, it is necessary to exchange with 13...bxa4!



I feel White should have some advantage here, but the simplified nature of the position gives Black hope of a successful defence. A possible continuation is 14.♖d2 ♖e7 15.♖c4 0-0 16.0-0 ♖d5 (16...♙d5!? 17.♖d6 ♖c8 18.♖e4 ♙xe4 19.♙xe4 ♖a7 20.♖xa4 ♗b6 21.♖fa1 a5 also seems OK for Black.) 17.♖d6 ♙c6 18.c4 ♖f6 19.♗f2 ♖d7 and Black is alive.

**13.0-0 ♗b6!**

This is threatening to win the bishop with 14...c4† and simultaneously prepares ♖d8 and ♖f5. Worse is 13...0-0 because of 14.a4! when Black does not have a wholly satisfactory defence: 14...♗b6 (After 14...bxa4 15.♖g5! Black has to defend against both ♗c2-f2-h4 and ♖a1xa4 followed by f5, and 14...c4 15.♙e4 ♖f5 16.♙xf5 ♙xf3 17.♗xf3 gxf5 18.♗b7 is slightly, but clearly, better for White.) 15.♖h1 bxa4 (15...b4 16.a5 is terrible for Black and after 15...c4 16.♙e4 ♙xe4 17.♗xe4 bxa4 18.♖d4 White dominates the centre and the h6-knight is out of play.) 16.♖g5 and, though Black can fight on, White seems to have a firm grip on the position.

**14.c4?!**

It was safer, and probably better, to play 14.♖h1 ♖d8! 15.a4 c4 16.♙c4 ♙xe4 17.♗xe4

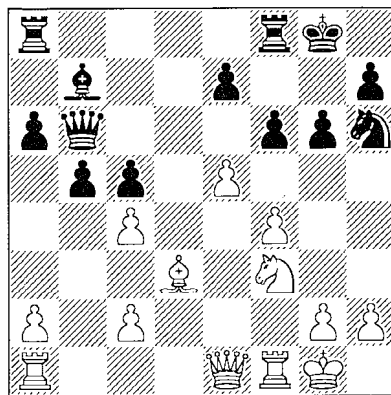
♖f5 18.axb5 axb5 19.♖ae1! e6 though Black is very close to equality. Also 14.♙e4 ♙xe4 15.♗xe4 ♖d8 is not dangerous for Black.

**14...0-0?!**

After 14...♖d8! 15.c3 ♖f5 16.♖ad1 0-0 the position is far from clear.

**15.♗e1 bxc4?!**

I did not feel comfortable with the position and proceeded to make one mistake after another. Better was 15...f6!



I do not see any advantage for White here. Both:

16.♗g3 ♖h8 (16...♖f7? 17.♙xg6 hxg6 18.♗xg6† ♖h8 19.♖g5 ♖xg5 20.fxg5 wins for White) 17.♗h3 ♖g7 and

16.f5 ♖xf5 17.♙xf5 gxf5 18.♖h4 ♗e6 19.♖xf5 ♖h8 seem OK for Black. The b7-bishop can easily become a real nuisance for White.

Really bad is 15...♖f5? 16.♙xf5 gxf5 17.♗h4 ♗e6 18.♖ab1! when ♖g5 followed by ♖b1-b3-g3 is difficult to meet.

**16.♙xc4 ♖f5 17.c3**

White has an advantage since my knight has difficulties joining the game.

**17...♙f3?!**

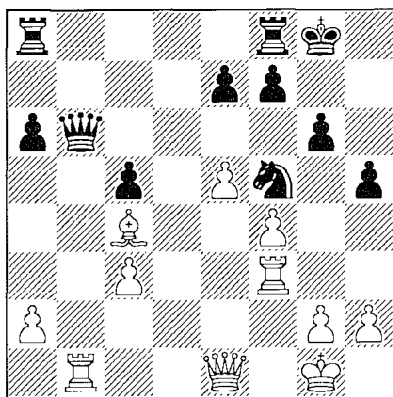
I was overly pessimistic here and did not like 17...e6 18.♖b1 ♗c7 19.g4 (19.♖g5 ♗c6 20.♖b2 h6 is fine for Black) 19...♖g7 because the knight seemed to be too passive on g7. In fact the weak b7-h1 diagonal gives Black enough to compensate

for one badly placed piece. Today I would not hesitate to go for this line, although White is still slightly better.

**18. ♖xf3 h5!**

This is a sad necessity since 18...c6?! 19.g4! ♗g7 20.♖h4 h5 (20...♖b7 21.♖h3 h5 22.gxh5 ♗xh5 23.♙e2 and White is about to deliver mate.) 21.♖h3 ♖b2 22.♖f1 is terrible for Black.

**19. ♖b1**



**19... ♖a7?**

What a horrible, passive move! I must have missed that after 19...♖c6! 20.e6 f6 21.♙d3 I have a defence in 21...c4! 22.♙xf5 ♖c5+ 23.♖e3 ♖xf5 24.♖b7 ♖fe8.

**20.e6 f6 21.♙d3 ♖ab8 22.♙d7 ♖xb1 23.♖xb1 ♖b8 24.♖xb8 ♖xb8 25.♙d3! ♗f8**

White wins easily after 25...♖b2 26.♙xf5 gxh5 27.♖xe7 ♖xa2 28.♖f7 ♖e2 (28...♖c2? 29.♖xf6 ♖xc3? 30.e7 and the pawn promotes.) 29.♖xf6 ♗g7 30.♖xf5.

**26.♙xf5 gxh5 27.♙d5 ♖b6 28.♖xf5 ♖xe6 29.♖xc5 ♖e4 30.♖xh5 ♖xf4 31.♖a5 ♖c4 32.♖xa6 ♖xc3 33.h3 ♗f7 34.a4 ♖a3 35.a5 ♗g6 36.♖a8 ♗g7?**

This move is the start of a quite incomprehensible passage of play from me. As usual in rook endgames, it was important for the defending side to be active: 36...e5 37.a6 ♗f5 38.a7 e4 39.♗f2 ♖a2+ 40.♗e3 ♖a3+ 41.♗d4 ♗f4 42.h4 e3 43.h5 ♖a4+ and it is a draw.

**37.a6 ♗h7? 38.h4 ♗g7? 39.h5 ♗h7?**

I am quite disgusted with my play here. After 39...f5 40.♗f2 e5 41.a7 f4 42.♖e8 (42.♗e2 e4 43.♖e8 ♖a2+ 44.♗c1 ♖xa7 45.♖xe4 ♖a2 draws) 42...♖xa7 43.♖xe5 ♗h6 44.♗f3 ♖a2 it is still not clear how White can win.

**40.a7 ♗g7 41.g4 ♗h7 42.♗f2 ♗g7 43.♗e2 ♗h7 44.♗d2 ♗g7 45.♗c2 ♖a1 46.♗b3 ♖a6 47.♗b4 ♖a1 48.♗c5 ♖a6 49.♗b5 ♖a1 50.♗b6 ♖b1+ 51.♗c6 ♖a1 52.♗d7 e5**

It was only now that I realised that 52...♖d1+ 53.♗xe7 ♖e1+ was not a draw since after 54.♗d6 ♖d1+ 55.♗c5 ♖c1+ 56.♗b4 ♖b1+ 57.♗c3 ♖a1 58.h6+! ♗h7 59.♗d4 White's king just goes back and picks up my f6-pawn.

**53.♗e6**

53.h6+! ♗h7 54.♗e6 wins immediately.

**53...e4**

Here I had the chance to play for a little trap: 53...♖a6+! 54.♗f5 ♖a4 55.h6+?? ♗f7 when White would have no good way of defending against 56...♖f4 mate.

**54.h6+ ♗h7 55.♗xf6 e3 56.♖e8 ♖a6+ 57.♗f5 ♖a5+ 58.♖e5 ♖xa7 59.g5 ♖f7+ 60.♗g4**

**1–0**

I was so depressed about this game that I almost stopped playing the Modern. How stupid that would have been, since there are so many ways to improve. The critical line in the main game is 14.♗h1 but Black seems to be OK after 14...♖d8! 15.a4 c4. Also interesting are 8...b4 and 8... ♙b7 intending ♗gf6, c7-c5xd4 and e5.

The next game features a set-up that has become increasingly popular since Morozevich first played it in the mid nineties:

## Game 10

**A. Sokolov – Bricard**

Val d'Isere 2002

**1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♙g7 3.♗c3 d6 4.f4 a6 5.♙e3**

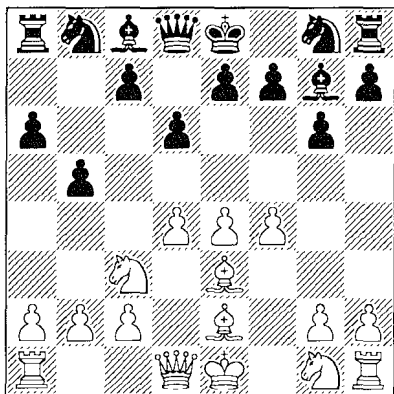
An idea that seems to originate from the game Westerinen – Keene, Reykjavik 1976, and was later picked up by Morozevich. It is also possible to play 5.♙e2!? with a similar idea to these games.



I believe Black should play similarly to the main game with 5...b5 6.♗f3 ♖d7! and if 7.e5 then 7...♞b8. A second possibility is 5...♖d7!? 6.a4 b6 with a position similar to Turov – Hillarp Persson. Black gains from the passive position of the e2-bishop.

### 5...b5 6.♗e2

After 6.♖f3 it is more accurate to start with 6...♗b7, threatening b5-b4, than 6...♖d7, when 7.a3 leads to Berelovich – Svidler and 7.d5 with the idea ♖f3-d4-c6 could become annoying.



### 6...♖d7!

White's idea is to play e4-e5, ♗f3 and then to exchange the f3-bishop against the b7-ditto, followed by ♖f3, when White has more space and stands very harmoniously. But guess what? I will not allow the bishops to be exchanged!

### 7.♗f3

This is less precise than 7.e5, when Black can choose between 7...♖h6!? and 7...e6 leading to the main game. If White does not get to exchange the f3-bishop then where shall the g1-knight go?

### 7...e6!?

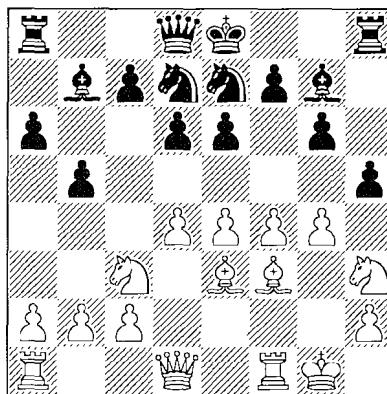
Black also has the option 7...e5! as seen in the next game. After 7...e6 White has more options, as he has not yet played e4-e5.

### 8.♖h3!

A more principled continuation is 8.e5 when Black has to play accurately: 8...♞b8 9.a4 b4 10.♖c4 ♖e7! 11.exd6 ♖d5! (this is an

important idea to remember) 12.♞d3 0-0 and the extra pawn is little comfort to White when contemplating other aspects of the position. The more conservative 9.♖ge2 ♖e7 10.0-0 0-0 leads to a complicated position.

### 8...♖e7 9.0-0 ♗b7 10.g4!? h5!



Black has an interesting plan, but there was no reason not to play 10...h6, when Black can elaborate with a combination of b4, c5, d5, e5 and f5 at his pleasure.

### 11.g5

Do not fall for 11.gxh5? ♖f6 12.hxg6 ♞xh3. 11...b4 12.♖e2 d5 13.e5 ♖f5 14.♗f2 c5?

I recommend preparing c7-c5 with 14...♗f8!, which at the same time stops a2-a3. Black is behind in development, but unless White can open the position it does not matter.

### 15.a3!

This move improves White's pawn structure at the expense of Black's, and simultaneously opens up the position.

### 15...bxa3 16.♞xa3 ♗f8 17.♞a2 ♞c7

White was threatening to play c2-c4.

### 18.c3 a5 19.♖g3 ♗a6?!

A horrible move that leaves Black without hope. Instead 19...♖xg3 20.♗xg3 ♗a6 21.♞e1 ♞b6 was an excellent alternative, when Black seems to be OK. After the text Black's position is cut in two, since the h8-rook has to watch the h-pawn and the king has to stay in the centre.

20. ♖xf5 gxf5 21. ♗e2 ♗xe2 22. ♖xe2 c4  
23. ♖fa1

Is it really that bad? Well, Black is lost because he has two weaknesses, one on a5 and one on h5. And rarely do we see two weaknesses more separated.

23... ♗e7 24. ♖g2 ♖a6 25. ♘g1 ♖a7 26. ♘f3 a4  
27. ♖h3 ♘b6 28. ♖g1 a3 29. g6 fxf6 30. ♗h4

Now we have a visual of the end. The end was:  
30... ♖g8 31. ♗xe7 ♖xe7 32. ♖ga1 axb2 33. ♖xb2  
♖xa2 34. ♖xa2 ♖c7 35. ♖a6 ♖b8 36. ♖a3†  
♖e8 37. ♘g5 ♖c6 38. ♘h7 ♖f7 39. ♖a7† ♘d7  
40. ♖c5 ♖xc5 41. dxc5 ♖e8 42. c6 ♘c5 43. ♘f6†  
♖f8 44. ♖a5

1-0

If White plays ♗c2 I would like to wait with e7-c6 until White has committed to e4-e5: Sokolov's plan of g2-g4-g5 was only efficient because his e-pawn was still on e4.

In the next game we will see what I think is a better alternative to 7...c6:

### Game 11

**Fluvia Poyatos – Hillarp Persson**

Spain 2003

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.♘c3 d6 4.♗e3 a6 5.f4

In Th. Thorhallsson – Hillarp Persson, Iceland 2004, a similar position to the main game arose by a different move order: 5. ♖d2 ♘d7 6. f4 b5 7. ♗c2 ♗b7 8. ♗f3 e5 9. fxe5?! (9. dxc5 dxe5 10. 0-0-0 ♘gf6 11. g4 leads to variation b) below) 9... dxc5 10. d5 ♘gf6 11. ♘ge2 (11. ♘h3 is better though Black is still fine.) 11...c6 12. dxc6 ♗xc6 13. ♘g3 ♖c8 14. 0-0 h5?! 15. ♖ad1 h4 16. ♘h1 and my 14th move proved to be more of a weakening than an asset. Next time, if I should be so lucky, I will play 14...0-0 and claim a slight advantage.

5...b5 6. ♗e2 ♘d7 7. ♗f3 e5!

I think this is the best way to meet 7. ♗f3. Only after 7.e5 should Black play e6.

**8.dxe5**

Black is fine after either 8.a4 b4 9. ♘d5 a5 or 8. ♘ge2 ♗b7 9. 0-0 ♘gf6. It seems to me that the

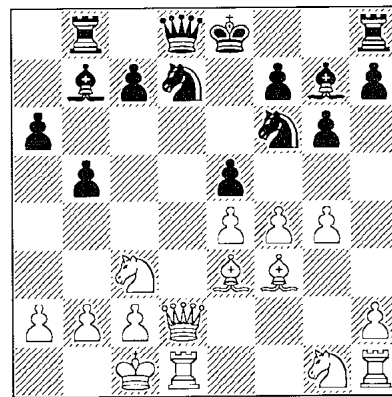
plan chosen by White in this game is the most critical.

**8...dxe5 9.f5**

There are two other moves that are critical:

a) In Hector – Hillarp Persson, Sweden (Team-ch) 2004, White played 9. ♖d5. This actually loses a tempo compared to line b, but it is the only practical example of this idea (♖d2 and g4). The game continued:

9... ♖b8 10. 0-0-0 ♘gf6 11. ♖d2 ♗b7 12. g4!



White is threatening to play g5 and f5 with deadly consequences for Black. This is something you always have to watch out and be prepared for. In this game Black is able to launch a counter attack on the e4-pawn, but what if White had played 12.a3 instead, keeping g4 up his sleeve? After 12... ♖e7! 13. g4 b4 14. axb4 ♖xb4 15. ♗a7 0-0 16. ♗xb8 ♖xb8 Black will have marvellous compensation for the exchange.

12...b4 13. ♘b1

13. ♘d5 exf4 14. ♗xf4 ♘xd5 15. exd5 0-0 is unclear.

13... ♖e7

My computer program sees nothing wrong with grabbing a pawn with 13...cxf4!? 14. ♗xf4 (14. ♗a7?! ♖a8 15. ♗d4 c5 16. ♗xf6 ♘xf6 17. ♖xf4 ♘d7 is clearly better for Black.) 14... ♘xc4, but I have my doubts as to whether it is reliable advice. The move I chose is good enough.

14.f5 gxf5 15.gxf5

After 15.exf5 ♖xg4 16.♗xb7 ♞xb7 17.♔f3 it might be compensation to Jonny Hector, but not to anybody else.

15...♞g8!?

Another excellent possibility is 15...a5 when 16.♔h3 a4 17.♞hg1 ♗f8 18.♔f2 ♞d6 is pleasant for Black.

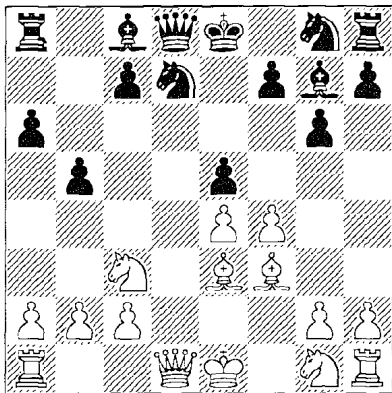
16.♔c2 ♖xe4 17.♗xc4 ♗xc4 18.♞hf1 ♔f6?

This is wrong. Much better is 18...♞d6! 19.♞xd6 cxd6 20.♔g3 ♗b7 21.♞xd6 ♗f8 22.♞d3 ♔f6 and Black has the kind of position a Sicilian diehard dreams of.

19.♔g3

and Jonny had excellent compensation for the pawn.

b) After this game I realised that White can be slightly more conservative with the queen:



9.♞d2! ♗b7 10.0-0-0 ♔gf6!?

10...exf4! 11.♗xf4 ♔c5 is also possible.

11.g4 b4! 12.♔d5 exf4!

An important move order since 12...♔xd5 13.exd5 exf4 14.♗d4! is better for White.

13.♗xf4 ♔xd5 14.exd5 0-0 15.g5 ♔e5 16.h4 a5 17.h5 b3! 18.cxb3 a4 19.♞h2 ♞e8!

Defending ♔e5 and giving the king a square on f8: A typical move in a position where White cannot achieve the exchange of the dark-squared bishops.

20.hxg6 hxg6 21.b4 a3 22.b3 ♔xf3 23.♔xf3 ♗xd5

With an advantage for Black. This is all quite hypothetical and needs to be tested in practice. However, I feel optimistic about Black's chances.

**9...♗b7 10.♔h3 ♔gf6 11.a3!**

It is important to stop Black from playing b4 since this would give him control of the centre. One example is 11.♔f2?! b4! 12.♔a4 gxf5 13.exf5 c4 14.♗e2 ♗c6 15.c4 h5 and Black was clearly better in Lanka – Peter Petran, Groningen 1991.

**11...♞c7 12.g4 gxf5 13.gxf5**

My pieces are well placed except for the g7-bishop and the following moves are intended to improve the position of the knights further and simultaneously prepare the ♗g7-f6-g5/h4 manoeuvre.

**13...♔b6 14.♞e2 ♔c4 15.♗c1 ♔d7 16.b3 ♔d6 17.♔f2 ♞d8!?**

Some people are quite happy about castling long in similar positions, but I generally wait until I have a more precise idea of how many moves it will take both sides to develop an attack. On e8 the king is quite safe since there is no way for White to open the centre. The main alternative is 17...♗f6, but there is no hurry to exchange the g7-bishop and I would like my opponent to have to keep guessing my next step.

**18.♗e3 ♗f6**

I considered 18...♔xf5?!, but decided to avoid it because of 19.exf5 e4 20.♔cxc4! ♗xc4 21.♔xe4 ♗xa1 22.♗g5 ♞e5 23.c3 when ♔f6† is a bad threat and after 23...0-0 24.♞c2 I did not like the look of my bishop on a1.

**19.♞g1 h6**

I definitely prefer Black now. My king is stuck in the centre but my pieces are clearly better placed (as soon as I have exchanged ♗f6 for ♗e3), attacking e4.

**20.0-0-0 ♔c4! 21.bxc4?**

My opponent crumbles. It was not clear how I could get a clear advantage after 21.♔b1. Only with the help of various computer programs did I come up with 21...♔xa3† 22.♔a2 ♗g5! 23.♗xg5 hxg5 24.♔d5 ♗xd5 25.exd5 b4 and it seems that Black is indeed clearly better.

**21...♞xa3† 22.♔d2!?**

Objectively this is worse than 22.♔b1 ♞xc3

23.♖d3, but it has the advantage of leading to a clearly lost but complicated position, rather than to a plainly lost position where the opponent has the initiative.

22...♗b6† 23.♗d5 ♗xc4† 24.♞xc4 bxc4  
25.♞a1 ♞b4† 26.♙e2 ♗xd5 27.exd5 ♗g5  
28.♗e4 ♗xc3 29.♞gb1 ♞e7 30.♙xe3 ♞h4!

The key move. Otherwise White has some compensation for the queen.

31.♞xa6 ♞f4† 32.♙e2 ♞xh2† 33.♙e3 ♞g8  
34.♞h1 ♞xc2 35.♞hxh6 ♞b8 36. ♗f6† ♙d8  
0-1

Considering the somewhat clumsy position of White's bishop on f3 I do not think this variation is dangerous for Black. 9.♖d2 is interesting, but I think White's position lacks harmony and that Black should be at least equal.

The next game deals with the theoretical main line: 6...b4, which I think is considerably weaker than 6...♗d7.

### Game 12

#### Galkin – Ponomariov

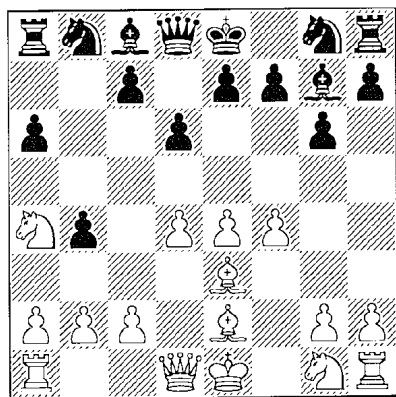
Lausanne 2001

1.c4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.♗c3 d6 4.f4 a6 5.♗e3 b5  
6.♗e2 b4?!

This idea of Ponomariov's is generally recommended by theory, but I find it rather second-rate.

7.♗b1

I am much more concerned about 7.♗a4!



The two main reasons are:

Both of Black's logical counter strikes in the centre, c7-c5 and e7-e5, weaken c5: a fact the knight on a4 is ideally placed to take advantage of. And after ♗c3-b1 and ♗b1-d2 White's pieces are cramped behind the pawns, while with ♗a4 White gains more space for the rest of the troops.

To prove my point I call forward the game Vavra – Inarkiev, Pardubice 2002, which continued 7...♗f6 8.♗f3 ♗b7 9.e5 ♗d5 10.♗d2 ♞c8?! (I prefer 10...a5 here, but White keeps the advantage with 11.c4 bxc3 12.bxc3.) 11.c4 bxc3 12.bxc3 ♗d7 13.c4 ♗5b6 14.c5, when neither 14...♗xa4 15.♞xa4 dxc5 16.dxc5 ♗xf3 17.♗xf3 0-0, 14...dxc5 15.♗xc5 ♗d5, nor 14...♗d5 make me happy about Black's prospects. I do not like the crowded feeling, and the open files on the queenside give me premonitions about elephants trampling down my c7-pawn. Maybe I am exaggerating. There is some hope in the third line. 15.♞c1 dxc5 16.dxc5 ♗c6 17.♗e2 ♗b8 18.♞b3 ♞d7 19.♗ac3 ♗xc3 20.♞xc3 0-0 and White could have gained a clear advantage with 21.♗d4.

7...♗b7 8.♗f3 ♗f6 9.♖d3

I doubt this is the best square for the queen, but the alternatives do not look too scary either:

a) 9.♗d2 and Black has two good alternatives:

a1) 9...♗bd7 10.c3 a5 11.♗e2 (White's set-up pleases the eye, but is not very effective.) 11...0-0 12.0-0 (12.e5 ♗xf3 13.♗xf3 ♗d5 14.♗d2 c5 is heaven for Black.) 12...c5 (I prefer to push the other pawn with 12...c5.) 13.♞c2 ♞e7 14.cxb4 axb4 15.♗g3 ♗h6?! and Black lost the thread in de Vreugt – van Wissen, Enschede 2002. Better was 15...exd4! 16.♗xd4 ♞fb8! with a complicated position, while a dangerous mistake would be 16...c5?! 17.♗xf6! ♗xf6 18.e5 ♗xf3 19.exf6 ♞e3† 20.♙h1 ♗d5 21.♗f5!! gxf5 22.♞xf5 ♗xg2† 23.♙xg2 ♙h8 24.♗c4 with a terrible initiative.

a2) 9...e5!? 10.fxe5 dxe5 11.d5 0-0 12.♗h3 a5 13.c4 bxc3 14.bxc3 c6 15.c4 cxd5 16.cxd5 and in this unclear position Black ran amok with 16...♗xd5 (16...♗a6!?) but never got enough compensation for the piece, Voloshin – Cicak, Czech Team ch. 2002.

b) 9.e5 ♖d5 10.♙d2 dxe5!? 11.dxe5 (11.fxc5 c5!) 11...♗c6 12.♗e2?! g5! and the white centre is no more, though not necessarily a dead parrot.

9...♗bd7 10.♗d2

Though it is of little theoretical value I should mention Rosandic – Delchev, Zadar 2001, where Black played truly inspired chess:

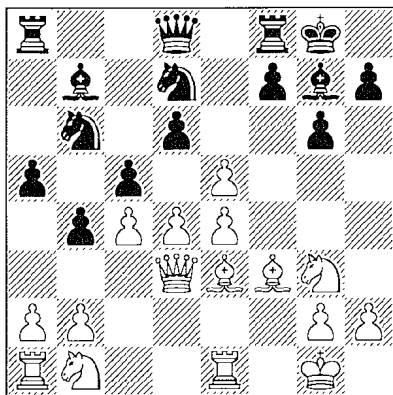
10.♗e2 0-0 11.0-0 e5 12.♗g3?! a5 13.♙e1?! ♗b6?!

Even better is 13...♙a6 14.♙b3 c5 with an advantage for Black.

14.c4?

After 14.♗d2 the position is unclear.

14...♗fd7! 15.fxc5 c5!!



A beautiful move that blows the centre to smithereens.

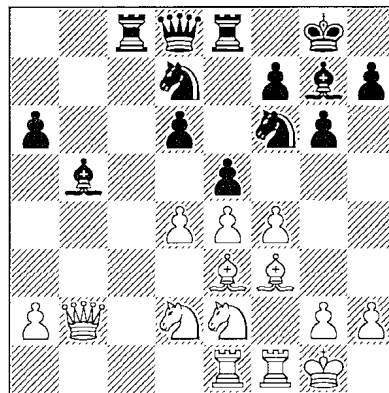
16.e6

After 16.exd6 cxd4 17.♙xd4 ♗e5 18.♙xe5 ♙xc5 19.c5 ♗d7 White's pawns fall one by one.

16...cxd4 17.♙xd4 ♗e5 18.cxf7 ♙xf7 19.♙xe5 ♙xc5 20.♙c2 a4 21.♗d2 a3 22.♙ab1 axb2 23.♙xb2 ♙xb2 24.♙xb2 ♗d7 25.♙g4 ♗c5 26.♙d4 ♙g5 27.♙h3 ♙xa2 28.♗f3 ♙f4 0-1

A lively game from Delchev.

10...0-0 11.c4 bxc3 12.bxc3 c5 13.♗e2 cxd4 14.cxd4 e5 15.♙b1 ♙c6 16.0-0 ♙b5 17.♙c3 ♙c8 18.♙b2 ♙e8 19.♙be1



The players agreed a draw. I presume Black benefited more from this draw than White since otherwise he would probably have continued 19...exd4 20.♙xd4 ♗c5 with a nasty initiative.

½-½

I expect 7.♗a4 to put this line out of business any day now.

The next game features White's safest try for an advantage in this chapter: 7.a4.

### Game 13

Hermansson – Hillarp Persson

Swedish Team Championship 2001

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♙g7 3.♗c3 d6 4.f4 a6 5.♗f3 b5 6.♙d3

It is also possible to play 6.a4!?. After 6...b4 White has two alternatives:

a) 7.♗d5 ♙b7 8.♙c4 when 8...a5?! 9.♗e3! c6 10.d5! is good for White. Black should instead play 8...c6 9.♗xb4 a5! 10.♗d3 ♙xe4 with mutual chances.

b) 7.♗e2 ♙b7?! (Forcing ♗g3, a move White would like to do anyway.) 8.♗g3 ♗d7 9.a5! c5 10.d5 (Because White is controlling both e5 and b6 it will be hard to challenge a white bishop or knight on c4 – a very bad omen.) 10...♗gf6 11.♙c4 ♙c7 12.0-0 0-0 13.♙d3 ♙fc8 14.♗g5

Ĥf8?! 15.e5 dxe5 16.d6 exd6 17.Ĥxf7† Ĥh8 18.Ĥxe8 Ĥxe8 19.Ĥxd6 and White was winning in Karasev – Sznepik, Rubinstein Memorial 1974.

After 7.Ĥe2 it is important to play accurately. 7...a5 looks like the safest option, but 7...e6 is also possible.

**6...Ĥd7!**

After 6...Ĥb7?!-7.a4 b4 8.Ĥe2 Black cannot avoid the lines where he is clearly worse.

**7.a4!**

It seems logical for White to trade some of his lead in development for a marginal weakening of Black's queenside. Possibly this is the most dangerous way for White to play against the a6-line.

**7...b4**

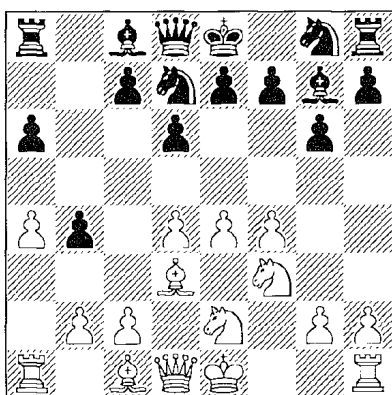
There have been many games with 7...bxa4, but if I have to play this I would rather change my opening repertoire. Even the Petroff comes to mind.

**8.Ĥe2**

This is much stronger than 8.Ĥd5 when Black has two alternatives:

a) 8...c5!? 9.dxc5 ( 9.c3 Ĥb7 10.0-0 cxd4 11.Ĥxd4 bxc3 12.bxc3 Ĥxd5 13.cxd5 Ĥa5 is promising for Black.) 9...Ĥxc5 10.Ĥxb4 Ĥf6 and Black has plenty of compensation for the pawn.

b) 8...a5 9.0-0 e6 10.Ĥc3 Ĥe7 is unclear. The white knight is more centralized on e3 than on c2, but it is also in the way of the c1-bishop.



**8...e6**

Black has four alternatives here:

a) 8...Ĥgf6!?, which I played against Jonny Hector in Gothenburg 1997.

9.0-0 Ĥb7

There is no time for 9...a5 since 10.e5! Ĥd5 11.Ĥb5! e6 12.f5 gxf5 13.Ĥc6 Ĥb8 14.Ĥxd5 exd5 15.Ĥg5 hurts too much.

10.e5

After 10.Ĥg3 c5 11.c3 cxd4! (it is important not to open the b file) 12.cxd4 e5! 13.Ĥd2 a5 the position is complicated and 14.fxe5 dxe5 15.dxe5?! Ĥg4 16.Ĥb5 0-0 17.Ĥxd7 Ĥxd7 18.Ĥf4 Ĥe6 is even slightly better for Black. I guess White can improve on this last line, but I think Black should be fine anyway.

10...Ĥd5 11.a5!

A healthy move. Not so much because it monitors the a6-pawn, but because it restricts the freedom of the d7-knight.

11...c5 12.Ĥg5 cxd4!? 13.e6 Ĥc5 14.Ĥxf/ Ĥc8 15.f5?! Ĥf8

With good chances for Black (though Jonny still managed to hunt down my king and kill it). Instead of 15.f5, Jonny should have played the prosaic 15.Ĥxh8, with a clear advantage.

b) Stefansson – Spraggett, Elista (ol) 1998, went 8...c5?! 9.c3 bxc3 10.bxc3 e6 and now Stefansson threw himself unnecessarily into deep water with 11.h4!?. Instead 11.0-0 leaves Black with a really sorry position: the combination of e6 and c5 has weakened the dark squares badly and e4-e5, Ĥf3-g5-c4 and Ĥc1-a3 are going to be difficult to handle.

c) A very interesting move for Black is 8...a5, intending to exchange bishops with Ĥa6. White has three main alternatives:

c1) 9.c4 bxc3?! (9...e5!? 10.fxe5 dxe5 11.d5 c6 is rather unclear) 10.bxc3 Ĥa6 11.Ĥb5! e6 12.Ĥb1 Ĥe7 13.Ĥa3 0-0 14.0-0 Ĥb6 was slightly better for White in Khruschiov – Hillarp Persson, Calvia (ol) 2004.

c2) More precise is 9.0-0 Ĥa6 10.Ĥb5! e6 11.c4 Ĥe/ and though White has a certain advantage, there is much to play for here.

c3) The final option is 9.d5 when 9...Ĥgf6

10.♖e4 0-0! (Black should not move the c8-bishop but rather continue ♖c5 and e6, answering ♖c6 with ♜e8.) 11.0-0 ♖c5 is unclear.

d) The fourth alternative is 8...♗b7, when 9.0-0 ♖g6 leads back to line a. Perhaps this is the best move order since White does not have the options 9.d5 and 9.e5.

### 9.0-0 ♖g6

Possibly 9...♖e7 is more exact, but I have become more and more worried about the f4-f5 idea lately. After 9...♖e7 10.f5! exf5 11.exf5 ♖f6 12.♖g3 (White is slightly better after 12.fxg6 hxg6 13.♗g5 c5, but Black's position has a lot of potential.) 12...0-0 13.♗g5 White has some initiative, but Black has chances too with c5. I avoided this line the last time I faced this variation (7.a4), but this is quite playable too.

### 10.e5

Even here 10.f5! is problematic for Black.

### 10...♖d5 11.a5! 0-0 12.c4

Another approach is 12.♗d2 ♗b7 13.♞e1, but Black is doing fine after 13...♞b8.

### 12...bxc3 13.bxc3 c5 14.♗d2

Somewhere around here I feel there should be an improvement for White, but I am not sure. Black's position might be more resilient than I first thought. For example, 14.♗e4 ♞b8 15.dxc5 ♖xc5! 16.♗xd5 exd5 17.♞xd5 ♖b3 and Black has excellent compensation.

### 14...♗b7 15.♞e1 ♖e7!

The knight was obstructing the b7-bishop and 15...cxd4 16.cxd4 dxc5 17.fxc5 ♗c6 works badly because of 18.♖g3, when the d7-knight has nowhere to go and White is coming with ♖g3-e4-d6.

### 16.♖g3 ♗xf3!

It is important to diminish the white forces before closing the centre. The bishop on b7 will be out of play and White's chances of a successful attack increase with every piece on the kingside.

### 17.♞xf3 d5 18.♖h1 ♖c6 19.♞f2 c4 20.♗c2 f5!

This is a necessary precaution before grabbing the a5-pawn: 20...♖xa5? 21.f5 exf5 22.♖xf5 and I do not think Black will be able to survive for long. 21.exf6

White must open lines against the black king or the a5-pawn will be lost without any compensation.

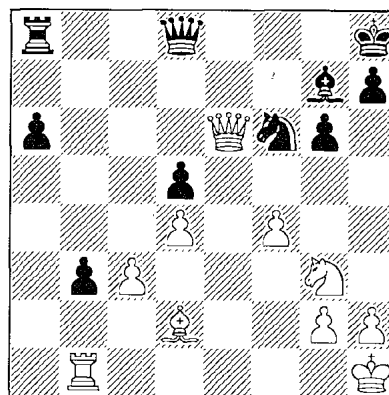
### 21...♖xf6 22.♞c2 ♗c8 23.♞c3 ♖xa5! 24.♞xc6

Black is on top after 24.♗a4 ♖b3 25.♞c1 ♞c7 26.♞xe6 ♞xc6 27.♞xc6† ♖h8 28.♗c1 ♞a5 when the weak c3-pawn is White's road to misery.

### 24...♖b3 25.♞c1 ♞xc6 26.♞xc6† ♖h8 27.♗xb3?

With this move White exchanges an integral part of his attacking potential, simultaneously giving me a passed pawn. Better was 27.♗c3 though 27...♞a5 keeps the initiative.

### 27...cxb3 28.♞b1



### 28...♞b8?

I was in grave time trouble (as usual) and missed 28...♞a5 with a winning position.

### 29.♞xa6 ♞d7 30.f5 ♖h5 31.♞e6?

Emil shares my troubles and misses 31.♞xb3 with an obvious advantage.

### 31...♞xc6 32.fxc6 ♖f6 33.♗f4 ♞b6 34.e7 ♖g8 35.♖g1 ♖c8 36.♖f1 ♖f7 37.♗c1 ♖d6 38.♗a3 ♖c4 39.♗c5 ♞b5 40.♖f2 ♗f6

Black is slightly better, but unfortunately I lost on time.

### 1-0

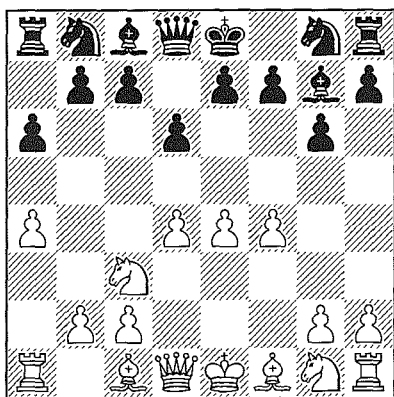
It is quite obvious that White had the initiative after 8...e6, but 8...a5 intending ♗a6, and 8...♗b7 followed by ♖g6, c7-c5xd4 and e5, are interesting and better alternatives.

In the next game White stops me from playing b5, but nothing could make me happier.

**Game 14**

**Spieß – Hillarp Persson**  
Recklinghausen 2001

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.♖c3 d6 4.f4 a6 5.a4?!



Some would say this is just one of many possible moves of equal value, a question of taste. I disagree. It seems to me that White renounces all ambitions of an opening initiative with this move.

5...♖c6!

Why not play ♖c6 one move earlier if it is so good now? Sure, you can, but it is much stronger here for a number of reasons:

1. Black can now use the b4-square for the knight.
2. White can no longer castle queenside.
3. Finally, Black does not have to worry about ♗b5.

What did White get in exchange? Don't ask me.

6.♗e3

This is the main line, but White has two other options. The first is nothing to be worried about: a) 6.♖f3?! ♗g4 7.♗e3 ♗xf3 8.gxf3 d5! 9.e5

Not 9.♖xd5 e6 10.♖c3 ♗xd4 when Black is clearly better, nor 9.exd5 ♖b4 10.♗c4 ♖f6, which is a positional catastrophe. 9...e6 10.h4 h5 11.♞d2 ♖h6

and Black held a slight advantage in Barskij – Hillarp Persson, Recklinghausen 2001.

b) The second option is 6.d5 when play acquires a forced character: 6...♖b4! 7.a5 (7.♖b1 a5! and Black can answer c3 with ♖a6.) 7...e6! (Every move is fighting for the b4-knight; 7...c6? 8.♞a4 c5 9.♖b1 and White picks up the knight on the next move with c2-c3.) 8.♞a4 c5! with a complicated position. In Mikhailovskij – Hillarp Persson, Gothenburg 2003, White played 8.dxe6 instead of 8.♞a4 and after 8...♗xe6 9.♖f3 ♖f6 10.♗d3 I should have continued 10...♗g4 with excellent chances.

6...♖f6 7.♖f3 0-0 8.♗e2

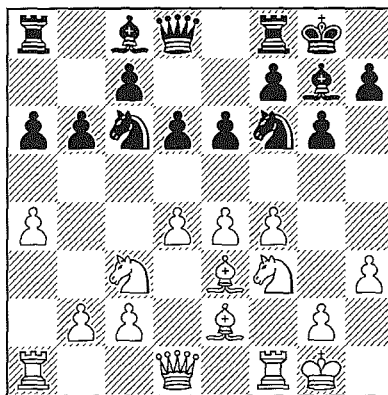
It looks more active to play 8.♗d3, but then Black grabs the initiative with b6, ♖b4 and c7-c5.

8...b6!

There is no need to fear 9.e5 since 9...♖g4! 10.♗g1 ♖b4! leads to active play for Black.

9.0-0 e6 10.♗h1

White would like to retreat the e3-bishop to g1 if Black answers e4-e5 with ♖g4. Another possibility is 10.h3!?



In Kiik – Paronen, Jyväskylä 2000, Black quickly went wrong:

10...♗b7

This is not a big mistake, but it leads to a position where Black has lost some of his dynamic potential. I prefer 10...♖b4 or 10...♖c7 with similar play to the main game.



11.e5 ♖d5?!

Black should keep the tension with 11...♖d7  
12.♗d2 ♖e7.

12.♖xd5 exd5 13.♗d2

Due to Black's static pawn structure White had a small advantage that he eventually turned into a win.

A third, and so far never used, idea is to play 10.e5 ♖g4 11.♙c1. Now 11...♙b7 12.♖g5 ♖h6 is okay for Black.

10...♖b4?!

More flexible is 10...♙b7!.

11.e5!

Sooner or later White has to do this, or Black will play c7-c5 and undermine his centre.

11...♖d7?!

Objectively not the best move, but I wanted to avoid 11...♖fd5 12.♖xd5 ♖xd5 13.♙d2 ♙b7 when the exchanges have made the position easier to play for White.

12.♖e4?!

This does not seem right, but I am not sure how White can improve. If 12.♗d2, with the idea 12...♙b7 13.a5!? b5? 14.♖xb5 axb5 15.♗xb5, then Black must play accurately. Instead of 13...b5?, better is 13...bxa5 14.♖a4 when things are far from clear.

12...♙b7 13.♖f2 c5

When playing c7-c5 after having played d6 and e6, it is important to keep an eye on the d6-square in order to keep White's knights out of there.

14.c3 ♖d5 15.♙d2 cxd4 16.cxd4

White is finally threatening to launch ♖f2-e4-d6, so Black must act before it is too late.

16...f6! 17.exd6 ♗b8 18.♖e4 ♗d8 19.♙c4!

This is better than 19.♗b3 f5 (19...♙f8!?) 20.♖c3 ♗xd6 21.♖e5 ♗b4 when Black's pieces are cooperating better than their white counterparts.

19...f5 20.♖eg5 ♗xd6 21.♗e1?!

White has no plan and proceeds to make small threats. The important question here should be: Where do you want your pieces to be? Black would like to play h6 driving the g5-knight to h3, where it is not well placed. Therefore White

could consider vacating the f3-square by playing 21.♖e5 ♖xe5 22.dxe5 with mutual chances.

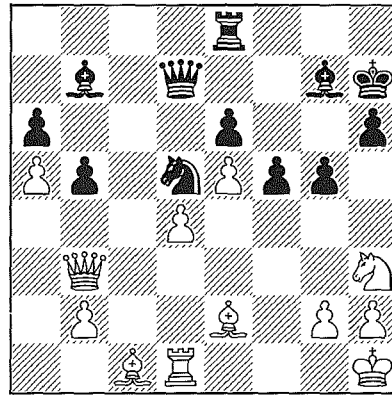
Even better is 21.♗e2 ♗e8 22.♖e5 ♖xe5 23.dxe5 ♗d7 24.♗fd1 ♙f8 when White even has an edge.

21...♗e8 22.♗b3?! h6 23.♖h3

Black has no problems after 23.♗xe6? ♗xe6 24.♙b4 ♗c6 25.♖xe6 ♗xe6 26.♗e1 ♗c6 27.♗e7 ♗d8 when White has burnt his best gunpowder.

23...♗ac8 24.♗ac1 ♖h7 25.♖e5 ♖xe5 26.fxe5 ♗d7 27.♗ed1 g5 28.a5?! b5 29.♙e2 ♗xc1 30.♙xc1

My position is wonderful, but time is an issue.



30...g4?

I avoided 30...♗c8! because I saw ghosts after 31.♙xg5 hxg5 32.♖xg5† ♖g8 33.♙h5, but alas 33...♖f4! 34.♙f7† ♗xf7 35.♖xf7 ♙d5! 36.♗g3 ♗c2 37.♖h6† ♖h7 should have won.

31.♖f4 ♗c8 32.♖d3 ♙f8 33.♙d2 ♗c4 34.♖c5 ♙xc5 35.dxc5 ♗d4?!

Black would still be slightly better after 35...♗xc5 36.♗g3 ♗c2. Now it is a draw.

36.♙c1 ♗xd1† 37.♗xd1 ♗g7 38.♗d2 h5 39.♗g5?! ♗xg5 40.♙xg5 ♖g6 41.♙d2 ♖e7 42.♖g1 ♙e4 43.g3 ♖c6 44.♙c3 f4 45.gxf4 ♖f5 46.♙d2 ♖e7 47.♙d1 ♖g6 48.♙b3 ♖xf4 49.♙xf4 ♖xf4 50.♙xe6 ♖xe5 51.♙c8 ♖d4 52.♙xa6 ♖xc5 53.♙c8 b4 54.♖f2 ♖b5 55.a6 ♖b6 56.♖g3 ♙d3 57.♖h4 ♙e2?!

½-½

Black is extremely flexible in this variation and it is difficult to say something general about what Black should strive for. My complete knowledge on the subject can still be condensed into something like: “♠f6, 0-0, b6, ♕b7, e6, hit e4, play c5 and sometimes ♖b4 is good.”

The final game of this chapter is a pseudo-f4 line originating from the Flexible Dragon System (4.♕e3). It is not a good line for Black and can be avoided (5...♗f6), but I have included it so that the reader acquires a more general understanding of the f4-positions.

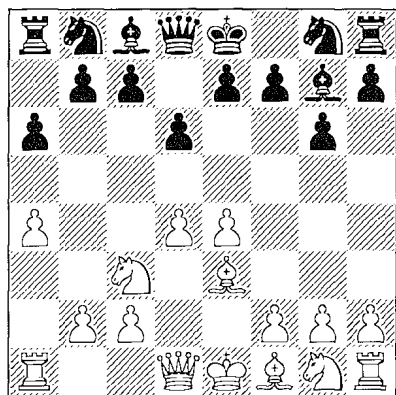
**Game 15**  
**Turov – Hillarp Persson**  
 Copenhagen 2002

**1.e4 g6!**

I was sharing the lead in this tournament prior to the eighth round and had a free day to decide what to play against Turov. Whether to spend an uneventful day with the French, or go to the Tivoli with the Modern. I felt like the Tivoli.

**2.d4 ♕g7 3.♗c3 d6 4.♕e3 a6 5.a4!?**

An interesting move order if White is pleased with a very small advantage indeed.



**5...b6!??**

I did not want to play 5...♗c6 since 6.♗f3 or 6.h3 lead to positions where I cannot enter

a Hippo set-up, nor advance my c-pawn. For the best move 5...♗f6! see the Flexible Dragon Restrained.

**6.f4!**

This is the best way for White to take advantage of Black's provocative play.

**6...♗d7 7.♗f3 e6!**

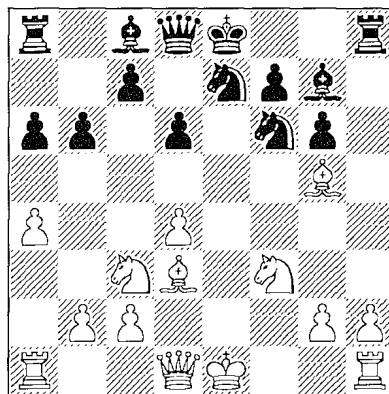
After 7...c5?! 8.d5! White continues ♕c4, h3 and 0-0, and Black is stopped from playing both b5 and e6.

**8.♕d3 ♗e7!**

The bishop should stay on c8 so that f5 can be met by exf5, ♗f6 and ♕f5. An excellent example of how not to play this variation is: 8...♕b7 9.0-0 ♗g6?! (9...♗e7 10.f5 is slightly better for White) 10.e5 ♗g4? (the knight has no future here) 11.♕d2 c5? 12.♗g5! Threatening both ♖xg4 and ♗e4. Black is lost. 12...cxd4 13.♗c4 ♕xe4 14.♗xe4 and only a miracle saved me from losing this game. Anand – Hillarp Persson, Benidorm (rapid) 2003.

**9.♗e2??**

White prepares to meet c5 with c3, but this gives me just enough time to coordinate my forces and prepare to meet f5 (which is generally the most dangerous way for White to proceed after Black has played ♗e7) with exf5 and g5. I was more worried about 9.f5! exf5 10.exf5 ♗f6 11.fxg6 hxg6 12.♕g5



It is clear that White has the initiative here, but Black might be able to get a reasonable position

by playing ♔f5. This is the reason why Black should not play ♔b7 earlier.

Another possible continuation is 9.0–0 c5 (9...h6!? 10.f5 exf5 11.exf5 g5) 10.a5!? cxd4 (10...b5 11.dxc5 ♖xc5 12.♙xc5 dxc5 13.e5 looks unpleasant for Black) 11.♙xd4 e5 12.♙e3 b5 and it all looks pretty unclear to me.

### 9...♔b7 10.0–0 h6!

Not 10...0–0?! 11.♖g3 h6 12.f5 exf5 13.exf5 g5 when White has 14.♖h5 with a clear advantage.

### 11.f5!?

After 11.♖g3 I planned to play 11...f5!? 12.e5. (Otherwise Black get excellent play with fxe4, ♖f6 and ♖f5.) 12...dxe5! Now Black gets a reasonable game after either 13.fxe5 c5 or 13.dxe5 ♖d5 14.♙e2 ♙f8!? 15.♙d2 g5.

### 11...exf5 12.exf5 g5!

It is important not to open more lines for White. After 12...0–0 13.fxg6 fxg6 14.♖f4 ♙e8 15.♙d2 White has some initiative.

### 13.♖g3?!

The knight is not well placed here, as Black will win a tempo when he throws his pawns down the board. It was better to play 13.c4 intending d5 and ♖e/♖f-d4. After 13...d5 14.c5 the position is complicated and difficult to evaluate.

### 13...♖f6

Stopping both ♖h5 and ♖e4.

### 14.c4 g4! 15.♖d2?!

After 15.♖h4 d5 the h4-knight is slightly misplaced, but I am not sure how I could have turned this to my advantage. Now Black takes a firm grip of the initiative.

### 15...d5 16.b3?!

It was better to play 16.c5 immediately.

### 16...h5! 17.c5 h4 18.♖e2 bxc5?!

I wanted very much to open up the a8-h1 diagonal for my bishop, but the effect of this move is very much the opposite. Better was 18...h3!

Now White has a difficult choice:

a) 19.♙c1 hxc2 20.♙f2 ♖c6 followed by ♖f8, ♙d7 and ♙e8 is much better for Black.

b) 19.cxb6 hxc2 20.♙f2 cxb6 is little different.

c) 19.g3? bxc5 20.dxc5 d4! and ♙d5 on the next move is devastating.

### 19.dxc5 h3 20.♖d4!

The only move that does not lose immediately.

### 20...hxc2 21.♙f2 ♙h3 22.♙e2 ♖d7?

This is much too crazy. Bytes for Brains recommends 22...♖e4! 23.♙xc2 (23.♙xe4? ♙xd4 24.♙xd4 dxe4 25.♙e3 g3 wins for Black) 23...♙e5 24.♙c1 ♙c8 with a big advantage for Black. It seems correct.

### 23.♙xc2 ♙h8 24.♖f1! ♖c6!?

This is better than 24...♖e4?! 25.♙xe4 ♙xd4 26.♙d1 ♙xe3 27.♖xe3 dxe4 28.♙c4 ♖c6 29.♙gd2 ♙g8 when White is only a few accurate moves away from a win.

### 25.♖xc6 ♙xc6 26.♙d1 ♙b8?!

Better fighting chances was offered by 26...♖e7 though White is still clearly better after 27.♙xa6 d4 28.♙xd4† ♖f8 29.♙c4.

### 27.♙xa6 ♙xb3 28.♙b5 ♙a8

I played the rest of the game in horrible time trouble and the quality of the game suffers badly. 29.♙d4 ♙xb5 30.axb5 ♙e8 31.c6† ♖d6!? 32.♙a2?!

The simplest win is 32.♙e1 ♙xe2 33.♙gxe2 when the threat ♙e6† is devastating.

### 32...♙xb5 33.♙a1 ♙d8 34.♙e5†?

34.♖e3! wins easily.

### 34...♖e7 35.♖g3?! ♖f8 36.♖e4!? ♖xe4 37.♙xc2† ♖g8 38.♙xc4 ♖h7 39.♙d4 f6 40.♙a2 ♙d6?

This loses immediately, but 40...♖g5 41.♙g2 ♙bb3 42.♙xf6 ♙xf6 43.♙xc5 is also quite hopeless.

### 41.♙g2

And there was nothing left for me to do but resign.

### 1–0

**Conclusions:** The most critical games in this chapter are 4, 5, 9 and 13. If you feel comfortable (“thrilled” is a more realistic attitude that I have adopted myself) with the Black side in these games, then there is nothing to stop you from playing 4...a6.

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## Chapter 2

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# Flexible Dragon Unleashed

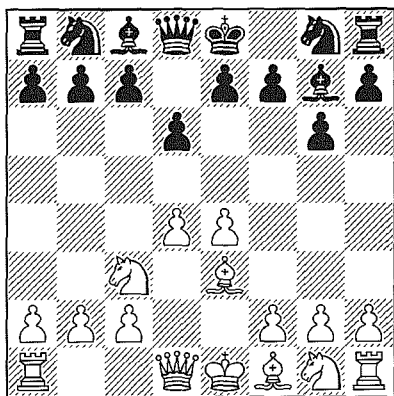
## – ♖e3 without ♘f3

If you expect this chapter to be about a young orphaned boy who learns Kung Fu and takes on the world, you will be disappointed. This line is more like the Invisible Man – leaving the knight on g8 and the king in the centre is really just a way of staying invisible, not showing the opponent your body or where to strike.

The Flexible Dragon Unleashed is the first of two Dragon siblings that have the first four moves in common.

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.♖c3 d6 4.♗e3

Out of slightly more than a hundred games with the Modern so far, my opponents have played 4.♗e3 in 46 games. It is by far the most popular move.



With this move White enters the Flexible variation. Flexible in the sense that White is playing with hidden cards and can still choose between a number of different set-ups, an idea similar to that of the English Attack with f3+♗e3 in the Najdorf Sicilian. It is up to Black to find a move that is good enough to fit in whether White continues 5.f4, 5.♞d2 with f3 and h4, or 5.♖f3. I believe there is only one such move:

4...a6!?

With this move the Flexible variation becomes the Flexible Dragon. With the pawns on g6, d6 and a6 the structure resembles the back of a dragon and the g7-bishop is preparing to breathe fire on the d4-pawn. Black intends to continue with b5, ♖d7 and c7-c5, exchanging the d4-pawn for Black's c-pawn and thus reaching a Sicilian Dragon structure.

Black has two other reasonable continuations: 4...c6 and 4...♖f6. In the case of 4...c6 I do not like Black's position after 5.f4!. The reason is that it will take longer for Black to achieve c6-c5 compared to the a6-lines, as after b7-b5 and ♖d7 Black has to spend a tempo on either b5-b4 (weakening the light squares on the queenside) or a7-a6, when 4...c6 has been quite unnecessary. Only if White plays an early ♞d2 and a2-a4 can I see Black gaining from this move order.

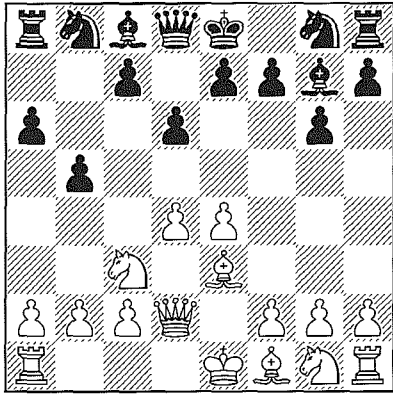
4...♖f6 is pretty straightforward, but gives White excellent attacking chances after ♞d2, 0-0-0 and ♗h6.

**5.♖d2**

This move is by far the most common, but not necessarily the most dangerous. The most aggressive move 5.f4 leads to the chapter 1, but 5.♖f3 is a dangerous option that will be dealt with in the next chapter.

**5...b5**

Most of the games in this chapter feature a different move order with 5...♖d7, but they will generally transpose.



White now has a choice between six main plans:

- a) h2-h4 intending h4-h5 and if Black plays h7-h5, then ♖g1-h3-g5 (Games 16 and 17).
- b) f3 and 0-0-0 with ♖ge2 (Game 18).
- c) g2-g4 followed by 0-0-0 and h2-h4-h5 (Game 19).
- d) a2-a4 and after b5-b4 then ♖d1, c3, f3, ♙d3, ♖e2, etc (Games 20 and 21).
- e) Stopping b7-b5 with 6.a4 (Game 22).
- f) ♖f3 leads to the Restrained Dragon, which is covered in the next chapter.

First we have a look at one of the most critical lines where White launches the h-pawn in "Plan A" style and does not play f3 until it is necessary:

**Game 16****Apicella – Hillarp Persson**

Zaragoza 1995

**1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♙g7 3.♖c3 d6 4.♙e3 a6 5.♖d2 ♖d7!?**

After 5...b5 6.a4 b4 7.♖d1 Black has to protect the b4-pawn with 7...a5. It somehow seems illogical to me to play a6, b7-b5-b4xc3, just to have to move the a-pawn once again. Still, it is perfectly playable for Black, as will be seen in Game 21.

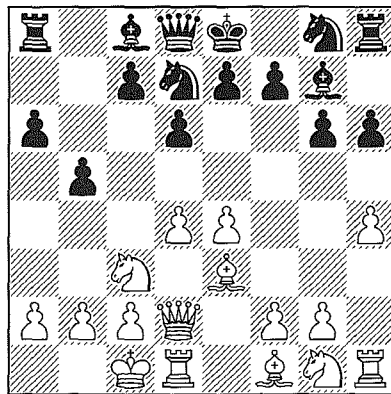
**6.h4!**

This is the most aggressive move order, because Black has to react to the threat of h4-h5. Actually the move order of the game was slightly different: 6.f3 b5 7.h4 h5 8.♖h3 ♙b7 9.♖g5 ♖gf6 10.a4 c6 But this slight manipulation will allow us to look at some important alternatives.

**6...h5**

I prefer to stop the white h-pawn from going any further, rather than 6...h6, a move that keeps the enemy knight out of g5 but has other drawbacks. The main problem is that White can wait with f4 until after Black has played b7-b5. And then I do not think Black has enough time to lose another tempo with h6-h5.

An example of this idea is: 7.0-0-0 (After 7.f4 White threatens h4-h5, but Black can get a good game by using the light squares: 7...h5! 8.e5 ♖h6 9.♙d3 ♖b6 and Black is OK.) 7...b5



Now we have:

- a) 8.h5 g5 9.f4 gxf4 10.♙xf4 ♗b7 11.♘f3 b4?!  
 Better is 11...c5 12.dxc5 (12.d5?! ♜a5)  
 12...♘xc5 13.e5! dxe5 14.♞f2 ♜c8 14...♞c7  
 15.♞g3 ♘e6 16.♘xe5 ♙f6 is messy. 15.♙xe5  
 ♙xe5 16.♘xe5 ♘f6 and Black's active pieces  
 compensate for the king's relative nudity.  
 12.♘d5 a5 13.♙d3  
 and White had an attack in Miladinovic –  
 Polzin, Chalkidiki 2003.  
 b) 8.f4 ♙b7!?

- 8...h5 9.♙d3 ♘h6 10.♘f3 and Black has little  
 space to survive on.  
 9.e5 ♘b6! 10.♘f3 e6?

The basic idea behind my play is to be able to  
 meet h4-h5 with g6-g5 and sacrifice a pawn for  
 better control of the central dark squares. After  
 10...e6 Black is too weak in the centre for this  
 idea to work.

Better was 10...h5 11.e6 (11.♙d3 ♘h6 12.e6  
 f5 13.♘g5 (13.d5? b4 14.♘e2 ♘xd5 15.♙d4  
 ♙xd4 16.♘exd4 c5 and Black is much better)  
 13...0-0 14.♞he1 b4 15.♘e2 ♘g4 16.♙g1 a5  
 with great counterplay on the queenside.  
 11...f5 is also interesting.

- 11.h5 g5?!  
 11...b4 12.♘b1 ♘d5 13.hxg6 fxg6 14.♙d3  
 ♘ge7 15.♘h4 ♘f7 16.♞h3 also looks dangerous,  
 but this was the path I had to take...

- 12.fxg5  
 and my opponent showed no mercy in Olsson  
 – Hillarp Persson, Hallsthammar 2003.

- 7.♘h3!  
 After 7.♘f3!? Black should play 7...b5, but it is  
 also possible to play 7...♘gf6 with the idea 8.♘g5  
 ♘g4, exchanging off the e3-bishop. In Hodgson –  
 Hillarp Persson, Yerevan (ol) 1996, there followed  
 8.e5 ♘g4 9.e6 fxe6 10.♙d3 ♘f8 11.0-0-0 ♙d7?!  
 12.♞he1 and White had enough compensation  
 for the pawn. It would have been better to play  
 11...c6, intending a6-a5-a4 followed by ♜a5,  
 when both sides have chances.

### 7...b5 8.♘g5

White intends a2-a4, and if b5-b4 then ♙c4 is  
 very strong. Counter measures are necessary.

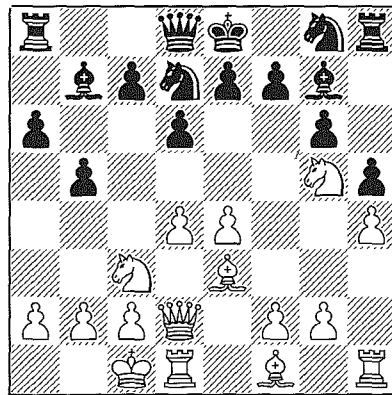
### 8...♙b7

Black prepares to meet a4 with c6, but an even  
 more flexible move order is 8...c6! to avoid the  
 boring lines after 9.0-0-0 (see below).

Now 9.a4 ♙b7 leads to the text and 9.0-0-0  
 ♜a5 10.♘b1 ♘gf6 11.f3 ♙b7 intending ♞c8, 0-0  
 and c6-c5 seems fine for Black. The knight on g5  
 is more of an obstruction than an asset if White is  
 to attack the black king.

### 9.a4

The most critical line in the Flexible Dragon is  
 9.0-0-0!.



In Game 17 we will see a similar position where  
 White has played f2-f3 instead of ♘h3-g5. The  
 move order chosen by White in this game is much  
 more accurate. The difference is in fact so big that  
 I think it is a mistake to play f3 before Black has  
 played ♘gf6. From the diagram position Black  
 has tried many different moves:

- a) 9...♞c8 10.f4 ♘h6 (not 10...c5? 11.e5 cxd4  
 12.e6! winning for White) and there is a further  
 division:

a1) 11.e5 ♘b6 12.♙d3 ♘c4? (12...e6 intending  
 ♘f5, ♘d5 and c5, is much better and even 12...b4  
 13.♘ce4 ♘d5 is an improvement.) 13.♙xc4 bxc4  
 14.♞e2 d5 15.♘a4 (I am more worried about  
 15.f5! ♘xf5 16.e6 fxe6 17.♘xe6 ♜d7 18.♙g5  
 when White has a fantastic initiative.) 15...e6 was  
 unclear in Hartikainen – Nouro, Finland 2002.

- a2) In Littlewood – McNab, Chester 1979,

White played the awful 11.f5?. This just ruins White's structure and control of the central squares. 11...gxf5! 12.exf5 ♖f6? (this knight should support c5) and the position was unclear. Instead 12...c5! would have led to a fantastic position for Black.

b) 9...♗g6? 10.e5 dxe5 11.dxe5 ♖xe5 12.♗xd8† ♜xd8 13.♞xd8† ♝xd8 14.f4 was clearly better for White in a rapid game between Emanuel Berg and me in Skelleftea 2000. (14.♙d4! ♖fd7 15.f4 was also strong.)

c) 9...♖h6 has been played a few times, but after 10.f3 Black will have to play the rest of the game without the knight.

d) 9...c6 is interesting when White has many options:

d1) 10.♗b1 ♗c7 11.f3 ♖g6 12.g3 intending ♙h3 is unclear.

d2) 10.e5 dxe5 11.dxe5 ♙xe5 12.♖xf7 ♗xf7 13.♗xd7 ♗xd7 14.♞xd7 ♙c8 15.♞d8 ♙c7 16.♞d2 ♖f6 is about equal.

d3) 10.f4!? ♖h6 11.e5 ♖b6 12.♙d3 ♖c4 13.♙xc4 bxc4 14.♗e2 d5 15.f5 ♖xf5 16.e6 fxe6 17.♖xe6 is not as effective here as in line a1, because after 17...♗d6 18.♙f4 ♙h6 Black is ready play ♙c8 forcing the e6-knight to leave or be exchanged. The position is unclear and needs further analysis.

### 9...c6 10.♙e2

In Koge 1997, Ivan Sokolov tried to mix two plans (h4, a4 plus f4) against me:

10.♞d1 ♗c7 11.f4!?

If White wants to play this, he should play ♙e2 first.

11...♖h6!

This is a good square for the knight as soon as White plays f4+h4.

12.♙e2 ♖f6 13.♙f3 ♖fg4 14.0-0 d5!?

To be truthful this is not quite necessary, but it is nevertheless very interesting. The black knights gets to surf on the light squares, at the price of a pawn.

15.exd5 ♖f5 16.♙f2 ♞d8!?

The greedy 16...bxa4 17.dxc6 ♙xc6 is excellent for Black, but I could not resist continuing in the style of 14...d5.

17.dxc6 ♞xd4! 18.♖d5 ♗xc6 19.♗a5?!

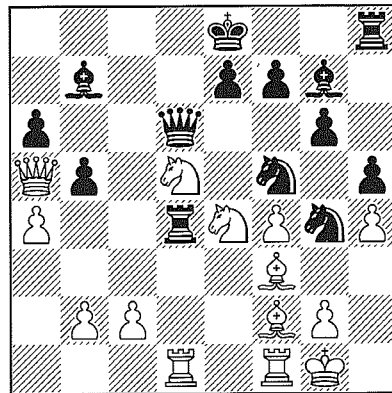
After 19.♖xe7! ♗d7 20.♗e2 Black has to play precisely to keep the balance: 20...♖xe7 21.♙xd4 ♙xd4† 22.♗h1 0-0 23.♙xg4 hgx4 24.♞xd4 ♗xd4 25.♗xe7 ♗d5 with a complicated position.

19...♗d6!?

This is rather spectacular, but better and simpler was 19...♗d7! when 20.♖c7† ♗f8 leaves Black with a clear advantage.

20.♖e4?

This is a mistake. However after 20.♖c7† ♗f8 21.♖xb5 axb5 22.♙xb7 ♗b8 (Aagaard) Black seems to hold on.



20...♗xd5 21.♖f6† ♙xf6 22.♙xd5 ♖xf2

23.♙xb7 ♖xd1 24.axb5 0-0!

After 24...axb5 25.♗a8† ♖d7 26.♙c6† ♖d6 27.♗b7 the Black king is in dire straits.

25.c3 ♖de3!! 26.bxa6

Or 26.g4 hxg4 27.cxd4 axb5 and White's lead in material is little consolation for such a wreck position.

26...♞d7?

It was better to play 26...♞d2 27.♞a1 ♙xh4 28.♙f3 ♙f2† 29.♗h2 ♖g4† 30.♗h3 ♙a7 with an advantage for black.

27.♙c6?

White's last chance was 27.♞a1 ♙xh4 28.♙f3 ♖g4 29.♙xg4 hxg4 30.a7 ♞a8 with only a small advantage for Black.

27...♙d2 28.♙b1?!

This loses quickly, but White is also lost after 28.a7 ♙xh4 29.a8♙ (29.♙a1 ♖g4) 29...♙f2† 30.♖h2 ♖xf1† 31.♖h3 ♙xa8 32.♙xa8† ♖g7 28...♙xh4 29.♙f3 ♙f2† 30.♖h1 ♖g4 31.♙xg4 hxg4 32.c4?

32.a7 ♙a8

32...♖g7 33.♙e5† f6

and White resigned in I. Sokolov – Hillarp Persson, Koge 1997.

**10...♖g6 11.f3**

Stopping ♖f6-g4.

**11...0-0!**

Black no longer has to worry about White playing 0-0-0 and e4-e5, so there is no reason to wait with 0-0.

**12.0-0 e5**

The standard reaction, but not necessarily the best move. I cannot find a single game with 12...e6!? intending b4 and c5. After 13.♖d1! (13.f4 b4 14.♖d1 c5 15.♖f2 cxd4 16.♙xd4 a5 gives Black his desired play) 13...♖b6 14.axb5 axb5 15.♙xa8 ♙xa8 16.b3 ♖bd7 17.♖f2 I would not mind playing either side of the board.

Another alternative is 12...b4 though I find Black's position rather passive after 13.♖d1 c5 14.d5. A possible plan is 14...a5 intending ♙c8 and ♙a6.

**13.dxe5**

The start of an interesting plan. Normal, but less threatening, is 13.♙fd1 ♙e8 14.♙f1 ♙e7 15.axb5 (15.dxe5 dxe5 16.♙d6 ♙xd6 17.♙xd6 ♙f8 18.♙d2 is roughly equal) 15...axb5 16.♙xa8 ♙xa8? (It is incomprehensible why Black does not play 16...♙xa8 17.b4 exd4 18.♙xd4 ♙f8 with an equal position.) 17.b4!? ♙c8? 18.dxe5 (18.d5! cxd5 19.exd5 leads to a clear advantage for White who will soon win the b5-pawn.) 18...dxe5 with a level position in Ciocaltea – Swanson, Luzern 1982.

**13...dxe5 14.♖d1**

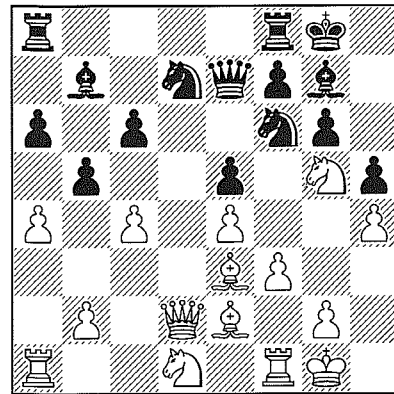
A similar plan was seen in Armas – Nogueiras, Matanzas 1994: 14.♖a2!? ♙e7 15.♖c1 (15.c4) 15...♙fd8 16.♙c3 ♖h7 (16...♖e8 17.♖b3) 17.♖b3 ♙ac8 18.♙fd1 ♖xg5 19.hxg5 ♙f8 20.♙d2 and Black was under unpleasant

pressure. Unless Black can find a way to improve on this game, I believe it is time to put 12...e5 on the scrap heap and start playing 12...e6.

After 14.♙fd1 ♙e8 15.♙f1 ♙e7 16.♙d6 ♙xd6 17.♙xd6 ♙f8 18.♙dd1 ♖c5 19.axb5?! (19.b4) 19...axb5 Black was slightly better in Nokso Koivisto – Nouro, Tampere 1998.

**14...♙e7 15.c4**

White could have tried 15.b4 intending c2-c4, but Black keeps the balance with 15...♙fd8 16.♖b2 ♙f8 17.c3 ♖e8.



**15...b4!**

All the alternatives will leave Black either with a bad pawn structure, or with a weak pawn on b5.

**16.c5! a5 17.♙c2?**

This gives me time to disentangle. After 17.♙d6! ♙xd6 18.cxd6 ♖e8 19.b3 ♖xd6 20.♖b2 ♙f6 21.♙fd1 ♙e7 22.♙d2 White has excellent compensation for the pawn.

**17...♖h7**

White has weaknesses on c5 and g5 and has to hold on to the initiative or else be in trouble in the endgame.

**18.♖f2 ♖xg5 19.hxg5 ♙fd8 20.♙ad1 ♖f8 21.♙c4 ♖e6 22.♙xe6?**

The only way to keep up some pressure was 22.♙b3 ♙a6 23.♙xd8† ♖xd8 24.♙xa6 ♙xa6 25.♙d3 ♙a7 26.♙d1 ♖e6 27.♙d6 though it is time for White to retreat after 27...♙e8 28.b3 ♙a8 intending ♙d8.



22...♖xc6 23.♞xd8† ♞xd8 24.♞d1 ♞xd1†  
25.♖xd1 ♖c4 26.g4?

Hoping for 26...hxg4, but only making matters worse.

26...h4 27.♖d3 ♙a6 28.♖c1 ♙f8

28...b3!? 29.♔g2 (29.♖xb3 ♖xa4 and White finds himself in an unpleasant pin.) 29...♙f8  
30.♙f2 ♙e7 31.♙e3 ♙xc5 32.♙xc5 ♖xc5  
33.♖xb3 ♖e3 wins for Black and it is hard to see how White can improve.

29.♖b3 ♙c8 30.♖xa5 ♖a6 31.♖b3 ♖xa4  
32.♖d3 ♙e6 33.♖c1 ♖a5 34.♔g2?

White can fight on with 34.♖c2 b3 35.♖f2.  
Instead he blunders a pawn.

34...♙xc5 35.♖b3 ♙xb3 36.♖xb3 ♖b5 37.♙xc5  
♖xc5

Black can combine threats on the queenside with mating threats. White will soon run out of moves.

38.♖d3 ♖d4 39.♖e2 c5 40.♔h3 c4 41.♔xh4  
♖d3 42.♖f2 c3 43.bxc3 bxc3 44.♖b6 ♖c4  
45.♖b8† ♔h7 46.♖b1 c2 47.♖c1 ♖e2 48.♖g1  
0-1

There are two important things to remember from this game. First, the plan involving ♖c3-somewhere, followed by c4, is very dangerous for Black. Indeed, so dangerous that it might be better to avoid 12...e5 altogether and try 12...e6 followed by c5 instead. The second thing to remember is to meet 9.0-0-0 with either 9...♞c8 or 9...c6. The first of these alternatives seems reliable and the second can be used as a surprise weapon.

The next game features a slightly different move order that forces White to defend e4 with f3 before he – in this case – can achieve ♖g1-h3-g5:

### Game 17

**E. Berg – Hillarp Persson**

Swedish Championship 2003

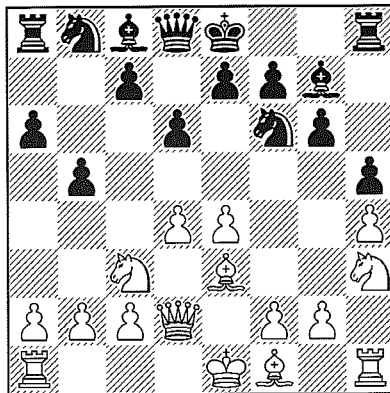
1.e4 g6 2.♖c3 ♙g7 3.d4 d6 4.♙e3 a6 5.♖d2 b5

I usually avoid this move order because I worry about 6.a4 as in Game 1, but I was pretty sure Emanuel would play differently.

6.h4 h5

It is more flexible to play 6...♖f6, waiting with h5 until White threatens to play ♙h6 (after ♖d2).

7.♖h3 ♖f6!



Now the advantage of this move order becomes clear. If White plays 8.♖g5, then after 8...♙b7 Black threatens b5-b4, followed by ♖xe4. To stop this White is forced to play f3, when Black avoids the most dangerous lines where White plays without f3 (see comment to move 9, Game 16).

8.f3 ♖bd7

Also interesting is 8...♙xh3 9.♞xh3 ♖bd7 10.♔f2?! (10.0-0-0 is more critical) 10...c5 11.♔g1 cxd4 12.♙xd4 0-0 13.g3 ♖e5 14.♙xe5 dxe5 15.♖xd8 ♞fxd8 when Black had excellent chances in Morrison – Benjamin, Philadelphia 1998. White should be able to avoid this line if he plays 7.0-0-0 instead of 7.♖h3.

9.0-0-0 ♙b7 10.♖g5

Emanuel has played this position many times and done well, but I do not believe White has any advantage here. The immediate threat is e4-e5-e6, so Black has to act now.

10...0-0!

Fearlessly, out of the frying pan into the fire. Also possible is 10...e6!? and White has a choice:

a) 11.♔b1 ♖e7 12.♖f2 0-0?! (12...♞c8 preparing c5 looks much better) 13.♖e2 e5 14.d5 c6 15.dxc6 ♙xc6 16.g4 hxg4 17.h5 gxf3 18.♖xf3 ♖xh5 19.♞xh5 gxh5 20.♖xh5 ♞fd8 21.♙h3 ♖f6 22.♖h4 ♙d7 23.♞g1 ♖e8 24.♖h7† and 1-0 E. Berg – Nill, Oropesa del Mar 1999.

b) 11.e5 ♖d5 12.♖xd5 (12.f4 ♖7b6 is excellent

for Black) 12...♙xd5 13.exd6?! cxd6 14.♙f4 ♖b6 15.♖b4 ♗c8 16.♘b1 ♗c6 17.♙e3?! ♖f6 and Black was taking over in Staniszewski – Urban, Warsaw 2003.

c) I am generally a bit sceptical about moves like ...e6 when White can play g3, ♙h3 and ♖c3-e2-f4. I am especially worried about 11.♖e2 followed by ♖f4. I know this might seem rather sparse compared to lines a and b, but so far this idea has not been tested in practice.

### 11.♖f2

Threatening e5 again. After 11.♖e1 ♖c8 (11...e5!? 12.d5 ♗c8 13.♘b1 c6 14.dxc6 ♗xc6 is also interesting) 12.♘b1 c5 Black is doing fine.

### 11...b4!

Here I felt very optimistic. My attack develops quickly and I did not see anything stirring around my own king, yet.

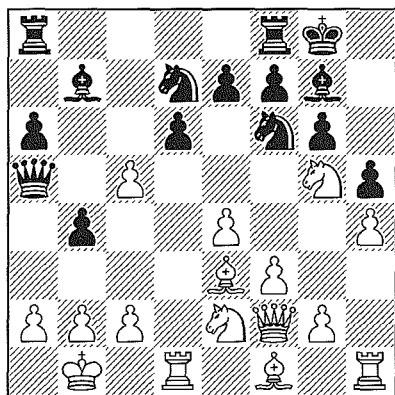
### 12.♖e2!

It is very dangerous for White to enter the complications after 12.♖b1 c5! 13.dxc5 ♖a5 14.cxd6 when both 14...♖xa2 and 14...exd6 give Black good chances.

### 12...c5!

It is now or never. White is prepared to strike on the kingside and there is no time to lose. After a move like 12...a5 my attack will be one tempo behind compared to the game.

### 13.dxc5 ♖a5 14.♘b1!



### 14...dxc5?!

This is a serious misjudgement. In nine out of ten similar cases the white queen is on d2, but with the queen on f2 everything is different, and I should have played 14...♖xc5! 15.♙xc5 dxc5 (15...♖xc5 16.♖xc5 dxc5 17.♖f4 e5 is unclear) 16.♖c1 ♖c7 17.♙c4. I evaluated this position as worse for me since my queenside pawns are blocked, but after 17...♖e8 things would not have been so clear. Next, Black will continue ♖d6 regaining queenside mobility as the c4-blockade is broken and then it is a mess.

### 15.g4!

After 15.♖c1? ♖c7! 16.♙c4 ♖b6! 17.♙xf7† (17.♙b3? ♖fd7 and White loses control of the c4-square) 17...♗xf7 18.♖xf7 ♘xf7 19.♙xc5 ♖c4 Black has some initiative since 20.♙xb4 is met by 20...♖xb2. Otherwise Black continues with ♖fd7, or a6-a5-a4 and b3. ,

### 15...♖e5

I played this move fairly directly, not spending even a minute on the consequences of 15...hxg4!? 16.h5 gxh5 17.♖g3!. If possible this type of chess should certainly be banned by the Swedish Social Board as very, very bad for your health.

### 16.♖f4

The best move, though a very natural one (which is why I am being tight with the exclamation marks). The difference between having the queen on f2 and d2 is quite clear here. If the queen was on d2, there would have followed ♖xf3 and ♖xe4 and then ♙xb2 and ♖a3†, or why not ♖c3†. This is generally the way to go.

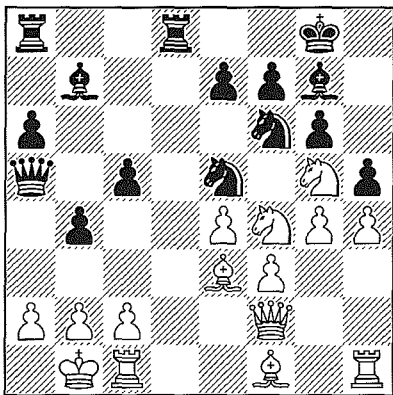
### 16...♗fd8!

This seems better than the alternatives. After 16...hxg4 17.h5 ♖xf3 18.♖xg6! ♗fe8 19.h6 ♖xg5 20.♙xg5 Black runs out of moves, but 16...♖fxg4!? 17.fxg4 ♖xg4 18.♖g1 ♙xb2 19.♙xc5 ♗ac8 20.♖d3 ♙f6 is far from clear.

### 17.♗c1

Black is doing OK after 17.♙d3 hxg4! 18.h5 (18.♙xc5 ♖xf3 19.♖xf3 gxf3 20.h5 ♖xe4 21.♙xe4 ♙xe4 and Black is ready to change from defence to attack.) 18...c4 19.♖xf7 (19.h6 cxd3 20.hxg7 dxc2† 21.♖xc2 ♗xd1† 22.♗xd1 ♖xf3 and the Silicon Guy assures me that Black is winning.)

19...♖xf7 20.hxg6 ♘d6 21.♙f1 b3 and Black should be winning.



### 17...c4?

I should definitely have played 17...hxg4! 18.h5 ♖xf3 and now:

a) 19.♖xf3 ♖xe4 20.♙g1 b3 21.cxb3 (21.axb3 ♖c3† is mate in two) 21...gxf3 22.hxg6 ♘d2† 23.♙xd2 ♙e4† 24.♙d3 ♙xd2 wins for Black.

b) 19.♖xg6 ♖xg5 20.♖xe7† (20.♙xg5 ♖xe4 21.♖xe7† is the same) 20...♗f8 21.♙xg5 ♖xe4 22.♖g6† ♗g8 23.♖e7† ♗f8 leads to a draw.

I have to say that you play this at your own risk. I might go for it again, but could have missed an improvement for White.

### 18.gxb5

I was hoping for 18.♙b6! ♗d2 19.♙xd2 ♙xb6 with good compensation (I am threatening ♖xf3, ♖xe4, etc), but I had no idea what to do if White rejected the offered exchange with 19.♙e3. It is indeed just bad for me.

### 18...c3 19.hxg6 cxb2 20.gxf7† ♖xf7

So far Emanuel has played brilliantly but now he throws everything away with one move.

### 21.♖ge6??

After 21.♙c4 bxc1♙† 22.♙xc1 ♗f8 23.♖g6 ♙c7 Black holds on, but 21.♗e1! wins quickly. I have no threats and White has a whole bucketful. The rest of the game was played in the worst time trouble I have experienced so far.

21...b3?! 22.cxb3 bxc1♙† 23.♙xc1 ♖xe4!

24.♙g2 ♖fg5! 25.♖xg7 ♗d2! 26.♙c4† e6!  
27.♙xd2 ♖xd2† 28.♗c2 ♖xc4?!

28...♙xa2†! 29.♗c3 ♙xf3 wins immediately.  
29.bxc4 ♙xa2† 30.♗c3 ♙a3† 31.♗c2 ♙xf3??  
32.♙xg5 ♗f7 33.♖gxc6 ♙a4† 34.♗c3 ♙a3†  
35.♗d2 ♙d6† 36.♗c3 ♗g8 37.♙f5†  
and my opponent lost on time.

0-1

It is difficult to say that this or that is an improvement in this game, but I recommend either the safe 14...♖xc5 or the spectacular 17...hxg4.

In the next game White plays “Plan B”, which involves “natural” moves like f3, ♖ge2 and ♗b1. It is a course of action that is quite welcome for Black:

### Game 18

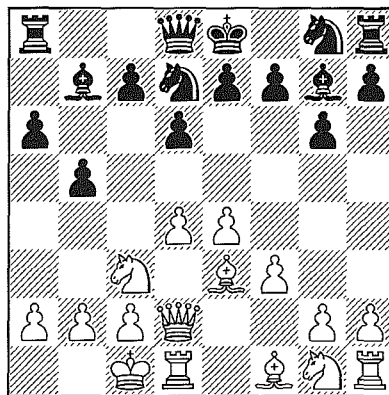
Yagupov – Hillarp Persson

Moscow 2003

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♙g7 3.♖c3 d6 4.♙e3 a6 5.♙d2 ♖d7 6.0-0 b5 7.f3?!

In some ways this is a very tempo-sensitive position, where White must put pressure on Black with every move. As far as I can see 7.f3 does not work into any aggressive framework, and it is in no way necessary, therefore faulty.

7...♙b7



8.♗b1!?

Here we have some alternatives.

After 8. ♖ge2 White no longer has the possibility of h4 and ♖h3, so I am planning to play 8...c6!? with the idea e5. Even 8...♙c8 and 8...b4 are interesting alternatives.

8. ♖h3 b4!? b5-b4 is generally not a good idea, but this is an exception since the h3-knight is blocking the h-pawn and it is difficult for White to attack on the kingside (See comment to the next move in the main game. However, I still prefer 8...♙c8.) 9. ♖e2 a5 10. ♖ef4 e6 11. ♗e2 h6 12. ♖f2 ♖e7 13. h4 ♖b6 14. h5 g5 15. ♖4h3 d5 16. ♗d3 ♖c4 17. ♗xc4 dxc4 18. f4? (Losing the e4-pawn) 18...g4 19. ♖xg4 ♗xe4 20. ♖e5 ♗d5 and Black was in total control in Gesing – Nevednichy, Creon 2004.

Another possibility is:

8. h4 h5 9. ♖h3 ♙c8!

An excellent move that prepares c5, intending to meet dxc5 with ♖xc5. Also possible is 9...c6 10. ♖g5 ♗c7 followed by ♖gf6 and c5. 9...c5 10. dxc5 ♖xc5 11. ♗d4 is annoying for Black since 11...♖f6? 12. e5 is clearly better for White.

10. ♖g5 c5 11. ♖e2?!

Black is OK after 11. e5 cxd4 12. e6 fxe6 13. ♗xd4 e5 14. ♗e3 ♖f8 15. ♖xb5?! axb5 16. ♗xb5† ♗c6 17. ♗xc6† ♙xc6 18. ♗d5 ♖d7! 19. ♖f7 ♗c7 20. ♖xh8 e6.

11... ♗c7 12. ♖b1 ♖gf6 13. d5

Black is better after 13. g3 cxd4 14. ♖xd4 ♖e5.

13... ♖e5 14. ♖f4 ♗b6 15. ♗e1

It is difficult to give White advice. His pieces seem to be developed harmoniously, but are not achieving anything. Black, on the other hand, can go strolling with his queenside pawns and delay decisions concerning the more valuable bits.

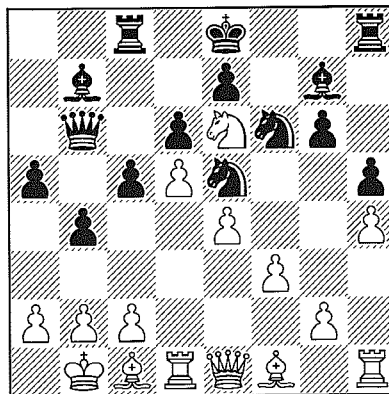
15...a5 16. ♗c1 b4 17. ♖ge6!?

An imaginative, though insufficient, try to animate the white pieces.

17... ♗h6 18. ♖g5 ♗g7

18...a4!?

19. ♖fe6 fxe6 20. ♖xe6



20... ♗g8

Black should try to exchange pieces with 20... ♗h6 21. ♗xh6 ♙xh6 22. f4 ♖eg4 23. ♗c4 ♗a6 and White does not have enough.

21. f4 ♖eg4 22. ♗c4 ♗a6 23. ♗xa6 ♗xa6 24. e5 ♖d7

24... dxe5 25. fxe5 ♖d7 seems more solid.

25. ♗e4 ♗h8 26. ♙hf1 dxe5 27. d6

White has to go fishing in muddy waters since 27. fxe5 ♗xe5 28. ♗f3 ♖gf6 is rock solid for Black.

27... exd6 28. fxe5 ♗xe5 29. ♗g5 ♖b6 30. b3 ♗a8?!

White has absolutely nothing after 30...a4, except a piece too little.

31. ♙xd6!

and Black resigned because 31... ♗xe4 32. ♖c7† ♙xc7 33. ♙d8 is mate. White is also threatening ♗xg6† and ♙f8 mate. Miladinovic – Hickl, Bled (ol) 2002.

**8... ♙c8!?**

8...b4!? is premature. 9. ♖ce2 a5 (9...c5 10. dxc5 dxc5 11. ♖f4 intending ♗c4 is better for White.) 10. h4 h5 11. ♖f4 and Black is very vulnerable to ♖g1-h3-g5 and ♗c4.

**9. d5?!**

Black is doing fine after 9. ♖ge2 c5 10. dxc5 ♖xc5 11. ♗d4 ♗xd4 (This is safer than 11... ♖f6 12. g4!? (12. ♖d5 ♖cd7) 12...b4 13. ♖d5.) 12. ♖xd4 ♖f6 13. a3 ♗b6 and Black is well coordinated.

A third possibility is 9.h4 h5 10.♖h3 c5 11.dxc5 ♖xc5 12.♗d4 ♖f6 (12...♗xd4!? 13.♞xd4 ♖f6 14.♗g5 ♞b6 15.a3 ♖d7 is level) 13.♗d5 e5! (13...♗xd5? 14.exd5 b4 (14...0-0? 15.♗f4) 15.♗f4 ♞b6 16.♗c4! and I was in trouble against Gwaze in Guernsey 2003, though I later managed to mix things up and get a draw.) 14.♖xf6† ♗xf6 15.♗e3 ♗xh4 16.♞xd6 ♞xd6 17.♞xd6 ♗e7 and Black was slightly better in the endgame in Gwaze – Davies, Halifax (rapid) 2003.

**9...c5 10.dxc6 ♗xc6 11.♗ge2 ♞c7!?**

I did not want to allow ♗e3-h6 and played what I thought was a useful waiting move. However the queen is not very well placed on c7 and it is possible that 11...h5, planning to continue with ♗gf6 12.♗d4 ♗b7, is better.

**12.♗d4 ♗b7 13.a3 h5!**

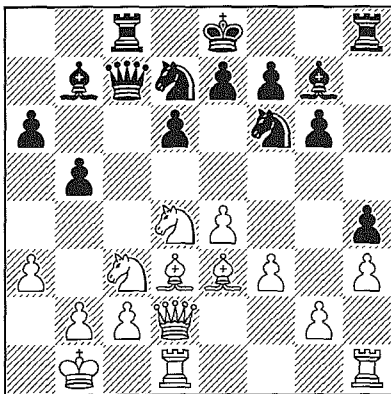
A typical move in this kind of position. Black prepares to develop the g8-knight without allowing ♗h6, and simultaneously stops g2-g4. Although I have no idea what the average GM would say about this position, I think many would agree with me that Black's position is more enterprising.

**14.h3!?**

After 14.g3 Black gets excellent play with 14...♗gf6. 15.♗h3 is nothing, as Black will play 15...♞b8 intending ♖d7-e5-c4.

**14...♗gf6 15.♗d3 ♖e5**

An unimaginative move that does nothing to make things harder for White. An interesting prophylactic continuation was 15...h4!?



Black wants to stop White from playing g2-g4. The flipside of the coin is that the h4-pawn can become weak, but Black has attacking chances on the queenside and can activate the h8-rook via h5. White can try to roll the central pawns at the black king: 16.♞he1! ♖e5 (otherwise 16...♞h5!? or 16...♗f8!?) 17.f4 ♖c4 18.♗xc4 ♞xc4 19.e5 dxe5 20.fxe5 ♖e4 21.♗xe4 ♗xe4 22.♗g5 ♗d5 23.b3 ♞c5 and White should be wise to scramble for a draw with 24.♗xh4 ♞xh4 25.♖f3 ♞h5 26.♞xd5 ♞xc2† 27.♗a1 ♞c3† 28.♗b1.

**16.g4 ♖c4?**

Fritz 8 judges the position to be better for Black after 16...♖fd7! and there might be something to it. White has no good moves and ♖c4 or ♖d7-b6-c4 will improve Black's position further... Or maybe I am just delirious with optimism!?

**17.♗xc4 ♞xc4 18.♖b3! b4!?**

It was much better to play 18...♖d7 19.♖d5 ♗xd5 20.exd5 ♖e5 when things are messy again.

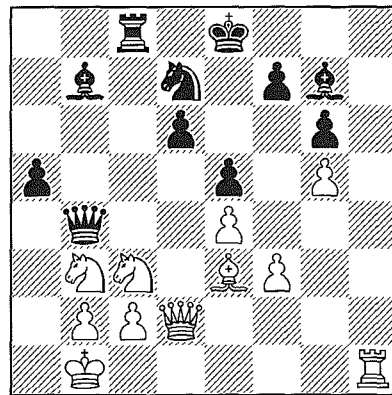
**19.axb4**

There are a few tactical tricks to look out for. After 19.♖a4? ♖xe4 20.fxe4 ♗xe4 21.♖d4 b3 it is obvious that White has fallen for one.

**19...♞xb4 20.♗d4**

White threatens g4-g5 and has the advantage for the first time in the game.

**20...e5 21.♗e3 hxg4 22.hxg4 ♞xh1 23.♞xh1 a5 24.g5 ♖d7**



**25.♖c1!**

I can do nothing to stop this knight from reaching the d5-square eventually, a sure sign that my position is very bad.

25...♙c6 26.♘1a2 ♖b8 27.♗d1 ♙f8 28.♘d5 ♖b5! 29.♗f2?

After 29.♘ac3! ♖b7 30.♗h1 ♗b8 31.♖c1 ♙g7 32.♗h7 ♘f8 33.b3 I doubt Black can survive for very long.

29...♖b7 30.♗d3 ♙xd5 31.♗xd5 ♗b8 32.b3 ♖a6 33.♖e1 a4 34.♗a5 ♖b7?

I just did not see 34...♖c4, when the position is suddenly level again.

35.♗a7! ♖c8 36.♗xa4 ♘c5 37.♗a7 d5!

I was bored with the bishop being out of the game and I thought I would rather lose in Rock and Roll style.

38.♖a5?

After 38.exd5 ♘xb3 39.cxb3 ♗xb3† 40.♘a1 my attack would have proven to be futile.

38...d4 39.♙d2 d3 40.♙c3 ♖e6 41.♘c1 dxc2† 42.♘xc2 ♙d6 43.♗a8

White should be able to win this position, but in the end I managed to set up a blockade and save the game.

43...♗xa8 44.♖xa8† ♘e7 45.♖h8 ♘d7 46.♙d2 ♙e7 47.♖a8?! ♖c6! 48.♖xc6† ♘xc6 49.♘d3 ♘xd3 50.♘xd3 ♘b5 51.♙c3 ♙d6 52.♘e2 ♙c7 53.♘f2 ♘c5 54.♘g3 ♙b8 55.♘h4 ♙c7 56.♘g4 ♙b8 57.♙a5 ♘d4 58.♙b4 ♙c7 59.♙e7 ♘c3 60.b4 ♘c4 61.♘g3 ♙b8 62.♘f2 ♙a7† 63.♘e2 ♙d4 64.♙f6 ♘xb4 65.♘d3 ♘c5 66.f4 ♘d6 67.♘c4 ♙b2 68.♘b4 ♙a1 69.♘b5 ♙d4 70.♘c4

½-½

Judging from this game and others the combination of 0-0-0 and ♘ge2 is not a good one. As long as Black keeps the king in the centre White cannot start an attack on the kingside and is therefore left with little in the way of a constructive plan. As Black, on the other hand, you can take your time and optimise your pieces before playing 0-0.

The next game features “Plan C”.

## Game 19

Shabalov – Benjamin

Connecticut 2000

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♙g7 3.♘c3 d6 4.♙e3 a6 5.♖d2 b5 6.f3 ♘d7 7.g4!?

This move makes my h-pawn itch, but for the moment it is best to keep it on h7. After 7...h5 8.gxh5 ♗xh5 9.♘ge2 White develops an initiative on the kingside with ♘g3 and h2-h4-h5.

7...♙b7

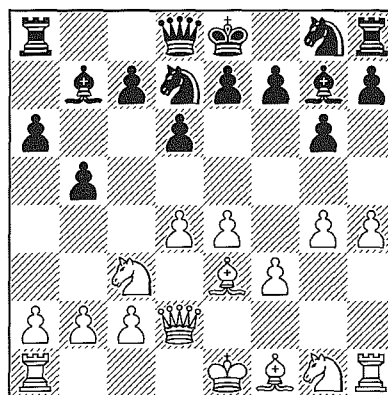
If Black succeeds in exchanging the c-pawn for White's d-pawn, then Black will reach a Sicilian Dragon deluxe.

8.♘ge2?!

I do not like this move since it gives Black the opportunity to play c5 undisturbed.

After 8.0-0-0! Black should wait with c5 since after 8...c5 9.dxc5 both 9...♘xc5 10.♙d4 and 9...dxc5 10.♘b1 are shaky. That does not necessarily mean bad, but for the sober minded there are two decent alternatives in 8...h5 9.g5 e6 and 8...c6!.

In Randazzo – Movsziszian, Spain 2001, White tried 8.h4 and got a free lesson on the subject of “not wasting too many tempi in the opening”:



8...h5! 9.g5

9.gxh5?! ♗xh5 10.♘ge2 ♙f6! is the important difference before playing h5 after rather than before White has committed himself with h4. 11.♙f2 e5 and Black is fine.

9...e6! 10.♖h3 ♖e7 11.♗f4?!

11.0-0-0 0-0 and Black is very flexible.

11...0-0 12.♙h3 e5! 13.♗fe2 ♖b6 14.d5 ♖c4

and it is a miracle that White managed to hold on for another twenty-two moves.

### 8...c5! 9.h4

White should avoid 9.dxc5 ♖e5! 10.♙g2 (10.♗g1 dxc5 11.0-0-0 ♗xd2† 12.♗xd2 c4 is fine for Black) 10...♖c4 11.♗c1 dxc5 12.♙xc5 ♗c8 13.♙f2 b4 14.♖d1 ♗f6 when Black has a strong initiative.

After 9.0-0-0 b4 play resembles our main game.

9.♗g3 ♗c7!? (9...♗c8) 10.♙e2 ♖b6!? This is outside the normal roads, but ♗g3 and ♙e2 does not look scary and Black has some options. (I like 10...h6 intending cxd4 and ♗gf6) 11.♖d1?! cxd4 12.♙xd4 ♙xd4 13.♗xd4 e5 was very strange, but better for Black in Ferron Garcia – Pablo Marin, Castellar del Valles 2004.

### 9...h6!

After 9...h5?! 10.gxh5 (10.g5 e6 11.0-0-0 ♖e7 12.dxc5 dxc5 is unclear) 10...♗xh5 11.♗g3 ♗h7 12.h5 White has the initiative.

### 10.0-0-0

Also possible is 10.♗g3 intending h5 and, if g5, ♖f5. In Kriventsov – Chase, Las Vegas 2004, there followed:

10...♗c7!?

A tricky move, although I would rather play 10...e6 in order to be able to answer 11.h5 with 11...g5 without allowing ♖f5.

11.h5! d5!

Any other move leaves White clearly better.

Now ♗xg3 is threatened.

12.♙f4 e5! 13.dxe5 ♖xe5 14.♗f2?!

The position is very unclear after 14.0-0-0 d4 15.♖d5 ♙xd5 16.exd5 ♖e7.

14...0-0-0?!

And Black had a slight initiative. Even better was 14...d4 when White would have been in trouble.

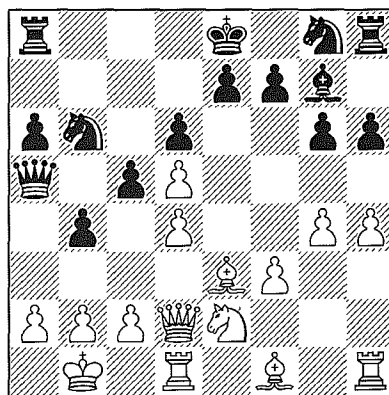
### 10...b4

Playing 10...♗a5 11.♗b1 b4 has the advantage of forcing 12.♖d5 and not giving White the extra option discussed in the next comment.

### 11.♖d5

The conservative 11.♖b1 is also interesting, intending 11...♗a5 12.a3 with unclear play. A possible continuation is 12...♗gf6 13.dxc5 dxc5 14.♗g3 ♖e5 15.♙e2 ♖c6 with a complicated position where both sides have their chances.

11...♙xd5 12.exd5 ♗a5 13.♗b1 ♖b6



### 14.♗f4?

This knight is not going anywhere. It was interesting to play 14.h5!? to give the knight a square on f5. 14...g5 15.♗g3 c4 16.♖f5 is logical. Now 16...♗f8 17.a3 c3 18.axb4 ♗xb4 19.♗xc3 is clearly better for White, so Black has to play 16...c3! 17.♗e1 (17.♗xg7† ♗f8 18.♖e6† fxe6 19.♗e2 ♖xd5 is better for Black) 17...♙f6 (17...♙f8? 18.♙xg5 hxg5 19.♖xd6† ♗d7 20.♖xf7) 18.b3 ♖xd5 19.♙c1 ♗d8 and I am inclined to put my money on Black.

### 14...♗f6!?

A safer option is 14...c4 15.a3 ♖f6 16.♗xb4 ♗xb4 17.axb4 ♖fxd5 18.♖xd5 ♖xd5 19.♙d2 ♖b6 20.d5 ♖xd5 21.♙xc4 ♖b6 22.♙f1 0-0 with a complicated game. White has the bishop pair and the better structure, but Black has attacking chances on the queenside with ♗fb8, ♖a4, a6-a5, etc.

After 14...cxd4 15.♙xd4 ♙xd4 16.♗xd4 ♖f6 17.♗g1 White is threatening g4-g5 and stands better.

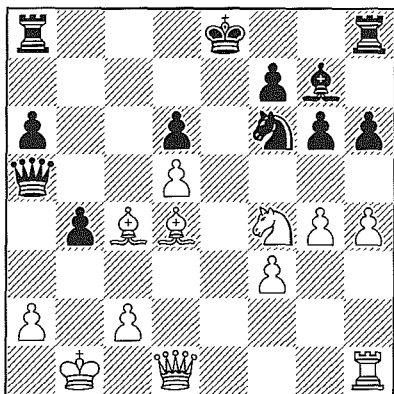
15.dxc5 ♖a4 16.cxd6 ♖xb2

I believe Shabalov was happy, now that both sides have pressed the *chaos button*. However, objectively, Black should be better.

17. ♖d4

The computer recommends keeping the extra material with 17. ♖e1, though after 17... ♗a4 18. ♖d4 ♗c3† 19. ♖xc3 bxc3 20. ♖xe7† ♗f8 21. ♖c1 ♖b6† 22. ♗a1 ♖xd6 23. ♖b7 ♗d7 it is time for the author to realise that he has to settle for “unclear”.

17... ♗d1 18. ♖xd1 exd6 19. ♖c4



19... ♗f8?

With this move Black locks up the rook on h8 for a long time to come and White has time to build up more dangerous threats. It looks suicidal to castle, but after 19...0-0 20.g5 ♗d7 I do not see anything convincing for White. For instance 21. ♖xg7 ♗xg7 22. ♖d4† ♗e5 and Black has no problem defending.

20. ♖d3 ♖e8 21. ♖d1

21.h5 g5 22. ♖f5 ♖d8 23. ♗e2 and Black defends with 23... ♗g8.

21... ♖e7?!

After 21... ♗d7?! 22.h5 g5? 23. ♗e6† fxe6 24. ♖xg7† White crashes through. The best defence is 21... ♖g8 when nothing is clear yet.

22.h5! g5 23. ♖f5! gxf4 24. ♖xf6 ♖c7

24... ♖e8 25.g5 hxg5 26. ♖xg7† ♗xg7 27. ♖xg5† ♗f8 28.h6 ♖g8 29. ♖xf4 and the h-pawn will refuse every peace treaty offered by Black.

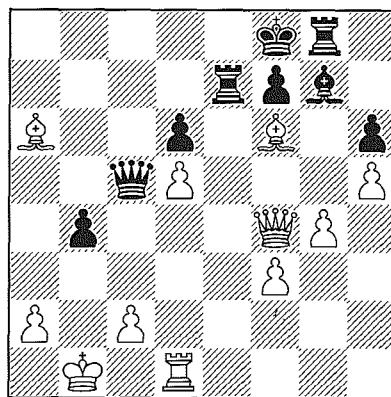
25. ♖xf4 ♖g8

Black can still dream of survival after 25... ♖e8

26. ♖xa6 ♖c5.

26. ♖xa6 ♖c5?

This makes the end quick and painless rather than 26... ♖e8 27. ♖b5 ♖b8 28. ♖c6 when Black can make a few more moves.



27. ♖xe7† ♗xe7 28. ♖e1† ♗f8 29. ♖b5 ♖e5

30. ♖xh6† ♖g7 31.f4 ♖c3 32. ♖xd6†

1-0

I think the burden of proof lies on White's shoulders after 10...b4. This does not mean that Black's existence in this line is a walk in the park, but provided that Black is alert and prepared to soak up some pressure he/she can look forward to a bright future.

The next two games features “Plan D”, which is quite popular among players who do not like to take big risks.

## Game 20

**Burrows – Hillarp Persson**

Guernsey 2003

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♖g7 3. ♗c3 d6 4. ♖e3 a6 5. ♖d2 ♗d7 6.f3

In Hebden – Hillarp Persson, Isle of Man 2001, White tried a different version of the idea in the main game:



6.h4 h5 7.♘h3 b5 8.a4 b4 9.♖d1 ♗gf6 10.f3

It is more critical to play 10.♗g5! when 10...♙b7 11.f3 c5 12.c3 bxc3 13.bxc3 ♖a5 is about equal. After 10.f3 Black can keep the bishop on c8, which is sometimes an advantage.

10...c5 11.c3 bxc3 12.bxc3 0-0?!

Much better is 12...♖a5!? 13.♗b2 ♗b6 when Black is very flexible and has a nice position.

13.a5

and White had a slight advantage.

**6...b5 7.a4 b4 8.♗d1 c5!**

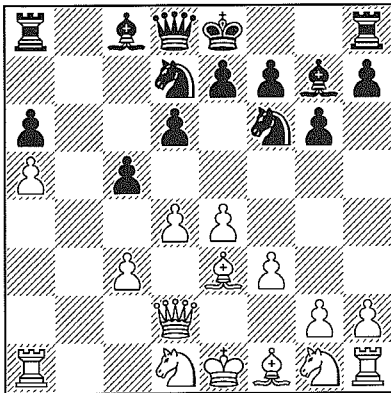
After 8...a5 Black has lost a tempo (c7-c6) compared to 4...c6 5.♖d2 b5 6.a4 b4 7.♗d1 a5 8.f3 ♗d7.

**9.c3**

White gets the better structure after 9.dxc5 dxc5 10.a5, but can fight for the initiative with 10...♗gf6 11.c3 (11.♗f2 0-0 12.♗e2 ♖c7 and White has trouble finding squares for his pieces.) 11...bxc3 12.♗xc3 0-0 13.♗a4 ♖b8.

**9...bxc3 10.bxc3 ♖a5!**

After 10...♗gf6 White can play 11.a5



In this kind of position it is difficult for Black to blow up the centre and White generally gets a small, but long term, advantage with ♙d3, ♗e2, ♗b2, d5, ♗c4, etc. If the c5-pawn was on c6 and the a-pawns on a4/a5, then Black would be able to open the centre with e7-e5 followed by d7-d5, as will be seen in a later game.

**11.♙d3 ♗gf6 12.♗e2 0-0 13.♗b2?!**

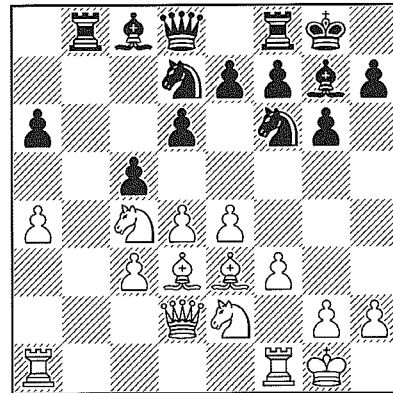
After 13.0-0 ♖b8 14.♗f2 (Or 14.♙h6 cxd4 15.cxd4 ♖xd2 16.♙xd2 e5!. A common way to fight for the c5-square. 17.d5? ♗xd5 18.exd5 e4 Black gets the piece back and stands better.) 14...♗b6 15.♖fb1 ♙e6 16.d5 ♙d7 Black is fine.

**13...♖b8**

In Izeta Txabarri – Damaso, Alcobendas 1994, Black played 13...♗b6 to stop ♗b2-c4. After 14.0-0 ♙e6 15.d5 ♙d7 White blundered with 16.♙h6? when, instead of 16...c4 17.♙xg7 ♗xg7 18.♗d4 with unclear play, 16...♙xh6 17.♖xh6 c4 18.♙c2 ♗bxd5 intending 19.exd5 ♖b6† 20.♗h1 ♖xb2 would have won a pawn for Black.

**14.♗c4 ♖d8 15.0-0?!**

After 15.d5! ♗b6 16.a5 ♗xc4 17.♙xc4 ♗d7! 18.f4 ♗f6 19.♖d3 e6 20.dxe6 ♙xe6 21.♙xa6 ♖e8 Black has enough compensation for the pawn.



**15...cxd4?**

The whole idea behind allowing White to play ♗c4 was to open up the centre with d6-d5, threatening the knight. Instead I hallucinated, thinking the c-pawns must go first to stop White playing dxc5, which is just rubbish. After 15...d5! 16.exd5 ♗xd5 White's pieces are cluttered in the middle of the board and I prefer Black.

**16.cxd4 d5 17.♗a5!**

This would not be possible had I not exchanged the c-pawns before playing d6-d5. Now things are desperate for Black.

17...dxe4 18.fxe4

I was hoping for 18.♖c6? exd3 19.♖xd8 dxe2 20.♗xe2 ♖xd8 when Black has fantastic compensation for the queen.

18...♗b7?!

18...♗b6 is objectively better, but I was still grieving over my 15th move.

19.♖xb7 ♖xb7 20.e5 ♖d5 21.♗xa6

I am a pawn down and my pieces are not working well together; it is time to play for tricks.

21...♗b3 22.♗h6?!

After 22.♗f2 I did not, and do not, know what Black should do.

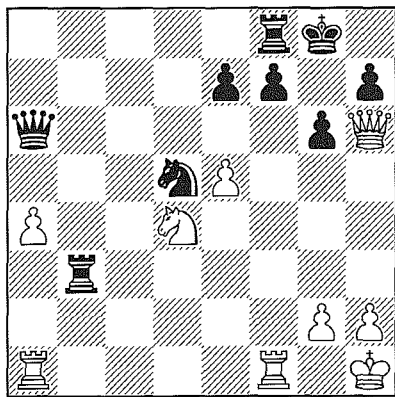
22...♗xh6 23.♗xh6 ♖xe5?!

I thought for a long time on this move, checking every variation twice. My opponent's answer came immediately.

24.dxe5 ♗b6† 25.♖h1?!

25.♗f2 ♗xa6 26.♖d4 ♗b6 27.♖f3 g5 28.e6! is winning according to Silicon Sid, but Black can still fight with 28...f6 29.♖xg5 ♗d3.

25...♗xa6 26.♖d4!



Now I realised that White threatens both ♖xb3 and ♖f5! If I defend against the latter with 26...♗b6, then White wins the exchange with 27.a5. What shall I do?

26...♖e3!

It is pure luck that I can survive another move and now – for once – it was my opponent's turn to think for a while.

27.♗fe1?

A mistake. The safest road to an advantage for White is 27.♖xb3! ♗e2! (27...♖xf1 28.♖d4 f6 29.♖f3 ♗d3 30.♗e1 and the knight will not survive for long on f1.) 28.♗h3 ♖xf1 29.♗f3 ♗xf3 30.gxf3 and the a-pawn will win the endgame for White.

27...♗d3! 28.♖f3

My opponent spotted 28.♗xe3? ♗xa4! 29.♗ae1 ♗xd4 when Black will be a nice clean pawn up.

28...♖f5 29.♗f4 ♗c8 30.♗e4 ♗c2?

Both players missed that White can play ♖e1 here and on the next two moves.

31.e6?! f6 32.♗b1? ♖g7? 33.♗b8?!

Going from a winning (with 33.♖e1) to a losing position in one move.

33...♗xf3 34.gxf3 ♗d3 35.♗f4 ♗f2 36.♗g1 ♗xf3 37.♗g4 ♗f2 38.h4

Or 38.a5 ♗c2 39.♗g2 ♗xg2 40.♗xg2 ♗b1† and Black wins the rook.

38...♗c2 39.♗g2 ♗xg2 40.♗xg2 ♗xe4 41.♗xe4 ♖g3† 42.♖g2 ♖xe4 43.a5 ♖c5 44.♖f3 g5

0-1

I was very fortunate to survive this game after my horrible 15th move, but before that I had nothing to complain about. It is possible that 9.dxc5 is the most dangerous move for Black although I think White's structural advantage is balanced by the activity of Black's pieces.

The next game illustrates the reason why I normally play ♖d7 before b5, although I have never been capable of deciding whether it is a good or bad reason...

### Game 21

van Delft – M. Gurevich

Amsterdam 2001

1.e4 d6 2.d4 g6 3.♖c3 ♗g7 4.♗e3 a6 5.♗d2 b5 6.a4!

If it was not for this move I would play 5...b5 more often than 5...♖d7.

6...b4 7.♖d1

The knight is badly placed here but it is only temporary. Given time it can reach either the

kingside with f3 and ♖f2, or the queenside – after the b-pawns have been exchanged – with ♖b2. Another possibility is 7.♖ce2!?:

a) 7...♖f6?! 8.♖g3 (8.f3 a5 9.♖h6 0–0 10.h4 is also dangerous) 8...♖g4 9.♗xb4 c5 10.♗d2 ♖xe3 11.fx3 ♖c6 12.♖f3 ♗b6 13.c3 ♖b8 14.♖b1 and Black did not have enough compensation for the lost pawn in Vehi Bach – M. Gurevich, Groningen 1997.

b) Instead I recommend 7...a5! 8.♖g3 ♖d7 9.♖f3, which leads to a position similar to the ones discussed in the next chapter.

### 7...a5

With this move the difference between 5...b5 and 5...♖d7 followed by 6...b5 becomes obvious: here Black cannot play 7...c5 because of 8.dxc5, and ♖b8 is just impossible, which leaves Black with the text move. In comparison with the 4...c6-lines Black has lost a tempo here (c6), but should still be fine.

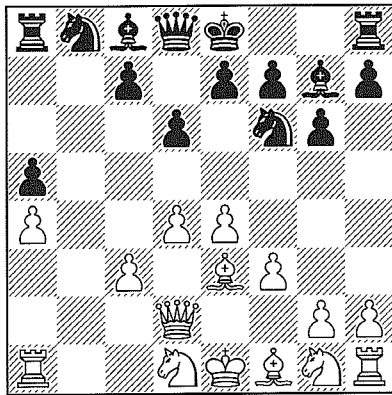
### 8.c3

White has many reasonable moves here, but 8.c3 is by far the most common.

### 8...♖f6 9.f3 bxc3

This looks safer than 9...0–0 10.cxb4 axb4 11.♗xb4 c5!?: (A more conservative approach is 11...♖fd7!?: 12.♗d2 c5 – sacrificing one pawn is enough.) 12.dxc5 dxc5 13.♖xc5 ♖a6 14.♖xa6 ♖xa6 15.♖e2 ♖b8 and Black had some compensation in Pel – Priborsky, Olomouc 2004.

### 10.bxc3



### 10...0–0

This has become the main line. The alternative 10...c6 fell into disgrace after the game Anand – Khalifman, Las Palmas 1993: 11.♖h6! (11.h4 ♖bd7 12.♖h6 ♖xh6 13.♗xh6 e5 is unclear) 11...0–0 (11...♖xh6 12.♗xh6 e5!?: looks a better try to me although White's position is still preferable.) 12.h4 e5 13.h5 ♖e8 (Anand gives plenty of evidence that 13...♖xh5 14.g4! is dangerous for Black.) 14.hxg6 fxg6 15.♖xg7 ♖xg7 16.♖f2 ♖a7?! (16...♖bd7! with counterplay – Anand) 17.♖b1! and White had a strong initiative.

### 11.♖d3

This seems stronger than 11.♖h6, which was seen in Skripchenko – M. Gurevich, Groningen 1997. The game continued:

11...e5! 12.h4 ♖e8

Another idea is 12...♖xh6!?: 13.♗xh6 ♖h5! (Not 13...exd4? 14.h5! ♖xh5 15.g4 ♖f6 16.♖e2! and Black has no defence against g5.) when Black seems to have excellent chances after both 14.♖e2 ♖a6 and 14.g4?! ♖g3 15.♖h2 ♖xf1 16.♖xf1 ♖d7.

13.d5 c6 14.dxc6

After 14.c4?! ♖a6! the knight is about to enter nirvana on b4.

14...♖xc6 15.♖xg7 ♖xg7 16.♖b5 ♗c7 17.h5 ♖e6 18.♖e3

And White had a slight advantage.

### 11...♖bd7

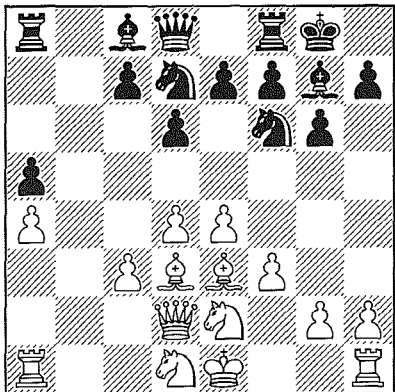
I think Black is facing some difficulties after this move and it is a good idea to search for improvements here, or earlier. Here, for instance, 11...c5!?: is interesting, intending cxd4 followed by ♖b8–c6–b4 with a harmonious position. White has three main alternatives:

a) The best is 12.♖e2! cxd4 13.cxd4 ♖c6 14.0–0 ♖b4 15.♖b5 which is slightly better for White, although Black is solid and has few weaknesses.

b) Not so good is 12.d5?! when 12...c6 13.dxe6 ♖xe6 is very pleasant for Black.

c) Finally, after 12.dxc5 d5 13.e5 ♖fd7 14.f4 ♗c7 the position is unclear.

### 12.♖e2

**12...c6!**

Black would like to play ...e5 but he must not allow White to block the centre: after 12...e5?! 13.d5! the position is reminiscent of a King's Indian Sämisch where White has the additional advantage of an open b-file.

Another alternative was seen in Krivec – Sermek, Bled 2001: 12...♖b6? Black is combining development with harassing the a4-pawn. It is an interesting idea, but I still think it is an ugly move that does not really improve the knight's scope. 13.♖h6 e5 14.♖xg7?! (This move only improves Black's position unless White is able to continue with h4-h5. It was better to play 14.h4 when h5 is on the menu and ♖b6 does not exactly make the defence easier. A possible continuation is 14...♖xh6 15.♗xh6 ♖h5 16.♗e3 with an initiative for White.) 14...♗xg7 15.0-0 ♖d7 16.♖b2 ♗e8 17.♖c2 ♗e7 and White was slightly better.

**13.0-0 e5 14.♗f2 d5**

In the 4...c6-line this position is rather common with Black to move. In that case the position is equal but here White has a slight initiative.

**15.♗f1**

White has a range of different alternatives, but his main ideas are to play either c4 or f4. In the main game White plays for c4 so another example is called for:

**15.♖h6 ♗c7**

I prefer 15...♗c8!? 16.♖xg7 ♗xg7 17.f4 dxe4 18.♖xe4 (Black is fine after 18.fxe5 exd3 19.exf6† ♖xf6 20.♖f4 ♖a6 21.♖4xd3 c5! 22.dxc5 ♖e4.) 18...♖xe4 19.♖xe4 exd4 20.♖d6 ♗e6 which seems OK for Black.

**16.♖xg7 ♗xg7 17.f4 dxe4 18.♖xe4**

It was better to play 18.fxe5! exd3 19.exf6† ♖xf6 20.♖xd3 ♖a6 21.♖c5 when White has some advantage.

**18...exd4 19.♖xd4 ♖b7 20.♖f3 ♗ad8 21.♖d3 c5?!**

21...♗fe8 intending ♖e4 looks better, keeping c5 in reserve.

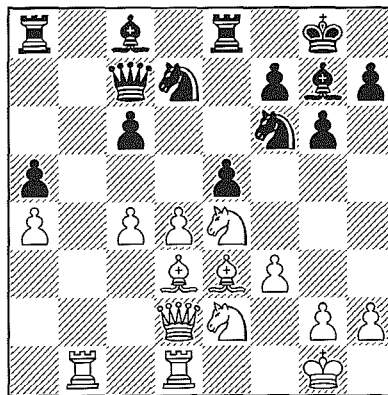
**22.♖b5 ♗b6 23.♖xb7 c4† 24.♖d4 ♗xb7 25.♖e5 ♖e4?!**

25...♗c7 is better, though White keeps a slight initiative.

**26.♗e3 ♖df6 27.♗ab1**

and White had a clear advantage in Ljubojevic – Ehlvest, Linares 1991.

I think 15.f4!? is the most critical move in this position. After 15...dxe4 16.♖xe4 exd4 17.♖xd4 (But 17.♖xd4 seems like an improvement for White, when 17...♗c7 18.f5 ♖xe4 19.♖xe4 ♖f6 20.♖f3 ♖xf5 21.♖xf5 gxf5 22.♖d4 is slightly nasty for Black.) 17...c5 18.♖f2 ♗c7 it was about level in Roschina – Lakos, Medulin 1997.

**15...♗e8 16.♗ab1 ♗c7 17.c4 dxe4 18.♖xe4**

**18...exd4**

There is nothing wrong with this, but 18...♞e4!?

19.♙xe4 f5 20.♙d3 ♗a6 is more ambitious.

**19.♞xd4**

19.♞xf6† ♗xf6 20.♙xd4 ♙xd4† 21.♞xd4 ♞c5 is roughly equal.

**19...♞e5 20.♞xf6† ♗xf6 21.♙f1 ♗a6 22.♗bc1 ♗ad8 23.♗f2 ♗b8?**

After 23...♗e7 24.♗e1 ♗h4 25.g3 ♗f6 Black has some initiative. Now instead White gains a winning position with a tactical trick:

**24.♞b5! ♗e7?**

It was better to play 24...cxb5 25.cxb5 ♗e7 when Black can fight on after either 26.♙c5 ♗h4 27.g3 ♗f6 or 26.bxa6 ♞xf3† 27.♗xf3 ♗xe3† 28.♗xe3 ♗xe3.

**25.♙c5 ♗h4 26.g3 ♗f6 27.♞c7 ♞xf3† 28.♞g2 ♗b2 29.♞xe8 ♗xf2† 30.♙xf2 ♗e7 31.gxh4 ♞e5 32.♞d6 c5 33.♙g3?!**

White is absolutely winning and should be able to wrap things up with a few precise moves. Instead he loses his way and Black is able to resist the invasion.

**33...♙b7† 34.♞xb7 ♗xb7† 35.♞f2 ♞g4† 36.♞g1 ♞g7 37.♗e1 ♗b3 38.♙g2 ♗xa4 39.h3 ♞h6 40.♙d5 ♞f5 41.♙f2 ♗b3 42.♞g2 a4 43.♗e2 ♗a3 44.♗ce1 ♗b3 45.♗a1 ♞d6 46.♙xc5 ♞xc4 47.♙d4† ♞h6 48.♙c5 ♞g7 49.♙d4† ♞h6 50.♙c5 ♞g7 51.♙d4†**  
1/2-1/2

I think that White can get an advantage in the main game with 15.f4, but Black can go looking for improvements earlier. 11...c5 is my suggestion, but there are plenty of other possibilities waiting to be discovered.

The last game of this chapter features a slightly unusual plan:

**Game 22****Sion Castro – Hillarp Persson**

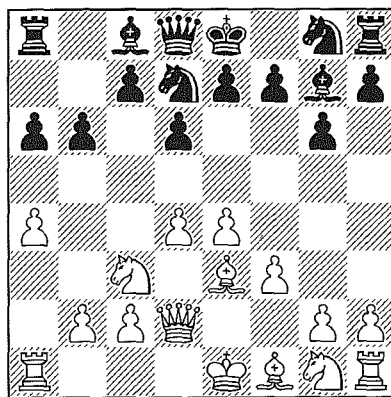
Mondariz 1994

**1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.♞c3 d6 4.♙e3 a6 5.♗d2 ♞d7! 6.a4**

White argues: “I have stopped b7-b5 and the knight is passive on d7, therefore I should be better.”

**6...b6 7.f3**

After 7.f3 the position resembles Turov – Hillarp Persson (page 70). Except here White has played an early ♗d2, which is not the most critical move and should, relatively speaking, favour Black.

**7...c5!?**

This is an interesting possibility, but 7...♙b7 followed by e6 is safer (see Game 38). I have not repeated 7...c5 since this game, but I have included this game because there are some interesting and illustrative ideas buried here.

**8.d5**

After 8.♞ge2 cxd4 9.♞xd4 ♗b7 10.♙c4 ♞gf6 Black has a reasonable position.

**8...♞e5!**

This is absolutely necessary. After 8...♞gf6?! 9.♞h3! 0-0 10.♙e2 ♗e8 11.0-0 it is very difficult for Black to achieve b6-b5 or e7-e6. e.g. 11...♞e5 12.♞f2 e6? 13.f4 ♞ed7 14.dxe6 ♗xe6 15.♙c4 is utterly awful for Black.

**9.h3 f5!**

Without this break the last move would have no meaning. Now the knight can retreat to f7 if White plays f4.

**10.f4 ♞f7**

The knight is not very active here, but it is

not in the way of the other pieces and it stops White from reaching the e6-square with ♖g1-f3-g5-e6.

### 11.exf5 ♖xf5

11...gx5!?! does not appeal to me. The f5-pawn can easily become weak and the c8-bishop is passive. After 12.♖c4 (Black is doing fine after 12.♖f3?! e5 13.dxe6 ♖xe6 14.0-0-0 ♖e7) 12...♖f6 13.♖ge2 h5 14.♖f2 Black is horribly passive.

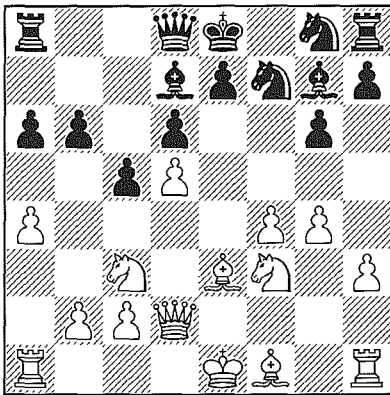
### 12.g4!

White is right in avoiding 12.♖f3 ♖f6 13.g4 ♖e4! when Black takes the initiative.

### 12...♖d7?!

If Black is trying to get by without e7-e6, then it is better to play 12...♖c8 13.♖c4 (13.♖f3 ♖f6 (13...e5!?) 14.♖g5 ♖xg5 15.fxg5 and Black can play 15...♖d7.) 13...♖f6 14.♖f3 0-0 and the question is whether White is overextended, or if Black is too cramped? I believe the position is balanced after 15.0-0 ♖b7 16.♖ae1 ♖b8 intending b6-b5.

### 13.♖f3



### 13...♖f6?!

I was quite intoxicated with the creative development of the game and totally forgot to check if my opponent had any threats. It was better to play 13...e5 14.fxe5 (14.dxe6 ♖xe6 15.0-0-0 ♖e7 16.♖g2 d5 is unclear) 14...♖xe5 15.♖xe5 ♖xe5 16.♖g2 ♖f6 and Black should not be worse.

### 14.♖g5! ♖c8

After 14...♖xg5? 15.fxg5 it is rather obvious why I should have played 12...♖c8: the knight can no longer go to d7 and 15...♖g8 is the same as resignation.

### 15.♖c4 0-0 16.♖e6 b5!?

I chose to press the *chaos button* rather than have to suffer after 16...♖xe6 17.dxe6 ♖d8 18.0-0.

### 17.♖xf8 ♖xf8 18.axb5

After both 18.♖a2 b4 19.♖d1 ♖xa4 and 18.♖b3 b4 19.♖e2 c4 20.♖a2 c3 21.bxc3 ♖e4 22.♖d3 ♖xc3 Black has some compensation for the exchange.

### 18...axb5 19.♖xa8 ♖xa8 20.♖xb5

Black has an excellent game after 20.♖e2? b4 21.♖d1 ♖xd5 22.♖f3 ♖c6.

### 20...♖xb5

20...♖xd5!? 21.♖xd5 ♖xb5 22.♖g1 (22.♖h2 ♖xb2) 22...♖c6 23.♖c3 ♖a1† 24.♖d1 and White has everything protected and can start improving his coordination.

### 21.♖xb5 ♖e4!

Black loses the initiative after 21...♖xd5 22.0-0! ♖a2 23.♖c3 ♖xc3 24.bxc3 ♖c4 25.♖b1.

### 22.♖g2!

After 22.♖c1 ♖a5† 23.♖c3 ♖xc3† 24.bxc3 ♖xc3† Black will soon win the exchange back with a slightly better position.

### 22...♖a1† 23.♖e2 ♖g3† 24.♖xg3 ♖xh1 25.♖f3

White will be clearly better in the endgame if I exchange queens, so there is only one thing to do...

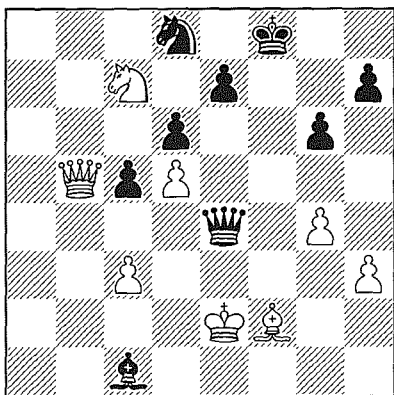
### 25...♖h2† 26.♖f2 ♖xb2 27.♖c7 ♖d8 28.c3 ♖c1 29.♖d3?

White is still much better after 29.f5 intending ♖e6†.

### 29...♖xf4 30.♖b5

I guess my opponent thought he was winning otherwise his 29th move is hard to explain. However there is no win now.

### 30...♖e4†!



### 31.♔d1??

After 31.♔f1 ♕g7 32.♖e8 Black has nothing better than 32...♖h1† 33.♔e2 ♗e4† forcing a perpetual.

### 31...♗g5 32.♗e1

Or 32.♖e8† ♔g7 33.♖xd8 ♗d3† 34.♔e1 ♗d2† 35.♔d1 ♗e3† 36.♔e1 ♗d2† 37.♔f1 ♖xf2 mate.

### 32...c4 33.♗d2 ♗d3 34.♖b2 ♔f7 35.♖c2 ♖xd2†?

35...♖xh3 36.♗xg5 ♖xg4† wins effortlessly.

### 36.♖xd2 ♗xd2 37.♔xd2 ♔f6 38.♔e3 ♔e5 39.g5?! e6

The rest is simple.

40.♗e8 ♔xd5 41.♗f6† ♔e5 42.♗xh7 ♔f5 43.♗f6 d5 44.h4 ♗c6 45.♗h7 e5 46.♗f6 d4† 47.♔d2 ♗e7 48.♗e8 ♔e6 49.♗c7† ♔f5 50.♗b5 ♔e4 51.♗d6† ♔d5 52.♗e8 d3 53.♗f6† ♔e6 54.h5 gxh5 55.♗xh5 e4 56.g6 ♗d5

### 0-1

I have not come up with a refutation of 9...f5 yet and maybe there isn't one. Still, I recommend some caution if you intend using this idea in a game. I renounce all responsibility for eventual mishaps.

**Conclusions:** The most critical games in this chapter are 16, 17, 20 and 21.

In Games 16 and 17 White plays "Plan A": h4 followed by ♗g1-h3-g5. With this set-up White reaches a more harmonious development than is the case after ♗g1-e2 (Game 18). In Game 16 Black should avoid 12...e5 in favour of 12...e6, and in Game 17 Black should be able to improve with 14...♗xc5 or 17...hxg4.

In Game 20 Black has no problems after 9.c3, but 9.dxc5 is critical. It seems to me that the resulting position holds an equal amount of danger for both sides.

Game 21 features the b5-before-♗d7 move order. The course of this game is not to my liking and I suggest you either look for improvements yourself or try my suggestion 11...c5.

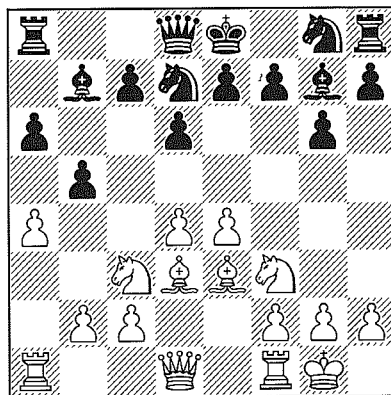
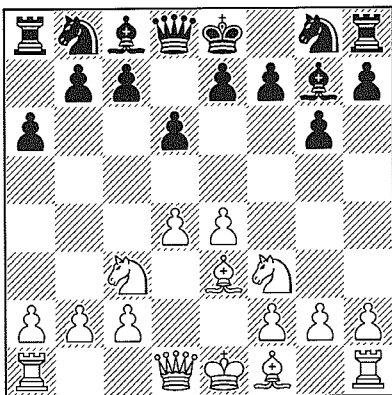
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## Chapter 3

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# Flexible Dragon Restrained – ♖e3 and ♞f3

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.♞c3 d6 4.♙e3 a6 5.♞f3



The Flexible Dragon Restrained is distinguished from its sibling, the Flexible Dragon Unleashed, by White's last move, ♞f3. In this line White rarely castles long and instead continues with "normal" moves like ♙d3, 0-0, ♖d2 and a2-a4, hitting b5. Black, on the other hand, plays the usual stuff: b5, ♞d7, ♙b7 and c7-c5.

**5...b5 6.♙d3 ♙b7**

After 6...♞d7 White has an extra option in 7.d5!?

**7.0-0 ♞d7**

By far the most common plan for White in this kind of position is a2-a4, to force Black to make a concession on the queenside.

**8.a4**

In the long run White will get nowhere without this move. In the previous chapter we saw a similar plan, except involving f3-f3 instead of ♞f3. In that position Black could bolster the queenside with c7-c6 but here it is better to play:

**8...b4 9.♞e2 c5 10.c3**

White intends to exchange the b-pawns, play 0-0 and then ♞g3. The next step is either to attack on the kingside with ♖d2 and ♙h6, or to put a rook on the b-file and attack the a6-pawn. It is such positions that this chapter is mostly about.

There are four main plans that White can choose from:

a) White plays a4 and c3 without ♖d2 (Game 23). I consider this to be the most critical move



order and Black has to play precisely (13... ♖a5 or 10...a5) to get a good game.

b) White plays e4-e5-e6, sacrificing a pawn (Game 24). This line became popular after Anand used it in 1998. Black is under pressure in the main game, but a pawn is a pawn. For those who do not like pawns, I recommend the alternative 11...h6!?

c) White plays ♖d2 and a4 (Games 25, 26, 27). In Game 25 White sacrifices the e4-pawn with 11. ♗h6 in order to prevent Black from castling. Black is in no way forced to take the pawn, but I did and would do so again. In Game 26 White hangs on to the e4-pawn with 11. ♘g3 and Black chooses a somewhat unorthodox way of continuing the attack on this pawn (11...h5). Game 27 features a slightly different version of the h5-idea.

d) White plays 5.a4 stopping Black from going b5 (Game 28). Black's best answer is 5... ♖f6 leading to a semi-Hippopotamus after b6. The direct 5...b6 is worse due to 6.f4 as seen in Turov – Hillarp Persson (Game 15).

First up is the most critical line when White leaves the queen on d1:

### Game 23

#### Manca – Hillarp Persson

Bolzano 1998

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.♖c3 d6 4.♗e3 a6 5.♖f3 b5

When White refrains from 5. ♖d2 there is no reason to play ♖d7 before b5, since after 5. ♖f3 b5 6.a4 b4 7. ♖e2 the b4-pawn is not under threat and Black has time to play 7... ♖d7.

### 6. ♗d3

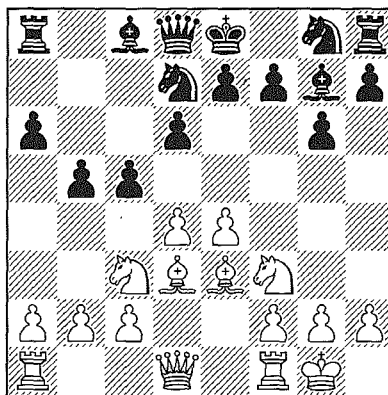
6.a4!? b4 7. ♖d5 a5 8. ♗d3 c6?! (Better is 8... ♖d7 9.0-0 ♗b7 intending ♖gf6, with equality.) 9. ♖f4 ♖d7 10.0-0 e5 11. ♖e2 ♖gf6 12. ♖d2 0-0 13. ♗g5!? was unclear in Timman – Hillarp Persson, Dan Hansson Memorial (rapid) 2002. After 13.dxe5 dxe5 14.c3 White would have had a small advantage.

### 6... ♖d7

Remember that playing b5 and ♖d7 before ♗b7 always gives White the opportunity to play d5, intending ♖f3-d4-c6. In the Classical lines this is very dangerous, but here Black gets off the hook rather easily: 7.d5 ♖gf6! 8. ♖d4 0-0 followed by ♖e5 and e7-e6. A common mistake is 7... ♗b7 when Black is left without counterplay after 8. ♖d4. If you do not like this, then 6... ♗b7 is better.

### 7.0-0 ♗b7

I am not too happy about 7...c5!? ignoring the basic principle “don't open up the position while underdeveloped”.



Still, the move is not easy to refute:

a) After 8.a4?! b4 9. ♖e2 cxd4 10. ♖exd4 ♗b7 11. ♖d2 ♖gf6 12. ♖xb4 ♗b8 Black will get the pawn back.

b) 8.dxc5!? and now:

b1) 8... ♖xc5?! 9. ♗d4 ♗xd4 (after 9... ♖f6 10.e5 is very strong) 10. ♖xd4 ♖f6 11.b4! followed by a2-a4 is good for White.

b2) 8...dxc5 9.a4!? and things are rather messy after 9...b4 10. ♖e2! ♖gf6 11.e5. A possible line is 11... ♖d5 12. ♗c4 ♖xc3 13.fxe3 ♗b8 14.e6 fxe6 15. ♖g5 ♖e5 16. ♖f4 ♖xd1 17. ♗axd1 ♗b6 18.a5 ♗d6 and the position is still unclear.

### 8.a4 b4

In this position 8...c6 has a bad reputation because 9.h3 e5 10.axb5 axb5 (10...cxb5 11.dxe5

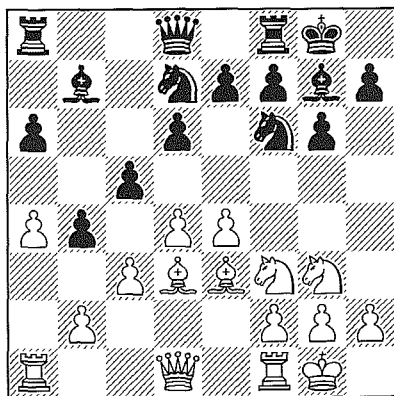
dxе5 12.♙xb5! was extremely dangerous for Black in van der Weide – Piket, Rotterdam 1998.) 11.♞xa8 ♙xa8 12.d5! (12.♞a1 exd4 followed by 13...♗g6 is fine for Black.) and there is nothing to stop me from agreeing with Yudasin that White is clearly better.

### 9.♗e2 ♗g6 10.♗g3 c5!?

If I reached this position today I would play 10...a5! to stop White's a4-a5, and then finish my development with 0-0. Compared to the 4...c6-lines there is one advantage for Black here: the e4-pawn is under attack from the b7-bishop and this makes it more difficult for White to claim an advantage. A possible continuation is 11.♞d2 0-0 12.c3 bxc3 13.bxc3 ♞b8 14.♙h6 e5 with a balanced position.

Also we have 10...0-0 11.♞d2 (11.a5 is slightly better for White) 11...c5 12.♙h6?!. This is just playing into Black's hands. 12...♙h6 13.♞xh6 cxd4 14.♗xd4 ♗e5 (14...♗c5 is more logical) 15.♞fe1 ♗fg4 16.♞d2 ♞b6 17.♗b3 (17.♙c2 a5 18.c3 bxc3 19.bxc3 and White has a slight initiative.) 17...♞ac8? 18.a5 and the b4-pawn soon fell in Cheparinov – Chatalbashev, Mondariz Balneario 2002. After 17...a5 Black would have been just fine.

### 11.c3 0-0?



It is necessary to exchange on c3 first (11...bxc3!), not to allow cxb4 on the next move. Compared to a position where ♞d2 has

already been played there are some advantages for White in this position. For instance, here 11...h5?! 12.♙g5 and Black is lacking explosives, since 12...d5? 13.e5 ♗e4 14.e6 is out of the question.

### 12.h3?

...♗g4 is not a threat so this is unnecessary. Instead White can get the advantage here with 12.cxb4! cxd4 (12...cxb4 13.a5 and the b4 pawn is very weak) 13.♙xd4 e5 14.♙c3 ♞e8 15.♞e1 when, contrary to my opinion at that time, Black has too little for the pawn. For this kind of pawn sacrifice to work it is important that Black can open up the centre for the bishops (with cxd4, e5, d5 etc.).

12.a5 is also stronger although I am not too worried about it because of 12...c4!? 13.♙xc4 bxc3 with only a very slight advantage for White.

### 12...bxc3!

Finally, the right move. Worse is 12...c4 13.♙xc4! bxc3 14.♙d3! cxb2 15.♞b1 when White has a slight advantage, while 12...♞a5?! 13.♙d2 cxd4 14.cxd4 is just very bad for Black. Nor do I like 12...a5 13.♞e2 ♞c7, compare this with Yakovich – Gorbatov in the comments to Videki – Hillarp Persson, (Game 44, comments to the sixth move).

### 13.bxc3

This position is critical, but should have been reached by way of 11...bxc3 12.bxc3 0-0 13.h3.

### 13...c4?!

I have included this game partly because of the many instructive mistakes I committed. Here it was clearly better to play 13...♞a5 when 14.♙d2! (14.♞d2 ♞ab8 is balanced) 14...c4! 15.♙c2 (15.♙xc4 ♗xe4 16.♗xe4 ♙xe4 17.♞e1 ♗f6 is fine for Black) 15...e5 16.♞e2 ♞c7 17.d5 a5 followed by ♙b7-a6 and ♗d7-c5-d3/b3 gives Black excellent chances. Black should always avoid positions like 13...cxd4?! 14.cxd4 a5 15.♞b1, when the queenside becomes White's playground.

### 14.♙c2

After 14.♙xc4 Black equalises easily with 14...♟xe4 15.♟xe4 ♙xc4 16.a5 ♞c7 17.♞d2 ♙b7 followed by e7-e5.

**14...e5**

I did not like the immediate 14...a5 because of 15.♞b1 ♞c7 16.♞d2 ♙a6 17.f4, when I could not see a plan for Black.

**15.d5**

I was more afraid of 15.a5! when Black can try 15...♙c6 intending 16.d5 ♙b5. Although White should be better here, he is slightly troubled by the weak a-pawn.

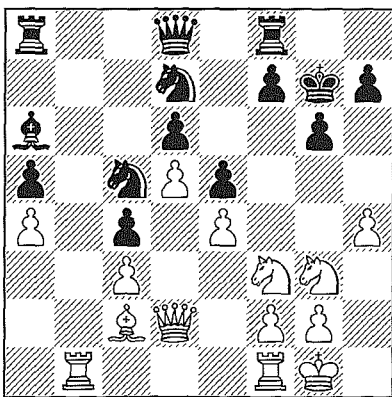
**15...a5!**

If White is allowed to play a4-a5, then Black will be left with no space and a weak c-pawn.

**16.♞d2! ♙a6 17.♙h6 ♟c5 18.♞ab1?**

This is inexact, giving me the opportunity to jump into the driver's seat. Better was 18.♙xg7 ♟xg7 19.♞g5 when only 19...♞g8! keeps the balance.

**18...♞fd7 19.♙xg7 ♟xg7 20.h4**



**20...h6?!**

Better was 20...♟b3! 21.♞e3 ♟dc5 when White will have to prove compensation for the a-pawn he is about to lose.

**21.h5 ♞e7 22.♞h2 ♞g5!?**

A rather nervous reaction, fearful of a white attack with f2-f4 and ♞g4.

**23.♞xg5 hxg5 24.hxg6 fxg6 25.♞f3 ♟f6 26.♞d2 ♞ab8**

I thought I could win this, but there is no way to improve my position.

**27.♞fd1 ♟b6 28.♞a1 ♟bd7 29.♞db1 ♞xb1† 30.♞xb1 ♞b8 31.♞xb8 ♟xb8 32.♞gf1 ♟bd7 33.♞e3 ♟b6**

The parties are mutually involved in the attack and defence of the c4-pawn. There is no room for improvement on either side.

**34.f3 ♟e7 35.♟h2 g4! 36.♟g3 gxf3 37.gxf3 ♟cxa4 38.♙xa4**

and a draw was agreed since 38...♟xa4 39.♞dxc4 ♟xc3 is dead equal.

**1/2-1/2**

The safest option for Black is to play 10...a5 with a level game. However, it is also possible to play 10...c5 if you are ready to take some risks. Then White can get some advantage with 12.a5, but it is still messy and I am not sure about the correct verdict

In the next game White shuns a4 and goes for Black's throat. It is a dangerous line that is unpleasant to meet if you are not prepared:

### Game 24

**Levin – Rausis**

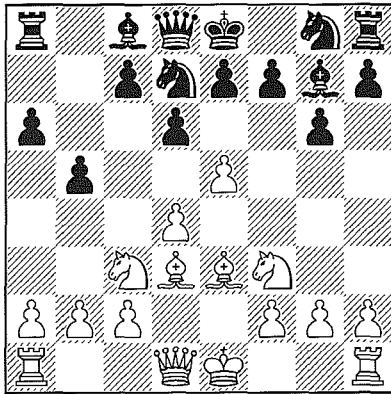
Hamburg 2001

**1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♙g7 3.♞c3 d6 4.♙e3 a6 5.♞f3 b5 6.♙d3**

Playing 6.a3 is a horrible waste of time for White. Not only is there no reason to stop Black from playing b4 (as long as the e4 pawn is protected), but it is also a clear sign that White has not realised that a2-a4 is the best plan available.

**6...♞d7 7.e5!?**

Always take your time when White plays e5. It is a signal of aggression and e6 is hanging in the air. Should you be afraid of that? Well no, not in general. But every position should be treated as unique and sometimes it is best to stop e6 (with ...e6) and sometimes it is better to allow it. I am more inclined towards allowing it.

**7...♗b7!**

I have no faith in 7...♖b6 as tried in Tkachiev – Spraggett, Ponferrada 1997. The game continued: 8.♗e2 ♖h6 9.0-0-0 ♖f5 10.♗g5 h6 11.♗d2 dxe5 12.dxe5 c5 13.♗e4 ♖a7 14.♗f4 ♗c7 15.g4 ♖d4 16.♖xd4 cxd4 17.♖xd4 and Black did not have enough compensation for the pawn.

Really bad is 7...dxe5 8.♗e4 ♖b8 9.dxe5 when Black is paralysed. A fourth line is 7...e6, though I have my doubts about Black's game after 8.a4! b4 9.♗g5! ♖e7 10.exd6 cxd6 11.♖e4. Still, Black can play on with 11...♗c7 when 12.♗xe7 ♖xe7 is nothing special for White. Curt Hansen tried this line with Black against Fishbein in Kerteminde 1991, and reached a good position after 8.♗g5?! ♖e7 9.a4 bxa4! 10.exd6 cxd6 11.♖xa4 0-0. It might be worth taking a closer look at this.

**8.e6!**

This is the point of 7.e5. After 8.exd6? cxd6 White has thrown two tempi away and only improved Black's pawn structure.

**8...fxe6 9.♖g5 ♖f8 10.0-0**

White needs a safe haven for the king before attacking. 10.h4?! ♗g2 11.♖h2 ♗b7 12.h5 ♗d7 and White has compensation for the first pawn, but not the second.

**10...♖f6**

Also interesting is 10...♖h6 intending ♖h6-f5. After 11.♗e2 ♗d7 12.a4 b4 13.♖a2 a5 14.c3 ♖f5 it is a mess.

**11.♖e1**

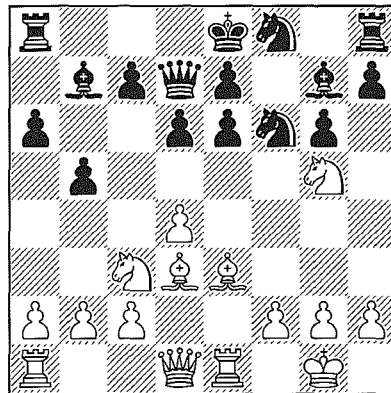
Possibly more dangerous is 11.a4!? when 11...b4 12.♖e2 h6 13.♖h3 e5 14.dxe5 dxe5 15.♗e1 c5 is unclear.

**11...♗d7**

I have tried 11...h6!? as Black against Thomas Ernst. The game continued 12.♗xg6† ♖xg6 13.♖xe6 ♗d7 14.♖xg7† ♖f7 15.♖h5 b4!? (After 15...♗c6?! 16.d5 ♖xd5 17.♗g4 ♖ag8 18.♖e4 Black's king is more vulnerable than White's.) 16.♖xf6 exf6 17.♖e2 (17.♖b1 ♗f5 with compensation for the pawn) and now:

a) 17...♖ae8?! 18.♖g3?! and Black had compensation for the pawn in T. Ernst – Hillarp Persson, Skara (rapid) 2002. However better was 18.♗d3! stopping the black queen from reaching f5. After 18...♗b5!? 19.♗xb5 axb5 20.♖f1! White has good winning chances.

b) Much stronger is 17...♖ag8! when White comes under a terrible attack: 18.♖g3 (18.f3? h5 19.d5 ♗f5 20.♗d4 ♗xd5 21.♗xb4 ♖e5 and White has no defence against all the threats.) 18...h5 19.f3 ♖h4 20.♗e2 ♖xg2 21.♖xg2 h4

**12.♗d2**

This is the main move, intending a2-a4, but there are other options:

a) 12.f3 h6 13.♖h3 b4

13...g5!? is very interesting, intending 14.a3 c5 15.dxc5 dxc5 16.♗xc5 g4, when files are opened to Black's advantage.

14. ♖e2 g5

14... ♖d5 15. ♙f2 e5 helps Black to get rid of his double pawns, but opens up the position prematurely.

15. ♖g3 ♜g8 16. a3 ♖d5 17. ♙f2 a5 18. c4 bxc3 19. bxc3

and White had the initiative in Spraggett – Vassallo Barroche, Maia 2003.

b) 12. ♛c2!? h6 13. ♖f3 ♗f7

I prefer 13...g5 by analogy with the main game. 14. ♙d2 ♗g8?!

This move does not improve Black's position.

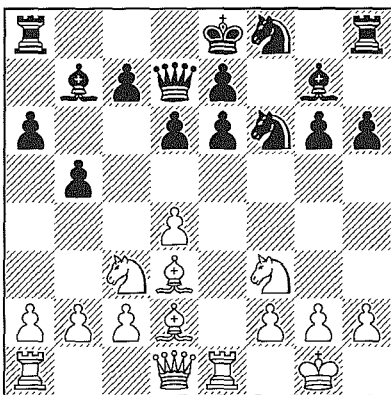
Better is 14... ♜b8 or 14...g5.

15. a4 b4 16. ♖e4 ♖xe4 17. ♙xe4 ♙xe4 18. ♛xe4 ♜b8 19. c4 bxc3 20. ♙xc3 ♙f6?! 21. ♛d3 ♜b6 22. ♖d2?!

and the position was unclear in Velcheva – Minasian, Dubai 2004. However, 22. ♙a5 ♜xb2 23. ♛xa6 would have been problematic for Black.

### 12...h6 13. ♖f3

The opening is over and the middlegame is commencing. What is Black to do? And what about White? It is usually useful for Black to play ♜b8, because White will try to open the b-file sooner or later. On the kingside Black should improve slowly: g6-g5 yes, but not g5-g4. White's most common plan is to play a4 and then ♖e4. Exchanges will follow on e4 and it is probably a good idea to be able to take back with the queen on e4 in the end, rather than with the rook.



### 13...g5!

I believe this is the most useful and flexible move Black has available. It helps prepare g4, h5 and ♙f6, gaining some space on the kingside. White will try to open files on the queenside, but it is still not clear how and where. If White plays the b4-followed-by-a4 idea, then I might prefer to keep my rook on a8, being able to answer a4 (after b4) with c6.

Black has tried three other moves:

a) 13... ♗f7?! 14. a4

I believe both 14. ♛e2 and 14. b4 are stronger.

14...b4 15. ♖e4 ♜b8?

Probably Black missed White's next move.

Otherwise he would have played 15... ♙xe4

16. ♙xe4 ♖xe4 17. ♜xe4 ♜b8 18. c3 bxc3

19. bxc3 ♛c6 intending ♙f6, g5 and ♖g6, with

excellent chances of keeping the pawn.

16. ♖c5!

and White was able to exchange the b7-bishop and had clearly better chances in Calzetta Ruiz – Chatalbashev, Cutro 2002.

b) In Magomedov – Urban, Koszalin 1999, Black went for an early c7-c5:

13... ♜c8?! 14. a4

14. b4 c5 (14...e5 15. dxe5 ♖g4 16. a4 ♙xf3

17. ♛xf3 ♖xe5 18. ♜xe5 ♙xe5 19. axb5 and

White has a dangerous initiative for the

exchange.) 15. dxc5 ♙xf3 16. ♛xf3 dxc5 17. bxc5

and White is clearly better.

14...b4 15. ♖e4

15. ♖e2!? ♙xf3 16. gxf3 ♖d5 (16...a5 17. ♖f4

♗f7 18. ♙c4 d5 and White exerts strong pressure

with 19. ♙f1.) 17. ♙xa6 ♜a8 18. ♙d3 ♜xa4 19. c4

♜xa1 20. ♛xa1 ♖b6 21. ♙xb4 is unclear.

15... ♖xe4 16. ♙xe4 ♙xe4 17. ♜xe4 a5 18. c3 c5

19. ♛e1?!

This is dubious, but 19. dxc5 bxc3 20. bxc3 ♜xc5

21. ♜b1 e5 is fine for Black anyway.

19...cxd4 20. cxb4

Not 20. ♖xd4 e5 21. ♖b3 bxc3 22. ♙xc3 ♖e6

and Black's active pieces compensate well for

the loss of a pawn.

20...e5 21. b5 ♖e6

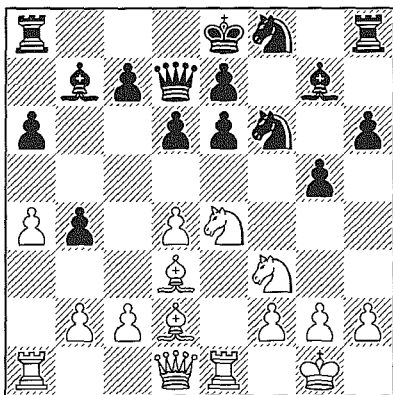
and Black had plenty of counter chances.

c) 13...♖b8 is given an “!” by Anand in *Informant* 72. After 14.a4?! (After this move 13...♖b8 does indeed make sense, supporting the b-pawn. Better is 14.♗e2 or 14.b4 intending a4.) 14...b4 15.♘e4 ♘xe4 16.♙xe4 ♙xe4 17.♞xe4 ♞c6 18.♞e3 ♞c4 19.c3 b3!? when the position was unclear in Anand – Svidler, Linares 1998.

#### 14.a4?!

14.♗e2 seems better, intending to take back with the queen on e4 after ♘e4, etc. Possibly critical for this kind of position, but not yet tried, is 14.b4!? intending a2-a4, not allowing b5-b4. A possible continuation is 14...♙f7 15.a4 c6 with the idea 16.axb5?! cxb5 when Black is fine.

#### 14...b4 15.♘e4



#### 15...♘xe4?!

Yudasin gives this move an exclamation mark, but I think it is better to play 15...g4! 16.♘h4 ♙xe4 17.♙xc4 ♘xe4 18.♞xe4 h5 with unclear play.

#### 16.♙xe4 ♙xe4 17.♞xe4 ♞c6

This is an improvement over 17...a5?! which featured in Yudasin – Kanstler, Israel 1998. The game continued:

#### 18.c3 ♞c6 19.♗c2 bxc3?!

It was better to play 19...♙f6 waiting with bxc3 since White is not threatening cxb4 yet. Answering c3 with b3 is sometimes a good idea, but it all comes down to time: is White able to play ♞a3, ♘d2 and pick up the pawn before Black can create counterplay somewhere else? It

is always a hard decision and generally I would rather play a less risky idea.

#### 20.bxc3 ♙f6

In *Informant* 74 Yudasin gives 19...♖b8 20.♗d3, intending c4 (attacking a5), as better for White.

#### 21.♖b1 ♞g8 22.♖b5

And White had the initiative.

#### 18.♗e2

Yudasin recommends 18.♗e1 ♞xc2 19.♙xb4, intending ♙a5 and ♞c1 “with compensation for the material”. I guess no one has followed this recommendation because 18...♖b8 is very pleasant for Black: after 19.c3 bxc3 20.bxc3 the position resembles Yudasin – Kanstler above, with the important difference that Black’s a-pawn is still on a6 where it is much safer than on a5.

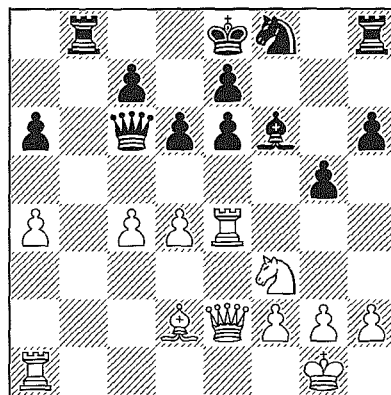
#### 18...♖b8

When a4 and b4 have been played this move - anticipating the opening of the b-file - is generally the right thing to do, but here it seems even better to grab a pawn with 18...♞xc2 when neither the Silicon Monster nor I have been able to find a way for White to get enough compensation. Still, we might have missed something and Rausis’ choice is good and solid.

#### 19.c3 bxc3 20.bxc3

Also interesting is 20.♙xc3 ♞d5 21.♘e1, when 21...h5 22.♘d3 a5 23.b4 axb4 24.♘xb4 ♞b3 is messy.

#### 20...♙f6 21.c4?!



White is trying to win by a direct attack, but this weakens the centre prematurely and makes Black's counterplay on the b-file even more efficient. A better move is 21.h3, when White has just enough compensation for the pawn.

21...♞b2 22.♞e1 ♞xa4 23.d5 e5

So, what now? Black is two pawns up and White has tripled the heavy mob on a closed file.

24.♟xe5?

This move just loses, but White was done for anyway.

24...dxe5 25.♞h5† ♔d8 26.♟c3 ♞xf2!?

27.♟xe5

After 27.♟xf2 ♞c2† 28.♞e2 ♞xc3 Black will win eventually.

27...♞c2 28.♟xf6 ♞xf6 29.♞4e2 ♞xc4 30.♞xe7 ♞f1† 31.♞xf1 ♞c5† 32.♞f2 ♞xe7

0-1

It seems Black is doing all right in this line, but there is plenty of scope for improvements for White, for instance 14.♞e2 and 14.b4. I recommend that you look into 7...e6 or 11...h6, when there is a good chance you will catch your opponent off guard.

The next game features the main line of the Flexible Dragon Restrained. Although the move order in Game 23 is more critical, I have met the following move order (♞d2 and then a4) far more often.

### Game 25

Carlsson – Hillarp Persson

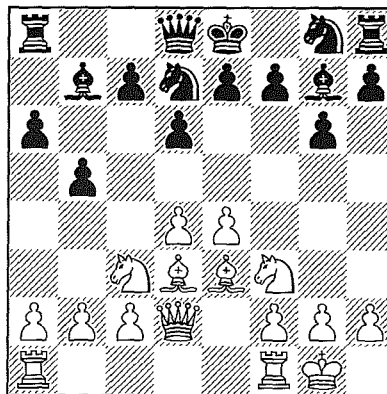
Stockholm 1999/2000

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♟g7 3.♟c3 d6 4.♟e3 a6 5.♞d2 ♟d7 6.♟f3 b5 7.♟d3

This kind of set-up attracts many White players, because it looks harmonious and well developed. So far, yes, but if Black manages to open up the position the white pieces will find the centre a bit crowded.

7...♟b7 8.a4

Recommended by Aaron Summerscale in *Killer Chess Opening Repertoire*. White can also continue down the developing road with 8.0-0



8...c5! 9.dxc5 ♟xc5 10.b4! ♟d7 11.a4 bxa4 12.♞xa4 ♟gf6 13.♟h6 0-0 14.♟xg7 ♟xg7 15.♞a5 ♟b6?! 16.♞e1. This position was better for White in Meister – Inarkiev, Moscow 2004. A possible improvement for Black is 15...♞c7 16.♞fa1 ♞fc8 17.♞1a3 ♟b6 with balanced chances. Another option is 9...dxc5 10.a4 b4 with a position similar to the comment to White's 10th move.

8...b4 9.♟e2 c5!?

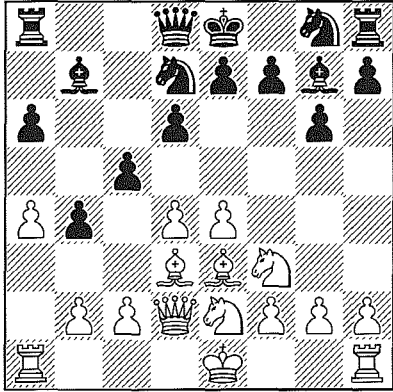
I played 9...a5 against Tommi Nybäck in Skellefteå 2001, and after 10.♟g3 then 10...h5!? (a similar idea is seen in the next game). Now we have:

a) 11.h3!? c5 12.c3 ♟gf6 13.♟g5 (A typical mistake is 13.e5 bxc3! 14.bxc3 cxd4 15.cxd4 dxe5 16.dxe5 ♟xf3 and Black wins.) 13...h4 14.♟e2 ♞c7 15.♞c1! (defending against c4) 15...b3! 16.♟c4 0-0 with complicated play.

b) 11.h4 ♟f6 12.e5 is very good for White, but 11...♟h6! is fine for Black, avoiding e5 and preparing ♟g4.

c) The game actually went 11.♟g5 h4 12.♟xh4 ♟xd4 13.♟xd4 ♞xh4 14.♟f3 ♞h8 15.c3 ♟c5 and I had an excellent position, though I later became too optimistic and my king was massacred.

The most solid option is to play 10...♟g6 instead of 10...h5 and then 11.♟h6 0-0 is approximately equal. A similar position is analysed in Game 23 after 10...a5.

**10.c3**

White can also try 10.dxc5!? dxc5 11.0-0 when Black has a choice between the risky 11...♙xb2 12.♞ad1 ♙g7, and 11...♖g6 when Black is fine after both 12.e5 ♖g4 13.e6 fxe6 and 12.♙h6 0-0!

A third possibility is:

10.♖g3 ♖g6 11.♙h6?!

11.c3 h5! is seen in the next game and both 11.0-0 ♖g4 and 11.h3 cxd4 12.♙xd4 a5 are fine for Black.

11...♙xh6 12.♞xh6 cxd4 13.0-0

13.♞d2! a5 (13...♞b6 14.a5 ♞c5 15.♞a4)

14.♖xd4 h5 and Black is whistling his favourite tune.

13...e5!

I do not think White has enough for the pawn. Black is threatening ♖g4, followed by 0-0 and if White plays slowly (14.h3) Black can disentangle with ♖g8 and ♗e8-f8-g7. It is an important detail that ...♖g8 cannot be met by ♞g7 as ...♞f6 will force the exchange of queens.

In Collins – Hillarp Persson, Isle of Man 2001, Black instantly went wrong: 13...♞b6?! 14.♖g5 ♞c8 15.a5 ♞a7 16.♞ae1 b3?! (16...♞f8 is better, intending 17.f4 ♞xc2 18.♙xc2? d3† 19.♗h1 ♖g4 20.♞h3 ♖f2† 21.♞xf2 ♞xf2 winning.) 17.cxb3 ♖e5 18.♙c4 and White had the initiative.

**10...♖g6**

My plan in this and the next game is to put pressure on e4 until White has to do something he would rather not. In this game I am allowed to pick up the e4-pawn, whereas in Game 26 White defends the pawn only to encounter a new wave of attack.

**11.♙h6?!**

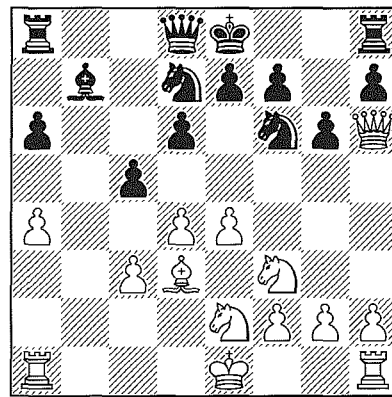
The alternative 11.♖g3 is seen in the next game and 11.e5? is a mistake when 11...cxd4! 12.cxd4 dxe5 13.dxe5 ♖g4 14.e6 ♖de5 is very good for Black.

**11...bxc3**

Here it is bad to give White the opportunity to take on b4.

**12.bxc3 ♙xh6! 13.♞xh6**

White gives up a pawn for the initiative. The position becomes very sharp and it is difficult to give a reliable verdict of whose chances are better. However I do think, provided Black plays better, that this is one of the most critical positions of the variation.



**13...cxd4?!**

It is not logical to open the c-file, since only White can gain from opening the position. After 13...♙xe4! 14.♙xe4 ♖xe4 15.0-0 even Fritz 8 judges the position to be slightly better for Black. This probably says more about the nature of computer programs than it says about the position, but it is definitely better not to open up the c-file. In Schmied – Hillarp Persson, Copenhagen 2002,



Black did in fact gain the better position after: 15.♞g7?! ♜f8 16.0-0 (16.♞xh7 ♞df6 17.♞h4 cxd4 18.♞fxd4 g5 19.♞h3 ♞c8 and Black is better due to a clearly better pawn structure and central control.) 16...♞df6 17.dxc5? (17.♞g3) 17...♞g8 18.♞h6 g5! 19.♞fd4 ♞c8 20.cxd6 ♞xd6 21.♞g3 ♞g6 22.♞h3 ♞xh3 23.gxh3 ♞c8 and White soon lost.

14.cxd4 ♞xe4

Black should avoid exchanging queens: 14...♞a5†?! 15.♞d2 ♞xd2† 16.♞xd2 0-0 17.f3 and White is dominating the queenside.

15.♞xe4 ♞xe4 16.0-0 e6 17.♞g3

I do not like this move. On g3 the knight does almost nothing. It is not going to f5 or h5, and of course I will not allow it to be exchanged. If White does not have anything better it tells us that Black is OK.

After 17.♞fe1 ♞f6 18.♞g3 ♞xg3 19.hxg3 g5 20.♞xg5 ♞xg5 21.♞xg5 ♞e7 Black is better in the endgame.

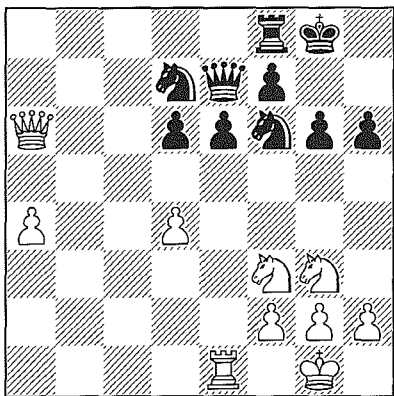
17...♞ef6 18.♞fe1 ♞e7

White has a strong initiative after either 18...♞b6 19.♞eb1 or 18...♞g8 19.♞f4.

19.♞a1 ♞f8 20.♞g5

After 20.♞d2 Black should play it safe with 20...♞e7 rather than go for the speculative 20...h5 when White has a strong initiative after 21.d5 e5 22.♞g5.

20...h6 21.♞a5 ♞e7 22.♞c6 0-0 23.♞xa6 ♞xa6 24.♞xa6



Objectively White is better here, but the Black side is easier to play: The white knights have no safe squares in the centre and it is difficult to get them over to the queenside. Black has access to the d5-square and can coordinate his forces with less trouble. If Black is allowed to blockade the a-pawn it might turn out to be weak in the end. Anyway, that is what I was hoping for.

24...♞b8 25.♞c6

The position is balanced after 25.♞c1 ♞f8 26.a5 ♞d8. Black does not want to play d6-d5 weakening e5, and White can generally swap his a-pawn for the d6-pawn.

25...♞b6 26.♞c8†?! ♞f8 27.♞c2

If White exchanges queens then the a-pawn will come under attack sooner than White will be able to defend it.

27...♞a8 28.♞d2 ♞g7 29.a5 ♞a6 30.♞a1 ♞b6

The a-pawn is safely blockaded and Black is slightly better.

31.♞b4 ♞bd5 32.♞d2 ♞d8 33.♞f1 ♞e7?!

33...♞c7 is better with the idea 34.♞e3 ♞c3, winning the pawn on a5 since 35.♞c1 is losing to 35...♞e2†.

34.♞e3 ♞c6 35.d5 exd5 36.♞xd5 ♞xd5 37.♞xd5 ♞xa5 38.♞d1 ♞xa1 39.♞xa1† ♞f6 40.♞c1 ♞d4 41.♞xd4 ♞xd4 42.g3 d5 43.♞c2 h5 44.h4 ♞c4 45.♞d2 d4 46.♞f4 ♞d5 47.♞f1 d3 48.♞e1 ♞e6†

White resigned. Possibly Pontus saw something I did not see, but I have not been able to find a simple win for Black after 49.♞f1.

0-1

I guess White could have forced a repetition of moves with 20.♞d2 ♞e7 21.♞h6 and that is not my cup of tea. On the other hand, it is better not to exchange on d4 on move 13 and 9...a5 is a relatively solid (compared to other a6-lines) and interesting option leading to mutual chances.

In the next game White does not give up his e4-pawn so easily:

## Game 26

von Bahr – Hillarp Persson

Swedish Team Championship 2003

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♖g7 3.♞c3 d6 4.♙e3 a6 5.♙d3  
 ♜d7 6.♚d2 b5 7.♜f3 ♙b7 8.a4 b4 9.♞e2 c5

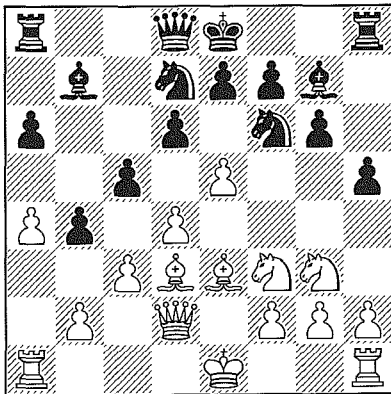
Do not forget that 9...a5 is also possible.

10.c3 ♜gf6 11.♞g3 h5!

Threatening h5-h4. Black can also try 11...bxc3  
 12.bxc3 ♞g4 when 13.♙f4 e5 14.dxe5 (14.♙e3  
 ♞xe3 15.fxg3 h5!?) and Black is better) 14...♞dx5!  
 (14...dxe5 15.♙g5 f6 16.♙h4 is problematic for  
 Black) 15.♙e2 ♞xf3† 16.♙xf3 ♞e5 17.♙e2 0-0  
 18.0-0 d5 is about equal.

12.♙g5

Not 12.e5?

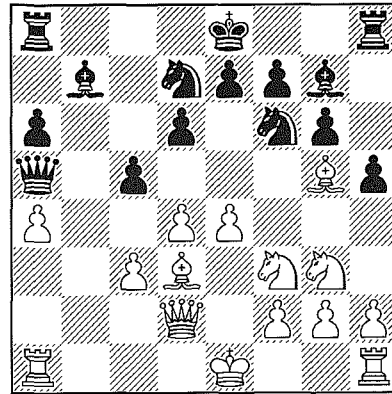


12...bxc3! 13.bxc3 cxd4 14.cxd4 (White's best  
 chance is 14.exf6! dxe3 15.♚b2 ♙xf6 16.♚xb7  
 ♙xc3† 17.♞e2 ♙xa1 18.♚xa1 exf2 when Black's  
 weak kingside gives White some compensation for  
 the lost material.) 14...dxe5 15.dxe5 ♙xf3  
 and Black had a decisive advantage in Deglmann  
 – Hillarp Persson, Franken 2002.

White's best option might be 12.h4 when  
 12...bxc3 13.bxc3 ♞g4 is unclear. This needs to  
 be tested in practice.

12...d5?

Opening a Pandora's box of complications. The  
 problem is that Black is not ready for this. Better  
 is 12...bxc3! 13.bxc3 ♚a5



It is not easy for White to hold on to the  
 e-pawn in this position: 14.0-0 (14.♚b1 ♙c6  
 15.d5 ♙xa4 16.0-0 ♞h7 17.♞e2 ♞xg5 18.♞xg5  
 ♞e5 is bad for White and the same goes for 14.h4  
 d5!.) 14...h4! 15.♙xh4 (15.♚fb1!? hxg3 16.♚xb7  
 gxh2† 17.♞h1 cxd4 18.cxd4 ♚xd2 19.♙xd2  
 e5 intending 20.dxe5? ♞g4 is better for Black.)  
 15...cxd4 16.♚b2 ♚b8 when White has to bid  
 farewell to the central phalanx, meaning Black is  
 slightly better.

13.e5!

White is not helped by 13.♙xf6 ♞xf6 14.e5  
 ♞e4 15.♙xe4?! (15.♚f4 ♙h6 16.♚h4 bxc3  
 17.bxc3 cxd4 18.e6 ♚c8 19.exf7† ♞f8 20.0-0  
 g5 21.♚xh5 ♙g7 22.♚g6 ♚h6 when White does  
 not get enough compensation for the queen.)  
 15...dxe4 16.♞g5 ♙h6 and White has no  
 satisfactory defence against f6.

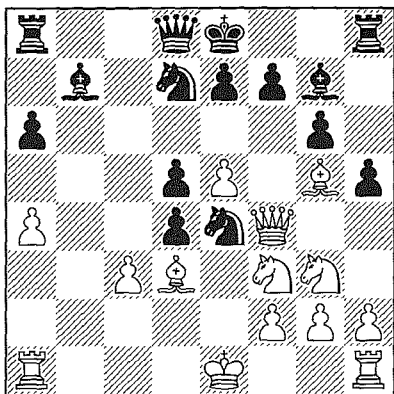
13...♞e4 14.♚f4!?

My analysis of this variation had more to do  
 with optimism than quality at the time of this  
 game. Also good is 14.♚e3 when Black is clearly  
 worse after 14...bxc3 15.bxc3 cxd4 16.cxd4 ♚a5†  
 17.♞f1.

14...bxc3 15.bxc3

I was hoping for 15.e6 0-0 16.exd7 cxb2  
 17.♚b1 ♚a5† 18.♞f1 ♞xg5 19.♚xg5 ♚c3 with  
 an attack.

15...cxd4

**16.cxd4?!**

Black has some compensation after 16.e6! 0-0 17.exd7 f6 18.♙h6 e5 19.♚c1 ♜xd7 though White is definitely better.

**16...♚a5† 17.♗e2 f5!?**

There is one other interesting possibility: 17...f6! 18.♗xe4 dxe4 19.♙xe4 fxg5 20.♙xg6† ♗d8 21.♗xg5 ♙d5 22.e6 (22.♗f7† ♙xf7 23.♚xf7 ♙xe5 is winning for Black) 22...♙f8 23.♗f7† ♙xf7 24.♚xf7 ♙c4† and White has nothing better than going for perpetual with 25.♗d1 ♙b3† 26.♗e2.

After both 17...♗c3†? 18.♗f1 ♗f8 19.♚d2 ♙c8 20.♗e2 and 17...♗f8?! 18.♗xe4 dxe4 19.♙xe4 ♗e6 20.♚e3 Black's position is hopeless.

**18.♙xe7!?**

The other two alternatives are also interesting:

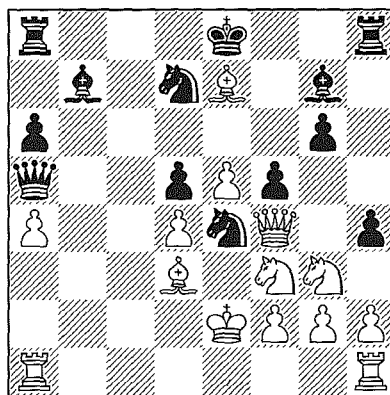
a) 18.exf6 exf6 19.♗xe4 dxe4 20.♙xe4 0-0 (My silicon companion recommends 20...fxg5!? 21.♗xg5 ♙f6!) 21.♙xb7 ♙ae8† 22.♗f1 fxg5 23.♚xg5 (23.♚d6 ♚c3 24.♚a3 ♚c4† 25.♗g1 g4 and Black has plenty of compensation) 23...♚xg5 24.♗xg5 ♙xd4 25.♙a2 ♗c5 and the active black pieces more than compensate for the missing pawn.

b) 18.♙hc1 ♗f8 19.♚h4! (19.♗f1?! h4! 20.♗e2 ♗e6 21.♚e3 h3 and Black has the initiative.) 19...♙c8! with a very unclear position.

**18...h4!?**

18...♗xe7 19.♙xe4 dxe4 20.♗h4 ♗e8! (20...♙h6?! 21.♗xg6† ♗d8 22.♚h4† ♗c7

23.♙hc1† ♙xc1 24.♙xc1† ♗b6 25.♗xh8 is horrible for Black.) 21.♚g5 ♙f8 22.♚xg6† ♗d8 23.♗hxf5 ♚c3 is unclear, though Black cannot hope for more than a perpetual.

**19.♙xh4?!**

Much stronger is 19.♙xe4!. Then 19...dxc4 20.♗xh4 ♚c3! (20...♙d5 21.♙hd1 ♚e6! 22.♗hxf5! gxf5 23.♗xf5 ♙h6 24.♚g4 and Black has no defence. For instance: 24...♙d5 25.♚h5† ♚f7 26.♗d6† ♗xe7 27.♚h4† ♗f8 28.♗xf7 ♙c4† 29.♗e1 ♙d2† 30.♗xd2 ♙xh4 31.♗d6 and Black is lost.) 21.♙hd1! ♚c4† 22.♗e1 ♚e6 23.♗hxf5 gxf5 24.♗xf5 ♙h6 25.♚g4 (25.♙g5 ♙f8 26.♙e7 ♙h6 is a repetition of moves) 25...♙d5 26.h3! is problematic for Black. It is messy, but I think this was the way to punish me for my stupid 12th move.

**19...♗f8**

Another complicated line is 19...♙h6 20.♙g5 (20.♗g5 ♗f8 is messy) 20...♙xg5 21.♗xg5 ♙h4 22.♚c1 ♗c3† 23.♗f1 ♙xd4 24.♗e6! ♙xd3 25.♚h6 ♗xe5 26.♚h8† ♗d7 27.♚xe5 ♙e8 28.♗f8† ♙xf8 29.♚g7† ♗e8 30.♚xg6† with an attack for White. Obviously this is a very long line and maybe both sides can improve along the way.

**20.♗xf5?**

This solves some of the tactical problems White has with ♗f8-♗e6, but it was still better to play 20.♚c1! ♗e6 21.♗f1 ♙c8 when the

position is unclear, or 20.♖hb1!? ♕h6 21.♖xb7 ♕xf4 22.♖e7† ♖d8 23.♖a7† (23.♖h7† g5 24.♖xh8 ♖c7 25.♖xf5 gxh4 26.♖xh4 Here the silicon monster claims that Black has a winning advantage. I am inclined to agree after 26...♗c3.) 23...♖xh4 24.♖xa8† ♖d7 25.♕xe4 fxe4 26.♖xh4 ♗d2† 27.♖f1 ♗xd4 and the analysis can go on and on and on... The position is simply unclear.

**20...gxf5 21.♖hb1 ♕c8 22.♕xe4?**

This makes matters much worse since it invites Black on to the a6-f1-diagonal.

**22...dxc4 23.♖g5 ♗d5 24.e6?**

White is in time trouble and goes berserk.

**24...♗c4† 25.♖e1 ♕xd4**

White resigned since both 26.♖xe4 ♗e6 and 26.♖a3 ♕c3† are hopeless.

**0-1**

I was in big trouble after 12...d5?, but 12...bxc3 13.bxc3 ♗a5 is a strong improvement that makes me optimistic about Black's chances in this line.

The next game is one of the first I played with the a6 set-up, so it is no surprise that I misplayed it slightly. However, my opponent was no more familiar with the line and commits a few mistakes himself. The resulting position is strategically interesting and important for the whole line (compare with Game 44).

### Game 27

**Kolev – Hillarp Persson**

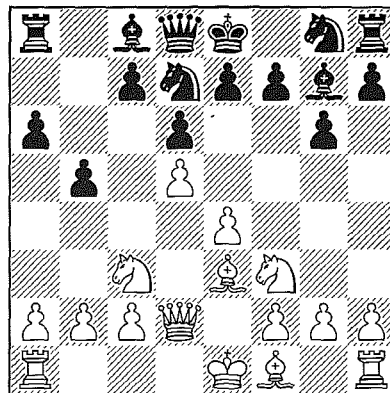
Zaragoza 1995

**1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♕g7 3.♖c3 d6 4.♕e3 a6 5.♗d2 ♖d7**

After 5...b5 White does not have the extra option discussed on move 7 but, on the other hand, Black must be prepared to meet 6.a4 (see Game 21).

**6.♖f3 b5 7.a4!?**

Another possibility is 7.d5!? intending ♖f3-d4-c6. This is very dangerous and Black must act with precision:



**7...♖gf6!**

I believe this is the only move that gives Black enough counterplay. Inferior is 7...♕b7?! 8.♖d4 ♗c8 when after 9.a4 b4 10.♖a2 c5 11.dxc6 ♕xc6 12.♖xc6 ♗xc6 13.♖xb4 ♗xe4 14.♖xa6 White had the advantage in Beshukov – Kantsler, Cappelle la Grande 2000. It looks as if Black has some compensation, but it is not enough. An even worse option is 7...♖c5?! 8.♕xc5 dxc5 when 9.♗e3 leaves White clearly on top.

**8.♖d4**

After 8.♕d3 ♕b7 9.a4 b4 10.♖e2 a5 11.♖fd4 0-0 12.0-0 ♖e5 White has a choice of allowing either ...c6 or – after 13.f4 – 13...♖g4. In both cases Black is fine.

**8...0-0 9.f3**

If 9.♖c6 ♗e8 10.a4 then 10...bxa4! looks very ugly, but Black is far ahead in development and can afford to play one ugly move. A possible continuation is 11.♕e2 e6 12.0-0 ♖b6 13.♕d4 ♕d7 with mutual chances.

**9...♖e5 10.a4 b4 11.♖a2 a5 12...♕b5 e6**

and Black has equalised.

**7...b4 8.♖e2 c5!?**

Compared to earlier positions where White plays a4 after ♕d3, White has some extra options here because ♕f1-d3 can wait in favour of other more important moves.

The most important alternative here for Black is 8...a5 when 9.♖g3 ♕b7! (9...♖gf6 10.♕h6 0-0 11.♕xg7 ♖xg7 12.e5 is annoying for Black) 10.♕d3

♠g6 11.0-0 0-0 leads to a position analysed in the first game of this chapter (10...a5).

A third possibility is:

8...♠g6?!

This seems premature.

9.♠g3 0-0!?

Or 9...a5 10.♠h6 0-0 11.♠xg7 ♜xg7 12.e5 and White has the initiative.

10.♠h6

I am not sure why White cannot play 10.♞xb4!

It seems like the win of a pawn to me.

10...♠xh6 11.♞xh6

This position is quite dangerous for Black who has difficulties creating counterplay.

11...e5 12.dxe5 ♠xe5 13.♠e2 ♠xf3† 14.gxf3 b3?!

It was better to play 14...♞e7 15.h4 ♞e5 forcing White to play 16.0-0-0 and now Black gets enough counterplay with 16...b3 17.c3 ♜e8 18.f4 ♞a5.

15.c3 ♜e8 16.h4 d5?!

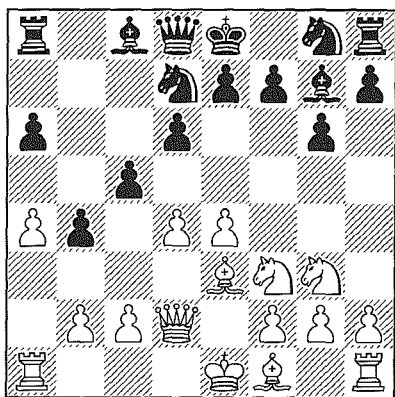
This is the only way to encourage White to castle long, but d6-d5 seriously weakens Black's position and therefore it was better to play 14...♞e7.

17.0-0-0! ♞d7

and Black had counterplay in Kobalia – Dzhumaev, Abu Dhabi 2004. If White had played 17.h5 then Black's prospects would have been anything but bright.

9.♠g3!

Black is doing fine after 9.c3 ♠g6 10.♠g3 bxc3 11.bxc3 ♠g4 12.♠f4 e5 13.dxe5 ♞a5!?



9...♠g6?!

There I go making mistakes again by allowing White to play dxc5 and ♠h6. The best move was 9...♠b7! and now White has an interesting alternative in 10.♠c4!?. This has not been played as far as I know, but it is the only way to diverge from von Bahr – Hillarp Persson above. A possible continuation is:

10...♠g6 11.dxc5 ♠xc5

11...dxc5 12.♠h6 is awkward for Black.

12.♠g5

12.♞xb4 ♠xc4! 13.♠xf7† ♜xf7 14.♠g5† ♜e8

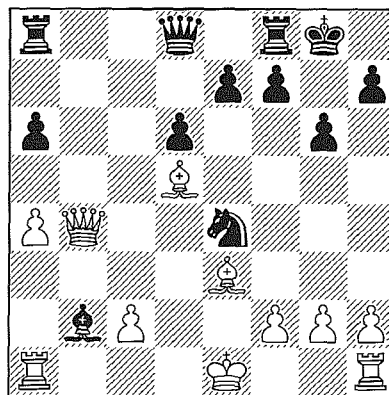
15.♠5xe4 ♠fxe4 16.♠xe4 ♜b8 17.♞c4 ♠xb2

18.♜b1 ♠xe4 19.♞xe4 ♞a5† 20.♠d2 ♞f5

when Black is fine is a long line, but I do not see how White should play differently.

12...0-0 13.♞xb4 ♠xe4 14.♠3xe4 ♠fxe4

15.♠xe4 ♠xe4 16.♠d5 ♠xb2!



Black's coordination is brilliant and White has no way to win back the pawn. After 17.♞xb2 ♞a5† 18.♜f1?! ♞xd5 19.♠h6 ♞c4† followed by ♠c3, Black is winning.

10.h3?!

The kind of lazy move an a6-Modern fan loves to encounter: the unnecessary kind. A more critical line is 10.dxc5!. Originally I had planned 10...♠g4!?. and maybe that is not so bad (10...dxc5 11.♠h6 ♠xh6 12.♞xh6 ♞c7 13.♠c4 is one of those positions with no dynamic breaks, where castling is impossible and White

has a strong bishop on c4: a position to avoid.) 11.c6! (11.cxd6 ♖xe3 12.♗xc3 ♖xb2 is good for Black and 11.♗d4 e5 12.c6 ♖b8 leads back to the main line.) 11...♖b8 12.♗d4 e5 13.♗e3 (13.h3 exd4 14.hxg4 ♗xg4 15.♖xd4 ♗b6 is the usual mess.) 13...♖xe3 14.♗xc3 ♖xc6 15.♗c4 I find it difficult to give an accurate verdict in this position. Is it an improved or deteriorated version of the Sveshnikov Sicilian? Improved, I think.

### 10...♗c7?!

This is also unnecessary and therefore bad. Much stronger is 10...cxd4! 11.♖xd4 h5, while after 11.♗d4 a5 12.♗d3 0-0 13.0-0 ♗b7 Black is ready to play e5 and d5 with a beautiful position.

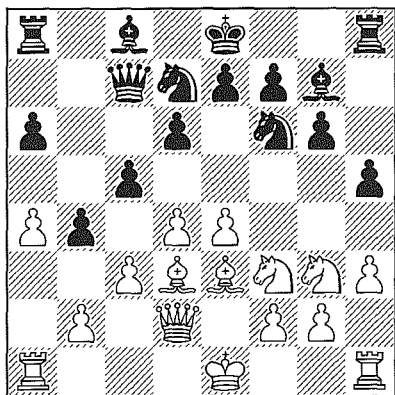
### 11.c3

After 11.dxc5 ♖xc5 12.♗xb4 0-0 13.♗xc5 dxc5 14.♗a3 ♖b8 Black has excellent compensation for the pawn.

### 11...h5!

This is almost the same position as in von Bahr – Hillarp Persson. The only difference is that h3 and ♗c7 have been added and that the light-squared bishops are in their original positions.

### 12.♗d3



After this move the d3-bishop ends up in quarantine on b1 together with the a1-rook. The following alternative might be better 12.♗g5!? ♗b7! (After 12...bxc3 13.bxc3 d5 White has 14.♗f4! with an advantage.) 13.d5! (13.♗d3 bxc3 14.bxc3 d5 15.♗f4 ♗c6 16.e5 ♖e4 17.♗xe4

dxe4 18.♖g5 0-0 and Black has the initiative.) 13...bxc3 14.bxc3 c4! 15.♖b1 ♖c5 16.♗c2 ♗c8 intending ♗d7 with a clear initiative for Black.

Another alternative is .12.h4?!, when Black is slightly better after 12...bxc3 13.bxc3 ♖g4.

### 12...c4! 13.♗b1 b3

Closing the door on ♖a1 and ♗b1. Now it is imperative for White to play a4-a5 so as to be able to attack the c4-pawn with ♖a1-a4. If Black is allowed to achieve both a5 and e5 then White will practically be playing with a rook and bishop less.

### 14.0-0 e5

After 14...a5 I was afraid that White would mess things up a bit with 15.e5!. But this was too nervous since 15...dxe5 16.dxe5 ♖xe5 17.♖xe5 ♗xe5 18.♗d4 ♗d5 19.♖e4 ♗b7 20.f3 0-0 is simply clearly better for Black.

### 15.♖g5?

White can always do this later, but Black can stop a4-a5 at any moment. 15.a5! should be played.

### 15...♗b7?

I should have played 15...a5!.

### 16.f4?!

16.a5!

### 16...a5!

Finally I realise that the door must be closed one more inch on the a1-rook! Now it is absolutely essential for White to force open the centre, or Black will connect his forces and win easily.

### 17.f5?!

This makes it easier for me to keep the centre closed. More flexible was 17.♗f2.

### 17...♖f8 18.♗f2 ♖a6!?

My silicon sidekick claims 18...h4 19.♖e2 gxf5 20.♗xf5 ♖g6 is better for Black, but I did not want to open up the position in any way until I had managed to put my queen on e7.

### 19.♖h1 ♗c8?!

This is far too passive, allowing White to coordinate his knights since e4 is no longer under attack.

### 20.♖e2 ♗e7 21.♖f3 ♗b7 22.♖d2

After 22.fxg6 fxg6 23.♖d2 ♖c6 24.♗g5 ♖h8h7 Black has everything defended and intends ♖h8-f8

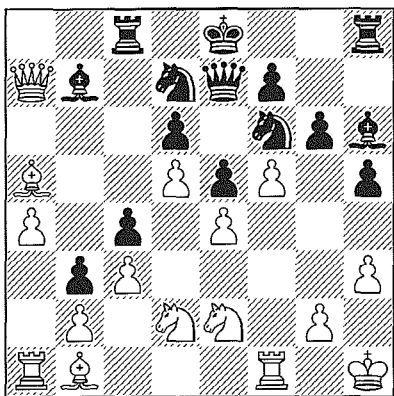
or 0-0 followed by exchanging rooks on the f-file. White cannot avoid exchanges in the long run and has to act fast.

22...♞c6 23.d5 ♞c8 24.♙b6

White is winning a pawn, but Black gets to finish his development.

24...♘d7 25.♙xa5 ♙h6 26.♞a7?

A blunder in a bad position. After 26.fxg6 fxg6 27.♘f3 0-0 28.♙b4 ♘c5 29.♙xc5 ♞xc5 30.a5 ♙a6 White is still boxed in on the queenside.



26...♘c5! 27.♘xc4 ♙a6

Forcing the exchange of queens and gaining two pieces for a rook. The rest is simple.

28.♞xe7† ♘xe7 29.♘b6 ♙xe2 30.♞e1 ♙a6

31.♘xc8† ♞xc8 32.fxg6 fxg6 33.c4 ♙xc4

34.♙b4 ♘fd7 35.a5 ♙a6 36.♞a3 ♞b8 37.♙c3

♞f8 38.♘g1 ♙f4 39.♘h1 g5 40.♙b4 g4 41.♞d1

♞g8 42.hxg4 hxg4 43.g3 ♙xg3 44.♘g2 ♙f4

45.♞h1 ♘d8 46.♞h7 g3 47.♙xc5 ♘xc5 48.♞a7

♙f1† 49.♘f3 ♞g6 50.♞a4 g2 51.♞b4 ♞g3†

0-1

Not a perfect game, but it is an interesting illustration of what happens if White protects the e4-pawn at the expense of allowing c4 and b3.

In the next game White stops Black from playing b7-b5:

## Game 28

Kosten – M. Gurevich

France 1991

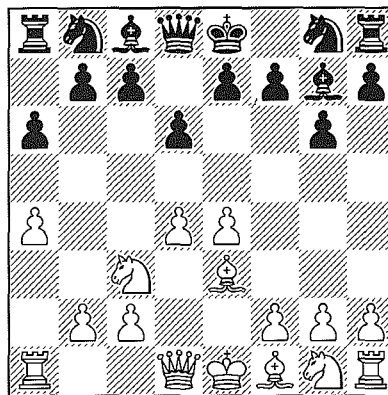
When referring to Gurevich in this game, I am thinking of his comments in *Informant* 51.

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♙g7

This game really had the move order 1.e4 d6 2.d4 g6 3.♘f3 ♘f6 4.♘c3 ♙g7 5.♙e3 a6 6.a4.

3.♘c3 d6 4.♙e3 a6 5.a4!?

This annoying move makes it difficult for Black to take a drive down Hippopotamus Road with 5...b6 because of 6.f4. (see Game 15)



5...♘f6!

This move is fine now as a result of White playing a2-a4, since Black is no longer afraid of the plan with 0-0-0 and h2-h4-h5. In positions where White has already committed the knight to f3 I generally react with b6 after a2-a4, but here this is less attractive on account of f2-f4 (Game 15 again). Another interesting idea is 5...♘c6 6.h3 f5!?, which has never been tested. However, I am more annoyed by 5... ♘c6 6.♘f3 ♙g4 7.♙e2 e5 8.dxe5 dxe5 when neither player has much chance of winning

6.♘f3

White can try almost any other move.

6.a5 0-0 7.h3 e5! 8.dxe5 (Otherwise Black plays exd4, ♞e8 and ♘c6, getting an excellent position where one wonders what use the pawn is on a5.)

8...dxe5 9.♖xd8 ♜xd8 10.♖f3 ♖c6 11.♗c4 h6 with mutual chances.

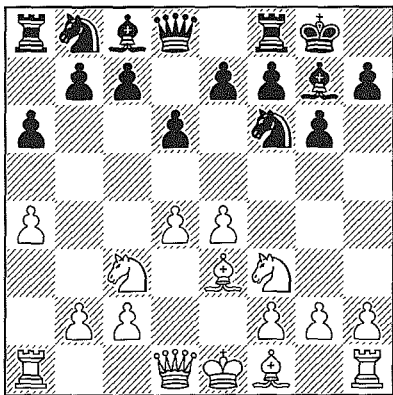
After 6.♖d2 0-0! 7.♖f3 Black should avoid 7...♗g4 8.♖g5 and play 7...b6! 8.♗h6 ♗b7. There have been two interesting games from here:

a) 9.♗xg7 ♗xg7 10.♗d3 ♖bd7 11.0-0 e5 12.d5 c6 13.dxc6 ♗xc6 14.♖e2 ♗b7 15.♞fd1 ♖c5 16.♞d2 ♖c7 and Black had a nice Sicilian structure in Vedder – M. Gurevich, Antwerp 1997.

b) 9.♗d3 ♖bd7 10.0-0 e6 11.♗xg7 ♗xg7 12.♞fe1 c5 13.e5?! ♖g4?! And now, instead of playing 14.♗e4, in Gallagher – van Wely, Krumbach 1991, White could have gained the advantage with 14.exd6 ♗xf3 15.gxf3 ♖gf6 16.dxc5 ♖xc5 17.♗f1. A huge improvement can be found in 13...dxe5! 14.dxe5 ♗xf3! 15.exf6† ♖xf6 16.gxf3 c4 and Black regains the piece with the better chances.

### 6...0-0

6...b6 7.♗c4 e6 is also playable.



### 7.♗e2

Again White has many options:

a) 7.♗d3

This makes White more vulnerable to an attack on the d4-pawn.

7...♖c6!?

Another possibility is 7...♗g4 when 8.h3 ♗xf3 9.♖xf3 ♖c6 seems fine for Black, since White cannot stop both e5 and ♖d4.

8.h3 e5

More ambitious is 8...♖b4!? 9.♗e2 b6 10.♖d2 c5 11.d5 e6 12.dxe6 ♗xe6 with an initiative for Black.

9.d5 ♖b4 10.♗c4 a5

It is a mistake to let White play a4-a5 isolating the knight on b4: 10...c6?! 11.a5 cxd5 12.exd5 ♗d7 13.0-0 ♞c8 14.♗b3. This position would be excellent for Black if only the pawns were on a4/a5 instead of a5/a6. Now the b4-knight is walking on water, but in danger of drowning.

11.0-0 c6

and Black has a good position.

b) 7.a5!? ♖c6! 8.d5 (8.h3 e5 9.dxe5 dxe5 is the same as the 6.a5-line.) 8...♖a7!! With this move Black turns a4-a5 against White, intending to meet any ♗f1-move with ♖a7-b5. White's best try is 9.♗d3 ♖b5 10.♖xb5 axb5 11.0-0 but Black equalises with both 11...c5 12.dxc6 ♞xa5 (12...bxc6?! 13.b4 is slightly better for White) 13.♞xa5 ♖xa5 14.♖d4 bxc6 15.♖xc6 ♖c7, and 11...e6.

c) 7.h3 leads to a line discussed in the Classical chapter.

d) 7.♗c4 ♖c6 8.h3 ♖xe4 9.♖xe4 d5 is dealt with in the ♗c4-chapter.

### 7...b6

After 7...♖c6?! 8.d5 ♖b4 9.a5! e6 (9...♗d7? loses to 10.♖b1 intending c2-c3, winning a piece.) 10.♞a4 c5 11.dxc6 ♖xc6 12.♗b6 ♖c7 13.0-0 Black has a cramped position.

### 8.0-0

White gains nothing by 8.e5 when 8...♖g4 9.♗f4 ♖d7 10.exd6 cxd6 11.0-0 ♗b7 is about equal, although I prefer Black's dynamism to White's space.

### 8...♗b7 9.♖d2

This does not scare anyone, but 9.e5 is similar to the last comment, and 9.♗d3 ♖bd7 is at least equal for Black.

### 9...♖c6

It is very logical to attack d4 now that White is vulnerable to the idea e7-e5, and if d4-d5 then ♖c6-d4.

Another good move is 9...e6 planning to meet 10.f4 with 10...c5. After 10.♗f3 ♖c6 (10...e5!?)



11. ♖c4 d5 12. exd5 exd5 13. ♜e5 ♜xe5 14. dxe5 ♜e4 was very nice for Black in S. Vajda – Czebe, Balatonlelle 2004.

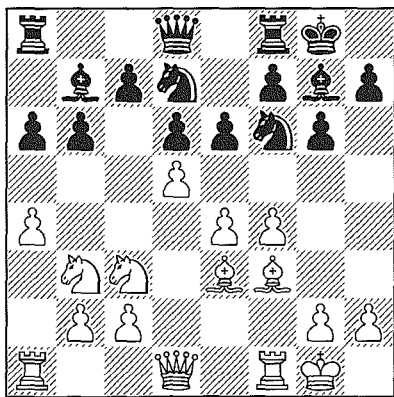
### 10.d5 ♜b8

I would play 10... ♜b4! if possible, and I cannot see a refutation as both 11. ♜cb1 a5 followed by e6 and 11. a5 b5 12. ♜cb1 ♜fxd5 13. exd5 ♙xb2 are fine for Black.

### 11.f4 ♜bd7 12. ♙f3 e6

Gurevich believes Black has counterplay here. This could well be an understatement and possibly his first?! However, I would prefer to open the c-file with 12... c6 striving for an asymmetrical pawn structure, but it is a matter of taste.

### 13. ♜b3



White is dreaming of turning this ugly knight into a swan on c6. It is a nice fairy tale but, alas, that's all it is. After 13. dxe6 fxe6 14. ♜c4 ♜e8 15. ♙e1 ♙e7 16. ♙d1 the position is complicated but better for White. I do not think this would have upset Mikhail much. In the post mortem of a game played against a friend of mine, he declared that he "had complications". Not compensation, complications! I absolutely sympathise with this expression and I should probably use it more often myself.

13... exd5 14. exd5 ♙e8 15. ♙d4 ♜c5 16. ♙d2 ♙d7!?

Gurevich intends ♙f5 and h7-h5.  
17. ♙ad1 ♙f5

Gurevich points out that 17... ♜xa4? 18. ♜xa4 ♙xa4 19. ♙c3 loses a piece for Black.

### 18.g3 h5 19. ♙fe1

After 19. ♜xc5 bxc5 20. ♙f2 ♙ab8 21. b3 ♜g4 Black is dancing, singing, and winning.

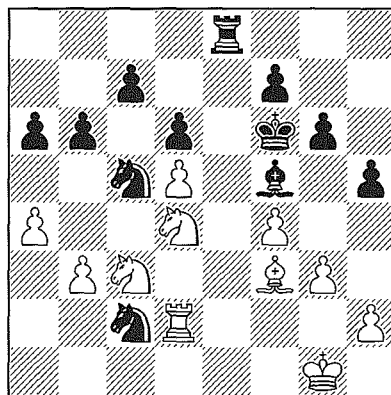
### 19... ♙ad8

I prefer Black's position here, but White has everything protected and it is not easy for Black to break through.

20. ♙g2 ♙c8 21. ♜c1 ♙d7 22. b3 ♜g4 23. ♙xg7 ♜xg7 24. ♙d2 ♙f6 25. ♙e2 ♙xe2 26. ♜1xc2 ♙e8 27. ♙d4

White has defended well and almost equalised. Normal moves will lead to a peaceful end, but Gurevich has a different plan...

27... ♙f5 28. ♙xf6 ♜xf6 29. ♙d2 ♜e3 30. ♜d4 ♜xc2!?!?



Surprise, surprise. I do not understand how he can get away with these things, but it is impressive.

### 31. ♜xc2

After 31. ♜xf5 ♜e1 32. ♙e2 ♜xf5 33. ♜f2 ♜xb3 34. ♜xe1 ♜xd2 35. ♜xd2 h4! 36. ♙xa6 ♜g4 the position is unclear.

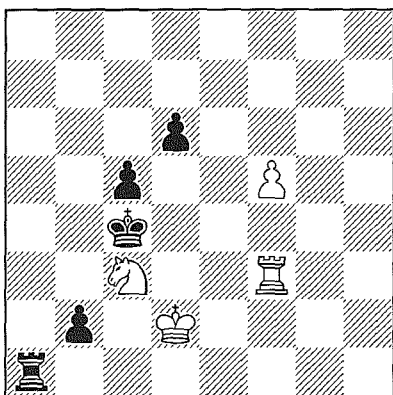
31... ♜xb3 32. ♙f2 ♙xc2 33. ♙xc2 ♜d4 34. ♙f2 ♙e3 35. ♜e4 ♜f5 36. ♜d2 b5!

Black seems to be losing by force after 36... ♜xf3 ♜f3 37. ♜xf3 ♜e4 38. ♜g5 ♜xd5 39. ♜xf7 ♙a3 40. ♜h8! ♙xa4 41. ♜xg6 ♜e6 42. f5 ♜f6 43. ♜f8! and it is not possible to defend against the threat of ♜h7 ♜f5-f6 etc.

37. axb5 axb5 38. ♖f1

Gurevich only gives 38. ♕d1 when he recommends 38...b4 “intending b4-b3 with initiative.” But 38. ♕g2 b4 39. ♖f3 could be stronger. The rest of the game is very exciting and I think White could still have gained a draw on move 66 with ♖f3.

38... ♖xf3† 39. ♖xf3 ♗e4 40. ♖g5† ♗xd5 41. ♖xf7 b4 42. ♗f2 ♖e7 43. ♖h8! ♖g7 44. ♗e3 c5 45. h3 ♗c4 46. g4 hxg4 47. hxg4 b3 48. ♗d2! ♗b4 49. f5 gxf5 50. gxf5 ♖g2† 51. ♗e3 b2 52. ♖g6! ♗c3! 53. ♖f4 ♖g8! 54. ♖d5† ♗c2 55. ♖f2† ♗b3 56. ♖f1 ♖a8 57. ♗d2! ♖a1 58. ♖f3† ♗c4 59. ♖c3



59... b1 ♖†! 60. ♖xb1 ♖xb1 61. f6 ♖b8 62. f7 ♖f8 63. ♖d3! d5 64. ♖f3 ♗d4 65. ♖f6 ♗e5 66. ♖c6? c4 67. ♖c7 ♗e6 68. ♖c6† ♗d7!

Now Black is winning.

69. ♖a6 ♖xf7 70. ♗e3 ♖f1 71. ♗d4 ♖d1† 72. ♗c3 ♖d3† 73. ♗c2 ♗c7

0-1

I do not think the combination of ♕e3 and a4 is in the least dangerous for Black.

**Conclusions:** The most critical lines of this chapter are seen in Games 23 and 25. Especially the position after 10...a5 in Game 23 is important to study, as it will probably become a future playground of this variation. The main lines with c5 (instead of a5) are quite playable, but also generally more sensitive and demand a higher level of accuracy from Black. I recommend that you do not decide in favour of just one of these set-ups, but be able to play both. A flexible mind is very important in the Flexible variations.

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## Chapter 4

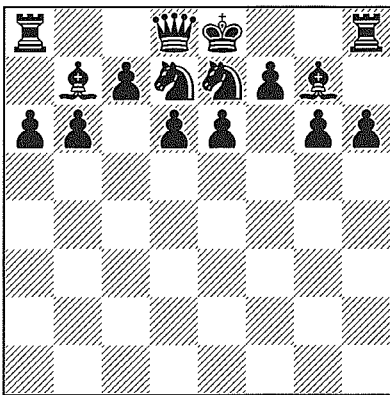
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# The Hippopotamus

“Heaven is a place where nothing ever happens.”

Talking Heads – *Heaven*

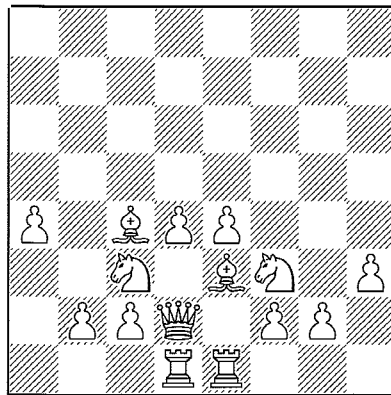
The Hippopotamus, which I from now on will refer to as the Hippo, is not so much a variation as it is a set-up. You can reach the Hippo from four different lines in the Modern: the Classical, the Flexible, the  $\text{♕g5}$  line, and finally the h3-variation. A fully-grown, thick-skinned Hippo looks like this:



As you can see, the Hippo lies low in the water. It looks almost ridiculously passive and many theoreticians consider the Hippo to be a peaceful, almost meek animal. But nothing could be further from the truth. On closer scrutiny the animal, the position, and the statistics look entirely different.

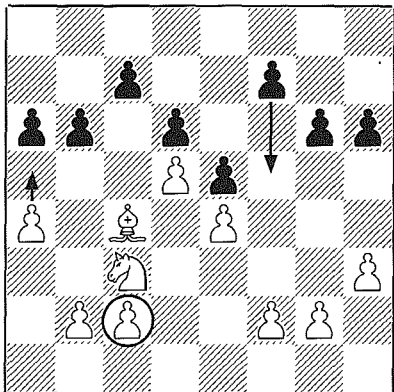
The Hippo is a fierce animal; ready to crush anyone who gets too close.

Black starts the game by occupying a solid subsurface position, staying cool in the water, keeping an eye on White. On the other hand White has more or less a free hand to develop a heavenly set-up.



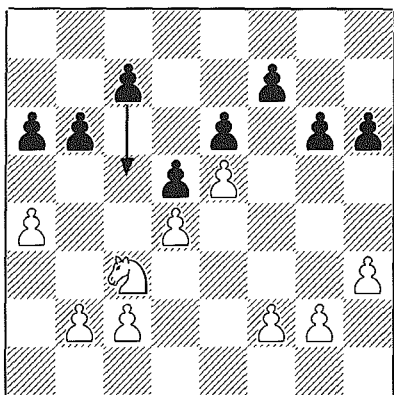
OK! White has reached Heaven (of development)! But now what? What next?

For White, to be able to claim any kind of an initiative, advancing to the riverbank will sooner or later be necessary. Considering that the black pawns are controlling the entire fifth rank, this can only happen by advancing a commoner as an *avant-garde* into enemy territory. There are two main ways to do this: e4-e5 and d4-d5. After d4-d5, Black usually answers with e6-e5:



when the game resembles a Classical King's Indian, where White has played a4 instead of c4 and Black has fianchettoed his bishop on b7. In this kind of position White's main plan is to play a5 and then c2-c4. This will take quite some time to do, as the bishop and knight are obstructing the c-pawn. Black intends f7-f5 and- if White gives up the control of d5 - sometimes even c7-c6.

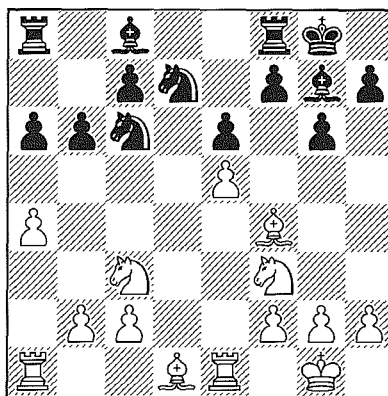
Black usually answers White's second road to aggression, e4-e5, with d6-d5 followed by c7-c5:



when the position takes on a more French character. It is generally important to play c7-c5 *before* White moves the knight from c3 (so he can protect the d4-pawn with c2-c3) in order to undermine the e5-pawn.

Both pawn moves (e4-e5 and d4-d5) can sometimes be met by exchanges, but only rarely, because opening the position generally benefits the better developed side and here this usually means White. There are exceptions to this rule: Sometimes an exchange on e5 can lead to positions where White has problems hanging on to the e5-pawn:

**Mikal Johansson – Tiger Hillarp Persson**  
Swedish Open 1995



In this kind of position White must constantly look out for g6-g5-g4 and sometimes ♖b4.

White's choice of plan is closely related to the development of the c1-bishop. If it goes to f4 you can expect e4-e5 to follow; if it goes to e3, d4-d5 is much more likely.

I believe few players have ever taken the Hippo seriously. Here I intend to show this point of view to be mistaken. There is nothing wrong with the Hippopotamus!

### A beautiful Hippo and a lazy King

As in many of the Modern lines, White must watch out for Black bursts of activity. If White stays passive Black will often lash out with d6-d5 or c7-c5. The e6-e5 push is not so common in the Hippo, mainly because the knight on e7 will be passive if White just continues to put the black

centre under pressure. If these advances are not possible Black sometimes plays either g6-g5 or b6-b5. There is also a sixth alternative:

**Game 29**  
**Yuferov – Chepukaitis**  
 St Petersburg 1996

1.d4 g6 2.e4 ♘g7 3.♟f3 d6 4.♞c3 a6 5.a4 b6  
 6.h3 e6 7.♙g5?! ♞e7 8.♚d2 h6! 9.♙f4

9.♙e3 is better, not encouraging ...g6-g5.

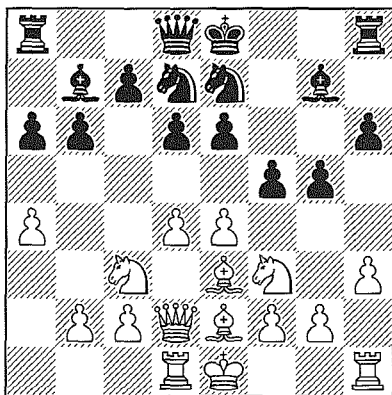
9...♙b7 10.♙e2 ♞d7

Behold the Hippo!

11.♞d1 g5! 12.♙e3?!

The white set-up might seem harmonious, but it is not. The pieces are not cooperating, but mainly standing in each other's way.

12...f5!!



Chepukaitis was a virtuoso of the Hippo and did not fear striking with his f-pawn.

13.exf5

After 13.d5 ♙xc3! 14.♚xc3 e5 the white centre falls apart, but 13.♚d3 was possibly better.

13...♞xf5! 14.♚d3 0-0 15.♙c1?

This is not the time for walking backwards. 15.0-0 was necessary.

15...c5!! 16.dxc5

There is not much of an alternative since 16.d5 ♙xc3† 17.♚xc3 ♙xd5 loses a pawn without any trace of compensation.

16...♞xc5 17.♚c4

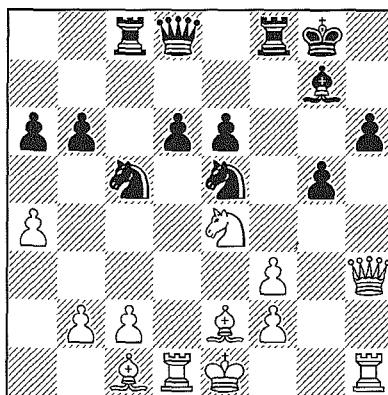
After 17.♚d2 ♞c8 18.0-0 ♚d7 White will end up a pawn down in a bad position.

17...♞c8 18.h4

A desperate act in an awful position.

18...♙xf3 19.gxf3 ♞xh4 20.♚g4 ♞g6!? 21.♞e4 ♞e5 22.♚h3?

White was lost anyway, for example 22.♚g3 ♞xe4 23.fxe4 ♞xc2.



22...g4! 23.♚h5 ♞xe4

23...gxf3! is even stronger.

24.fxe4 ♚f6 25.♞h2 ♞xc2 26.♙xh6 ♞xe2†  
 27.♞xe2 ♚f3† 28.♞e1 g3 29.♙xg7 gxf2!?

Very aesthetic, but 29...♚xe4† 30.♞f1 ♚c4† would have won immediately.

30.♚h8† ♞f7 31.♚xf8† ♞g6

The point of 29...gxf2. After 32.♚xf3 ♞xf3† 33.♞e2 ♞g1† there is no way to stop the pawn from queening.

32.♞d2 ♚xf8 33.♙xf8 ♞f3† 34.♞e3 ♞g1  
 35.♞xd6 h1=♚

0-1

I love this game.

White often stops Black from castling by tying the h8-rook to the protection of the h6-pawn. Do not move this pawn! It would severely weaken Black's kingside. The most reliable way to react is to play 0-0 and h6 before White can double the bishop and queen on the c1-h6 diagonal, so that

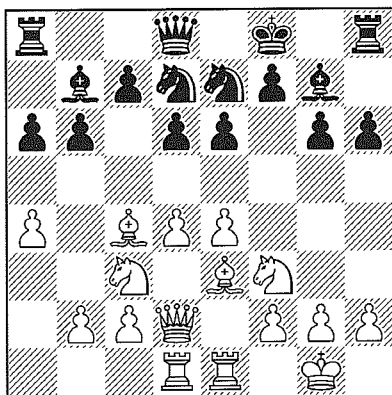
♖h7 is possible. In general, Black does not have time for this and is left with either g6-g5 blocking the diagonal, or with a somewhat ceremonious manoeuvre:

### Game 30

Spaelman – Hort

Essent Open 2002

1.e4 g6 2.d4 d6 3.♙e3 ♗g7 4.♘c3 a6 5.a4 b6  
6.♗d2 ♙b7 7.♙c4 ♘d7 8.♘f3 e6 9.0-0 h6  
10.♞fe1 ♘e7 11.♞ad1 ♖f8!??



Black plans to walk the king to h7 via g8, thus defending the h6 pawn and freeing the h8-rook from duty. It might seem too provocative, but the argument is that White can do little to stop the king from reaching h7 and, further, that White cannot do much in general. Some Hippo connoisseurs even play this manoeuvre fairly mechanically, but I always keep it as a last resort.

Here, for instance, I prefer 11...g5 12.d5 e5 with mutual chances.

12.♙d3!?

After 12.d5 e5 White can try 13.g3, intending 13...f5 14.exf5 gxf5?! 15.♘h4 followed by f4 with an advantage. Black can improve with 14...♘xf5 when play seems balanced: the king is somewhat strange on f8, but there is no way for White to open up the centre.

12...♖g8 13.♘e2!?

White is planning to put the knight on g3 and then answer ♖h7 with h4, threatening h5. It is a good idea, but it was necessary to play 13.h3 before ♘g3. The reason for this is instantly apparent.

13...♘f6!

There is nothing White can do to both defend the e-pawn and stop ♘f6-g4xe3 (White should only exchange this bishop for the g7-bishop).

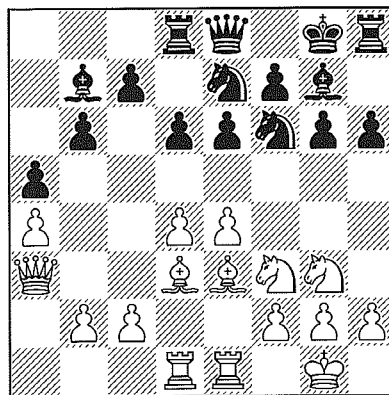
14.♘g3 ♗e8

Very ambitious, but I would be quite happy with 14...♘g4 15.♙f4 e5 16.dxe5 dxe5 17.♙e3 ♘xe3 18.♗xe3 ♗e8 with approximate equality.

15.♗b4 a5!?

I would be less happy to weaken the b5-square in this way. After 15...♖h7 Black has a fine position and it is not clear what White has achieved.

16.♗a3 ♞d8



17.c4?

A horrible move that permanently weakens b4. It was better to play 17.♙b5 ♗f8 18.♙d2 with a slight advantage for White.

17...♘d7 18.h4 ♘c6 19.♙b1 ♘b4 20.b3 e5 21.dxe5!?

It was necessary to keep the position closed.

21...dxe5 22.♗c1 ♗e7 23.♞d2!?

White's best chance was 23.h5 ♖h7 24.hxg6† fxg6 25.♞d5 when 25...c6 is slightly better for Black.

23...♖h7 24.♞ed1 ♘a6 25.♘e2 ♘dc5

## 26. ♖c3??

A blunder in a worse position. The rest is not important.

26... ♖xb3 27. ♗xd8 ♖xc1 28. ♗g8d7 ♗e6  
29. ♗xc1 ♗c6 30. ♗7d3 ♖b4 31. ♗3d2 ♗xc4  
32. ♗b2 ♗e8 33. ♗c1 ♗e6 34. ♗a3 ♗e7 35. ♖d5  
♗xd5 36. exd5 ♗g4 37. d6 cxd6 38. ♗xd6 e4  
39. ♖h2 ♗xh4 40. ♗xb6 ♗d4

0–1

White never came close to punishing Black for his strange king manoeuvre. In the rest of the chapter I will seldom comment on this idea unless it is absolutely necessary; it is almost always possible to go ♗e8-f8-g8-h7, but it should not be thought of as the solution to all of Black's problems.

## Plans

Since Black sticks to virtually the same set of moves again and again, White is the one to define the course of the game. Here is a sample of the many possible set-ups White can choose from:

a) **White plays ♗c4, ♗e3, ♗d2 followed by d4-d5** (Games 31 and 32). I consider this to be the main line and also the most critical. In Game 31 White is in too much of a hurry to play d5 and Black takes the initiative. In Game 32 White takes his time and Black chooses the wrong moment to play ♖f6. The critical move is 11...g5 and then after 12.d5 e5 the position is very complicated and only the future can give an exact verdict. Until then I think “unclear” will have to do.

b) **White plays ♗c4, ♗f4, ♗d2 followed by e4-e5** (Game 33). Admittedly White never actually plays e5 in Game 33, but most of the references to this plan can be found here. The *Waiting for Godot* strategy that White adopts in this game is not dangerous, and Black has excellent counterplay with b6-b5 at some stage.

c) **White plays ♗c4, ♗e2 followed by e4-e5** (Games 34 and 35). This plan is similar to ♗e1/♗f4/e5 (Game 31: 8. ♗e1 and Game 33: 9. ♗e1), but this is more complicated since after

e4-e5 it is not possible for Black to take on e5 and then, if dxe5, to exchange queens. In Game 34 White launches the e-pawn at the first possible opportunity and I achieved an excellent game with 8...d5, hitting the bishop so that White did not have time to defend against 9...c5. In Game 35 White enjoys the freedom of central domination until move 15, when he has run out of small improvements. I strongly advise the Black player to exchange on f3 on move fifteen, before closing the centre with d5 or trying the messy 16...♖f5.

d) **White plays ♗g5?! (Game 36)**. This is a very common mistake that loses a tempo for White, but because the position is not “tempo-sensitive” I have included a game to give the reader a clue of what to do in case this happens.

e) **White plays ♗d3, ♗e3 and ♗d2 (Game 37)**. This is very flexible, but it is not a set-up designed to prepare either e5 or d5 and therefore not very purposeful. Gofshtein's idea of 9...♗b7 10.0-0 ♖gf6!? is very interesting, but there is nothing wrong with doing the old Hippo dance if you play one of my recommendations on move twelve.

f) **White plays f3, ♗e3 and ♗d2 (Game 38)**: “The Hippo vs. the Dragon”, as they would call it in Hollywood. The most important thing to learn from this game is to remove the king from the e-file before playing d5 and c5. Had Black stayed cool and played 11...♗f8 instead of 11...d5, I think he would have been slightly better considering the clumsy position of White's pieces.

g) **White plays f4 (Game 15)**: There are so many possibilities and move orders that it is difficult to avoid hundreds of cross-references. I have tried to illustrate the different plans separately, but it has proved to be almost impossible.

In the first game White ties Black to the defence of h6, stopping 0-0, puts the bishop on c4, and then proceeds to play d4-d5... only too quickly.

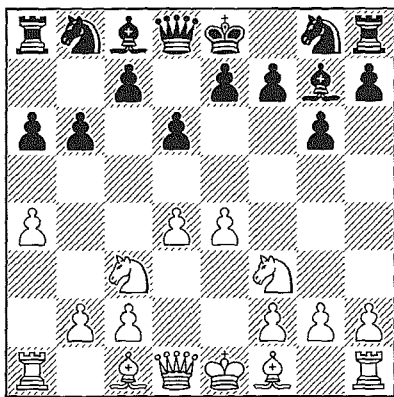
## Game 31

## Drei – Gofshstein

Arco 2000

1.e4 d6 2.d4 g6 3.♘c3 ♙g7 4.♗f3 a6 5.a4 b6

This is a necessary move order since 5...e6 6.a5! is awkward for Black. After 6...b5 7.axb6 cxb6 Black has lost the dynamic possibility c7-c5 and White's pawn structure is clearly preferable.



## 6.♙c4!

This is the most active square for the bishop. Another dangerous idea is 6.♙g5!?, when Black has to react accurately to avoid trouble. In Shamkovich – Ivkov, Amsterdam 1968, Black immediately went wrong with 6...♙b7?! 7.♙c4! h6 8.♙h4 ♘d7 9.0-0 c6 10.♗e2 ♗c7 11.♙b3 e6 12.♞ad1 ♘e7 (Black would not last long after 12...♘gf6 13.e5 dxe5 14.dxe5 ♘d5 15.♘e4 ♘xe5 16.♙g3.) 13.♞fe1 and White's position was overwhelming. It is important to "put the question" to the bishop on g5 immediately with 6...h6! 7.♙h4 g5! (Not 7...♘d7? 8.♙c4 g5? 9.♙xg5! hxg5 10.♙xf7+ ♗xf7?! 11.♘xg5 ♗f6 12.♗g4 and Black will soon be mated. But 7...♘f6 is interesting.) 8.♙g3 e6 9.e5 (Otherwise I do not see how White can fight for an advantage.) 9...♘e7 10.♙d3 ♙b7 11.0-0 ♘bc6 and the position is unclear, as 12.exd6 cxd6 13.d5?! exd5 14.♞e1 0-0 is fine for Black.

## 6...e6!

Blocking the white bishop and preparing the development of ♘g8 to a square (e7) where it is not worried about being hit by e4-e5.

## 7.0-0 ♘e7

I prefer to avoid 7...♘d7 8.e5!?! ♘e7 9.♙xe6! fxe6 10.♘g5 as happened in Makarov – Shchekachev, Russia 1991. Shchekachev has continued to play this move order and perhaps it is okay for Black, but 7...♘e7 has the advantage of not allowing any tricks.

## 8.♙e3

It is a common plan for White to double the queen and bishop on the c1-h6 diagonal, to stop Black from playing h6, 0-0 and ♗h7. I believe this is the most logical way to challenge Black's set-up, but where is the bishop better placed, on e3 or f4? It may be just a matter of taste, but I lean towards ♙e3, since ♙f4 can be hit by both g6-g5 and e6-e5.

In Swanson – Hillarp Persson, Jersey 2000, White let me get away with castling, h6 and ♗h7:

## 8.♞e1 0-0!

When I played Prasca, at the Bled Olympiad in 2002, I totally forgot about a primitive threat: 8...♘d7 9.♘e2?! ♙b7?? (9...0-0 is fine for me) 10.♘f4, and facing the threat of ♙xe6, I had nothing better to do than 10...♘f8 leaving me in a very sorry state.

The ♘c3-e2-g3 idea is quite common, but I am not worried about it. Black has so many dynamic possibilities (e5, d5, c5) that one of them should suffice.

## 9.♙e3

This is not logical in combination with ♞e1. It is more critical to play 9.e5 when Black should play 9...dxe5!. Then both 10.♘xe5 ♙b7 and 10.dxe5 ♗xd1 11.♞xd1 ♘d7 12.♙f4 ♘c6 13.♞e1 ♙b7 are fine for Black.

9...h6 10.♗d2 ♗h7 11.b4?! ♘d7 12.h3 ♙b7 13.b5 axb5 14.axb5 ♘f6 15.e5?! ♘d7

Launching the b-pawn to b5 has not improved White's position and 15.e5 has only made matters worse.

16.exd6 cxd6 17.♙e2 ♘f5 18.♙f4?



With this move my opponent drops a pawn, but he was facing great problems anyway. My pieces are much better coordinated and my pawn structure is more dynamic. If only White could have returned the b5-pawn to b2, then I would have been only slightly better.

18...♖xa1 19.♖xa1 ♗xf3 20.♗xf3 ♖xd4

And Black won comfortably.

8...♖d7!

There is at least one good reason to wait with the development of the c8 bishop: If White chooses to play an early d4-d5 and Black answers with e6-e5, then the bishop can be better placed on c8, where it supports Black's attack on the kingside. After 8...♗b7 9.♖d2 h6 10.d5! e5 11.♖e1 White is prepared to go a4-a5, ♖d1 and c2-c4, opening up the queenside. Sooner or later, Black will have to return to c8 to help the counterattack on the other flank. So in most lines White would win two tempi compared to the main game.

9.♖d2 h6!

Black should always avoid 9...0-0 10.♗h6. In such a position Black would have great difficulties keeping control of the dark squares around the king. With 9...h6 Black keeps the white pieces at bay. On the downside, it seems as if Black postpones castling far into the future. Though this is true, we need to ponder how White will take advantage of this before we pass judgement. The uncastled king would only be critical if it were possible to open the centre, which it is not. In the meantime Black will move the king out of harm's way, either by playing g6-g5 followed by 0-0 or, should White prevent g5, by walking the king to h7 via f8 and g8.

10.d5?!

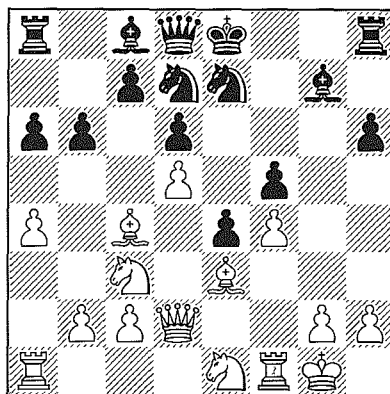
I believe White should wait with this move until Black has played ♗b7. Better is 10.h3 as seen in the next game. It is difficult for White to find a move that is in accordance with his plan (which is to push d5, a5, then evacuate the c-file and play c2-c4). A possible improvement is 10.♖ac1!? or even 10.♖fc1, preparing for the opening of the c-file. In this case Black should consider 10...g5!?

10...e5!

Black is well prepared to start operating on the kingside.

11.♖e1 f5 12.f3

After 12.exf5 Black should play 12...♖xf5 with mutual chances instead of 12...gxf5 13.f4! e4.



This kind of position, except with a white pawn on c4, is rather common in the King's Indian. There, in general, White is better since the c8-bishop is boxed in and the pawn structure favours White. Here this is not necessarily the case since Black can attack the d-pawn with ♖f6, ♗b7 and ♖d8-e8-f7. The question is: what difference does this make? I have no answer and recommend 12...♖xf5.

12...♖f6 13.♗e2!?

White is preparing a5, ♖c3-somewhere and then c2-c4, breaking up Black's queenside.

13...f4

Another possibility is 13...g5 keeping the c3-knight bound to the defence of e4. The downside is that White can start playing for control of the e4-square: 14.exf5 ♗xf5 15.♗c4 0-0 16.♖d3 intending ♖d3-f2-e4. Black should be okay anyway.

14.♗f2 g5

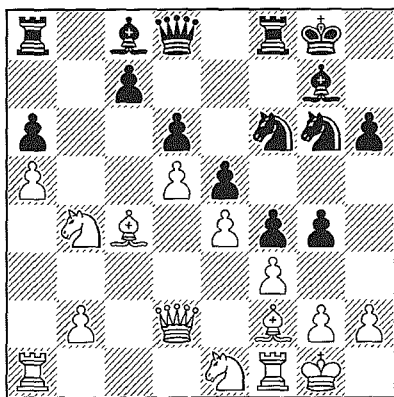
The position is reminiscent of the Mar del Plata variation of the King's Indian Defence. The main differences are that White's c-pawn is on c2 instead of c4, and the queen is uncomfortable on d2 where it does nothing to stop Black from

playing g5-g4, while Black has advanced the a- and b-pawns and lost a tempo by playing e5 in two moves. I believe the ups and downs of these differences should not be disadvantageous for Black, rather the opposite.

**15.a5?!**

White must create weaknesses on the black queenside as quickly as possible, but this move turns out to be counterproductive. A better idea was 15.♖a2! 0-0 16.c4 a5 17.b4 axb4 18.♗xb4 g4 with an unclear game.

**15...b5 16.♗a2 0-0 17.c4 bxc4 18.♙xc4 ♖g6 19.♗b4 g4**



This is a very complicated position and, for an outsider, it would be easy to draw the wrong conclusions. My personal belief is that Black's kingside attack is strong enough to compensate for White's obvious advantage on the other wing. **20.♙d3?!**

Here the queen will soon find herself in the line of fire, but it is hard to suggest anything better for White. Now Black is at least forced to act. Had White not provoked him, Black could have continued with h5, h4, etc.

**20...g3 21.hxg3 ♗h5 22.gxf4 ♗gxf4! 23.♙c2 ♙g5 24.♗h2 ♖f6 25.g3?**

White commits a blunder, but Black had the initiative anyway. For example, 25.g4 ♖f7 26.♙d2 ♗f6 and it is difficult for White to defend against h5 and ♙xg4.

**25...♗xg3 26.♙xg3 ♖g6 27.♗h1 ♙xg3 28.♙h2**

White has avoided immediate mate, but in the long run his king is too exposed.

**28...♙g5?!**

Sometimes exchanging queens and playing a mating attack are not incompatible. Here 28...♙xh2† 29.♗xh2 ♖g5 30.♗ed3 ♗f7 seems even stronger than the game continuation.

**29.♖g1 ♙f6 30.♙xg6 ♗xg6 31.♙g3?!**

After 31.♖c1 the position is unclear. Now Black is allowed to improve his position with h5 and ♙h6.

**31...h5 32.♗ed3 ♙h6 33.♖g1 ♗h7 34.♖g2 ♙e3 35.♗c2 ♙h6 36.♗cb4 h4 37.♙f2 ♗f4 38.♗xf4 ♙xf4 39.♗d3 ♙g3**

Black has a clear advantage and the rest is a one-sided story.

**40.♙e2 ♙d7 41.♗f2 ♙f4 42.♗d3 ♙g5 43.♗f2 h3 44.♖g1 ♙h4 45.♗g4 ♙xg4 46.fxg4 ♙f2 47.♖d1 ♙g3 48.♙f1 ♙f3† 49.♗h2 ♗g7**

White probably resigned because 50.♙xh3 runs into the evil 50...♙g3†, leading to a quick mate. **0-1**

Obviously Black does not have any problems if White plays d4-d5 before Black is committed to ♙b7.

In the next game White is in less of a hurry.

## Game 32

**A.Ivanov – Benjamin**

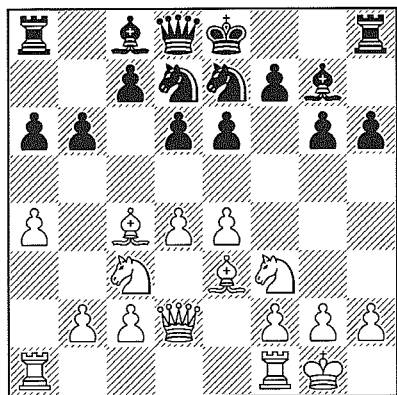
Seattle 2000

**1.e4 d6 2.d4 g6 3.♗c3 ♙g7 4.♗f3 a6 5.a4 b6 6.♙c4 e6 7.0-0 ♗d7 8.♙e3 ♗e7 9.♙d2 h6**

It is common in the world of theory that the same, frequently mistaken, judgements are passed on from one commentator to another. This is a very rewarding fact for those of us who dare to enter Modern territory, as we repeatedly encounter opponents who think they ought to punish us for our insolence because their books state that the Modern is rubbish. Let them try...

I do not have the faintest idea what "theory" says about this position, or if indeed there is such

a thing as theory here. In any case, I have played this line for ten years without knowing a single prepared line. Nor do you have to learn any if you know the ideas.



### 10.h3

I have little confidence in 10.h4!?, which was played by Vescovi against Vadasz in Budapest 1993. Even though White stops g6-g5, he also weakens the kingside and the g4-square. That game continued:

10...♙b7 11.♚fe1 ♖f6!

A very logical move, eyeing the g4-square, but 11...♜f8 is also possible, intending either ♜f8-g8-h7 or d6-d5 and c7-c5. I am generally sceptical of marching the king to h7 as it is so slow, but unless White can make use of the extra tempi there is nothing wrong with it.

12.♙d3 d5?!

I do not like this move. Unless he is guaranteed a good position, Black should not open the centre, especially not when White is clearly better developed. In this position Black could have gained a good position by 12...♖g4! 13.♙f4 0-0 (13...e5?! 14.dxe5 dxe5 15.♙g3 is marginally better for White since the e7-knight is passive.), when Black has completed development, is blessed with a beautiful square on g4 for his knight, and can start to contemplate all kinds of dynamic counter strikes.

13.♙f4

Black is fine after 13.e5 ♖e4 14.♚e2 (Or 14.♙xe4?! dxe4 15.♖h2 ♖f5 16.h5 gxh5 17.♚ad1 ♚h4 with an advantage for Black.) 14...c5!? 15.dxc5 ♖xc5. Black can put pressure on the e5-pawn and is even a little bit happy not to have castled yet, as White might get himself into trouble if he attacks too early on the kingside.

13...c5

This does not work out too well for Black, but the alternatives were not much better. 13...dxe4 14.♖xe4 ♖h5 with "a small advantage for Black" is the advice of the Silicon Monster. It is time for a small word of advice: Do not trust the Monster. After 15.♙e5 f6 16.♙h2 f5 17.♖c3 ♙xf3 18.gxf3 ♚xd4 19.♚xe6 it is obvious that Black's bridges have burned.

14.dxc5 bxc5?!

Black would have better chances of survival after 14...dxe4 15.♖xe4 ♖xe4 16.♙xe4 ♙xe4 17.♚xe4 bxc5.

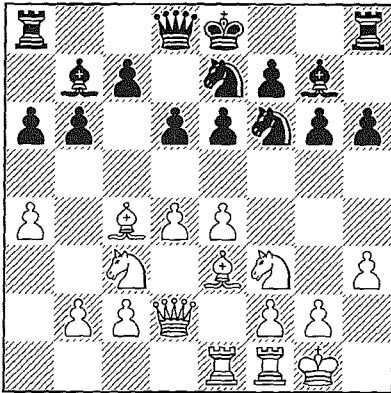
15.exd5 ♖exd5 16.♖xd5 ♙xd5 17.♖e5 ♙b7 18.♖c4 0-0 19.♙xh6 ♚d5 20.♙f1

White had an extra pawn, which he eventually converted into a full point.

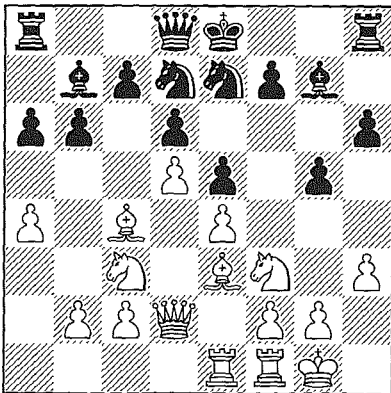
**10...♙b7 11.♚ae1**

In Xie Jun – Chiburdanidze, Manila 1991, White tried 11.♖h2 and gained the initiative after 11...♖f6?! 12.♙d3 ♚d7 13.♚ad1 d5 14.f3 (14.e5 seems much stronger) 14...♖h5 15.♚f2 f5 16.g4 dxe4 17.fxe4 ♖f6 18.♖f3 0-0-0 19.♖e5. Very creative chess from both sides. Black focused on playing f7-f5 and White was not afraid of playing g2-g4. But let us go back to Black's 11th move. Why not 11...d5! 12.exd5 (12.♙d3?! c5 and the threat of cxd4 forces White into 13.e5 cxd4 14.♙xd4 ♖c6 when Black wins a pawn, at least.) 12...exd5 13.♙d3 c5 when Black takes over the initiative. In general, when White runs out of natural moves and starts pulling rabbits (like ♖h2) out of the hat, it is often time to get active in the centre with moves like d6-d5 or e6-e5.

**11...♖f6?!**



This move gives White the chance to close the centre achieving a position similar to Drei – Gofshtein, but with a few extra tempi. I normally wait with  $\text{♞d7-f6}$  until either I have played  $\text{g5}$  and  $\text{♞g6}$  and the  $\text{♞h5-f4}$  manoeuvre is in the air, or until White has committed some positional crime and I no longer have to watch out for  $\text{d4-d5}$ . Here I would have preferred  $11...g5!?$ , intending to meet  $12.d5!?$  with  $12...e5$ .



This is one of the critical positions of the Hippo. Black is planning  $0-0$ ,  $f5$  and possibly  $c7-c6$ . White will have no choice but to meet  $...f5$  with  $\text{exf5}$ , since allowing  $\text{f5-f4}$  would lead to a catastrophe. After  $13.♞h2$  Black can play either  $13...f5$  or  $13...♞f6!?$   $14.♙e2 c6!$ , when a possible continuation is  $15.♞g4 \text{cxd5}$   $16.♞xf6† ♙xf6$   $17.\text{exd5} ♙g7$   $18.♞d3 0-0$

$19.♞c4 ♜b8$   $20.♞b3 ♙c8$  with mutual chances.

A totally different approach is  $11...c6!?$ , intending  $\text{♞c7}$  before putting a pawn on the fifth rank.

**12.♙d3!?**

White defends the e-pawn, but much stronger was  $12.d5!$  when after  $12...e5$  the knight on  $\text{f6}$  obstructs Black from achieving  $\text{f7-f5}$ , eventually leading to the loss of two tempi. Even worse is  $12...exd5$   $13.\text{exd5}$  when Black is left with the king in the centre since  $...0-0$  loses a pawn to  $\text{♙xh6}$ .

**12...♞d7!**

Black continues to improve his position slowly and correctly avoids  $12...g5$   $13.e5!$  when White would have chances of attacking the kingside with  $\text{h3-h4}$ . Neither is  $12...d5!?$   $13.♙f4!$  (preparing  $\text{♙e5}$ )  $13...dxe4$   $14.♞xe4$  very attractive. Usually  $\text{d6-d5}$  is played in two situations:

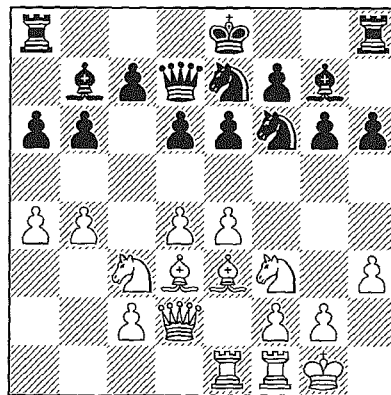
a) When after  $\text{e4-e5}$  White cannot answer  $\text{c7-c5}$  with  $\text{c2-c3}$ , or

b) When, with a bishop on  $\text{c4}$ , White has no alternative but to exchange the e-pawns and Black can then follow up with  $\text{c7-c5}$ .

There are other scenarios, but Black should always think twice before sending the d-pawn on an active mission.

**13.b4!?**

I cannot see how this move improves White's position, but the obvious developing moves have already been made, so it is time for some kind of action. After  $13.e5$   $\text{♞fd5}$   $14.♙e4$  White should be slightly better.



**13...♖d8?!**

Black tries to avoid g6-g5 and plays a “natural” move, possibly intending to continue with ♖d7-c8-a8 putting pressure on the e4-pawn. There is nothing wrong with the general idea, but here it was better to leave the rook on the a-file to stop White from continuing as he does in the game. Both 13...♗f8 intending you-know-what, and 13...g5 14.♖h2 ♖g6 seem fine to me. In neither case does White receive bonus points from the b4-pawn.

**14.b5 a5**

It would have been possible to play 14...axb5 with the rook still on a8, but now it is inadvisable because 15.♙xb5 c6 16.♙d3, intending ♖b1 and d4-d5, gives White a strong initiative.

**15.♖h2!**

Black has no counterplay on the queenside, so White can do more or less as he likes on the kingside.

**15...♗c8 16.f3**

Why put on the silk gloves, when with 16.f4 0-0 17.f5 the white f-pawn is acting as the first nail in Black's coffin.

**16...♖h5 17.♖e2?!**

White has a clear advantage after this move, but 17.g4 ♖g3 19.♖f2 h5 20.♗g2 h4 21.♖f1 was even better.

**17...e5 18.f4!? exf4 19.♙xf4 ♖xf4 20.♗xf4 0-0 21.♖g4 ♗h7 22.♖f6† ♗h8 23.♖g3 ♖g8 24.e5 dxe5 25.dxe5 ♗e6 26.♗h2 ♙xf6 27.exf6 ♗d6**

Black has some counterplay against the f6-pawn, but White should be close to winning somehow.

**28.♖e5 ♖de8 29.♖xe8 ♖xe8 30.♙c4 ♗xf4 31.♖xf4 ♖f8 32.♖e2 g5 33.♖f2 ♙c4 34.♖c3 ♙g6 35.♖d5 ♗h7 36.♙b3 ♖c8 37.g4 h5 38.♗g3 ♖h6 39.gxh5**

Here White misses a win with 39.♖e2! ♖g8 40.h4! gxh4† 41.♗xh4 ♗h6 42.g5† ♗h7 43.♖f4, when both ♖xh5 and ♖xg6 followed by ♙d5 are serious threats that Black cannot defend against.

**39...♙xh5 40.♗h2 ♙g6 41.♖g2 ♖f5 42.♖xg5 ♖d8 43.♖g4 ♗h6 44.♖f4 ♖e8 45.♙c4 ♖e1 46.♗g2?**

The rest of the game is rather strange; 46.♖xc7 was still very good for White.

**46...♖e3† 47.♗f2 ♖xd5 48.♙xd5**

Not 48.♖h4†? ♗g5 49.♖g4† ♗xf6 50.♗xe1 ♖e3 51.♖xg6† fxg6 52.♙b3 ♗e5 when it is Black who is winning.

**48...♖e5 49.♙b3 ♗g5 50.♖c4 ♖c5 51.♖xc5† bxc5 52.c3 ♗xf6**

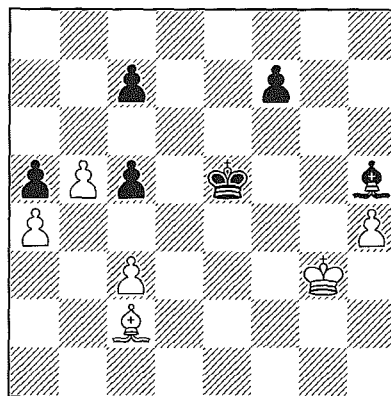
Only Black can try to win this endgame. White will have to keep a constant eye on the a4-pawn, and Black's monarch is slightly more active than White's. Still, the game should end in a draw.

**53.h4?**

It was necessary to stop Black from playing ♙h5, so White should play 53.♙d1! when he can answer 53...♗g5 with 54.♗g3 and 53...♗f5 with 54.♙c2†. I do not see how Black could make progress then.

**53...♗f5 54.♗g3 ♙h5 55.♙c2†?**

Now it turns from bad to worse. The only chance was 55.♙d5 intending ♙f3. Black can try 55...♙d1 56.♙xf7 ♙xa4, when 57.♙c4? ♙d1 58.♗f2 a4 59.♗e3 ♙b3 60.♗d3 ♗g4 61.♙xb3 axb3 62.c4 ♗xh4 63.♗c3 ♗g4 64.♗xb3 ♗f4 leads to a win. But better is 57.♗f3 ♙xb5 58.♗e3 when White should be able to draw.

**55...♗e5!**

White is in zugzwang: either Black's king must be allowed to advance to e3 or g4, or White has to let go of the a4-pawn.

**56.♙b3**

Black also wins after 56.♙d3 ♘d1 and 56.♙f2 ♙f4 57.♙b3 f5 58.♙e6 ♙g6, when White cannot stop ♙f4-g4xh4.

56...♙e4 57.♙c2† ♙e5 58.♙b3 ♙e4 59.♙c2† ♙e3

Here the monarch is ideally placed to support the f-pawn (if it can reach f4) and at the same time c5-c4, followed by ♙e3-d2xc3, is a horrible threat.

60.♙f5 ♘d1 61.♙d7 c4 62.♙e8 f5 63.h5 f4† 64.♙h2 f3 65.h6 f2 66.h7 f1 ♙ 67.h8 ♙ ♙f4†

White gets mated after both 68.♙g2 ♙f3† 69.♙f1 ♙g4† 70.♙g1 ♙f2† 71.♙h1 ♙f3 and 68.♙h3 ♙g4† 69.♙g2 ♙f2† 70.♙h1 ♙f3, so he resigned.

**0-1**

I believe that 12.d5 would have kept the advantage for White, but it was only because 11...♙f6 was a mistake. Instead 11...g5 was better and should be OK for Black. It is also possible to play 11...♙f8, but I would rather not.

In the next game White prepares e5 instead of d5, but never finds the time to play it.

**Game 33**

**Brynell – Hillarp Persson**

Swedish Cup (team) 1997

1.e4 d6 2.d4 g6 3.♘c3 ♙g7 4.♘f3 a6 5.a4 b6 6.♙c4

After 6.♙d3 Black should play ♘d7 and ♙b7, before deciding whether to go e7-e6 entering the Hippo, or just play ♘f6, 0-0 and e5, when the structure resembles a Ruy Lopez.

**6...e6 7.0-0**

A similar idea involving ♙f4 is 7.h4. After 7...h6 8.♙f4 ♘e7 9.♙d2 ♘d7 10.0-0 ♙b7 11.♙fe1

we have reached the game Blauert – Lau, Bad Neuenahr 1989. There have also been a few games with 11.♙ad1, but it makes no difference in the long run. The question is: What will White do after the rooks have been centralised? Lau continued:

11...♙b8!!?

A beautiful move, intending ♙a7, ♙a8-somewhere and then ♙a8, slightly improving the black position. Also possible is 11...♘f6 when 12.e5 ♘fd5 is OK for Black, but 12.♙d3 should keep a certain advantage for White.

12.♙ad1 ♙a7! 13.♙a1

This cannot be critical, but White has taken the path of natural development and now finds himself facing a jungle of possibilities, none of which are tempting.

13...♙c8 14.♙ad1 ♙a8 15.♙b3

After this move Black can walk the king to h7, as White cannot answer ♙e8-f8-g8-h7 with ♙d3, h5 and e5 without losing a lot of time, giving Black the possibility to play ♘f6.

15...♙f8 16.♙e2 ♙g8 17.♘b1 ♙h7 18.c3 ♙hf8

Black was doing well and eventually won. I really like the way Black played in this game.

7...♘e7 8.♙f4 ♘d7

When White places the bishop on f4 there is no need to wait with ♙c8-b7, as d4-d5 is met with e6-e5, hitting ♙f4 and gaining an important tempo.

**9.♙d2**

White can also play 9.♙e1 intending e4-e5. The best way to meet this is 9...♙b7 with the idea 10.e5 ♙xf3! 11.♙xf3 d5 12.♙f1 c5!. This kind of position would clearly be to White's advantage if ♙b7 and ♘f3 were still on the board, but here Black seems to be fine.

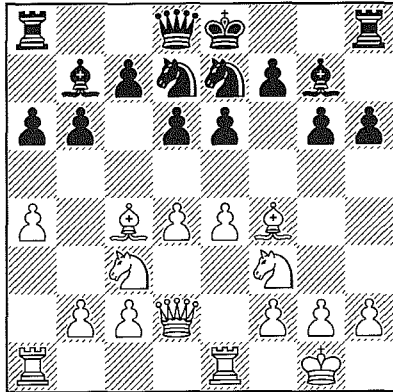
Even better is the simple 10...dxe5 11.♘xe5 (Both 11.dxe5 h6 12.♙d2 g5! and 12.h4 0-0 are mighty fine for Black.) 11...♘xe5 12.♙xe5 ♙xe5 13.dxe5 ♙xd1 14.♙axd1 ♙d8 when the position is about equal.

After 9.e5 ♙b7! White has nothing better than 10.♙e1, since 10.exd6 cxd6 11.♙xd6 ♘f5 followed by ♙xf3 and ♘xd4 is fine for Black.

**9...h6 10.♙ad1!?**

It is not certain what the function of this rook move is, so it seems more logical to play 10.h3 first before deciding on where to put the rook.

Another normal continuation is 10.♙fe1 ♙b7.



Now we have:

- a) 11. ♖b3 g5 12. ♗g3 ♘g6 13. h3 ♘f6!?

This leads to unclear complications. A safer option was 13...0-0! with an approximately equal game.

14. e5!? ♘h5! 15. d5?! ♘xg3 16. fxg3 0-0?

After 16... ♘xe5! 17. ♘xc5 dxe5 18. ♖ad1 exd5 19. ♗xd5 ♗xd5 20. ♘xd5 c6 21. ♘b4 ♗xd2 22. ♖xd2 ♖c8 Black is not worse.

17. dxe6 ♗xf3 18. exd6 cxd6??

Black blunders instead of playing 18... ♗c6 19. e7 ♘xe7 20. ♖xe7 ♗xd6 with a slightly worse position.

19. exf7 ♘h8 20. gxf3 ♘e5 21. ♘g2

Black could very well have resigned already here. Kleinplatz – Barlov, Candas 1996.

- b) 11. h3 g5 12. ♗g3

There is at least one argument in favour of 12. ♗h2: if Black plays ♘d7-f6-h5 the bishop is not very well off on g3.

- 12... ♘g6 13. ♖ad1 0-0 14. ♗e3 ♗e7

White has more space and a harmonious development, but Black is very flexible and I believe he is not worse. I mean, try to find a good plan for White...

15. ♘e2 ♘f6

Other ideas are 15... ♘h8 intending ♖ae8 and f7-f5 or 15... ♗c6 intending b6-b5.

16. ♗d3 e5!? 17. ♗h2 ♘h5 18. ♘g3 ♘xg3 19. fxg3 c5??

This is absolutely incomprehensible. After 19... g4! 20. hxg4 exd4 21. ♘xd4 both 21... ♗g5 and 21... ♗xd4 22. ♗xd4 ♘e5 give Black a clear advantage.

20. dxc5 dxc5 21. ♗c4 ♖ad8 22. ♗e2 a5

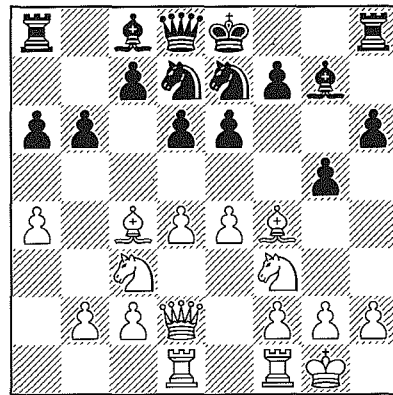
A tragic move to have to make.

23. ♘d2

It is a miracle that Black survived (½-½ in 57 moves) in Manca – Chatalbashev, Padova 2000.

- 10... ♗b7?!

I had this idea that I should not play g6-g5 until my opponent had “weakened” his kingside with h2-h3, but this is all wrong. h2-h3 is rather an improvement for White and it was just about the right time to play 10...g5!:



White has two ways of reacting:

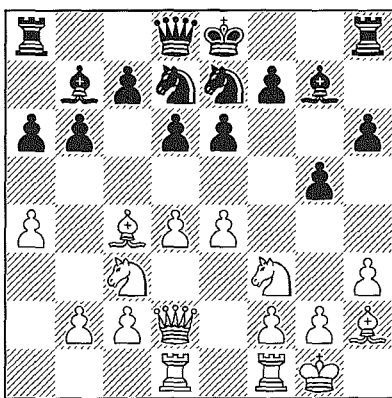
- a) 11. ♗g3 ♘g6! 12. ♘e1 (12. h3 ♘f6 13. e5 ♘h5 is okay for Black) 12... ♘f6! and Black is doing fine; I do not see how White can make Black suffer for having played g6-g5.

- b) 11. ♗e3 0-0? 12. h4 g4 13. ♘h2 h5 14. ♗g5 is exactly the kind of position that Black should avoid. White will open up the kingside with f2-f3 at some moment and Black will not be able to defend. But 11... ♘g6 12. d5 e5 is fine for Black and 11...c6!? intending b6-b5 is also interesting.

The most important thing to contemplate before playing g6-g5 is whether White can achieve an advantage with h2-h4. If not, then Black should be all right.

**11.h3 g5**

It is also possible to play 11...♘f6!? 12.♞fe1 ♘h5 13.♙h2 (13.♙e3 g5 followed by 14...♘g6 looks nice for Black) 13...g5 (after 13...0-0?! 14.♞e2! Black cannot stop e4-e5 and that is not good at all) 14.g4!? (if Black is allowed to follow up with ♘g6 he would be fine) 14...♘f6 15.d5 e5 16.♘xe5 dxe5 17.♙xe5 and it might just be surplus imagination, or White may have some compensation for the piece.

**12.♙h2****12...0-0**

I generally castle when I see no way for White to punish me for it. The alternatives are not very good:

a) 12...♘g6 13.♞fe1 ♘f6? (13...0-0 leads to the main game) 14.e5 ♘h5 15.d5 is very bad for Black.

b) 12...f5? 13.exf5 ♙xf3 14.gxf3 exf5 15.♞fe1 is horrible for Black.

c) 12...♘f6?! 13.♞fe1 g4 14.hxg4 ♘xg4 15.♙g3 ♘g6 16.e5! dxe5 17.♞e2 is also horrible for Black.

It is true there are few decent alternatives for Black here, but it is just one bottleneck in a variation where the possibilities are close to endless.

**13.♞fe1 ♘g6**

White dominates most of the board and you would not have to ask a chess classicist twice which side he/she would prefer. Still, to turn this domination into something less abstract White

has to cross the fifth rank, somehow, somewhere. In this position d4-d5 can be met by e6-e5, e4-e5 can be met by ♙xf3, and 14.h4 g4 loses the h-pawn. Stellan improves his position slowly by first preparing e4-e5.

**14.♞e3 ♞b8?!**

With this move I step away from the d-file and prepare to meet 15.e5 with 15...♙xf3. But far more natural is 14...♞e7 as played by Joel Benjamin against Solomon in Sydney 1999. After 15.♘e2 (Not very scary, but 15.e5 dxe5 16.d5 exd5 17.♘xd5 ♞c5 is at least equal for Black.) 15...♘f6 (I also like 15...♙h8! 16.♘d2 ♞ae8 with the idea ♞d8 and f7-f5.) 16.e5 ♘d5 17.♞a3 dxe5 18.♞xe7 ♘dxe7 19.♘xe5 ♘xe5 20.♙xe5 ♙xe5 21.dxe5 ♘g6 the position was about balanced.

**15.♘e2?!**

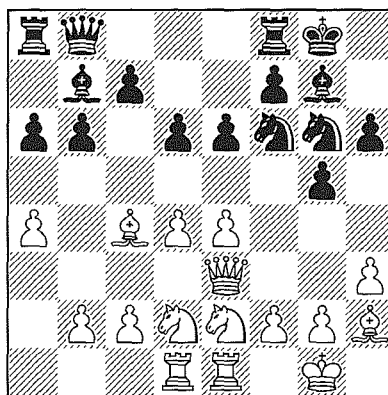
From a prophylactic point of view it seems better to play 15.♙b3, stopping Black from hitting the bishop with d6-d5. If White instead plays 15.♙d3 it will be easier for Black to play d5 followed by c5, as d5 is no longer under attack.

**15...♘f6**

It would have been very much in the spirit of modernism to play either 15...♙c6 or 15...♙h8 intending ♞a7, ♞ae8 and f5; maybe it would also have been good.

**16.♘d2?!**

White's last two moves are far too passive and should have been punished. After 16.♙d3 ♞e8!? (not 16...c5 17.dxc5! bxc5 18.♙c4 and Black is in trouble) 17.b3 b5 Black has counterplay.





**16...♔c6?**

Here I missed a typical Modern trick with 16...d5! 17.♔d3 dxe4 18.♗xc4 ♗d5 19.♞d2 f5! 20.♗c3 ♗h4, when White is in deep trouble on the a8-h1 diagonal. A possible continuation is 21.f3 f4 22.♗xd5 ♔xd5 23.♞f1 ♞b7 when Black has a strong initiative.

**17.♔b3 ♞b7?!**

In the rest of this game I had no plan and was totally crushed. Stellan had a fantastic score against me at the time and his mysterious strategy somehow hypnotized me, so that I missed his main threat of 24.f4.

18.f3 b5 19.axb5 axb5 20.♗c1 ♞a1 21.♗d3 ♞xd1 22.♞xd1 ♞b6 23.c3 ♔b7 24.f4 ♗h7 25.♗f3 b4 26.c4 gxf4 27.♗xf4 ♗h8 28.♗h5 f5 29.c5 dxc5 30.dxc5 ♞c6 31.exf5 exf5 32.♗xg7 ♗xg7 33.♔d5 ♞a6 34.♔xb7 ♞xb7 35.♞d7 ♞f7 36.♞e6 ♞xd7 37.♞xd7 ♗g8 38.♞e6 ♗g7 39.♔e5 ♗e5 40.♗xe5 c6 41.♞g6 ♗f8 42.♞xh6 ♗g8 43.♞g6 ♗f8 44.♞xf5 ♗g8 45.♞g6 ♗f8 46.♞xc6

Here I came to my senses...

**1-0**

Stellan's 10.♞ad1 is not the most logical move for White but the alternative 10.♞fe1 ♔b7 11.h3 g5 also seems fine for Black. It is worth noting that it might be best to play ...g5 before White has played h3, if you get the chance.

In the next game White chooses a very aggressive set-up with ♞e2 and e5, but Black gains an excellent position by going d5 and c5.

**Game 34****J. Shahade – Hillarp Persson**

Reykjavik 2002

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♔g7 3.♗c3 d6 4.♗f3 a6 5.a4 b6 6.♔c4 e6 7.♞e2

Also interesting is 7.e5!? when 7...d5?! 8.♔a2 ♗e7?! (8...c5 9.♗e2 cxd4 10.♗exd4 ♗e7 11.0-0 h6 is preferable, though White is slightly better.) 9.♗e2 c5 10.c3 ♗bc6 11.h4 h6 12.♔b1 a5 13.0-0 ♔a6 14.♞e1 ♞c8 15.♗f4 left White with

a clear advantage in Nisipeanu – Nevednichy, Bucharest 1998. I am horrified to see a move like 7...d5: I would only play like this if I won more than one tempo in the process.

So instead of 7...d5 I prefer 7...♗e7!. After 8.♔f4 ♔b7 9.0-0 (Black is fine after 9.d5?! exd5 10.♗xd5 dxe5 11.♔h6 0-0) 9...♗d7 we have the same position that is discussed in the comment to White's ninth move in Game 33.

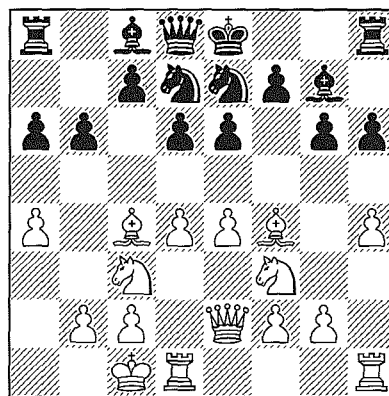
**7...♗e7 8.e5**

This is the main idea behind 7.♞e2, but there are other aggressive possibilities for White that should not be underestimated:

**8.h4?!**

With this move White plans to control the whole of the board. It is very ambitious and Caesar-like, in the best and worst senses.

8...h6 9.♔f4 ♗d7 10.0-0-0!??



I cannot recommend this line of action: the combination of 0-0-0 and a4 seems highly suspect. Better is 10.0-0, which is similar to Blauert – Lau (see the comment to the 7th move of Game 33 Brynell – Hillarp Persson).

10...♔b7 11.♗b1 ♗f6?!

White gets the initiative after 11...0-0?! 12.♞d2! ♗h7 13.♔d3 intending h4-h5, but why not 11...b5(!)? After 12.axb5 axb5 13.♔xb5 0-0 Black has a fantastic initiative on the queenside and I do not see how White will survive.

12.d5

I am much more worried about 12.♔d3 followed by e4-e5.

12...exd5!?

After 12...e5 13.♙e3 ♘g4 White should be better, though Black will get some kind of counterplay with b6-b5 or f7-f5.

13.♗xd5 ♗exd5! 14.exd5† ♚e7!?

The chances were balanced in Lastin – Privakov, Marganets 1999.

**8...d5!?**

Usually Black waits with this move until after having played ♙c8-b7xf3, but here – because I gain a tempo on ♙c4 and ♚e2 is not protecting the d4-pawn - I thought it was better to go d5 and c5 immediately. I did not see how White would protect her centre.

The alternative is 8...♗d7 when we have:

a) 9.♙xe6 fxe6 10.♗g5 ♗xe5 11.dxe5 d5 12.♚f3 ♗f5 13.g4 ♗h6! 14.♚g3 (14.♚h3 ♚e7 15.♗xe6 ♚xe6 16.♙xh6 ♚xe5† is clearly better for Black) 14...♚e7 and Black has the better position.

b) 9.exd6 cxd6 10.♗e4 ♗f6 11.♗xf6† ♙xf6 and Black is very flexible and doing fine.

c) 9.♙f4 ♙b7 10.♚d1 ♙xf3 (10...d5!?) 11.gxf3 d5 12.♙xa6 0-0 intending c7-c5, with excellent compensation for the pawn.

All in all 8...♗d7 is more in the spirit of the Hippo, but 8...d5 seems to be good enough.

**9.♙a2!?**

I thought Jennifer was planning to develop her pieces to the most active squares and then sacrifice her way through my centre by means of ♚ad1 and ♗xd5 or ♙xd5. Another good reason for withdrawing the bishop to a2 is that it will not be in the way of the other pieces.

**9...c5**

If White was allowed to play ♗c3-somewhere and meet c5 with c3, then I would be clearly worse.

**10.♙g5!?**

After this move the e5-pawn is weak. Better was 10.♙f4 although Black has the initiative after 10...♗bc6: d4 and e5 are weak.

**10...0-0**

Do not fall for 10...h6?! 11.♙f6! ♙xf6? 12.exf6 ♗ec6 13.♙xd5.

**11.♚d1!?**

White strengthens her centre and intends to go dxc5 and ♗e4. The “normal” 11.0-0 runs into 11...h6 12.♙f4 ♗d7 when White’s centre is about to dissolve.

In the game 11...cxd4 can be met by 12.♚xd4.

**11...♙b7**

Even better is 11...h6! and Black has the advantage in all cases:

a) 12.♙f4 ♗d7

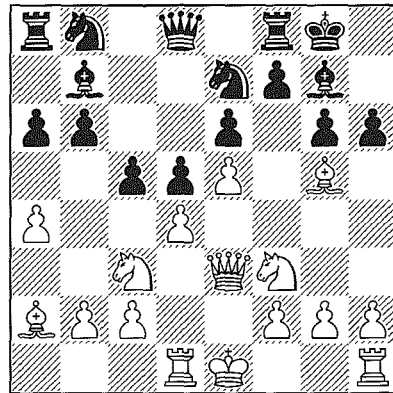
b) 12.♙xc7 ♚xe7

c) 12.♙f6? ♙xf6 13.exf6 ♗f5 14.dxc5 bxc5 15.♙xd5 exd5 16.♗xd5 ♚a5†

**12.♚e3!?**

After 12.♚d2 cxd4 13.♚xd4 (Black wins the e5-pawn after 13.♗e2 ♚c7 14.♗exd4 ♗ec6) 13...♗d7 14.0-0 h6 White is forced to give up the bishop pair with 15.♙xe7. The resulting position is clearly better for Black who can attack the white e-pawn and make good use of the c-file.

**12...h6!**



**13.♙f6!?**

Jennifer senses that things are going in the wrong direction and tries to pull us into muddy waters. After 13.♙xe7 ♚xe7 14.♗e2 cxd4 15.♗fxd4 ♚b4† 16.♗c3 ♗c6 I would have had a clear advantage without having to take any risks.

13...♙xf6 14.exf6 ♘f5 15.♖f4 ♗xf6 16.♗c7!?

After 16.g4 g5 17.♗c7 ♘d6 (17...♘e3!? is also interesting) 18.♗d3 ♗d8 19.♗xd8 ♗xd8 20.h4 ♘c6 Black wins with little effort.

16...♗e7 17.♗xb6 c4!

I am threatening ♗fc8, a5 and ♗a6, trapping the white queen, which forces White to take some extraordinary precautions.

18.b3 cxb3 19.♙xb3 ♗c8

The white queen is far from home and Black has a clear advantage.

20.♘e2 a5

Threatening ♙a6 followed by ♘d7.

21.♘e5 ♘c6 22.♘xc6 ♙xc6 23.0-0 ♙e8!

White has no defence against ♗c6. The rest of the game plays itself.

24.♘f4 ♗c6 25.♗b5 ♗xc2 26.♗d3 ♗b2 27.♗fe1 ♗b4 28.♙c2 ♗xc2 29.♗xc2 ♙xa4 30.♗c7 ♙xd1 31.♗xd1 ♗b8 32.♗c1 a4

0-1

This line holds no problems for Black, so maybe White should play ♙b3 before playing e5. Still, that cannot be very good since Black can always answer e5 with ♘d7, keeping d5 or ♙xf3 for later.

In the next game White prepares e4-e5 until he runs out of preparations (reaches Heaven) and when e5 finally comes Black does not react in the best way.

### Game 35

Gabriel – Bischoff

Altensteig 1994

1.d4 g6 2.e4 ♙g7 3.♘c3 d6 4.♘f3 a6! 5.a4 b6 6.♙c4 e6 7.0-0 ♘e7 8.♗e2 h6 9.h3 0-0 10.♙f4

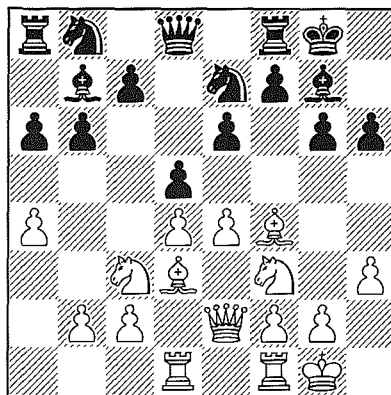
White is prepared to meet g6-g5 with ♙h2.

10...♙b7 11.♗ad1

In *ChessBase Magazine* Stohl judges White to be slightly better here. So far I can agree.

11...♘d7

Stohl judges 11...d5 12.♙d3 to be slightly better for White.



But of course! Opening up the position when White is fully developed and Black still has not developed the b8-knight can only be met with a “no, no, no!” Have a little patience please.

12.♗fe1 ♖h7

After this move it is seldom a good idea to play g6-g5, as among others the sacrifice ♙xg5 will be dangerous for Black. I see no reason to disclose my intentions so easily and prefer the more flexible 12...♘f6 13.♙d3 ♗d7 or 12.♗b8!?

13.♙g3!?

White prepares to play e5, but it seems more important to move the c4-bishop so that after e4-e5 d6-d5 can be met by ♘c3-b1, planning to answer c7-c5 with c2-c3.

13...♗b8!?

Stohl does not approve of this move and gives 13...♘f6 intending ♘xe4, d5 and ♗d7 as being better. I do not see anything wrong with Black’s idea, only the continuation.

14.♙a2

Possibly 14.♙d3 is stronger: on a2 the bishop will be out of the game.

14...♗a7

If Black is allowed to play ♗ad8 followed by ♗a8 then White can hardly change his position without actually making it worse. The pieces have reached Heaven and nothing is happening.

15.e5 d5!?

This is very risky indeed. It was much safer to diminish White's attacking potential with 15...♙xf3!. After 16.♞xf3 d5 (16...♜f5!? followed by c5 is chaotic but promising) 17.c4 (otherwise Black is slightly better after 17...b5) 17...dxc4 18.♙xc4 ♜ac8 I prefer Black's position.

### 16.♞d3

White starts reorganising his pieces, intending ♜c3-e2-f4, c3 and ♙b1. Black must act fast before he is blown away on the b1-h7 diagonal.

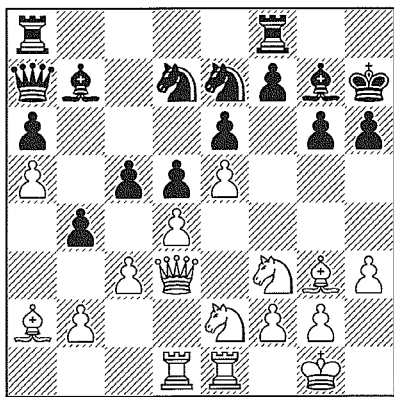
### 16...c5 17.♜e2 b5

Stohl gives 17...cxd4 18.♜exd4 with a large advantage for White. I believe 18...♜c5 19.♞a3 ♜c6 is playable for Black.

### 18.a5?!

White needs every tempo he can get for the attack on the black king and with this move he tries to slow down Black's counterplay. Still, better was 18.c3 when 18...bxa4 19.♜f4 ♜f5 20.♙b1 ♞b6 21.♜h4 seems unclear.

### 18...b4 19.c3



### 19...bxc3

There is no time for 19...♜c6 20.♜f4 ♜xa5 when 21.♙b1 c4 22.♞c2 b3 (otherwise ♜xg6 wins on the next move) 23.♞c2 leads to a position where the black bodyguard has captured a pawn but, alas, forgotten its monarch.

### 20.bxc3 ♙c6 21.♜f4 ♜ab8!?

Why not use the other rook so g6 can be defended with ♜f8? When going through Stohl's

comments I get the feeling that White was better all the time and Black never had a real chance. Just looking at the game gives me a completely different impression. After 21...♞fb8! White must show his hand:

a) 22.♙h4? ♜f5 23.g4 ♜xh4 24.♜xh4 ♜f8 and Black is rock solid – and has the initiative.

b) 22.c4 dxc4 23.♙xc4 cxd4 24.♜xd4 ♙a4 25.♞a1 ♞b4 with an initiative for Black.

### 22.♙h4! ♜fe8!

Not 22...♜f5? 23.g4! ♜xh4 24.♜xh4 ♙b5 25.♞c2 ♜g8 26.♜hxg6 when Black is shattered.

### 23.♙xc7 ♜xc7 24.h4 ♜g8 25.♞c3

Stohl judges this position to be clearly better for White. I could not disagree more.

### 25...c4?

An absolutely horrible move that Stohl fails to comment on. White has a dangerous initiative on the kingside and Black must make use of every open file and diagonal to get the attention of White's pieces! Clearly better was 25...♞c7!? when 26.h5 g5 27.♜e2 ♞b5 is unclear.

### 26.h5?!

It was better for White to hide his intentions one more move with 26.♙b1, not to allow Black the ♞f8 and f7-f6 defence.

### 26...g5 27.♜e2 ♞f8!

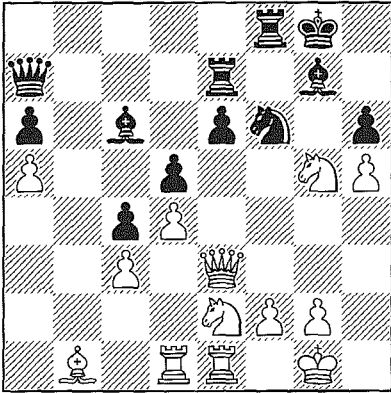
Black cannot let White play ♙b1 and ♜xg5 undisturbed. The a5-pawn will not run away.

### 28.♙b1 f6! 29.exf6 ♜xf6?

The position would still be unclear (I really think Black's better, but I am biting my tongue) after 29...♙xf6 followed by e6-e5. Black's kingside might look a bit airy, but I can see no way for White to take advantage of this.

### 30.♜xg5?!

I see only one clear way for White to get the advantage: 30.♜g3! threatening ♜f5. Black can try 30...♜g4 31.♞e2 ♜xf2 32.♞xf2 ♞c7 33.♜h2 g4, but after 34.♞c2 gxh3 35.♞h7† ♜f7 36.♞g6† ♜g8 37.♞xe6 White will take the whole point. Stohl gives ♜xg5 an exclamation, but also gives 30.♜e5 ♙e8 31.g4 with a big advantage for White. Well, wrong again. After 31...♞c7 intending ♜d7 Black is slightly better.



30...♘g4?

Stohl gives 30...hxg5 31.♖xg5 with a clear advantage for White, but after 31...e5! 32.h6 (32.dxe5? ♘e4) 32...e4 33.♘f4 ♘h7 34.♖g3 ♖xf4 35.♖xf4 ♙f6 it is not even clear that Black is worse.

31.♖g3 ♘xf2 32.♖f1! hxg5

Black probably missed that 32...♘xd1? 33.♙h7† ♘h8 34.♖xf8† ♙xf8 35.♘f7† followed by ♖g6 is checkmate.

33.♖xf2 ♖xf2 34.♖xf2

Now things look very bad for Black.

34...♖f7

Stohl points out 34...e5 35.♖f5 e4 36.♖xg5 with a winning position for White. The rest of the game is an exhibition of White's superiority.

35.♖e3 ♖e7 36.♙g6 ♖f8 37.♖b1 ♙b5 38.♘g3 ♖f4 39.♘e2 ♖f8 40.♘g3 ♖f4 41.♘f5! ♖f6 42.♖xb5! axb5 43.a6 e5 44.a7 ♖a6 45.♘xg7 ♖xa7 46.♘e6 ♖a1† 47.♘h2 ♖h4† 48.♘g3 ♖d1 49.♙f7†!

Black resigned as 49...♘xf7 50.♘xg5† followed by 51.♘xh4 wins a piece.

1-0

It is generally very important to play ♙xf3 before closing the centre with ...d5. It is only when Black can somehow afford to open up the centre that the bishop should be retained. There are very few exceptions to this rule. After 15...d5

I have the feeling that Black was slightly worse even though I cannot prove it. Still, there is more to learn from this game: closing the centre with 25...c4? is not a good idea when your opponent is attacking with all his pieces on the other flank, and 28...f6 is an absolute necessity in order not to be smothered (a similar idea is seen in Game 13).

In the next game White throws away a tempo on move seven, but since the position is not in the least tempo-sensitive (remember ♘e8-f8-g8-h7) it does not make a great difference.

Game 36

Yagupov – Shchekachev

Bela Crkva 1990

1.d4 g6 2.e4 ♙g7 3.♘f3 d6 4.♘c3 a6 5.a4 b6 6.♙c4 e6 7.♙g5?!

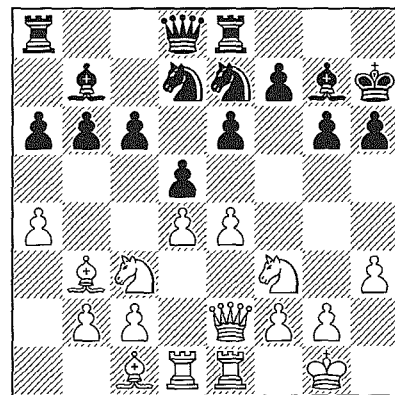
It is really incredible how common this move is, considering that it throws away a tempo. This will be more obvious after move 8.

7...♘e7 8.♖d2

Other moves would give Black the opportunity to castle. After

8.0-0 h6 9.♙e3 0-0 10.♖e1 ♘d7 11.♖e2 ♙b7 12.♖ad1 ♘h7 13.♙c1!? ♖e8 14.h3

it is time to act:  
14...d5! 15.♙b3 c6!?



The combination of c6 and b6-b5 is a rare idea in these positions and it is possibly better to play 15...c5! when 16.exd5 exd5 17.dxc5 ♖xc5 is pleasant for Black.

16.♘h2?!

This can never be correct! 16.♙f4 seems logical, as the d6-square has been weakened.

16...c5!

Black held the initiative and eventually won in Gruvæus – Hillarp Persson, Örebro (Swe-ch) 2000.

### 8...h6!

This move is an integral part of the Hippo, which Black is very happy to play. It also chases the bishop away from g5. In the process White loses a tempo since the bishop will have moved twice in the opening.

### 9.♙e3

Worse is 9.♙f4?! ♘d7 10.0-0 g5! 11.♙g3 ♘g6 12.♘e1 ♘f6 13.f3 0-0 14.♘e2 ♘h5 with an initiative for Black in Zeier – Hillarp Persson, Recklinghausen 2001.

9.♙h4?! ♘d7 leads to the same thing.

### 9...♘d7 10.0-0 ♙b7

Against Bykhovsky in Reykjavik 2000 I played:

10...♘f6!?

This is not as bad a move as I had originally thought (in my private database I gave it a "?"), as long as Black follows up in the right way. Still, if I could go back in time I would play 10...g5! when 11.h3 ♘g6 followed by 0-0 is fine for Black.

11.h3 ♙b7 12.d5!

After 12.♙d3 c5! Black is doing fine.

12...e5!?

With this move I enter a position where my knight on f6 would have been better off on d7 if I intended f7-f5. In general it is fine for Black to exchange on d5 in this kind of position if the h-pawn is still on h7, but here it is not so good: 12...exd5 13.exd5 ♘f5 14.♙f4 0-0 15.g4! g5 16.♙xg5 hxg5 17.gxf5 g4 18.hxg4 ♘xg4 19.♗f4 and Black is in deep trouble.

Even worse is 12...♘xe4? 13.♘xe4 exd5

14.♙d4! when Black will not get the piece back.

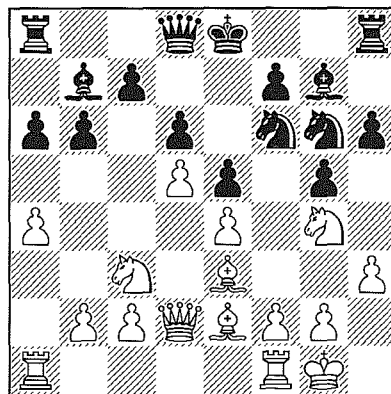
13.♘h2!?

A strong evacuating move that prepares to meet 13...♘h5 with 14.♙e2.

13...g5!?

This kind of move is generally good if Black can plant a knight on f4 before White plays g2-g3. This often depends on whether Black can attack the h3-pawn and thereby force White to keep the g-pawn on g2. It is quite a complex matter to judge these positions, but it is generally a bad omen if White can place a knight on f5 or manage to exchange the light-squared bishops. In this position Black should make use of the fact that White has just decentralized one of his knights with 13...c6! 14.dxc6 ♙xc6, when both 15.♗fd1 ♘xe4 16.♘xe4 ♙xe4 17.♗b4 d5 and 15.f3 d5 are absolutely fine for Black.

14.♙e2 ♘g6



15.♘g4! h5?

After this White gets the chance to excel. Better was 15...♘f4 16.♘xf6† ♗xf6 17.♙g4 h5 18.♙f5 g4 when Black has enough counterplay.

16.♘xf6† ♙xf6 17.♗d1!!

Now I realized that I had been outmanoeuvred: there is no way for me to keep control of the white squares. I tried

17...♘f4 18.♙xf4 gxf4 19.♙xh5 ♔e7

but never gained enough compensation, only to eventually win because of a blunder from my opponent.

**11.d5**

White has little to gain from waiting moves when Black has placed the bishop on b7.

11.♖fe1 ♘f6

I prefer 11...g5.

12.♙f4?

Now Black takes the initiative. Obviously the best move is 12.d5.

12...g5! 13.♙g3 ♘h5! 14.♖ad1 ♘g6 15.d5 e5

Another interesting possibility is 15...♙xc3

16.♗xc3 e5 intending ♘hf4, ♖c8, ♗f6 and h6-h5-h4.

16.♗e3 ♘hf4

There is nothing wrong with this move, but even stronger was 16...♘xg3 17.fxg3 g4 18.♘d2 h5 when Black has a strong initiative. In this type of position White would have a winning advantage if he could get a knight to f5, but here it is not possible.

17.♙xf4 exf4 18.♗d2 g4 19.♘d4 ♙xd4 20.♗xd4 ♘e5 21.♙f1 h5 22.♗d2 ♗f6 23.♘e2 f3 24.♗f4 ♗g7?

There are at least two better alternatives: 24...♙e7 25.♗xf6† ♘xf6 26.♘d4 fxg2 27.♘xg2 ♖ae8 and 24...♗xf4! 25.♘xf4 h4. In both cases Black has the better chances.

25.♘d4

With a clear advantage for White in Milos – Shchekachev, Las Palmas 1993.

**11...e5 12.♘e1 f5**

12...g5 is not attractive here since White has not played h2-h3. The g-pawn has nothing to bite on.

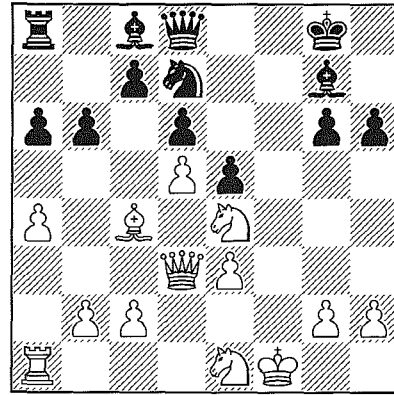
**13.exf5 ♘xf5**

Also possible is 13...gx f5. After 14.f4 e4 15.♙d4 ♙xd4! 16.♗xd4 ♘f7?! 17.g3 (otherwise Black throws in h6-h5-h4) 17...h5 18.♘g2 h4!? intending 19.♘xh4 ♖xh4 20.gxh4 ♗h8, the weak d5-pawn and Black's better pawn structure give him excellent counterplay.

**14.♗d3 0-0 15.♘e4 ♘xe3 16.fxe3**

Black is fine after 16.♗xe3 b5!?. Time and again White has problems with his d-pawn.

**16...♖xf1† 17.♘xf1 ♙c8!**



The bishop has served well on b7, but it is time to seek new horizons: to put the e4-knight under pressure.

**18.♘f3 ♘f6 19.♘g3?!**

White dreams of controlling e4 with one of his pieces, but he probably missed Black's 20th move. Better was 19.♘xf6† ♗xf6 20.e4 h5! with just a slight initiative for Black after ♙h6, ♗f4, etc.

**19...♗e8 20.♘d2 e4! 21.♗e2**

After this move one does not envy White's position, but 21.♘dx e4 ♘xe4 22.♗xe4 ♗xe4 23.♘xe4 ♙xb2 is not inspiring either. The black bishops dominate the board and White's a-pawn is weak in the endgame. White is probably lost.

**21...♗e5 22.c3 h5!**

Gaining space on the kingside and simultaneously clearing the way for ♙g7-h6, attacking the e3-pawn.

**23.♘g1 ♙h6! 24.♘gf1 ♘g7?!**

Even simpler is 24...♙b7 intending 25...♙xd5, when White has no way to protect the pawn and can start contemplating resignation.

**25.♙b3 ♖a7?!**

Black can still get a clear advantage with 25...♘xd5 26.♗c4 ♙b7. If, in the best-case scenario, White regains the pawn, he will find himself in a position where Black has at least three advantages: better pawn structure, more space and the bishop pair.

26.♖c4 a5 27.♗e1 h4 28.h3 ♘h7 29.♘b1 ♙g7?

White is in trouble after 29...♗g5 30.♘h1 ♙a6 31.♖d4 ♙g7 intending ...♙d3, but now he manages to get his act together.

30.♘a3 ♙a6 31.♖c6 ♗e7 32.♘b5 ♙xb5 33.axb5 ♘d7 34.♖c4 ♘f6 35.♖c6 ♘d7 36.♖c4 ♘f6

A draw was agreed.

1/2-1/2

A sad end to a game that Black ought to have won.

In the next game White chooses a set-up reminiscent of the Flexible Dragon Restrained. Flexible is indeed the word but efficient is not.

### Game 37

**Bromann – Hillarp Persson**

Stockholm 2002

1.d4 g6 2.e4 ♙g7 3.♘c3 d6 4.♙g5 a6 5.a4!? h6!

I did not like the look of 5...b6 6.♙c4 h6 7.♙h4! when 7...c5 8.d5! leads to a horribly passive position for Black. Instead I pressed the g5-bishop to declare its intentions.

6.♙e3

After 6.♙h4 the d4-pawn is weakened and it is time for Black to strike at the white centre. There are two ways to do so.

a) 6...♘c6, when 7.♘ge2 g5 8.♙g3 f5!? is interesting.

b) 6...c5, when both 7.d5 ♗a5 and 7.dxc5 ♗a5 seem fine for Black.

6...b6 7.♘f3

After 7.f4 ♘d7 8.♘f3 e6 Black has an extra tempo compared to Turov – Hillarp Persson, (Game 15).

7...e6

Entering the Hippo without a regret in the world.

8.♗d2 ♘d7 9.♙d3

The bishop is more passive here than on c4, as it does nothing to promote the d4-d5 advance. The

advantages compared to ♙c4 are that the e4-pawn is further protected (perhaps this is not entirely necessary) and that the bishop cannot be hit by d6-d5. Still, I do not like the way the white pieces are clustered in the centre: the queen must feel somewhat claustrophobic on d2.

9...♘e7

In Rublevsky – Gofshtein, Frankfurt 2000, Black tried an interesting idea:

9...♙b7 10.0-0 ♘gf6!?

From a Hippo viewpoint this is slightly unorthodox, but considering that Black has won a tempo (h6) and White played the passive ♙d3, there are good reasons not to fear the usual problem with putting the knight on f6: e4-e5. If Black is allowed to continue c7-c5 and enter a Sicilian structure then White's set-up will look really silly.

11.h3 c5! 12.♗fe1!?

I believe this is very cooperative. After 12.e5 dxe5 13.dxe5 ♘d5 14.♙e4 ♘xe5 15.♘xe5 ♙xe5 16.♗fe1 White has compensation for the lost pawn, but no more.

12...cxd4 13.♘xd4

Black has reached a wonderful Sicilian position. The only "but" being that the h6-pawn is hanging after ...0-0. There are many different ways to solve this problem. I like 13...g5 followed by ...0-0 when only Black can be happy.

13...♘c5?!

Black has nothing to gain from exchanging his knight for the bishop on d3, and I think forcing White to play f2-f3 is a very superficial victory.

14.f3 d5!?

This move is the logical follow-up to 13...♘c5.

15.e5 ♘fd7 16.f4 0-0!?

It was time to press the *chaos button* with 16...g5!? when 17.f5 ♘xe5 18.fxc6 0-0 seems fine and 17.fxc5?! hxg5 18.♙xg5 ♗c7 is better for Black.

17.b4 ♘e4?

The last chance was 17...♘xd3 18.cxd3 ♗e7 19.♘ce2 f6 when Black has some counterplay.

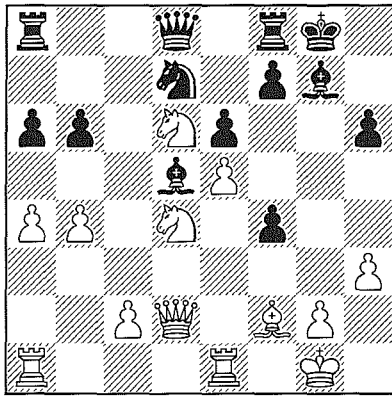


I will give a few more moves just to scare you away from reaching this kind of position.

18. ♖xe4 dxe4 19. ♕f2 g5

Black goes dynamic, but it only makes things worse.

20. ♖xe4 gxf4 21. ♖d6 ♕d5



22. ♖4f5!

Rublevsky is a tough guy who steadily pulls the catch into the boat even though it wriggles.

22... ♕xe5

There is nothing better. 22... ♖xe5 23. ♕h4 ♖d7 24. ♖xg7 ♖xd6 25. ♖h5 ♖g6 26. ♖d4 is also winning for White.

23. ♖xe5 ♖xe5 24. ♖xf4

And Black soon ran out of defensive resources. It is worthwhile to have one more look at 16...g5: It is an important idea, not too uncommon in the French, and definitely in the spirit of the Modern! Now back to our main game.

10.0-0 ♕b7 11. ♖fe1 g5

It is also possible to play 11...c5, though I would generally wait with this kind of action until my king is safe on the kingside.

12.h3

White has indeed developed his pieces harmoniously, but what next? Does this question seem familiar? White will get nowhere until he moves one of the bishops and plays either e4-e5 or d4-d5.

12... ♖g6?!

Now my opponent is allowed to improve his position. Better was 12... ♖f6! intending ♖h5, ♖g6 and ♖h5-f4, alternatively d6-d5. Also 12...c5!? or 12...c6 with the idea b6-b5 are both playable.

13. ♖e2!

The knight had no future on c3 and now c7-c5 can be answered with c2-c3.

13... ♖f6 14. ♖g3 0-0 15.c3

Thorbjørn has managed to pamper the centre and has a slight advantage; it is not easy for Black to open up the queenside.

15... ♖d7 16. ♕c2 ♖ad8 17. ♖ad1 ♖c8!?

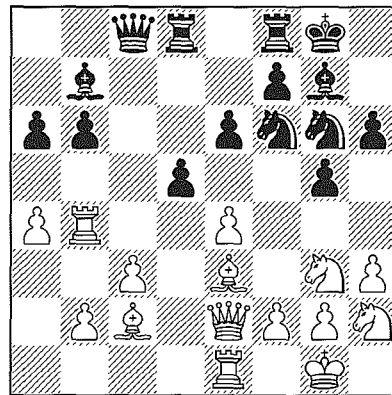
Preparing c7-c5 and starting a flirtation with the a8-square.

18. ♖h2 c5 19. ♖e2 cxd4 20. ♖xd4?!

A pleasant surprise. I intended to meet 20.cxd4 with 20... ♖d7 followed by doubling the rooks on the c-file. Now instead I can open the centre with d6-d5 at my leisure, when my slumbering bishops will come alive.

20...d5 21. ♖b4!

Much better than 21.exd5 ♖xd5 22. ♕xg6 fxe6 23. ♖c4 ♖d7 when my pieces are dominating the board and White's ♖c4 has problems returning to home base unharmed.



21...dxe4!

After 21... ♖f4 22. ♕xf4 gxf4 23.e5 fxe6 24.exf6 gxe6 25. ♖h1 ♕xf6 White can force a draw with 26. ♖g4 ♕g5 27. ♖xg5 ♖hxg5 28. ♖h5 ♖fe8 29. ♖h6.

**22. ♖h5 ♜d5!**

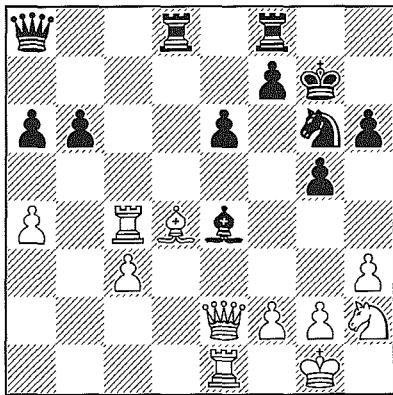
Black should not fear the exchange of the g7-bishop. In this position it just hangs around thinking about this and that. The knights are on the other hand aiming for the f4-square, where one of them will eventually strike with awesome power. After 22... ♜xh5?! 23. ♖xh5 ♙xc3? 24. bxc3 ♗xc3 25. ♖bb1 ♗xc2 26. ♜g4 the Black Emperor needs new clothes.

**23. ♖c4 ♗a8 24. ♜xg7 ♜xg7 25. ♙xe4 ♜xc3?**

I do not know why I passed on 25... ♜df4 26. ♙xf4 ♜xf4 27. ♗f3 ♙xe4 28. ♖cx4 ♖d3 29. ♖le3 ♖fd8 with a nice initiative for Black. Maybe I just felt that my opponent would go for the exchange?

**26. bxc3?**

White is blinded by the material. Better was 26. ♖xc3 ♙xe4 27. f3 ♙c6 28. ♙xb6 when the position is unclear, but possibly holds more dangers for Black.

**26... ♙xe4 27. ♙d4†****27... ♖xd4! 28. ♖xd4 ♙xg2 29. ♗g4 e5 30. ♖b4 a5 31. ♖xb6?**

The last chance to fight on was 31. ♖c4.

**31... ♜f4 32. ♜f3 ♗xf3 33. ♗xf3 ♙xf3 34. ♖xe5 ♜xh3† 35. ♜h2 ♜f4 36. ♖xa5 ♖d8 37. ♖b1 ♖d3 38. c4 ♙e4****0-1**

This game originated in the ♙g5-line and consequently White lost a tempo (♙c1-g5-e3)

compared to a normal Hippo. It is especially worth noting the idea 12...c6 intending b5. It is not common and should not be played if White can either attack the d6-pawn, or play e5 not allowing ♙xf3 before d5.

The next game is a mix of different systems: half Hippo, half Dragon (at least, the White side of a Dragon).

**Game 38****Couso – Åkesson**

Linköping 2001

**1. e4 g6 2. d4 ♙g7 3. ♜c3 d6 4. ♙e3 a6 5. ♗d2 ♜d7! 6. a4 b6!**

This move is absolutely necessary to discourage White from continuing with a4-a5. With the knight still on b8 this might not be such a horrible scenario. Black could continue with ♜c6 and e7-e5 getting a reasonable position. However, with the knight on d7, if White were allowed to continue with a4-a5 before Black has played b7-b6 it would leave Black in a miserable state since ♜d7 blocks the c8-bishop and does nothing to attack the white centre. Now 7.a5 b5 is only in the interests of Black.

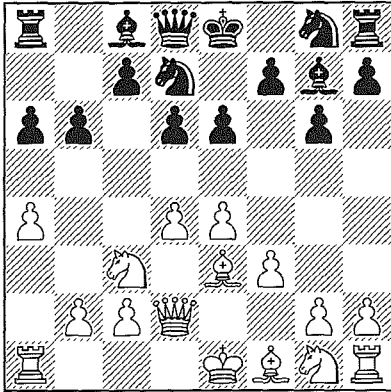
**7. f3!?**

This is rather unusual in combination with a2-a4, giving the position a Pseudo-Hippo character. After the normal 7. ♜f3 Black should play 7...h6! and not 7...e6, when White can force the exchange of dark-squared bishops with 8. ♙g5! ♜e7 9. ♙h6. Usually the more cramped side gains from exchanges, but this is generally not the case in the Hippo. There are two main reasons for this:

First of all, White's bishops and knights are not so easily deployed and tend to obstruct each other. Secondly, Black's pawn structure will look like Swiss cheese if you take away the bishops and knights. One might say there is a kind of symbiosis between the pawns and the pieces in Black's camp. So please, if you are about to exchange a piece early on in the game, I heartily recommend you think about it very carefully.

7...♔b7

If White answers e7-e6 with d4-d5 then this is sometimes not the best square for the bishop. I recommend starting with 7...e6 followed by h6 and ♖e7.



This position has occurred many times. In Lazic – Delchev, Turin 2000, White was in an aggressive mood:

8.h4!? h5!?

This weakens the dark squares on the kingside, but I do not see how White can exploit it. A second possibility is 8...h6 when White can try 9.h5 g5 10.d5 intending to close the kingside after 10...e5 11.g4, but Black should be all right after 10...♖e7. If 11.dxe6 fxe6 then the position is very unclear. I would not mind having such a position with Black.

9.♔g5

I believe the bishop would do a better job on e3, keeping an eye on the d4-square. Another possible continuation is 9.♖h3 ♖e7 10.♖g5 ♔b7 when Black is ready to lash out with d6-d5 followed by c7-c5, achieving an excellent position. After 9.♖ge2 ♖e7 10.♖f4 ♖f6 11.♖d3 c5! Black took a firm hold of the initiative in Schmitt diel – Muse, Recklinghausen 1999.

9...♖e7 10.♖h3 ♔b7 11.♔e2 c5! 12.dxc5?!

After 12.d5 exd5 13.♖xd5 ♔xd5 14.♔xe7 ♗xe7 15.♗xd5 0-0 16.0-0-0 ♔e5 17.f4 ♔d4 Black is fine.

12...dxc5 13.♗d1 ♖e5 14.♗f4 ♗b8 15.0-0 ♖5c6

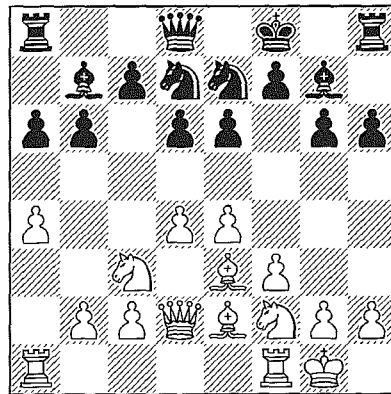
... and Black held a private party on the dark squares.

8.♖h3

There have been quite a few games between strong players continuing ♔d3/♔c4, ♖ge2 and 0-0, just waiting for Black's reaction. I do not think it is necessary to waste time on this. The combination of f3, a4 and ♔c4/d3 cannot be critical and Black should be fine after e7-e6 followed by either d6-d5 and c7-c5, or simply c7-c5. An interesting possibility is 8.♖ge2 e6 9.g4!? when Black should avoid 9...♖gf6 10.♖g3 h5 11.g5 ♖h7 as in Sekulic – Ianov, Bijeljina 2001, when White could have gained a clear advantage with 12.h4. Instead of 9...♖gf6 I recommend 9...h5 when both 10.gxh5 ♗xh5 11.♖g3 ♗h7 and 10.g5 ♖e7 look promising for Black.

8...e6 9.♔e2 h6! 10.♖f2 ♖e7 11.0-0 d5?!

Black is not ready for action yet and should have played 11...♗f8 first:



Now Black is ready to blow up the centre with 12...d5 and 13...c5 when White's cluster of pieces will be unhappy. If you have a silicon friend it will tell you that White has a huge advantage and you might think I am an unreliable Hippo-lover. Just calm down, have a look at the alternatives it is suggesting and then play a few moves against it. The judgement will soon change. (If you

remember the introduction you will of course know all of this already...)

### 12.exd5

This is better than 12.e5 c5 when White's centre crumbles, leading to a position where f3, d2 and e2 look rather pathetic. Black is planning to continue with c7-c5 on the next move and White should find some way to make this less attractive. One way is 12.a5!? intending to weaken Black's control of c5. If Black allows axb6 his position will lose dynamic potential and the a-pawn will be weak. The best chance is 12...b5 when 13.dg4 g5! 14.e5 c5 is critical. White's centre will disappear, but Black's king will be stuck in the middle for some time. That it is a mess is an uninformative expression, but quite called for here.

### 12...exd5 13.fel c5!?

This is premature considering the position of the black king. It was better to hunt down the bishop on e3 with 13...f8! 14.f1 d5 when White must act energetically not to be worse. Instead 13...d5? loses immediately to 14.xa6 xa6 15.g5† winning the queen.

### 14.f1!

Clearing some of the debris from the e-file. White's pieces were treading on each other's toes, but now they have picked up on the rhythm better.

### 14...f8 15.dxc5 bxc5 16.f4

Black is lagging behind in development, has weak central pawns and a king in trouble.

### 16...g8 17.ad1! h7 18.dg4 h5 19.de5 xe5 20.xe5 f6 21.f4

White has a clear advantage, but Ralf is a formidable defender.

### 21...e8 22.e6 d7 23.d6 c8 24.e1 24...d4?!

Black was probably in time trouble. Better is 24...d5! 25.xe8 xe8 26.b6 f7 when Black can hold on longer.

### 25.de4 d5 26.c4?!

Black's position is hopeless after 26.g3! followed by a5 or c2-c4.

### 26...f5 27.xd5?

White can keep a huge advantage with 27.g3! d3 28.dxf6† xf6 29.d3! g5 30.f4 followed by xf6. Now the advantage passes to Black.

### 27...xd5 28.xc5? xe1† 29.xe1 xf3?!

One can almost see the hands flying back and forth over the board. After 29...c4! 30.e4 xc5 31.c6 d5 32.xc4 xc4 33.xa8 d3! White is lost. The rest of the game is really horrible and should not be commented upon.

### 30.de6 e4 31.g3? e8 32.dxd4 c5 33.f2 h4 34.de6? h5? 35.dg7? hxg3 36.hxg3 xg7 37.xf6† h6 38.f4† g5 39.f7?? e3?!

If Black had played 39...xg3 White could have resigned. Instead Black ran out of time.

### 1-0

The f3 set-up does not impress against the Hippo. After 11...f8 the pressure is on White to do something constructive with his central cluster of pathetic pieces.

**Conclusions:** The Hippo is thriving in the current chess climate. The most critical lines are seen in Games 32 and 35, but in both cases Black seems to be doing fine. The most important thing to remember from this chapter is that the general ideas are more important than remembering specific lines. Also, do not be afraid of White's "heavenly" set-up (since nothing happens in Heaven). At the beginning of the chapter I quoted a Talking Heads song. The song continues:

"It's hard to imagine that nothing at all could be so exciting, could be so much fun."

With that utter lack of ironic intentions so typical of me, I say: "Amen".

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## Chapter 5

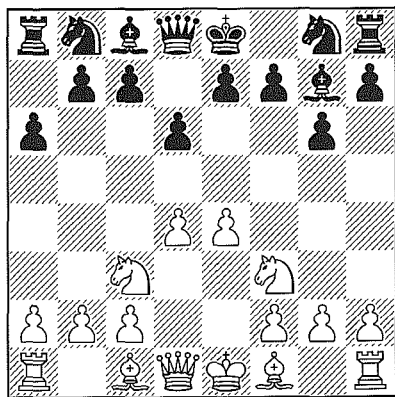
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# Classical Variation

The starting position of the Classical line arises after:

**1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♘g7 3.♗f3 d6 4.♘c3**

4.♙e2 and 4.h3 are featured in Games 41 and 42. Now the most common move is 4...♗f6 transposing to the Pirc, but I have always played: 4...a6



It's the old b7-b5, ♗d7, ♙b7, c7-c5 idea again! The majority of my opponents tend to choose 5.a4 here, when 5...b6 leads to a Hippo set-up. I do not fear those lines in the least, but what if White plays:

**5.♙e2**

This brings us to the Classical variation. In the first two games we look at the position that arises after:

**5...b5**

I have played this position many times so far, but in the future it is possible that I will try the more restrained 5...e6 (see Game 39).

The first game in this chapter deals with what I consider to be the main line, although in this game Black commits a slight inaccuracy by playing 7...c5 rather than 7...♙b7, which would lead to the lines discussed in Game 40 (9.a4). After 8.♙g5 White has the better game with a4 at some stage, but Black should be able limit the damage by playing bxa4. There are few practical examples of this strategy, but I believe it is the best try.

The second game shows a different plan for White who meets c5 with d5 and then continues with a4 to create a square for a knight on c4. Black should be fine here if he reacts correctly, either by exchanging everything that lands on c4, or playing ♗e8 and e6 as quickly as possible.

The third and fourth games show that White can avoid the a6-systems by holding back ♗c3. I recommend a somewhat unusual system against 5.♙e2 in Game 41, since I do not see how White can get a serious – or indeed any – advantage against it. (This seemingly proves that the Classical variation is not one to cause Black a headache.) Game 42 deals with the h3-system, a line that most books on the Modern/Pirc put in a separate chapter. I do not find this line in the least dangerous, and this game plus some general ideas are all you will ever need to counter White's intentions.

### Game 39

**Khalifman – Popov**

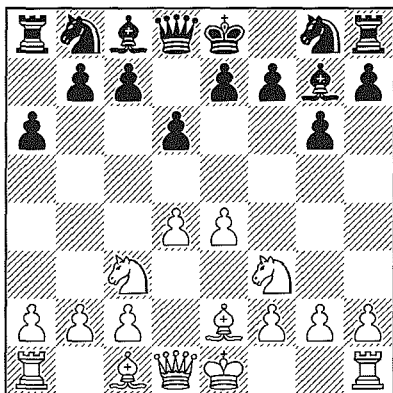
St Petersburg 1997

**1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♘g7**

The game actually started 1.d4 g6 2.e4 ♘g7.

**3.♘c3 d6 4.♗f3 a6 5.♙e2!**

I believe this is more poisonous than forcing a Hippopotamus with 5.a4 b6 6.♗c4. The main reason is that after b7-b5 White actually has something to attack: the b5-pawn.



### 5...b5!?

It might seem daft, but I believe 5...e6! is interesting here, intending b6 later and not allowing White the opportunity to attack the b5-pawn with a2-a4. If White plays slowly with ♗e3 and 0-0 and Black is allowed to play b6, then there is really nothing White can do to avoid a Hippo set-up, where the bishop is quite passive on e2. White has to act immediately to fight for the initiative:

### 6.♗f4

There are many examples of games where White just plays 6.0-0 and ♗e3, which leads to an excellent Hippo set-up for Black after ♖e7, h6, ♘d7 etc. After 6.e5 Black should play 6...dxe5! 7.♘xe5 c5! with mutual chances.

### 6...♘e7

It is a mistake to play 6...♘d7, because after 7.e5 it is difficult to protect the d6-pawn, but 6...h6 intending 7.e5 g5 8.♗g3 ♖e7 9.♘e4 ♘f5 is interesting.

### 7.e5!

This is without question the most dangerous move.

### 7...h6 8.♘e4

Black has no problems after 8.exd6 cxd6 9.♘e4 ♘f5 since 10.g4 is met by 10...d5!

### 8...d5 9.♘g3

and White is slightly better. This all needs testing before a reliable verdict can be given.

### 6.0-0 ♘d7?!

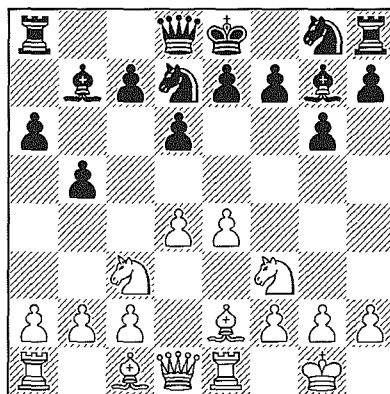
This position is an exception to the “play ♘d7 before ♗b7” rule. 6...♗b7! 7.♗g5 h6 8.♗h4 b4 9.♘d5 a5 intending g5 and e6 looks fine for Black. 7.♗e1 ♘d7! 8.♗f1 c5 9.a4! is analysed in the next game. Here I would say that Black should generally avoid pushing the b-pawn unless it actually wins the e-pawn. There are exceptions - but this is not one of them: 7...b4?! 8.♘d5 and now 8...a5 9.♗c4! the position is unpleasant. After 9...e6?! 10.♘f4 Black is too weak on e6 and after 9...♘d7 10.a3 ♘gf6 11.axb4 ♘xd5 12.exd5 axb4 13.♗g5 White has a huge advantage. Also 8...e6?! 9.♘xb4 a5 10.♘d3, ♗xe4 11.♘g5 ♗b7 12.♗f3 gives White a strong attack.

### 7.♗e1

The main reason for preferring 6...♗b7 is that White can get an advantage here with 7.d5! ♗b7 8.♘d4 ♘gf6 9.a3, when White controls c6 and e6, making it difficult for Black to attack the d5-pawn.

### 7...c5!?

This is playing with fire, and I feel more comfortable with 7...♗b7!



Then White can choose between 8.♗f1! as seen in the next game, and 8.♗g5:  
8... h6 9.♗h4 b4! 10.♘d5

White does not have enough compensation for the pawn after 10. ♖a4 g5 11. ♙g3 ♗xe4, or 10. ♖b1 g5 11. ♙g3 ♗xe4.

10...g5!

White is slightly better after 10... ♗xd5 11. exd5 g5 12. ♙g3 ♖gf6 13. a3! ♖xd5 14. axb4 ♖xb4 15. c3 ♖d5 16. ♖xa6 ♖xa6 17. ♗xa6 0-0, but considering the reduced material, Black should be able to hang on. 10...a5 is also possible.

11. ♙g3 e6!? 12. ♖xb4 a5 13. ♖d3 ♗xe4 and Black seems to be fine, since 14. ♗f1?! ♗xf3 15. ♗xf3 ♗xd4 16. c3 ♗g7 leaves White with too little compensation and 14. c3 ♖gf6 is unclear.

**8. ♙g5 ♗b7 9. a4!**

In the next game we look at the idea ♗f1, d4-d5, but in combination with ♙g5 this is not dangerous:

9. d5?! ♖gf6 10. ♗f1 0-0 11. ♗d2

11. a4 b4 12. ♖b1 h6 gains many tempi compared to the next game.

11... ♗c7 12. ♖ad1 ♖fe8 13. ♗h6 ♖ad8 14. ♗f4 ♖e5!?

I prefer 14...e6! 15. dxe6 fxe6 16. ♗xg7 ♖xg7 intending 17. ♗xd6 (17. ♖xd6 b4 18. ♖b1 e5 is even worse) 17... ♗xd6 18. ♖xd6 b4 19. ♖a4 ♖xe4 and White has nothing better than 20. ♖xd7 ♖xd7 21. ♗d3 ♖d6 22. ♖xc5 ♖de7 when Black is much better.

15. ♖xe5 dxe5 16. ♗h4 ♗xh6 17. ♗xh6 e6 18. ♗g5 ♖xd5?!

A very creative, but mistaken move. After 18... ♖g7 19. d6! ♖xd6 20. ♗xe5 ♖d7 21. ♗xc7 ♖xc7 22. e5 White is clearly better; but 18... ♖d7! 19. dxe6 ♖xe6 is enough to keep White's advantage to a minimum after something like 20. a4 b4 21. ♖d5 ♗xd5 22. exd5 f6.

19. exd5 exd5 20. f4!?

Better is 20. ♖e2 intending ♖e2-g3 and h2-h4-h5. I do not think Black is even close to having enough compensation here.

20...b4 21. ♖xd5?

Why not 21. ♖e2 e4 22. ♖g3? Then White has a strong kingside attack and Black cannot get his centre rolling, since d5-d4 can be met by ♗f1-c4, making things even worse.

21... ♖xd5 22. ♖xd5 ♗xd5 23. ♖xe5 ♖xe5 24. ♗xe5 ♗xe5 25. fxe5 a5

Black had a slight advantage and went on to win in Doncevic – Nunn, Germany 1984.

**9...h6!**

Practice has also seen:

9...cxd4 10. ♖xd4 bxa4 11. ♖d5?!

This is absolutely unnecessary. After the normal 11. ♖xa4 h6 12. ♗h4 ♖gf6 13. ♖b3 White is slightly better.

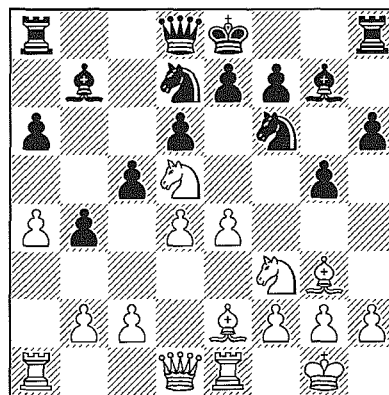
11... ♖gf6 12. ♖xf6 ♖xf6 13. ♗f3 h6 14. e5 ♗xf3 15. ♗xf3 dxe5 16. ♖xe5?

White should minimize the damage with 16. ♗xf6 ♗xf6 17. ♖c6 ♗d2 18. ♖xe5 0-0, when Black is only slightly better.

16...hxg5 17. ♖c6 ♗d6 18. ♖xe7 ♖f8

and Black was winning in Kapnisis – Postny, Murek 1998.

It is possible that Black can disarm some of White's pressure with 9...b4!? 10. ♖d5 h6 11. ♗h4 g5! (11... ♖gf6?! 12. ♖xe7! ♗xe7 13. e5 dxe5 14. dxe5 0-0-0 15. ♗xa6 ♖xe5 16. ♗e2 is awful for Black) 12. ♙g3 ♖gf6.



I believe Black is fine here, but it needs to be tested in practice.

**10. ♗h4**

After 10. ♗e3?! b4 11. ♖d5 e6? 12. ♗f4! exd5 13. exd5! ♖e7 14. ♗xd6 White has a nasty attack. Better is 11... ♖gf6 12. ♖xf6 ♖xf6 13. e5 ♖d5 14. e6 0-0, with a small advantage for Black.

**10...cxd4 11. ♖xd4 ♜b6!?**

This is a unique possibility after the bishop has been forced to h4. There are no examples with 11...bxa4 12. ♖xa4 ♗gf6 13. ♖b3, though this seems like the most logical continuation. White is probably better here, but I will not swear to it.

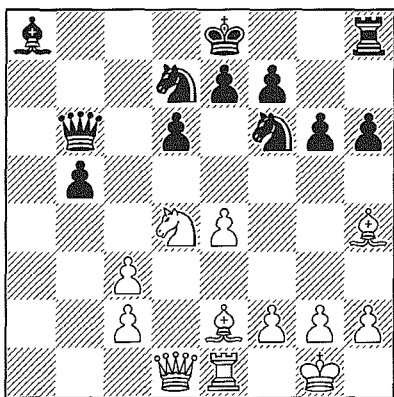
Also, for a moment I thought 11...♗xd4 12. ♜xd4 e5 was strong, but the computer ruined it all with 13. ♜d5!, when 13...♗xd5 14. ♗xd8 is just bad for Black.

**12. ♖b3 ♗xc3!**

This is the only way to justify the queen's b6 expedition. I have included this game in the chapter partly to show how dangerous such a line of action is for Black, and to give you a point of reference. I believe Black would have been fine in this game if he had the opportunity to make two moves in a row, or move the b-pawn one square backwards.

**13. bxc3 ♗gf6**

Black finishes his development, but is left with a weak pawn on b5. Maybe 13...bxa4 14. ♖xa4 ♗gf6 15. ♗d3 a5 16. ♜a1 ♗c6 17. ♖xa5 0-0 is better, though it is up to Black to show compensation for the pawn.

**14. axb5 axb5 15. ♖xa8 ♗xa8 16. ♖d4****16...♗xe4!**

After this move White develops a strong initiative, but the alternatives are not very attractive:

a) 16...g5?! 17. ♗g3 ♖xe4 (17...h5 18. ♗xb5! h4 19. e5! hxg3 20. exf6 gxf2† 21. ♗xf2 e5 22. ♜g4 wins for White.) 18. ♗xb5 ♖xc3? (18...♖xg3? 19. ♜g4 0-0 20. ♜xg3 ♖e5 21. ♜h3 and 18...♗d8 19. ♜a1 ♗b7 20. ♖b1 both lose for Black.) 19. ♜a1! is winning for White (Movsziszian).

b) 16...b4!? 17. cxb4! (17. ♗xf6 ♖xf6 18. ♗b5† ♗f8 19. cxb4? e5 wins a piece) 17...♜xb4 18. c3! ♜b8 (18...♜xc3 19. ♗xf6 exf6 20. ♗b5 is unpleasant for Black.) 19. ♗b5 and the white bishops are very powerful.

**17. ♗xb5 g5 18. ♗g3 e5**

After 18...♗g6 19. ♜e2 e5 20. ♗xe5! it is time to take painkillers.

**19. f3**

White also has a strong initiative after 19. ♗xd7† ♗xd7 20. ♖b3, intending c3-c4-c5.

**19...♗g6**

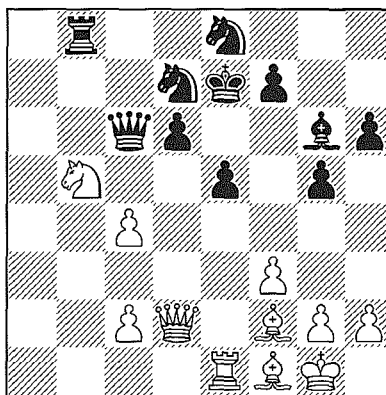
If one feels tired of fighting then 19...exd4 is the solution, allowing 20. ♗xd7† ♗xd7 21. fxe4 dxc3† 22. ♗f2 when Black has no defence against either e5 or ♗d4 on the next move.

**20. ♗f2 ♜c7 21. ♗f1 ♗e7!?**

Movsziszian prefers 21...0-0 22. ♖b5 ♜c6 23. ♖xd6 ♜xc3, but the problem is not 23. ♖xd6, rather 23. ♜xd6, when Black is probably lost in the endgame.

**22. ♜d2 ♖b8 23. ♖b5 ♜c6 24. c4 ♖e8**

White should be better somehow, but there does not seem to be a forced win.





25.h4! f6 26.♔d3!

White forces a weakening of the light squares on the kingside, clearing the way for the queen to g6 or h7.

26...♙xd3 27.♖xd3 gxh4?

A blunder in a clearly worse position. After 27...♙f8!? White gains nothing from 28.♖h7 ♖xc4 29.♖xh6† ♙e7 30.♘d4 ♙d8, but 28.♘a7! ♖c7 29.♖h7 is close to winning.

28.♘d4

Now everything falls into place for White.

28...♖a4 29.♖h7† ♙d8 30.♘e6† ♙c8 31.♖e7 ♙b7 32.♖b1† ♙a8 33.♖xe8!

There is nothing to do against ♘c7 check and mate on the next move so

1-0

#### Game 40

Vernersson – Hillarp Persson

Swedish Team Championship 2003

1.♘f3 g6 2.e4 ♙g7 3.d4 d6 4.♘c3 a6 5.♙e2 ♘d7?!

I wanted to tempt my opponent into playing a2-a4, but this move order has its downside...

6.0-0 b5 7.♖e1

As seen in Game 39, White has the opportunity to play 7.d5! here.

7...♙b7 8.♙f1 c5!?

This is necessary since the alternatives are all bad for Black:

a) 8...e6?! 9.d5 ♘gf6 (9...e5 10.b4! intending a2-a4) 10.♘d4 ♖e7 11.a4 b4 12.♘a2 a5 13.c3 bxc3 14.♘xc3 and Black is too weak on the light squares.

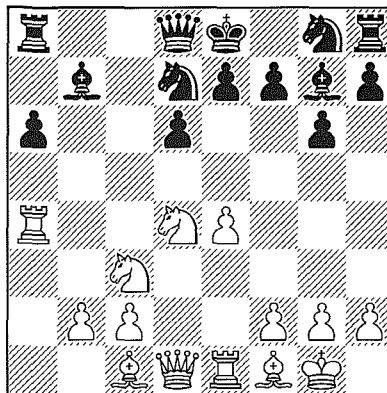
b) 8...e5?! 9.a4 c6 10.d5

c) 8...b4 9.♘a4! ♘gf6 10.e5!

9.d5!?

Another dangerous option is 9.a4! when Black has two possibilities:

a) 9...cxd4 10.♘xd4 bxa4 11.♖xa4



and draw was agreed in Antic – Barlov, Nis 1995. I cannot find any other examples from this position, but it seems that White is slightly better. From the diagram position I have analysed:

11...♘c5

Also possible is 11...♘gf6, though 12.♘b3 a5 13.♙e3 0-0 14.♙d4 ♖c7 15.♘b5 ♖d8 is a bit shaky for Black.

12.♖a3

12.♖b4 ♘f6 13.♘b3 a5 14.♖b5 ♘xb3 15.♖xb7 ♘xc1 16.♙b5† ♙f8 17.♖xc1 ♖c8 and Black has a nice position.

12...♘f6 13.f3 0-0 14.♙c3 ♖c7 15.♖d2 ♖fc8

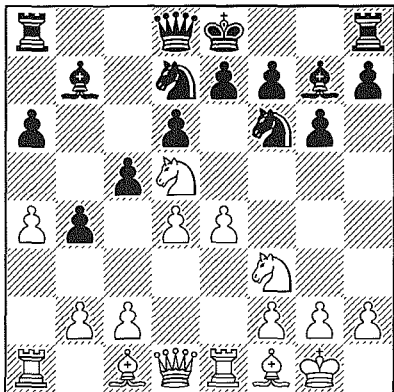
and the position is unclear. Only a practical test can prove if White is better here, but while waiting for that I prefer:

b) 9...b4! 10.♘d5 Now we have:

b1) 10...cxd4?! 11.♘xd4 ♘gf6 12.♘xb4 ♘xe4 (12...♖b6? 13.c3 ♘xc4 14.a5 ♖c7 15.♙xa6 ♙xa6 16.♖xe4 wins for White, and 12...♖c8! is very risky.) 13.c3 and I have not been able to find anything acceptable for Black. White is threatening both ♘bc6 and ♙xa6. Worse is 13.♘dc6?! ♙xc6 14.♘xc6 ♖b6 15.♖xe4 ♖xc6 16.♖c4 ♖b7 when Black is doing fine thanks to his strong centre.

b2) 10...e6? 11.♙f4 is game over, which leads us to the best move.

b3) 10...♘gf6!



11. ♖g5

After 11. ♜xf6† ♜xf6 12. d5 0-0 13. ♗c4 a5 Black should have been able to equalise with ♜f6-d7-b6, ♜c8 and ♗b7-a6 in Geller – Hort, Linares 1983.

11...cxd4?!

This move leaves the b-pawn hanging. Better is 11...0-0 when I do not see an advantage for White after either 12. ♜xf6 ♜xf6 13. d5 h6 or 12. dxc5 dxc5 (12... ♜xc5 13. ♗xf6 ♗xf6 14. ♜xf6† exf6 15. ♜d4 f5 is also promising for Black) 13. ♜d2 ♜xd5 14. exd5 ♜f6. Both lines are perfectly OK for Black.

12. ♜xd4 0-0 13. ♜xb4

and Black never got enough for the pawn in Belikov – Shchekachev, Sochi 1990.

9... ♜gf6 10. a4! b4 11. ♜b1

White's plan is simple, reroute a knight to c4, put the bishop on f4 and – if possible – play a4-a5. In the resulting position Black would be choking.

11...0-0 12. ♜bd2

After 12. a5 Black has time to play ♜c7 and e7-e6 with a good position.

12... ♜c7 13. ♜c4 a5!?

I also thought about 13... ♜fe8, but decided that my position would be positionally suspect after 14. a5. Now I have looked at this position for some hours and I am still not sure if Black can get

away with 14...h6 intending e7-e6. Another idea is to play a similar idea as in the text:

14... ♜ad8 15. h3

15. ♗f4 ♜h5 16. ♗e3 ♜hf6 17. ♗d3 h6 18. ♜d2 ♜h7 followed by e7-e6 seems OK for Black.

15...e6!?

15... ♜h5 16. ♜d3! h6 17. g4 ♜hf6 18. ♗f4 is better for White.

16. dxc6 ♜xc6 17. ♜g5 ♜xe4! 18. ♜xe4 ♜xe4 19. f3

Black has the initiative after 19. ♗f4 ♜e5 20. f3 ♜xc4 21. ♗xc4 ♗d4†.

19...d5 20. fxe4 dxc4 21. ♗xc4 ♗d4†

and Black is much better off than in the main game. ♜ad8 is a more important move than a6-a5 in this line.

14. ♜b1!?

Vernersson would like his pawn on b2. to be defended in case I challenge the c4-knight with ♗a6 and ♜b6.

14... ♜fe8?

I was dreaming of e7-e6, but then it would have been better not to waste a tempo with 13...a5. The logical continuation was 14... ♗a6, intending 15. ♗f4 ♜h5 16. ♗g5 ♜fe8 with a balanced position.

Clearly worse is 14... ♜b6 15. ♜xb6 ♜xb6 16. ♗f4, when White gains the advantage by going ♜f3-d2-c4. The assessment depends, over and over again, on who gets control over c4.

15. h3 e6!?

This does not work out well, so maybe it was better to stop White from going ♗f4 with 15... ♜h5. Still, after 16. g4 ♜hf6 17. ♗f4 ♜xe4 18. ♜xe4 ♜f6 19. ♜e1 ♜xd5 20. ♗g3 ♜ad8 Black has some compensation for the piece, though probably not enough.

16. dxc6!

White does not fall for 16. ♗f4?! exd5 17. ♜xd6 ♜xe4 18. ♜xe4 ♜xf4 19. ♜xf6† ♜xf6, when the bishop pair and the strong centre give Black good compensation.

16... ♜xc6 17. ♜g5 ♜xe4

This was all according to my plan. Sadly my plan was not that great...

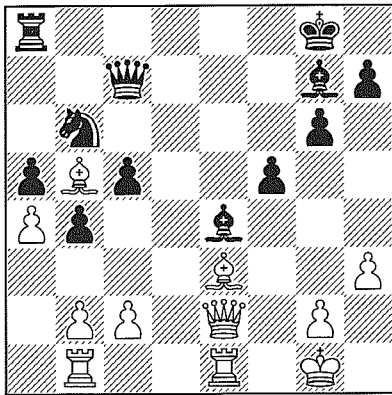
18. ♜xe4 ♜xe4 19. f3!?

19. ♖f4! is stronger, intending 19... ♗d4 20. ♗e3 ♗g7 21. f3 d5 22. fxe4 dxc4 23. ♗xc4 ♖b6 24. ♗b5 ♗xe4 25. ♖e2 winning a tempo compared to the game.

19...d5 20.fxe4 dxc4 21. ♗xc4 ♖b6! 22. ♗b5

After 22. ♗f1 ♖xa4 Black is happy.

22...f5! 23. ♗e3 ♗xe4 24. ♖e2



24...b3?

After this move I am facing an uphill struggle in the endgame. Much better was 24... ♗d8! 25. ♗bd1 (25. ♖f2 b3! 26. cxb3 ♗xb1 27. ♗xb1 ♗d4 is fine for Black) 25... ♗xb2 26. ♗xd8† ♖xd8 27. ♗d1 ♗d4 28. ♗xd4 cxd4, when Black is doing well thanks to the weak c2-pawn. If it falls the black b-pawn will be extremely dangerous.

25.cxb3 ♗xb1 26. ♗xb1 ♖h8?!

It was better to play 26... ♖e5, though in the end the weaknesses on a5 and c5 will tell. I was more bothered by my passive knight and planned to activate it at the price of a pawn.

27. ♖f2 ♖d5 28. ♗xc5 ♖f6 29. ♗d4 ♖e4 30. ♖e3 ♗d8 31. ♗xg7† ♖xg7 32. ♗c1 ♖e5 33. ♗c6 ♗d4 34. ♗xe4 f4?

Black has some chances to hold the game after 34... fxe4 35. ♗e1 ♖d5.

35. ♖c3?

Neither of us spotted 35. ♗c7† ♖h6? (35... ♖g8 36. ♖c3 ♗xe4 37. ♗c5 ♗e1† 38. ♖h2 ♖xc3 39. bxc3 ♗b1 40. ♗b5 is hopeless for Black.) 36. ♗xh7† ♖xh7 37. ♗xg6† winning on the spot.

35... ♖xe4 36. ♗e1

Vernersson does not fall for my only trap: 36. ♗d1 ♖e3† 37. ♖xe3 ♗xd1†, when I would have won. Now it is the other way around.

36... ♖d3 37. ♖xa5 ♖h6 38. ♖c3 ♖g5 39. a5 ♖h4 40. ♖xd3 ♗xd3 41. a6 ♗d7 42. ♗a1 ♗a7 43. b4

and I felt this was a good time to resign.

1-0

The next time I encounter this variation I will probably go for 13... ♗fe8 followed by ♗ad8 and e6 or 14... ♗a6, which looks fine for Black.

The last two games in this chapter are concerned with move orders where White refrains from ♖c3:

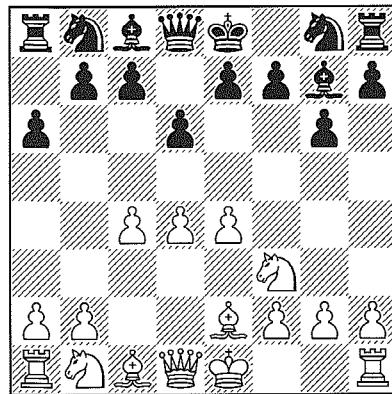
### Game 41

#### Zontakh – Jenetl

Krasnodar 2000

1. e4 g6 2. d4 ♗g7 3. ♖f3 d6 4. ♗e2!?

This is a very tricky move order White can use to avoid the a6-lines. Now 4...a6?! 5. c4



clearly favours White as the a6-move does not fit in with this King's Indian structure and White has every reason to be happy.

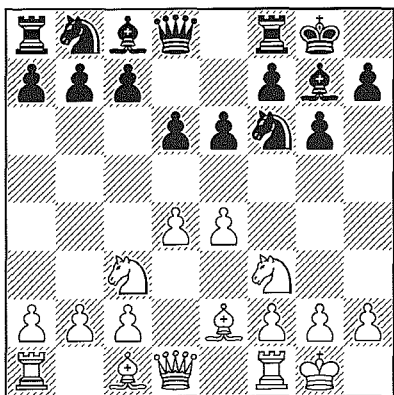
4... ♖f6!

This is the best move, transposing into the Classical Pirc; a rather toothless line for White where Black can choose between many good lines...

### 5.♖c3 0-0 6.0-0

The most popular moves in this position are 6...♗g4 and 6...c6. Both options are OK for Black, but also demand a lot of theoretical knowledge, especially if Black does not want to spend the next forty moves or so defending a slightly worse position. In light of this I recommend a quite new and more "Modern" approach.

### 6...e6!?



It took a few years before I started taking this move seriously. My first worry was: Can White take advantage of the weakened dark squares in my position? Now that I have played it a few times myself, I find the answer to this question closer to *no than yes*.

### 7.h3

White has many other options:

a) After 7.a4, Black can choose between 7...a5 followed by ♖c6 and e6-e5, or 7...♖c6!? intending 8.a5 ♗b8 and then b7-b6.

b) In Guernsey 2004, Anthony Corkett played 7.♗e1 against me. The game continued:

7...♖c6 8.♗f1 h6 9.a3?! a6 10.♗b1!?

The last two moves do nothing to improve White's position. I could have played e6-e5 here, with immediate equality, but I wanted more.

10...b6! 11.♗d3 ♗b7 12.b4?! e5! 13.d5 ♖e7 14.♖d1 b5 15.♖e3 c6

I have the initiative, but my opponent defends well and I have to settle for a small advantage.

16.dxc6 ♗xc6 17.♖d2 d5 18.exd5 ♖fxd5 19.♖xd5 ♖xd5 20.♖e4 ♗e8 21.♗h3 f5!?

This is a mistake resulting in an unclear position. Better was 21...♖f4, which would have kept some advantage for me.

c) 7.♗e3 h6!

Though after 7...b6 8.♗d2 (8.e5 dxe5 9.♖xe5 ♗b7 is very slightly better for White) 8...♗b7 White has nothing better than 9.e5 dxe5 10.♖xe5 when 10...♖bd7 is about level.

8.h3 ♖c6 9.♗d2 ♖h7 10.♗ad1

10.♖h2?! e5! illustrates well the idea behind Black's set-up: waiting with e6-e5 until White does something strange (or plays ♗h6).

10...♖e7!

Intending to meet e5 with ♖fd5.

11.♗fe1 b6 12.e5 dxe5!?

This exchange is fine in positions where a4 and a6 have been played and Black has not wasted time on ♖g8-h7 and ♖c6-e7. Here, however, Black is clearly behind in development and should of course play 12...♖fd5! 13.♖xd5 ♖xd5 with an excellent position.

13.dxe5 ♗xd2 14.♗xd2!?

Missing an opportunity to take the initiative with 14.♗xd2!. After 14...♖d7 15.♗f4 a6 16.♗d2 ♖c6 17.♗f1 Black is lacking an active plan.

14...♖fd5 15.♖xd5 ♖xd5

and a draw was agreed in Amrein – Belotelov, Harkany 2000.

d) 7.e5!? dxe5 8.dxe5 ♗xd1! 9.♗xd1 ♖fd7 10.♖b5?

After 10.♗f4 a6! 11.♗f1 ♖c6 12.♗e1 h6 13.h4 b5 both sides have chances. (Compare this to Amrein – Belotelov above, where Black was far behind had White played 14.♗xd2 – here Black has more space and will have no problem connecting the rooks, leaving White with a weak pawn on e5.)

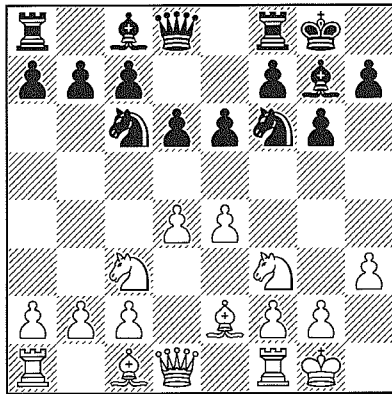
10...a6 11.♖bd4

A sad but necessary retreat since after 11.♖xc7?! ♗a7 White has no defence against b7-b6 winning the knight.

11...♖xe5 12.♗f4 ♖bd7

and Black was winning in Yermolinsky – Benjamin, USA (ch) 1998.

7...♖c6



**8.♙g5**

The Swedish grandmaster Evgeny Agrest is a brilliant champion of the 6...e6 line and there is much to be learnt from his games:

8.♞e1 b6 9.♙f4 ♘b7 10.d5 exd5 11.exd5 ♘e7 12.♙c4 a6 13.a4 ♞d7 14.♞d2 ♞f8 15.♞ad1 ♘f5 16.♞d3 ♞xe1† 17.♞xe1 ♘e7

The position is equal, but because there are so many pieces left, both sides can play ambitiously.

18.♘d2! ♖f8

18...c6 19.dxc6 ♞xc6 is an interesting suggestion from the silicon bug.

19.g4?!

This is ambitious, but also seriously weakens the kingside. Better was 19.♘de4 ♘xc4 20.♞xc4 with a slight advantage for White.

19...♞e8 20.f3 ♞c8 21.♘f1 ♞a8 22.♞d1 ♘d7

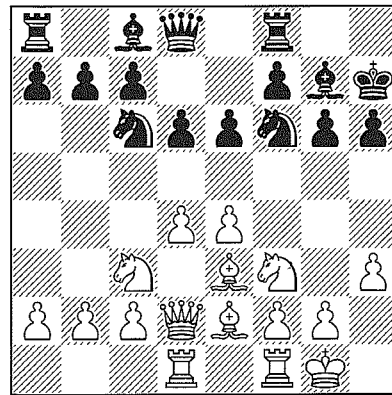
The thematic 22...b5! 23.axb5 axb5 also looks strong after both 24.♙xb5 ♘fxd5 and 24.♘xb5 ♘fxd5 25.♙g3 ♞b8. Evgeny prefers a calmer approach.

23.♞d2 ♘g8 24.♘g3 ♞d8 25.♖g2 h6 26.♘ge4 ♞e7 27.♙g3 ♘e5 28.♙e2 f5 29.♘f2 ♘f6 30.f4 ♘ed7 31.♙f3 ♘c5 32.♙h4 ♞f7 33.b4 ♘fe4 34.♙xe4 ♘xe4 35.♘fxe4 fxe4 36.♞e3 ♖g8 37.♙e1 ♖h7 38.♖g3 ♙xc3 39.♙xc3 ♙xd5 40.a5

41.bxa5 ♞f8 42.♞b1 ♙a8 43.♙a1 ♞c4 44.♞d1 ♙b7 45.♙c3 ♙c6 46.♞b1 ♖g8 47.♞d4 ♞xd4 48.♙xd4 ♙b5 49.♞e1 ♞e8 50.f5 ♖f7 51.♙e3 gxf5 52.gxf5 ♙d7 53.♙xh6 ♙xf5

and Black went on to win in Brynell – Agrest, Örebro 2000.

Another critical position for this line arises after 8.♙e3 h6 9.♞d2 ♖h7 10.♞ad1



Now Black should avoid 10...b6 11.e5 dxe5 12.♘xe5 ♙b7 13.♙f3 ♘a5 14.♞e2 when White has some pressure.

Better is 10...♘e7!, intending 11.♘h2 b6 12.f4 ♙b7 13.♙f3 d5 14.e5 ♘d7 followed by c7-c5 and f7-f6 with an unclear position.

**8...h6 9.♙e3 b6 10.♞d2**

Practice has also seen:

10.♞c1 ♖h7 11.♞d1 ♞e7!

A good flexible move, that steps away from all sorts of tricks on the d-file.

12.a4 ♙b7 13.♙f1 ♞fe8 14.♞d2 ♞f8!?

Black is teasing White: “You can’t get to me!”

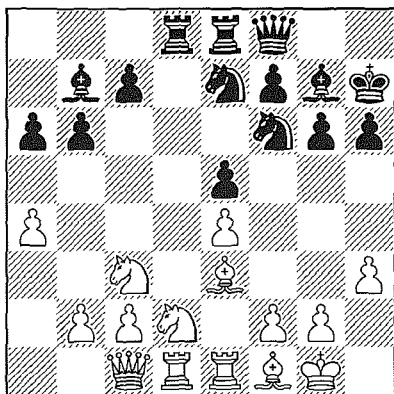
15.♞e1 a6 16.♞ad1 ♞ad8 17.♞c1

With this move White finishes one of the least impressive manoeuvres I have seen: ♞d1-c1-d2-c1, ♞f1-d1-e1, ♞a1-d1.

17...♘e7 18.♘d2 e5!?

Why in such a hurry? I prefer 18...♘d7 and then e6-e5. Now White finds a good idea with 20.a5 leading to a complicated position.

19.dxe5 dxe5



20.a5! b5 21.♙c5 ♘d7 22.♘b3 ♘xc5 23.♘xc5 ♙c8 24.♞e3 ♞xd1 25.♞xd1 ♘c6 26.♘d5 ♞d8 27.♞b1

After 27.♘d3 f5! 28.♘xc7 fxe4 29.♞xe4 ♞d6! White has no defence against ♞d8 picking up the knight on c7.

27...♘d4 28.♞c3 ♞d6 29.b4 h5 30.♞b2 ♘e6 31.♘xe6 ♙xe6 32.c4 c6 33.♘e3 ♙h6

and Black held the advantage in the endgame in Roos – Shchekachev, Metz 2000.

**10...♗h7 11.♞ad1 ♘e7**

After 11...♙b7! Black can meet 12.♘h2 with 12...e5 and 12.e5 with 12...dxe5 13.dxe5 ♞xd2 14.♞xd2 ♘d5 15.♘d5 exd5 16.♞xd5 (Black is fine after 16.♙f4 ♘d8 intending ♘d8-e6) 16...♘xe5 17.♞xe5 ♙xf3 18.♙xf3 ♙xe5 19.♙xa8 ♞xa8 20.b3 when the position is equal.

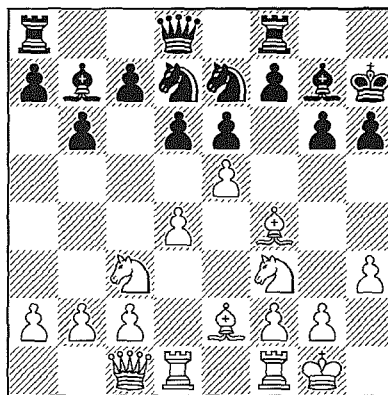
**12.♞c1**

An interesting idea is 12.♘h2!? (This would not be possible if Black had played 11...♙b7.) 12...♙b7 13.f3! intending ♘h2-g4 (13.♘g4 ♘fg8 14.f3 f5 15.♘f2 ♘f6 and Black is fine). After 13...♘h5 14.♞e1 f5 15.g4 ♘f6 16.♙d3 (However I am more worried about 16.g5 hxg5 17.♙xg5 intending e4-e5.) 16...a6 17.♞h4 White had the initiative in Garbett – Benjamin, Hawaii 1998, though Black managed to win in the end. I do not like this line for Black and would rather try 11...♙b7, or something other than 13...♘h5.

**12...♙b7 13.e5 ♘d7!**

13...♘fd5 14.♘xd5 ♘xd5 15.♙d2 is a bit better for White.

**14.♙f4**



**14...♙xf3!? 15.♙xf3 d5**

I have advocated this idea in the Hippopotamus chapter and I like it here too. It will take White a long time to coordinate an attack against the black king and meanwhile Black starts rolling his queenside pawns.

**16.♘e2 c5 17.c3 b5 18.♘g3 cxd4?!**

It is premature to release the tension in the centre. Better was either 18...♞c8 19.♞b1 ♘g8 or 18...b4, when White still would be guessing about how Black will play his cards.

**19.cxd4 ♞a5 20.♞b1 ♞ac8 21.♙e2 ♘b6 22.h4!**

White gets nowhere with 22.♘h5 after 22...♙h8 when 23.♘f6? ♙xf6 24.exf6 ♘g8 25.♙e5 ♘d7 is even better for Black.

**22...♘g8 23.h5 ♘c4 24.♙c1 b4 25.♙d3 ♘f5 26.♘e2 ♞b6 27.♙xf5?!**

A horrible positional blunder! Did White touch the piece by mistake? Instead, after 27.hxg6 fxg6 28.♙xf5 gxf5 29.♞d3 (not 28...♞xf5? 29.g4) Black's kingside would have been very vulnerable to an attack on the h-file.

**27...gxf5**

In this position it is hard for White to open up files against the black king. The h5-pawn is doing more to defend Black than it does to attack him.

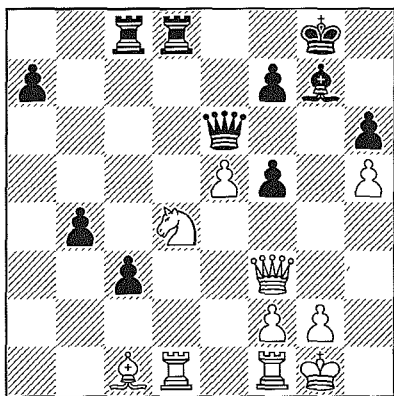
28.♖d3 ♖a6 29.b3?!

With this move the game enters a complicated stage, where I cannot tell what is up and what is down.

29...♖xa2 30.bxc4 dxc4 31.♖f3 ♖fd8

It seems to me that Black has excellent compensation for the piece here. It all boils down to one thing: Can White use his extra piece to threaten the black king? If not, then Black is at least equal.

32.d5 c3 33.dxe6 ♖xe6 34.♘d4



34...♖xd4!

With such strong passed pawns Black is not fussy about material. ♘d4 is White's most active piece and so it has to go!

35.♖xd4 b3 36.♖b7

Black has enough compensation for the rook after 36.♖d6 ♖xe5 37.♖b7 ♖e8 38.♖d7 ♖e6.

36...♙xe5 37.♖e1?! b2 38.♙xb2 cxb2 39.♖dd1 ♖c7 40.♖b5 ♖e7 41.f4 ♙d4† 42.♙f1 ♙e3 43.♖xb2 ♖c4† 44.♖e2 ♖xf4† 45.♖f3 ♖c4† 46.♖e2

The initiative is on Black's side after 46.♖e2 ♖h4 47.♖f3 ♖h1† 48.♙e2 ♙b6† 49.♙d3 ♖xe1 50.♖g3† ♙h7 51.♖xe1 ♖xh5.

46...♙b6 47.g3?!

And here (according to my database) the game ended, possibly because 47...♖e3 48.♖g2 (48.♖f2 ♖a3 49.♖f4 ♖c6 or 49.♖g2 ♖g4 is equally bad) 48...♙g7 49.♖f2 ♖d3 wins for Black. Instead of

47.g3 White could have fought on with 47.♖d3, intending 47...♖h4 48.♖h3! with chances for a draw.

0-1

I spent a year brooding over 6...e6 before I actually dared to play it. So far, I have seen nothing that would stop me from repeating the experience.

The next game features one of the old main lines of the Pirc:

### Game 42

Ilincic – Todorcevic

Ulcinj 1997

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♙g7 3.♘f3 d6 4.h3?!

This puts Black in the same dilemma as in the previous game.

4...♘f6!

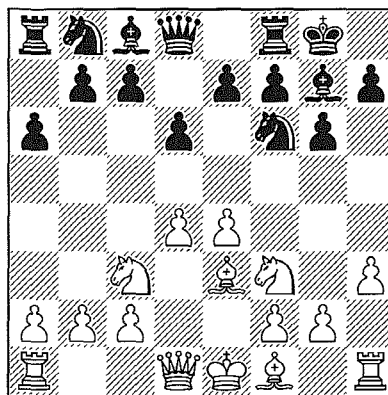
There is no good way to avoid this move.

5.♘c3

The actual move order of this game was 1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♘c3 g6 4.♘f3 ♙g7 5.h3. Now we have reached a main line of the h3-Pirc.

5...0-0 6.♙e3 a6!

The combination of ♘f6 and a6 is not common, but here White has spent an important tempo on h3, which gives Black some extra time to go for the a6+b5 set-up.



**7.a4**

White has two additional alternatives:

a) 7.♔c4 b5 8.♙b3 b4 9.♗e2 (I prefer Black after 9.♗d5 ♗xe4 10.♗xb4 ♙b7) 9...e6 10.♗g3 ♙b7 11.♚d3 a5 and Black has an excellent position.

b) 7.♙d3!? b5!? 8.e5

8.0-0 ♙b7 9.b4!? ♗c6!? (9...♗bd7 10.a4 c5!?, intending 11.bxc5 b4, seems unclear.) 10.♙b1 e5 11.dxe5 (11.d5 ♗e7 12.a4 c6 13.dxc6 ♙xc6 14.axb5 axb5 15.♚e2 ♙a3 is unclear) 11...♗xe5 12.♗xe5 and a draw was agreed in Dvoirys – Chernin, Skelleftea 2000.

8...dxe5

Also possible is 8...♗fd7 9.e6 fxe6 10.h4 ♗f6 when White has some compensation.

9.dxe5 ♗d5 10.♗xd5

After 10.♙e4 ♗xe3 11.fxe3 c6 White runs into a blind alley.

10...♚xd5 11.♚e2 ♙b7 12.c4?!

This idea proves to be mistaken. Better was 12.0-0 though I prefer Black after 12...♗d7.

12...bxc4 13.♙xc4 ♚a5† 14.♙d2 ♙xf3 15.♙xa5 ♙xe2 16.♙xe2 ♗c6 17.♙d2 ♗d4 18.♙c1 ♙xe5 – and Black went on to win in Kveinys – Ponomariov, Lubniewice 1998.

**7...b6**

This position often arises via a different move order: 1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♙g7 3.♗c3 d6 4.♙e3 a6 5.a4 ♗f6 6.♗f3 0-0 7.h3 b6

**8.♙c4**

The most aggressive move. White can also try:

8.♙d3 ♙b7 9.0-0

After 9.e5 ♗fd7! White can try 10.exd6 cxd6 11.d5, with a complicated position.

9...e6 10.♙e1 h6 11.e5 dxe5

If Black is playing for a win it is worth trying 11...♗fd7.

12.♗xe5

This idea is generally stronger if White develops the bishop to c4 or e2 instead of d3.

12...♗c6 13.♚d2 ♗h7 14.f4?!

14.♗xc6 ♙xc6 15.♙f4 ♗d5 16.♙e5 ♚h4 is approximately level.

14...♗xd4 15.♙ad1

Black is clearly better after 15.♙xg6† fvg6 16.♙xd4 ♗h5 17.♗e2 g5! 18.♙ad1 gxf4.

15...♗f5

and White was just a pawn down in Boensch – Gallagher, Germany 2000.

**8...e6**

In general ♙d3 and ♙e2 can be met by ♗bd7 followed by e5, with a good game for Black. But after 8.♙c4 White is threatening 9.e5 followed by e6, so 8...e6 is necessary.

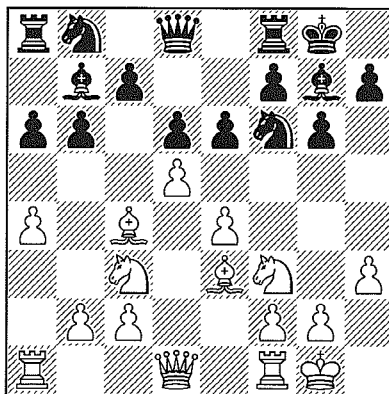
**9.0-0**

After 9.e5 dxe5 10.♗xe5 ♙b7 11.0-0 ♗c6 12.♗xc6 ♙xc6 13.♚e2 ♚c8 14.♙ad1 ♚b7 15.f3 ♙fe8 Mikhail Gurevich, as Black against El Taher in Manila 1992, showed that it is possible to win even such a level position.

A third possibility was seen in Brynell – Hillarp Persson, Malmo 1996: 9.d5?! It is better to put d4-d5 on ice until Black is committed to ♙b7. 9...e5 10.0-0 ♗h5 11.♚d2 ♗d7 12.g4!? ♚f6 13.♗h2 ♗f4 and the position was unclear.

**9...♙b7**

After 9...d5!? White should play 10.♙d3! (10.exd5 exd5 11.♙d3 ♗c6 is fine for Black) 10...dxe4 11.♗xe4 ♙b7 12.♗xf6† ♙xf6 13.c3 with a slight advantage.

**10.d5****10...e5!?**

A solid option is:

10...exd5 11.exd5 ♙e8



Black's back ranks are slightly crowded, but practice seems to show that there is just enough space for everyone. It is important to keep the knight on b8 for the moment and not play 11...♖bd7 when 12.♗d4 gives White control of the c6-square.

12.♞e1 ♗bd7 13.♙d4

Now 13.♗d4 can be met by 13...♗e4, with approximate equality.

13...♞xe1† 14.♞xe1 ♞f8

An improvement over 14...♗c5 15.b4 ♗cd7 16.a5 b5 17.♙b3 ♞f8 18.♞d2, with a balanced position in Istratescu – Chernin, Moscow 1994. 15.♞f1 ♗c5 16.♞d1 ♞e8 17.b3 ♞d7 18.♗e1 h6 19.♗d3 ♞f5 20.♗b4 a5 21.♗d3 ♞e8 22.♙b5 ♞e7

and Black had a firm grip on the initiative in Istratescu – Slobodjan, Halle 1995. White has trouble defending the d-pawn and Black can start a minority attack on the kingside.

11.♞d2!?

White would like to stop Black from going ♗f6-h5-f4 and be able to meet f7-f5 with exf5 followed by f2-f4. After 11.♗e1 ♗bd7 12.♗d3 Black can play either 12...♗c5! when 13.♗xc5 dxc5 intending ♗f6-e8-d6 is interesting, or 12...♗h5 intending ♞e8 and f7-f5.

11...♗bd7!

Black should not be in too much of a hurry with f7-f5. 11...♗e8 12.♗h2 f5 13.exf5 gxf5 14.f4 ♗d7 15.♗f3 and Black is clearly worse.

12.♙g5!?

After 12.♗h2 ♗c5 (12...♗h5 13.♙e2 and the knight has to go back) 13.f3 ♗h5 the position is unclear.

12...♞e8 13.♞fe1

After 13.♞ae1 ♗h8 14.♗h2 Black can try a different approach from the text. 14...♗h5 (14...♗g8 15.b4 f5 16.exf5 gxf5 17.f4 ♞g6 18.♗f3 h6 19.♙h4 ♞ae8 and White is better placed than in the main game. The rook is better on e1 than a3.) 15.♙e2 f5! 16.♙xh5 gxh5 17.exf5 ♞xf5 18.f4 h6 It seems Black is fine here, for instance 19.♞d3 ♞g6 20.g4 hxg4 21.hxg4 exf4 22.♙xh6 ♞g8 with unclear complications.

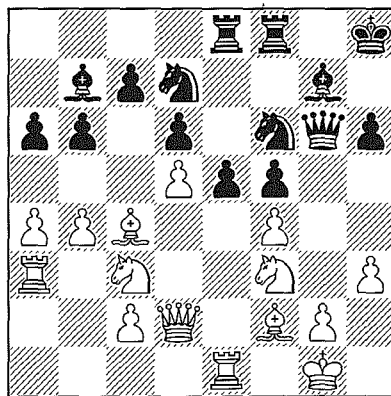
13...♗h8 14.♗h2 ♗g8 15.♞a3 f5 16.exf5 gxf5 17.f4 ♞g6 18.♗f3

Black has a definite initiative here, just enough to compensate for an inferior pawn structure. The initiative must be fed constantly or transformed into something else (see move 33).

18...h6 19.♙h4 ♞ae8

Black should not play e5-e4 as it would rob his position of all dynamism: 19...e4? 20.♗d4 ♙xd4† 21.♞xd4† ♗gf6 22.♗d1 ♗h7 23.♗e3 and – having safely blockaded the e3 square – White continues ♙e2, c2-c4, ♗f2, ♞g1, g2-g4 and wins. A slight exaggeration? Yes, but it is not easy for Black to put up resistance when the only active plan remaining includes b6-b5.

20.b4 ♗gf6 21.♙f2



21...♞h7

To keep the initiative Black must combine pressure down the g-file with an attack on the d5-pawn. Correct was therefore 21...♞f7! 22.♗h4 exf4 23.♞xe8 ♞xe8 24.♞xf4 ♗e5 25.♙e2 ♙xd5 and Black is far better coordinated than White.

22.♗h4 exf4 23.♞xf4 ♗e5

Better was 23...♞xe1†! 24.♙e1 ♗e5 25.♙e2 ♞g8 when ...♗xd5 is one of those threats one can do nothing about. Now instead White gets off the hook.

24.♙a2 ♗h5 25.♞d2 ♙f6 26.♗e2 ♙g5

The position is highly unclear after 26...♞g8 27.♗d4 f4 28.♞f1 ♙c8 29.♗e6 ♞e7.

27. ♖d1 ♜f6 28. ♜f3 ♜e4 29. ♙d4 ♙f6 30. ♜f4 ♙g8 31. ♙ae3?!

It was important to exchange the strong knight on e4 with 31. ♜d2. Black now gets a second chance to gain the advantage...

31... ♗g7 32. c3 ♗g3?

...but does not take it. After 32... ♜xf3† 33. ♗xf3 ♙xd4 34. cxd4 ♗xd4 35. ♜e6 ♗e5 White would not have had sufficient compensation for the pawn.

33. ♜xe5?

White could have played 33. ♗f1! when Black's initiative would have come to an end, leaving White with the better structure and clearly better chances.

33... ♗f2† 34. ♜h1 ♗xf4 35. ♜d3 ♗g5 36. ♙xf6† ♜xf6 37. ♗f3?!

White needs his rooks to mix things up, so 37. ♗3e2 was better.

37... ♗xe3 38. ♗xe3 ♙xd5?

Black could have gained a decisive advantage with 38... ♜xd5! 39. ♗e1 ♜xb4 40. ♗xb7 ♜xa2 when White would have to fight on two pawns down.

39. ♙xd5 ♜xd5 40. ♗e2 ♜xc3 41. ♗c2 ♜e4 42. ♗xc7

White has enough counterplay to make Black lose the thread.

42... ♗d2 43. ♜f4?

43. ♜h2 was necessary, holding on to the b-pawn.

43... ♗xb4! 44. ♜h2 ♗e1?!

Black could have kept winning chances with 44... ♗d4! 45. ♗h5 ♗f6 46. ♗f7 ♗g5 47. ♗xf5 ♗xh5 48. ♗xh5 ♜g7.

45. ♜h5 ♗f8 46. ♜f4 ♗g8 47. ♜h5 ♗f8

After 47... ♗d2 48. ♗e7! ♗g5 49. ♗f7 the position is far from clear.

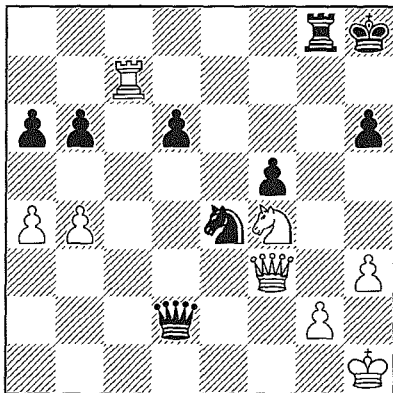
48. ♜f4

½-½

**Conclusions:** The Classical system is not the most dangerous for Black, but the move orders are very important. ♙b7 must be played before ♜d7 and c5, or White will have the advantage. Variation b3) in the comment to move 9 in Game 40 is critical for the whole line, though I believe Black should be all right there too.

For those who think that this is too fine a line to walk, I recommend either to do some homework on 5...e6, or play the solid set-up featured in Game 41. 6...e6 has been tested for a few years now and seems like the most reliable alternative.

Finally, the complications in Game 42 might seem too much for a human, but there is nothing to stop you from playing 10...exd5 with a solid position. I have never feared the Classical and I have not encountered any reasons for changing my mind while writing this chapter.



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## Chapter 6

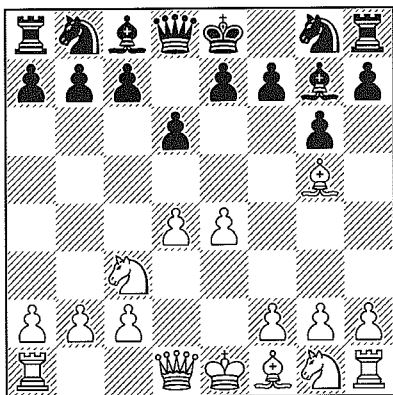
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# g5 – Into midair

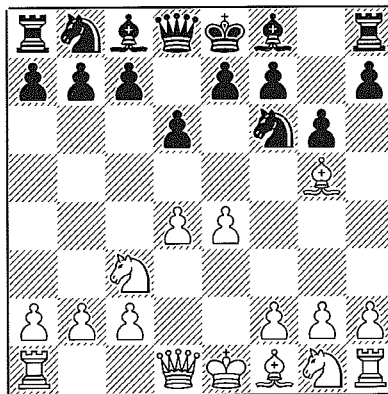
This line is one of the most poisonous against the Pirc move order, but against the Modern it loses some of its venom:

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♖g7 3.♗c3 d6 4.♖g5

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♘f6 3.♗c3 g6 4.♖g5



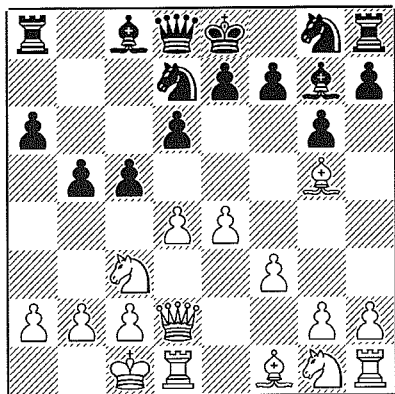
Modern



Pirc

As can be seen from the Diagram 2 on the right, 4.♖g5 hits the knight on f6 in the Pirc, while in the Modern 4.♖g5 only invites a staring contest with the e7-pawn. The bishop *is* more active on g5 than on e3 in some vague sense, and sometimes it will be easier to defend the e4-pawn later with ♖e1, but I believe the bishop is still better off on e3.

Some of the White players who launch the c1-bishop to g5 tend to be quite aggressive, verging on impatient. The attitude is “I am going to play ♗d2 and 0-0-0 and then I am going to run you over on the kingside with h4-h5, or in the centre with e4-e5.” Wait! Hello there! I recognize that. Is that not the same stunt White tries to pull in the Flexible Dragon Variation? The answer is yes, but here there is even less to be afraid of. The reason is that it is easier for Black to attack d4 in the ♖g5-line compared to the ♖e3-lines: The bishop does not support d4 from g5 and Black can achieve c5 will much less trouble.



...if the bishop was on e3 here White wins a pawn with dxc5, followed by ♖xc5.

White can also go for a more temperate approach involving ♜f3, ♔d3, 0-0, etc. This is reminiscent of the Flexible Dragon Restrained, but it is relatively easier for Black to gain counterplay against the d4-pawn (with c7-c5) when the bishop is on g5.

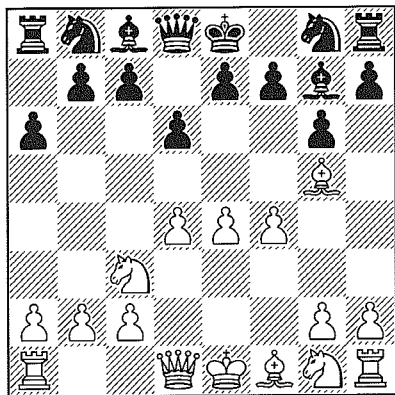
#### Game 43

Tydecks – T. Paetz Jr

Oberhof 1999

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.♝c3 d6 4.♗g5 a6 5.♞d2

This is the most flexible option, but White can also try 5.f4?! here:



With this set-up White plans to launch an attack in the centre with e4-e5. I am not too worried by this, as there is little or nothing in the centre for White to attack. The most important thing for Black to keep in mind is that *the d4-pawn must be undermined before, the g8-knight is developed to f6*. This is true in most of the a6-lines, but here it is an absolute necessity. After the normal moves 5...b5 6.♜f3 Black has two alternatives: a) 6...♗b7?! and b) 6...♜d7!.

a) 6...♗b7?!

This does not support c7-c5 and is therefore the second most important move.

7.♗d3 ♜d7 8.a4! b4 9.♜e2 c5 10.c3 ♜gf6!?

White has a clear advantage in the endgame after 10...h6 11.♗h4 bxc3 12.bxc3 cxd4 13.cxd4 ♜gf6 14.♜g3 ♞a5† 15.♞d2 ♞xd2† 16.♜xd2. It is difficult for Black to coordinate the pieces on the kingside and the b7-bishop is vulnerable to threats along the b-line.

11.♜g3?!

The consistent continuation is 11.e5! ♜d5 12.♞d2, with a slight advantage for White.

11...♞a5 12.0-0!

After 12.♞d2?! bxc3 13.bxc3 (13.♞xc3 ♞d8! is at least equal Black) 13...d5! White's centre is blown to pieces. Both 14.e5 ♜e4! and 14.♗xf6 ♜xf6 15.e5 ♜c4 16.♗xe4 dxe4 17.♜g5 e3! are really bad for White.

12... bxc3 13.bxc3 0-0?!

Ten years ago I was afraid of grabbing material, but today I would play 13...♞xc3! when I do not see how White will get full compensation for the pawn.

14.♞e1 ♞ac8 15.♞b1 ♗a8 16.e5 ♜d5?!

Better was 16...c4! even though White has a magnificent attack after 17.♗c2 ♜d5 18.e6 ♜7f6 19.exf7† ♜h8 20.♗xf6, intending ♜e4.

17.e6

and White broke through my defences with f5, etc. in Lejlic – Hillarp Persson, Rodeby 1995.

b) 6...♜d7! is much better, after 7.♗d3 (7.a4 b4 8.♜e2 c5 9.c3 bxc3 10.bxc3 ♞a5 11.♞d2 ♜gf6 12.♜g3 ♗b7 13.♗d3 d5! is mentioned in

note a) 7...c5 8.dxc5 ♖xc5 9.0-0 ♙b7 Black has a wonderful position.

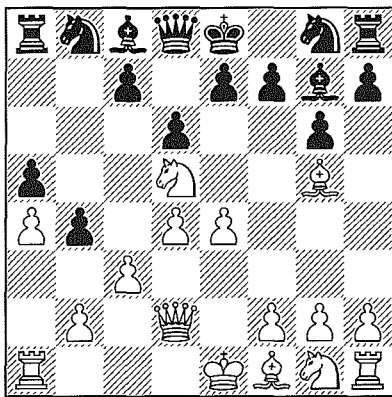
**5...b5 6.a4**

It is not very good to play 6.0-0 here. Compared to a position where the bishop is on e3 instead of g5, White is clearly worse off: the d4-pawn is weaker and Black has no problem achieving ♖d7, c7-c5.

In Spangenberg – Azmaiparashvili, Moscow 1994, Black gave convincing evidence for putting the combination of ♙g5 and 0-0-0 back on the shelf: 6.0-0 ♙b7 7.f3 ♖d7 8.h4 c5! 9.♖ge2 ♗a5 10.♖b1 b4 11.♖d5 ♙xd5 12.exd5 ♖b6 13.♖c1 c4 14.♗e1 ♗b5 15.b3 h6 16.♙f4 ♖f6 17.♙xd6 ♖fxd5 and White was overrun.

Another bad move with similar ideas was seen in Milu – I. Zaitsev, Bucharest 1994: 6.f3 ♖d7 7.h4 c5 8.dxc5 ♖xc5 9.h5 ♙e6! 10.h6 ♙e5! 11.♖ge2 ♖f6! Black has finished his development and the h6-pawn is not so much a threat as extra protection for Black's king; White is doomed. 12.♙f4 ♗c7 13.♙xe5 dxe5 14.♖c1 0-0 15.♖d3 ♗fd8 and White resigned seven moves later.

**6...b4 7.♖d5 a5 8.c3**



**8...c6!**

This is flexible and forces White to play f3 on move 10. When Black has played a5 it is generally better to play c6 and e5 rather than c5. In the first case Black can continue to strike at

the centre with d5, but in the latter case the light squares on the queenside would be very weak and neither d5 nor e5 will open up the centre because of, respectively, e4-e5 or d4-d5.

In Filipenko – Shchekachev, Smolensk 1992, Black tried a different path:

**8...h6 9.♙h4 g5 10.♙g3 e6?!**

This weakening move makes it more difficult for Black to achieve c7-c5, leaving him with a rather passive position. Instead, 10...♙b7 11.♙d3 f5 is very unclear.

**11.♖e3 ♖f6 12.f3 bxc3 13.bxc3 0-0 14.♙d3**

14.h4 seems more energetic.

**14...♖h5 15.♖e2 f5!?**

If Black plays slowly with 15...♖d7 then White is just a bit better since Black is unlikely to achieve one of the breaks c5, e5, d5 or f5.

**16.♙f2 ♖c6 17.♗xf5 exf5 18.h4**

and Black was in trouble.

**9.♖e3 ♖f6!**

This is the logical follow-up to 8...c6, forcing White into a slight concession with the f-pawn:

**10.f3**

White would prefer to play 10.♙d3 0-0 11.♖f3, but this gives Black the chance to strike in the centre with 11...bxc3 12.bxc3 d5! (not possible after 10.f3) 13.♙xf6 (Black cannot complain after 13.e5 ♖e4) 13...exf6!, with chances for both sides. Therefore 10.f3 is more ambitious.

**10...♗b6?!**

There is no reason to protect the b-pawn and I do not see what use the queen is on the b-file. Much better is 10...0-0, when 11.cxb4 axb4 12.♗xb4 ♖fd7! 13.♗d2 h6 14.♙h4 c5 gives Black a strong initiative to compensate for the pawn. If White plays normal moves like ♙d3 and ♖e2, Black has no trouble equalizing with ♖bd7 and e7-e5.

**11.♖c4 ♗b7 12.cxb4?!**

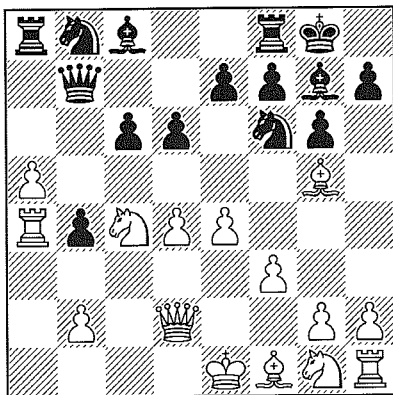
With this move White ruins his pawn structure and makes his centre more vulnerable to future attacks. White should never take on b4 unless it wins a pawn and here it was better to play ♙d3 and ♖e2, keeping the centre intact.

12...axb4 13.a5

White totally forgets about development...

13...0-0 14.♖a4

...and challenges destiny once too often.



14...c5! 15.♗b6 ♖a7

I would probably have played 15...♖xa5 16.♖xa5 ♗xb6, with excellent compensation.

16.dxc5 dxc5 17.♗c4

After 17.e5 ♗fd7 18.♗xc8 ♗xc8 19.f4 ♗c6 White has to act to prevent ♖xa5, ♗d4, f7-f6 and h6, followed by g6-g5.

17...♗bd7

Even better was 17...♗c6 winning a pawn, but it does not matter since White had clearly lost the plot.

18.♗d5?! ♗c7 19.♗c4? ♗xd5 20.exd5 ♗e5 21.♗e3 ♗a6

and it was high time for White to resign.

0-1

White's twelfth move was really awful, but Black was OK anyway. It seems that the 6.a4 and 7.♗d5 plan does not set Black serious problems as long as he hits ♗d5 with c6 rather than e6.

In the next game my opponent gets tired of defending his centre and plays d4-d5 at the wrong moment. A desperate try to keep the position closed with 15.♗xf6 backfires after 15...exf6!

## Game 44

Videki – Hillarp Persson

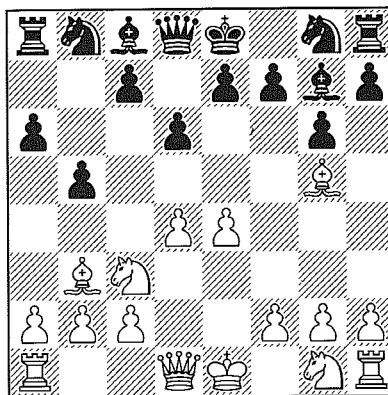
Budapest 1996

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.♗c3 d6 4.♗g5 a6 5.♗f3

Another aggressive option is 5.♗c4!?, with the idea 5...h6?! 6.♗f3 ♗f6 7.♗xf6 exf6 8.♗ge2, when White has a huge lead in development and should be slightly better. Black's best answer to 5.♗c4 is 5...b5!, when White has two possibilities:

a) 6.♗b3 and b) 6.♗d5?!

a) 6.♗b3 ♗b7!



This move is necessary to be able to answer 7.♗f3 with 7...♗f6, when 8.e5 is not possible. 7.♗f3 ♗d7 8.0-0 h6!

This is Kanstler's recommendation from *ChessBase Magazine*. It is actually difficult to find another reasonable move for Black. (After 8...c5 9.♗d5! ♗c8 10.♖e1 White had a fantastic initiative in Kanstler – Bitansky, Tel Aviv 2001.)

9.♗h4 b4!

This is an exception to the rule that Black should not push the b5-pawn to b4 unless forced to do so. The reason will soon be apparent. Worse is 9...g5?! 10.♗xg5 hxg5 11.♗xf7 ♗xf7 12.♗xg5†, when White has at least a draw.

10.♗d5 g5! 11.♗g3 e6

It is also possible to go for a crazy Hippo with 11...a5 12.♗d3 e6 13.♗e3 ♗e7. White seems

to be a bit better here, but Black has counterplay against the e4-pawn.

12. ♖xb4 a5 13. ♖d3 a4 14. ♙c4 ♙xe4

Kanstler judges the position to be unclear, which seems like a reasonable verdict. The pressure is on White though, because if Black is allowed to castle smoothly and then expand in the centre, White will soon be in trouble.

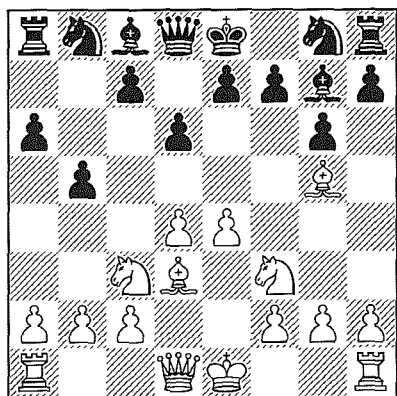
b) 6. ♙d5?! c6 7. ♙b3 ♖d7 8. ♖f3 ♖c7 9. a4 b4 10. ♖e2 ♖gf6 11. ♖d3 0-0 (Why is Black in such a hurry to castle? Both 11...a5 12.0-0 ♙a6 13. ♖e3 c5 and 11...c5!? seem better and more ambitious.) 12.0-0 a5 and Black had a comfortable position in Smirin – Kanstler, Rishon le Zion 1997.

**5...b5?!**

When White has played ♖g1-f3 there is no reason to fear f2-f4 anymore, therefore Black should play 5...h6! when 6. ♙c3 ♖d7! 7. ♙d3 e6! intending b6, ♙b7, ♖e7 is a Hippo where White has not played a2-a4. It might seem a paradox to play b7-b6 when it is possible to play b7-b5 in one go, but in this exact position b5 is more of a weakness than an asset.

**6. ♖d2?!**

This is not the best move. Much more dangerous is 6. ♙d3:



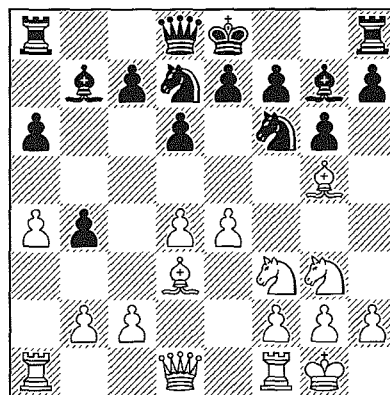
In this position Black must choose: h6 or not h6? After 6...h6 7. ♙e3 Black has won a tempo (h6) compared to the main line of Flexible

Dragon Restrained. Sadly, this is not a tempo Black is happy about, since the g6-pawn will miss its bodyguard on h7, especially if White plays e4-e5-e6. It is therefore better to keep the h-pawn on its original square. I believe Black's best option here is:

6... ♖d7! 7. a4 b4 8. ♖e2 ♙b7 9.0-0

After 9. a5 ♖gf6 10. ♖g3 h6 11. ♙d2 c5 12. c3 bxc3 13. bxc3 ♖c7 14. ♖e2 h5! the position is unclear. There are many other possibilities, but Black should be all right.

9... ♖gf6 10. ♖g3



10...a5!

After 10...c5 11. c3 h6 12. ♙e3 bxc3 13. bxc3 ♖c7, intending c5-c4 and e5, Black is slightly worse.

11. ♖d2 0-0

Using a different move order we find ourselves in the game Yakovich – Gorbатов, Pardubice 1994.

12. c3 c5?

Both 12...d5 and 12...bxc3 13. bxc3 ♖b8 are interesting, though White keeps a slight advantage in both cases.

13. d5

This is a position to avoid for Black: His white squares are fatally weakened on the queenside, and it is very difficult to open up the centre with e7-e6.

13... ♖c7 14. ♙b5 ♙a6 15. ♙xa6 ♖xa6 16. c4

White has a huge advantage and won without too much effort. This game is the reason why I prefer 5...h6! to 5...b5.

**6...♖b7?!**

At the time of this game I had not yet realized the greater importance of achieving c7-c5, compared to attacking the e4-pawn. 6...♖d7 7.♗d3 c5 is a clear improvement over the game.

**7.♗d3 ♖d7 8.a4 b4 9.♖e2 c5! 10.c3 ♖gf6?!**

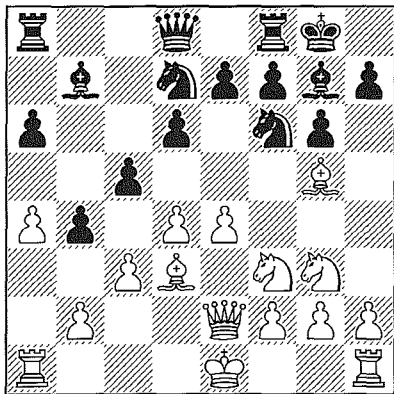
Another possibility is 10...bxc3 11.bxc3 cxd4 12.cxd4 ♖c5 13.♖g3 ♖xd3† 14.♞xd3 ♖f6, with a fine position for Black.

**11.♖g3 0-0**

After 11...h6 12.♗e3 (12.♗xf6!?) 12...h5! we reach a position discussed in the Flexible Dragon Restrained.

**12.d5?**

There is nothing wrong with closing the centre from a positional point of view, especially if White is allowed to continue c3-c4. Still, it would have been better to keep the tension in the centre with 12.♞e2:



Now Black has to react before White castles and claims a comfortable advantage:

**12...bxc3! 13.bxc3 h6 14.♗d2 cxd4!**

After 14...♞c7? 15.0-0 and it is time for Black to contemplate his sins.

**15.cxd4 e5!**

Harassing d4, to give the d7-knight a strongpoint on c5.

**16.♞b1?! ♗c6 17.a5 d5!**

and Black has excellent counterplay.

A computer program often recommends stuff like 12.cxb4 here, but Black generally gets good compensation in the centre. 12...cxd4 13.♖xd4 ♖e5 14.♗c2 d5 and Black's pieces work wonderfully together. Instead, after a natural move like 12.0-0 Black equalizes easily with 12...c4 13.♗xc4 bxc3 14.bxc3 ♗xe4! 15.♖xe4 ♖xe4. **12...c4!**

A recurrent idea in these structures. Compare with Game 27, Kolev – Hillarp Persson.

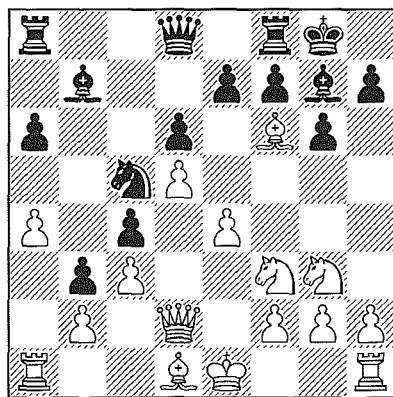
**13.♗c2**

White is losing after 13.♖b1 ♖c5 14.♞e2 bxc3 15.bxc3 ♖xd5, followed by 16...♗xc3†. Also bad is 13.♗xc4 bxc3 14.bxc3 ♞c7! 15.♞a2 (15.♞b1 fails to 15...♞xc4 16.♞xb7 ♖c5) 15...♞fc8 16.♞b1 ♞xc4 17.♞xc4 ♞xc4 18.♞xb7 ♖c5, when Black has a clear advantage.

**13...b3! 14.♗d1?!**

After 14.♗b1 a5!? White's queenside is paralysed, in similar fashion to Kolev – Hillarp Persson, but at least White can fight on by trying to attack the c4-pawn.

**14...♖c5! 15.♗xf6**



**15...exf6!**

Opening the e-file for the rook and making it possible to hit the e4-pawn with f6-f5. Worse is 15...♖d3† 16.♖f1 ♗xf6 17.♗c2, when White wins a pawn.



16. ♙e2

After 16.0-0 ♖e8 17. ♖e1 a5 White has trouble moving and Black can slowly increase the pressure on e4, before playing f6-f5.

16... ♖e8 17. ♙xc4 ♜xe4 18. ♜xe4 ♞xe4† 19. ♙e2 ♞e8!

Stopping White from castling, threatening the a-pawn and leaving the e7-square for the e4-rook if necessary.

20. ♜d4 f5 21. ♜c6 ♙h6 22. ♞d1 a5 23. ♜f1 ♞xe2!!

My bishops become very evil when the white king is left in the centre.

24. ♞xe2 ♙a6 25. c4 ♞xe2† 26. ♜xe2 ♙xc4† 27. ♜d1 ♜f8!

Robbing White of a possible check on e7, but giving White time to find a defence... if only there was one.

28. ♜d4 ♙xd5 29. f3 ♙e3 30. ♜b5 ♞c8 31. ♖e1 f4 32. ♜a3 ♙b7 33. ♞xe3 fxe3 34. ♜e2 ♙a6† 35. ♜xe3 ♖e8† 36. ♜d2 ♖e2† 37. ♜c3 ♞xg2 38. ♜b5 ♞xh2 39. ♞d1 ♜e7

The endgame is hopeless, so White resigned.

0-1

**Conclusions:** I believe Black is fine in these lines. Paetz's treatment of the main line is excellent and I will not hesitate to follow in his footsteps. The most dangerous line is 1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♙g7 3. ♜c3 d6 4. ♙g5 a6 5. ♜f3, when 5...b5 is complicated, but 5...h6 – heading for Hippo waters – seems excellent. Another line that we will see more of in the future is 5. ♙c4, not because of its objective value, but because White is hoping to score a quick win with the aggressive looking bishops. Read through the comments to 5. ♙c4 carefully: After 5...b5 6. ♙b3 I believe Black should hunt down the e-pawn with 9...b4, whereas after 6. ♙d5 c6 7. ♙b3 Black should play slowly with ♜d7, ♞c7 and ♜gf6.

The most important thing is to play carefully in the opening. If White does not crash through, you will have a great position. <sup>1</sup>

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## Chapter 7

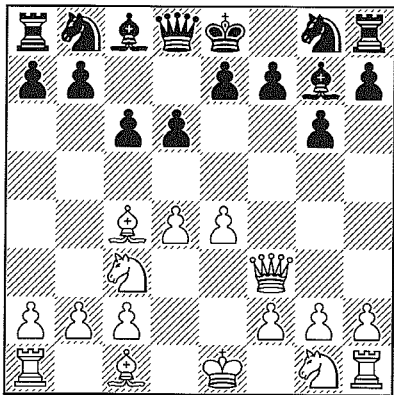
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# c4 – Mad Dog

As beginners many of us learned to calibrate our weapons by firing wildly at the f7-pawn. Who has not heard of scholar's mate (1.e4 e5 2.♘c4 ♘c6 3.♖f3 and 4.♗xf7 mate) and who has not – at least once – tried his/her luck with this naive scheme? For some this is an important threshold to overcome on the road to becoming a better chess player. Some never get past it and I have often heard comments like: “My interest in chess declined slowly from the day my uncle/father/brother/classmate saw through scholar's mate.”

Still, with time one expects a chess player to outgrow this infantile obsession with combining the queen and bishop towards f7, to wipe the foam from the corner of their mouth and develop a more complex attitude to the game. But some people just can't let go:

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♘g7 3.♘c3 d6 4.♗c4 c6 5.♖f3



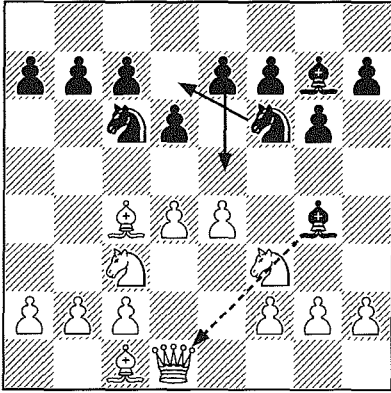
My early chess development followed a somewhat unusual path and, though this position is free from sentimental temptations for me, I cannot recommend that you reach it as Black.

After 5...e6 6.♘ge2 we are on the verge of a large and complicated opening system – which I am going to completely ignore since there are better alternatives for Black.

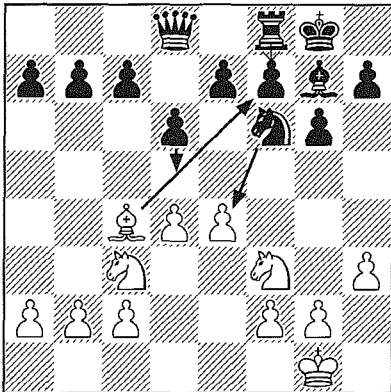
When I started writing this chapter (three years ago) I had only a vague idea what theory said about the different variations. The rumour was that 4.♗c4 was one of the less dangerous variations of the Modern/Pirc complex and I thought it was going to be a piece of cake to write this chapter. In the process I have learnt that things are not so easy and there are many ideas for White that should not be underestimated.

Let us retrace our steps to the beginning. After the obligatory 1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♘g7 it is time for White to decide which knight ought to be developed first. (After 3.♗c4 d6, White still faces the same dilemma.) White has two choices: 3.♘f3 and 3.♘c3. 3.♘f3 is more positional and is favoured by players who like to avoid deep theoretical lines. 3.♘c3 is popular among players who prefer a theoretical duel with high stakes. I recommend that you meet both these lines with d6, ♘f6 and 0-0.

The main idea of this logical system is to attack the d-pawn with a combination of ♗g4 and ♘c6.



In order to avoid this kind of position White often plays h3, preventing ...g4. If so Black just castles, intending  $\text{...}\text{e4}$  followed by d6-d5, immediately regaining the piece. Mostly White is not that cooperative and instead meets  $\text{...}\text{e4}$  with  $\text{...}\text{xf7}\dagger$  before capturing on e4:



In the following I will show that White cannot easily avoid both of these two scenarios.

Games 45-47 deal with the positional  $\text{...}\text{f3}$ , when White intends some combination of  $\text{...}\text{e2}$  and e5 before developing the b1-knight. This line is unique to the Modern (since in the Pirc White is forced to play  $\text{...}\text{c3}$ ) and slightly more dangerous than the Pirc lines dealt with in

Games 48-52. The most critical line  $\text{...}\text{e5}$   $\text{...}\text{e8}$  is seen in Game 47. In Games 48 and 49 we look at positions where White plays without  $\text{...}\text{e2}$ . In both these games Black gets a good game by playing  $\text{...}\text{e4}$  at the proper moment. Finally, in Games 50-52 White plays  $\text{...}\text{c3}$  and  $\text{...}\text{e2}$  with the intention of going e5 at the first opportunity. I will cover two lines:  $\text{...}\text{d7}$  in Game 50 and the more ambitious  $\text{...}\text{g4}$  in Games 51 and 52.

### The positional $\text{...}\text{f3}$ , $\text{...}\text{e2}$ and e5

#### Game 45

Blomström – Hillarp Persson

Skara (rapid) 2002

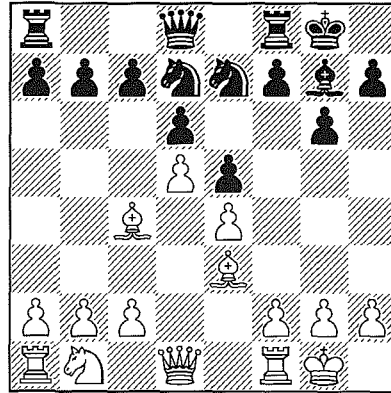
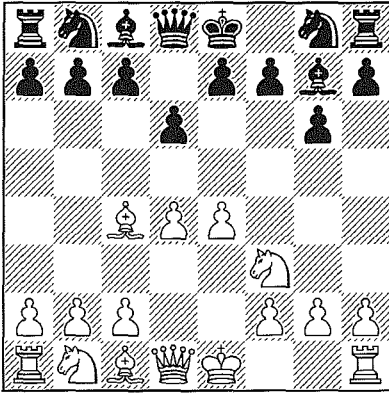
#### 1.e4 g6 2.d4 $\text{...}\text{g7}$ 3. $\text{...}\text{f3}$

The main advantage of this move over  $\text{...}\text{c3}$  is that d4 is protected so that – after  $\text{...}\text{c4}$  and  $\text{...}\text{e2}$  –  $\text{...}\text{c6}$  is not immediately threatening to take the d-pawn (see Games 48, 49 and 50) and can even be met by c2-c3. But why not postpone the development of the knights and play  $\text{...}\text{c4}$  immediately? Ignoring the fact that  $\text{...}\text{d6}$  leaves White in the same predicament as before, Black can also try  $\text{...}\text{c5}!$ . The game Shevchenko – Gorbunov, Odessa 2001, initially followed a consistent path:

4.dxc5  $\text{...}\text{a5}\dagger$  5.c3  $\text{...}\text{xc5}$  6. $\text{...}\text{b3}!$ ? e6 7. $\text{...}\text{e3}$   $\text{...}\text{c6}!$  8. $\text{...}\text{d2}$   $\text{...}\text{f6}$  9. $\text{...}\text{b5}!$ ?  $\text{...}\text{c7}$  10. $\text{...}\text{e2}$  0-0 11. $\text{...}\text{f4}$  d6 12.0-0  $\text{...}\text{bd7}$  13. $\text{...}\text{g3}$   $\text{...}\text{c5}$  and Black was doing fine. Though White's must certainly be able to improve on his ninth move, I am even more worried about  $\text{...}\text{a3}!$ , when White gets a fantastic initiative if Black grabs the e-pawn.

In Petrenko – Gorbunov, Odessa 2001, White fell for a cheap trick: 4. $\text{...}\text{f3}!$ ? d5! 5. $\text{...}\text{xd5}!$ ? (5.exd5 cxd4 6. $\text{...}\text{e2}$   $\text{...}\text{d7}$  7.0-0 a6, with the idea  $\text{...}\text{b6}$ , is fine for Black.) 5...e6 6. $\text{...}\text{b3}$  cxd4 7. $\text{...}\text{e2}$   $\text{...}\text{c6}$  8.0-0  $\text{...}\text{ge7}$  9. $\text{...}\text{d2}$  0-0 10. $\text{...}\text{g3}$   $\text{...}\text{a5}$  and Black had a great position. Considering  $\text{...}\text{a3}$  in the line above, I would rather stick to  $\text{...}\text{d6}$  waiting for White to play his next card.

#### 3...d6 4. $\text{...}\text{c4}$



**4...♘f6!**

Why not play 4...a6 here? It does seem logical since White cannot answer with c2-c4 anymore and b7-b5 will harass the c4-bishop. Still, it's not good enough. After 5.c3!? b5 6.♘b3 ♘b7 7.♙e2, White will finish developing and play a2-a4, when Black has no good answer: b5-b4 loses a pawn, b5xa4 leaves Black with a silly pawn structure, and c7-c6 is just too passive.

**5.♙e2 0-0!**

I prefer this to 5...♘c6 when 6.h3 leaves Black rather passive. White has successfully defended against our two main ideas ♘g4 and ♘xe4.

**6.0-0**

The main alternative 6.e5 is seen in Game 47.

**6...♘g4 7.h3**

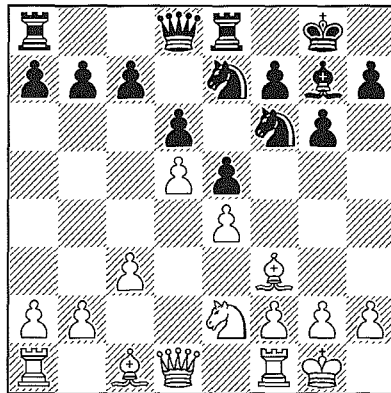
In the next game we look at the more aggressive 7.e5. Another possibility is 7.♙d1, when 7...♘c6 8.e5 ♘xf3 9.♙xf3! (9.gxf3 ♘d7 10.f4 ♘b6 is better for Black) 9...dxe5 10.dxe5 ♘xe5 11.♘xf7+! is awkward for Black who has the clearly worse pawn structure after 11...♙h8 12.♙e2. Instead of 8...♘xf3 Black should play 8...♘d7 9.e6 ♘b6 10.exf7+ ♙h8 11.♘e6 ♘xf3 12.♙xf3 ♘xd4 when White must try 13.♙xd4 ♘xd4 14.♙xb7, with some compensation for the exchange.

**7...♘xf3 8.♙xf3 ♘c6 9.c3**

If White intends to close the centre later it might be an idea to play 9.♘e3 ♘d7 10.♙d1, planning to do without c3. After 10...e5 11.d5 ♘e7 we reach an interesting position:

Here Black is slightly ahead in development and ready for f5. So closing the centre is not such a good idea for White when he has played ♘c4.

It is interesting to compare this to a similar position from the Classical Pirc:



Although similar, there are two major differences between this diagram and the previous. Firstly, Black is comparatively behind in development, having not yet played ♘d7 and with the rook badly placed on e8. Secondly, White's bishop is on f3, which makes it easier to advance on the queenside with c4 and ♘c3. Additionally ♘d7 and f7-f5 can be met strongly by h3-h4-h5! In fact White is clearly better here.

**9...e5 10.♘e3**

In Nikolac – Tkachiev, Solin 1999, there followed:

10. ♖b5 ♘d7!

After 10...exd4 11. ♙xc6 bxc6 12.cxd4 ♘d7 13. ♙e3 Black's c6-pawn is rather weak on the open c-file.

11.d5?!

White is lagging behind in development and is badly prepared for a closed centre. The logical choice would be 11. ♙xc6 bxc6 12. ♙e3, when the position is balanced after 12...♞b8. Black should generally not take on d4 unless there is some immediate gain.

11...♘e7 12. ♘d2 f5

Black starts undermining the white centre and is already better.

13. ♙xd7 ♞xd7 14. ♞d3 c6!?

I would have preferred 14...♙h6 followed by ♙xd2 and f5-f4, etc...

15.dxc6?!

White loses faith in his centre. Better was 15.c4 cxd5 16.cxd5 ♞c8, though Black still has the initiative due to his better coordination.

15...bxc6 16. ♘c4 d5 17.exd5 cxd5 18. ♙g5 ♘c6 19. ♘e3?! d4

Black's pieces are working together harmoniously and he eventually won.

10...♘d7!

It is important to continue the attack of the d4-pawn as long as White's queen is on f3, so that dxe5 is unattractive due to ♘xe5 with a fork on ♞f3 and ♙c4.

11. ♞d1!

To claim any kind of advantage White must try to keep a dynamic centre until it is possible to open up the position for the bishop pair. In the game Ernst – Hillarp Persson, Skara 2002, White chose the less critical:

11. ♞d1?!

This would be an excellent move if it secured the centre, but this is not the case.

11...♞h8! 12. ♘a3 f5!

I am threatening to win a pawn by playing f5-f4, followed by exd4. White does not have much choice.

13.exf5 ♞xf5?!

Looking in the rear-view mirror, I realise that 13...gxf5 was stronger. After 14.d5 (not 14.dxe5?! f4! 15. ♙d4 ♘dxe5 when Black gets a nice initiative with f4-f3) 14...♘e7 15. ♙g5 ♙f6 16. ♙h6 Black can either repeat moves with 16...♙g7, or play for the whole point with 16...♞g8.

14. ♞e2! exd4 15.cxd4 ♞e7 16. ♘b5 ♘b6 17. ♙d3?!

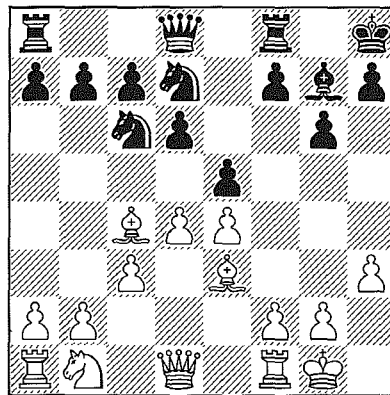
Here my opponent could have gained a slight advantage with 17.d5 ♘xc4 18. ♞xc4 a6 19.dxc6 ♞xb5 20.cxb7. My pawn structure is slightly worse and so is my king.

17...♞ff8 18. ♘c3 d5

and the chances were about even.

11...♞h8

This excellent move prepares f5, but against Perez Candelario, at the Calvia Olympiad 2004, I tried a different idea and obtained a slightly better game: 11...♘b6 12. ♙b5 (12. ♙b3 exd4 13.cxd4 ♞f6 and White cannot hold on to his centre anymore.) 12...exd4! 13.cxd4 f5 14.exf5 gxf5 15.d5 (This leaves White with a slightly worse position, but 15...f4 is an annoying threat and 15.g3 f4! 16. ♙xf4 ♘xd4 17. ♙d3 ♞xf4 18.gxf4 ♞h4 is no fun for White.) 15...♘e5 16. ♙xb6! axb6 17.f4! Having stopped me from achieving f5-f4, my opponent managed to get a draw in the end.



12.f4!

My moderately rated opponent plays very well and puts pressure on me before I get things my way. After 12.♘a3 Black can choose between 12...f5 and 12...exd4 13.cxd4 ♖e7, in both cases with a good game for Black.

12...exd4 13.cxd4 ♘b6 14.♙b3

I was more worried about 14.♙b5!? during the game, but 14...f5! 15.e5 ♘e7 16.♘c3 c6 17.♙e2 ♘ed5 seems no worse than what actually happened.

14...f5!??

I did not want my opponent to consolidate his centre, but it was not necessary to use such drastic measures: 14...♖e7! 15.♘c3 ♘a5 and Black has counterplay on the light squares.

15.e5 g5!

Having said A, I proceed to B – I thank God there was no C...

16.e6!?

I expected 16.d5 ♘e7 17.e6 exf4 18.♙d4 ♙e5 19.♘c3 ♘g6, with an unclear position. Again my opponent finds a good move and avoids 16.fxg5?! dxe5 17.dxe5 ♖xd1 18.♖xd1 ♘xe5, which would be clearly better for Black. White's pieces are shattered and f5-f4-f3 is hanging in the air.

16...gxf4 17.♖xf4 d5 18.♖f3 ♘e7

The greedy 18...♙h6?! backfires after 19.♘c3 ♙xf4 20.♙xf4, when White has fantastic compensation for the exchange.

19.♘c3 c6

Now, however, it was time to be greedy: 19...♖f6 followed by ♖xe6 wins a pawn and it is not clear how White can prove compensation.

20.♖e1 ♘bc8!?

I "talked to my pieces" and the b6-knight told me "e4 would be a nice square, thank you". Perhaps it was still better to play the brutal 20...♖d6! 21.♙f2 ♖f6 followed by ♖xe6.

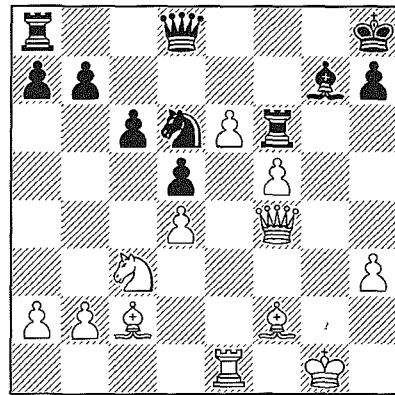
21.♙c2 ♘d6 22.g4!?!?

White wisely avoids 22.♖h5 ♖e8, realising it is time to change the character of the position.

22...♘g6 23.gxf5 ♘xf4 24.♖xf4 ♖f6!??

From a practical point of view this is dubious – unless one has calculated correctly, which I had not. The rook is not a good blockader and it would have been safer to play 24...♙f6 with a small advantage.

25.♙f2



25...♖f8?

Running out of time I missed that 25...♙h6 26.♖f3 ♖e7 27.♙h4 ♖g8†, followed by ♙g5, is winning for Black. The rest of the game was played in mutual time trouble.

26.♙h4 ♖xf5? 27.♙xf5 ♖xf5 28.♖xd6 ♖xh3 29.♙f2?

After 29.♖h2 ♙xd4† 30.♙h1 ♖f5, Lars would probably have won.

29...♖g8 30.♖g3 ♙f6 31.♖xg8† ♙xg8 32.e7 ♖g4† 33.♙f1 ♖h3† 34.♙g1 ♙xe7 35.♖xe7 ♖c8 36.♙h2 h5 37.♘e2

and the game continued another ten, twenty moves or so, until I realised I was being outplayed and offered a draw. Being short of time, my opponent accepted.

...½-½

That was a very reassuring game for the Black side, but surely White must have something better?

In the next game White goes for e5 without the preparatory h3.

**Game 46****Schlosser – Bologan**

Mulhouse 2001

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♘g7 3.♟f3 d6 4.♙c4 ♗f6 5.♞e2  
0-0

Beware of 5...♙g4?! 6.e5 dxe5 7.♙xf7† ♜xf7  
8.♗xe5 when White is clearly better.

**6.0-0 ♙g4 7.e5!**

I believe this is more critical than 7.h3, as played in the previous game. Now, Black has to play accurately to avoid a passive position.

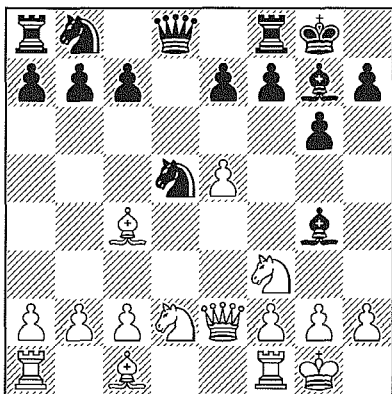
**7...dxe5**

I only recommend this line of action if Black has already played ♙g4. In the next game we will see that 7...♗e8 also is possible.

**8.dxe5 ♗d5 9.♗bd2**

Preparing to meet ♙xf3 with ♗xf3, when the e5-pawn is safely guarded and White has reached the set-up of his dreams. Black's knights have no strongpoints and the g7-bishop is a sorry sight.

A different kind of dream set-up is reached after 9.h3? ♙xf3 10.♞xf3 e6 when Black continues with ♗d7 and (if necessary) c6, forcing White to play ♞e2 and f2-f4. In the resulting position Black has a huge lead in development and can choose from a *smorgasbord* of ideas like b5, g5!? and f6.



**9...♗b6!**

After 9...e6?! White gets the chance to enter the dream scenario of above: 10.h3! ♙xf3 11.♗xf3 In

Ravi – Dzhumaev, Dubai 2001, White had a big advantage after 11...c6 12.c3 ♗d7 13.♞e1 ♞c7 14.♙b3.

Another less attractive possibility is 9...♗c6?! 10.♞e4 ♙e6 11.♗b3 b6 12.♗bd4 when White gained a clear advantage in Volkmann – Brittner, Leon 2001. The conclusion seems to be that it is vital for Black to mix things up a bit.

**10.♙b3**

Leko tried a different course as White against Shirov in Vienna 1996:

10.♙d3 ♗c6 11.h3 ♙e6!?

After 11...♗d4 12.♞e4 ♗xf3† 13.♗xf3 ♙xf3 14.♞xf3 c6 Black has a solid position and active ideas like a7-a5-a4 and ♞d4. The position is reminiscent of a line from the Alekhine Defence (1.e4 ♗f6 2.e5 ♗d5 3.d4 d6 4.♗f3 ♙g4 5.♙e2 c6 6.0-0 ♙xf3 7.♙xf3 dxe5 8.dxe5 e6), but I prefer to have exchanged both White's knights. Black's weak dark squares will be much less of a problem when he does not have to worry about ♗d6 (after e7-e6) or ♗f6.

12.♞d1 ♗d7!?

My friend Ludvig Sandström used to say I had “too much talent”, when I came up with excessively intricate moves where natural ones seemed good enough. He meant, in a friendly way, that I should at least make a small effort to be objective. It seems that Shirov is slightly too talented here (ignoring the fact that he is indeed massively talented in general). Leko gives 12...♞c8!? in *Informant 67*, and I think 12...♗b4 13.♙e4 c6 looks interesting.

13.♙c4 ♗c5 14.♙xe6 ♗xe6 15.♗b3 ♞c8 16.♞e4

White has more space and the better position, but Black has no real weaknesses and can relieve some of the pressure by exchanging pieces.

16...♞d8 17.♙e3 ♞xd1† 18.♞xd1 ♞e8 19.c4 ♞d8 20.♞d5 ♗b4!

Shirov goes into an endgame where his pawn structure is clearly inferior, but the alternatives are even worse. Leko gives 20...b6 21.♙d2 ♗b8 intending ...c6 without comment. I believe this line to be bad. After 22.♗bd4 Black is facing an uphill struggle.

21.♙b5 ♖c6 22.♗xc6 ♜xc6 23.♞xb7 ♜xe5  
24.♜bd2

and White had a clear advantage, even though Shirov managed to make a draw in the end.

**10...♜c6 11.e6 f5**

The dynamically inclined can try 11...a5!? 12.exf7† ♜h8 when White has three reasonable alternatives:

a) 13.c3 a4 14.♙e6 ♙xe6 15.♗xc6 a3 and Black has excellent compensation for the pawn.

b) 13.♗e4! ♙f5 14.♗h4 ♙f6 a4 15.♜g5 h6!? 16.♜e6 ♙xe6 17.♙xe6 ♜d4 18.♗e4 and now 18...♗d6, 18...a3 and 18...♜xe6 followed by ...♗d6, all look interesting.

c) 13.a4 is met by 13...♜d4 14.♗e4 ♙f5 15.♗xb7 and Black has at least a draw.

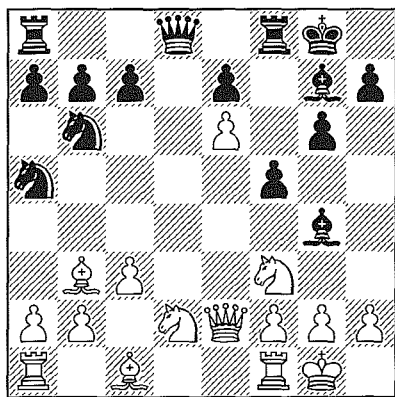
An absolutely wild alternative is 11...♜d4, but after 12.exf7† ♜h8 13.♗e4 ♙f5 14.♗xb7 ♜e2† 15.♜h1 a5 16.♞f1 it is difficult to see how Black is going to continue.

**12.c3 ♜a5?!**

I believe 12...♜e5 is stronger. After 13.h3 ♙h5 14.♗e3 ♗d3 15.♗c5 ♙xf3 16.♜xf3 ♜xf3† 17.gxf3 ♙f6 18.♜g2 c6 the position is unclear. White's e-pawn is not very effective and Black's remaining pieces are active.

**13.♙c2?!**

There was no reason to let the black queen become active. After 13.♞fd1 ♜xb3 (13...♗c8 14.♙c2 is horribly passive for Black) 14.♜xb3 ♗e8 15.h3 ♙h5 16.♜a5 I prefer White's position.



**13...♗d5! 14.h3 ♙h5 15.♞d1 ♗c6 16.♜b3 ♜xb3 17.♙xb3 ♙xf3 18.gxf3?!**

Black's queen is more active than White's and there is no good reason not to exchange queens when the chance is there.

**18...f4!**

Bologan closes the door on the c1-bishop and simultaneously opens a road to the fifth rank for his rooks.

**19.a4 a5 20.♗e4 ♞f5 21.♙c2 ♞af8 22.♗xc6 ♞g5† 23.♜f1 bxc6 24.♞a3**

It is difficult to point out exactly what went wrong for White, but possibly Black was already better after the 18th move?!

**24...c5 25.♞e1**

After 25.♞b3 c4 26.♞b5 ♞xb5 27.axb5 Black keeps an advantage with 27...♙e5, intending ...a4 and ...♙d6.

**25...c4 26.♞e4 ♙e5 27.b4 ♙d6 28.♙d2 ♞d5 29.♙e1 ♞h5 30.♞a1 ♞ff5 31.♜g2 ♞fg5† 32.♜h2 ♞h4 33.♙d2 ♞gh5 34.♜g2 ♞xh3 35.♙xf4?!**

White could have fought on with 35.♞g1 or 35.♞d1. Now it ends quickly.

**35...♙xf4 36.♞xf4 ♞h2† 37.♜g3 ♞5h3† 38.♜g4 ♞h4† 39.♜g3 ♞2h3† 40.♜g2 ♞xf4 41.♜xh3 ♞xf3† 42.♜g2 ♞xc3 43.♙e4 axb4 44.a5 ♜c8**

and White resigned since 45.a6 is easily repelled by either 45...♞a3 or 45...♜a7, when three extra pawns should count in Black's favour.

**0-1**

The key moves to remember from this game are 9...♜b6 and 12...♜e5, when you should achieve a very complicated game with mutual chances.

In the next game White plays e5 even before 0-0:

**Game 47  
Shamkovich – Keene  
New York 1980**

**1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♙g7 3.♜f3 d6 4.♙c4 ♜f6 5.♗e2 0-0 6.e5 ♜e8!**

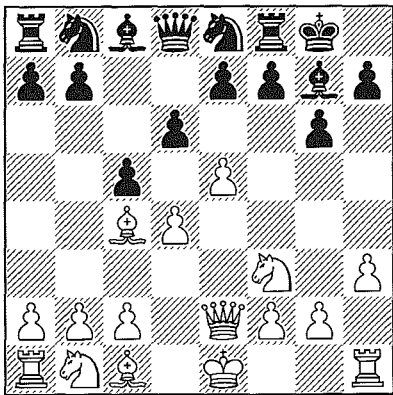
Black should avoid 6...dxe5?! 7.dxe5 ♜d5 8.h3! which is extremely annoying since Black



is left with a very passive white-squared bishop. A possible continuation is 8...♖b6 9.♗b3 ♖c6 10.0-0 ♗d4 11.♗xd4 ♗xd4 12.♞e1 e6 13.♗d2 and Black is clearly worse.

### 7.0-0

7.h3 c5!



8.c3 cxd4 9.cxd4 ♗c7 10.0-0 ♗c6 11.♞d1!

Black is doing fine after 11.♗c3 because of 11...dxc5! 12.dxe5 ♗d4 13.♗xd4 ♗xd4 14.♞e1 ♗e6.

11...d5! 12.♗b3 b6!

It is important to activate the bishop on the a6-f1 diagonal before playing f6.

13.♗g5?!

This only helps Black to open the centre. 13.♗c3 ♗a6 14. ♗e1 was better, or 13.♗f4, when 13...♗a6 14. ♗e3 ♗e6 15.♗c3 is unclear.

13...f6 14.exf6 exf6 15.♗f4 ♗e6 16.♗g3 ♗a5 17.♗c3 ♗xb3 18.axb3 ♞e8

and Black had an excellent position in Quinteros – Robatsch, Nice 1974.

### 7...♗g4

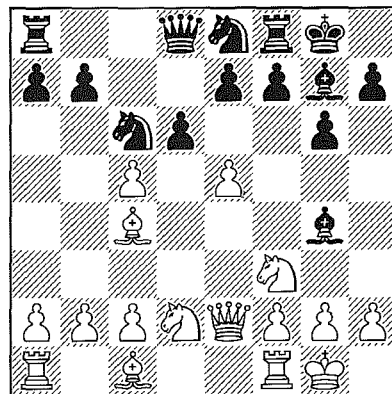
It seems very logical to develop the bishop when allowed to, but there is something to say for 7...c5!?. In Eckhardt – Pflug, Bavaria 2000, play continued 8.dxc5 dxe5 9.♗c3 (9.♗xe5 ♗d4 10.♗f3 ♗xc5 is fine for Black) 9...♗c6 10.♞d1 ♗a5 11.♗e3 ♗c7? 12.♗d5 ♗b8 and Black would have been in deep trouble if only White

had played 13.♗b5. But what kind of a move is 11...♗c7? I much prefer 11...♗g4, when the chances are balanced.

### 8.♞d1

This effectively stops Black from playing ...c5, but it might still be better to play 8.♗bd2. Now 8...♗c6 9.♗e3 leaves the e8-knight looking a bit silly, so Black's best answer is 8...c5! when White has three moves to choose from:

a) 9.dxc5 ♗c6!?



This is a common and good idea when White is behind in development. Now Black has excellent play after either 10.c6 d5 or 10.exd6 exd6 11.♗e3 ♞c8.

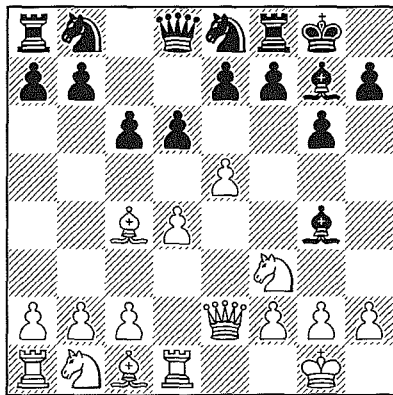
b) 9.♗e4 ♗f5 10.♗xb7 ♗d7 and Black has compensation for the pawn.

c) 9.exd6 ♗xd6 10.dxc5 ♗xc5 11.h3 ♗c8 12.♗c4 and White had a slight initiative in Podgaets – Usmanov, Riga 1975. In the face of this I prefer 9...♗xd6! 10.dxc5 ♗xc4 11.♗xc4 ♗d7 when it seems to me that Black has just enough compensation for the pawn.

There are almost no practical examples here and it might all seem a bit shaky for Black, but I do sincerely think Black is OK. The position after 8.♗bd2 is rich in possibilities and it is difficult to give a definite judgement in any of the lines. However, this is what chess should be like: rich and difficult.

### 8...♗c6

This is a move I would rather not play since (if White can hold on to the centre) the knight is badly placed on c6 and it is hard to see how the e8-knight will re-enter the game. Still, it seems to be OK though I personally find 8...c6! (intending ♖c7, ♗d7, d5 and f6) to be more logical:



This is a move I have not been able to find in my database. Possible continuations are:

- a) 9.h3! ♙xf3 10.♗xf3 ♗d7 11.♙f4 e6 12.♗g3 (12.exd6 ♗b6 followed by ♗xd6 is fine for Black.) 12...c5 is unclear.
- b) 9.♙g5 d5 10.♙d3 f6 11.exf6 exf6 12.♙f4 ♗d6 is at least equal for Black.
- c) 9.♗bd2 ♗c7 10.h3 ♙f5, followed by d5 and f6, looks fine for Black.

In G. Garcia – Benjamin, Connecticut 2000, Black tried a third path: 8...♗c8?! 9.♙g5 ♗c6 10.♙d5 h6 11.♙h4 g5 12.♙g3 ♗b4?! 13.♙b3 and White had a clear advantage. Instead of 12...♗b4 Black can improve with 12...e6 13.♙xc6 bxc6 14.h3 ♙h5 15.♗bd2 f5 with unclear play. But 9.♙d5 is better.

**9.♙d5**

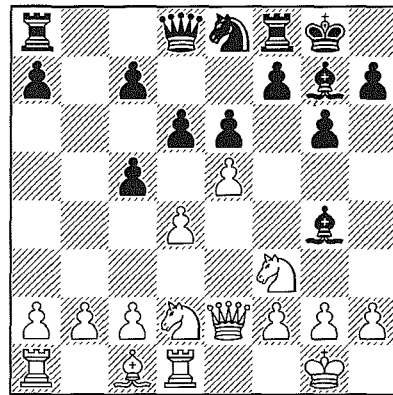
This is better than 9.♗c3, when Black has an important choice:

- a) 9...♙xf3!? 10.gxf3 (Not 10.♗xf3?! dxe5 11.dxe5 ♗xe5 12.♗xb7? ♗d6, followed by ♗exc4 winning for Black.) 10...e6, intending ♗h4, ♙h6 and ♗e8-g7-h5/f5. I would not like to be White here.

- b) In Szekely – L. Vogt, Budapest 1976, Black quickly gained a winning position after 9...♗c8?! 10.♙f4? ♗f5, when White could no longer hold on to his central pawns. A better move for White was 10.♙d5! when the black queen would have been badly placed on c8. For example: 10...e6 11.♙xc6 bxc6 12.h3 ♙xf3 13.♗xf3 dxe5 14.dxe5 ♙xe5 15.♙h6 ♙g7 16.♙xg7 ♗xg7 17.♗e4 and White has a strong initiative.

**9...♗d7**

9...♗c8 10.♙g5 resembles Garcia – Benjamin above. Also interesting is 9...e6 10.♙xc6 bxc6 11.♗bd2 c5:



Black manages to open up the position and has a good game after 12.h3 ♙xf3 13.♗xf3 cxd4 14.♗xd4 ♗b8!.

**10.♗c3**

After 10.♙f4?! dxe5 11.dxe5 ♗f5 White has to let go of the e-pawn. More interesting is 10.h3 ♙xf3 11.♙xf3 dxe5 12.dxe5 ♗d4 13.♗e3 ♙xe5! which looks OK for Black. For instance 14.♙g4 ♗d6 15.c3 ♗f5 16.♗f3 ♗f6 17.♗xb7 ♗ed6 and the position is rather unclear and needs testing in practice.

**10...e6 11.♙b3 d5**

Instinctively I prefer 11...dxe5 12.dxe5 ♙xf3 13.♗xf3 ♗e7 14.♙f4 ♙xe5 15.♙xe5 ♗xe5 16.♗xb7 ♗d6 with a complicated game. But Keene's move is also good.

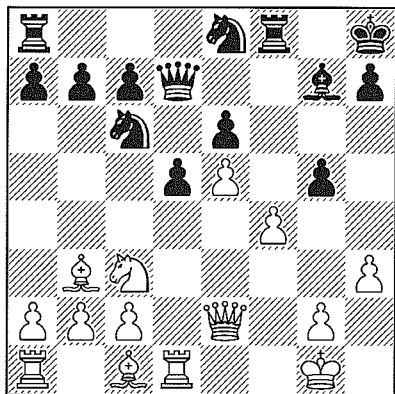
**12.h3 ♙xf3 13.♗xf3 f6!**

The strength of this idea is due to the clumsy position of White's pieces on b3 and c3.

14. ♖e2

After 14. exf6 ♜xf6 15. ♖g3 ♜e7 Black has the initiative.

14... fxe5 15. dxe5 ♜h8 16. f4 g5!



A standard procedure with the intention of undermining e5 (also seen in Game 45).

17. ♖f1

Another possibility is 17. g3 gxf4 18. ♙xf4 ♖f7 with an unclear position where I would still bet on Black.

17... ♜d4 18. ♖h5 c5 19. ♙e3?

With this move White sacrifices a piece, but does not get enough compensation. Better was 19. ♖xg5 b5 20. a3 c4 21. ♖d1 though Black has a strong initiative after 21... ♜f3† 22. gxf3 ♖g8 23. ♜h1 cxb3 24. cxb3 ♙f8 25. ♖h4 ♜g7. However, I doubt that White will be able to defend in the long run, as the black knight will arrive on f5.

19... ♜xb3 20. axb3 d4 21. fxg5

21. ♜e4 dxe3 22. ♜xg5 h6 is no better.

21... ♖xf1† 22. ♖xf1 dxe3 23. g6 h6 24. ♖f7 ♖d4 25. ♜e2 ♖e4 26. ♜f4 ♖d8 27. ♜h2 ♜g8??

Black commits a horrible blunder. Instead 27... e2 28. ♜xe2 ♖xe5† 29. ♜f4 ♜d6, with an extra piece, is pretty straightforward.

28. ♖h4

There is no defence against 29. ♖e7.

28... ♖c8

Black is lost after both 28... ♖d7 29. ♖xd7 ♙xe5 30. ♖d8 ♖xf4† 31. ♖xf4 ♙xf4† 32. ♜g1 ♜f8 33. g7† ♜xg7 34. ♖xe8 ♜f6 35. ♜f1 and 28... ♖d2 29. ♖e7 ♖xg2† 30. ♜xg2 ♙xe5† 31. ♜h1.

29. ♖e7 ♖xf4† 30. ♖xf4 ♜c7

A possible end was 31. ♖f7† ♜h8 32. ♖h4, followed by ♖xh6† and ♖h7 mate. A tragic end for Black who did almost everything right up to move 27.

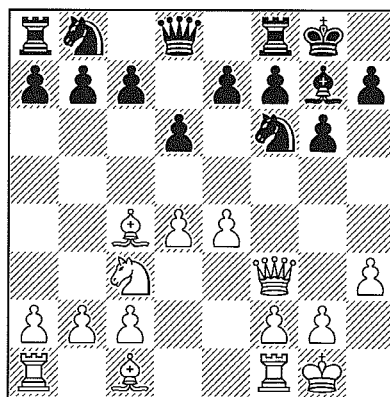
1-0

I expressed my doubts about 8... ♜c6 above, but I have not been able to find an advantage for White anywhere, so probably it is OK. The conclusion is that the combination of ♜f3, ♖e2 and e5 before ♜c3, is dangerous. But with accurate play Black is able to get a decent game in all lines.

White waits with ♖e2 and allows ♜xe4

When White withholds ♖e2 and develops the knights first, Black should avoid ♙g4. The reason is best illustrated with an example:

1. e4 g6 2. d4 ♙g7 3. ♜f3 d6 4. ♙c4 ♜f6 5. ♜c3 0-0 6. 0-0 ♙g4 7. h3 ♙xf3 8. ♖xf3



Compared with move eight in Game 45, White has won a tempo – ♜c3 – in this position. It might not be the most important tempo in the world since ♜c3 has the drawback that 8... e5 can

no longer be met by 9.c3. Still, I recommend a different approach here.

**Game 48**

**Medina Garcia – Larsen**

Las Palmas 1972

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.♖c3 d6 4.♙c4 ♘f6 5.♗f3

A common continuation here is 5...♗c6 when 6.h3 0-0 7.♞e2 ♘d7 8.♙e3 ♘b6 9.♙b3 ♘a5 possibly is OK for Black. My reason for avoiding this line is 6.d5 ♘b8 7.h3 c6 8.a4 when I believe Black is too far behind in development.

**5...0-0 6.0-0**

The flexible 6.♙e3 is not very impressive here because of 6...♗xe4 7.♙xf7† (7.♗xe4 d5 8.♙d3 dxe4 9.♙xe4 c5 is fine for Black.) 7...♞xf7 8.♗xe4 d5!? 9.♗eg5 ♞f8 10.♗e5 c5! with a complicated game, where Black is not worse.

In the next game we look at 6.h3.

**6...♗c6!**

The impatient 6...♗xe4 is met by 7.♗xe4 d5 8.♙d3 dxe4 9.♙xe4 when White is slightly better.

A few simple rules in positions where White has developed both knights:

...♙g4 should be played *after* White is committed to ♞e2 or ♙b3 (both moves are defending against ♗xe4).

...♗xe4 should not be played until White has played h3.

...♗c6 poses something of a double threat: White cannot avoid both ♗xe4 and ♙g4.

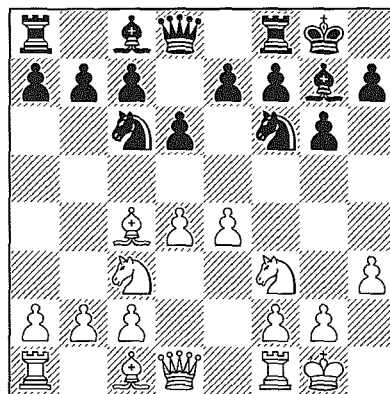
**7.h3**

This is the main continuation here, but 7.♙e3!? looks more interesting to me. After 7...♗xe4 8.♗xe4! d5 9.♙d3 dxe4 10.♙xe4 ♞d6 11.c3 in Torre – Yates, Marienbad 1925, White had a very nice position. Black should prefer 7...♙g4 8.h3 ♙xf3 9.♞xf3 e5 10.d5 ♗e7 with play similar to Game 45. A third possibility is 7...a6, but I do not see a good way for Black to continue after 8.a4.

Other options for White are not very attractive:

7.e5 dxe5 8.dxe5 ♗g4 9.e6 ♙xe6 10.♙xe6 ♞xd1 11.♞xd1 fxe6 is very nice for Black since the queens are off the board.

7.♞e2?! ♙g4! 8.♙e3 e5 9.d5 ♗d4 10.♙xd4 exd4 11.♗b5 ♞e8 is quite bad for White.



**7...♗xe4! 8.♙xf7†**

This is played almost automatically by most players and for good reason. After 8.♗xe4?! d5 9.♙xd5 ♞xd5 10.♗c3 ♞c4 Black has the bishop pair in an open position, and we all know what that means.

**8...♞xf7 9.♗xe4 d5!**

Equally common is 9...h6, to keep the knight out of g5. I do not see the necessity for this and I am unconvinced by Black's position after 10.d5! ♗b4 11.c3 ♗a6 12.♗d4 as in Young – Ginzburg, New York 1993.

**10.♗c5!**

White is striving for control of the e5-square, intending ♗e4-c5-d3 if Black allows. I have some difficulty in seeing the meaning of other knight moves, but still two other options have been tried. In Bojkovic – Gligoric, Novi Sad 1979, play continued:

**10.♗g3**

This move leaves me absolutely clueless as to the reasoning behind it. Where is this knight going next? If you know, please inform me.

10...♞d6 11.c3 e5 12.dxe5 ♗xe5 13.♗xe5 ♙xe5 14.f4

I guess one could argue that this move, intending f4-f5, is the idea behind 10.♖g3. Well, come on then!

14...♙g7 15.♙e3 ♙e6 16.♚d2 ♜af8!

Black discourages White from f4-f5 for eternity, unless White is prepared to double rooks on the f-file, play ♖e2, g2-g4 and then return with the knight to g3. Decades before this will happen Black will have launched the d-pawn...

17.♜f3 b6 18.♚d1 ♙c8! 19.♚f2 ♙b7?! 20.f5

and White eventually managed to mess things up. Instead of 19...♙b7, Black should have tried 19...c5 when his central pawn majority in combination with the bishop pair would have proved enough for a clear advantage.

Unzicker tried a second possibility against Keene in West Berlin 1971:

10.♖c3

This move is even more puzzling to me than 10.♖g3. On c3 the knight deters Black from going e7-e5, since White would win the d-pawn after dxe5 followed by ♖/♚xd5. But that is all it does.

10...♙f5 11.♙e3 ♚d7?!

To me 11...h6 seems like a good idea here to stop White from playing ♖g5 followed by f2-f4. White has developed his pieces, but there is no harmony, no cooperation between them. Black can answer 12.♚d2 with 12...♙xh3 13.♙xh6 ♜xf3! and if White plays 12.♜e1 then ♚d7 intending ♜af8 and g6-g5-g4 looks really awkward for White.

12.♖g5! ♜ff8 13.f4

White has managed to stop Black from going e7-e5 and the chances should be approximately equal.

Besides these two continuations, White can also go 10.♖ed2 or 10.♖eg5. The first of these loses a pawn to 10...♖xd4 and the second is just plainly bad: 10...♜f8 11.♜e1 ♚d6 and White has problems meeting h7-h6 on the next move.

10...♚d6 11.♙e3!

In Letelier Martner – Garcia, Buenos Aires 1975, White chose a weaker strategy: 11.c3 e5 12.♙e3?! when Black could have gained the

advantage with 12...e4!. A possible continuation is 13.♖g5 ♜e7 14.♚b3!? ♖a5 15.♖gxe4 ♖xb3 16.♖xd6 ♖xa1 17.♖xc8 ♜xc8, when Black has a few technical problems to overcome.

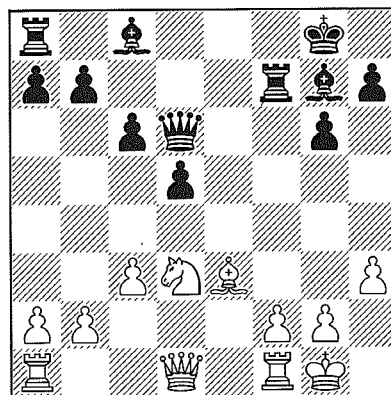
11...e5

If Black wants to keep the tension it is possible to play 11...b6 12.♖d3 ♙a6 with an unclear position.

12.dxe5 ♖xe5 13.♖xe5 ♙xe5 14.c3

After 14.♙d4 ♙xd4 (14...♙h2† is interesting) 15.♚xd4 b6 16.♖d3 ♙a6 the position is very equal indeed.

14...c6 15.♖d3 ♙g7



16.♚d2

White should try to exchange the black-squared bishops as soon as possible. With the bishops still on the board Black's position tends to improve move by move. In Najjar – Almahmoud, Cairo 1998, White tried 16.♙c5 when Black had slightly the better chances after 16...♚c7 17.♖b4 ♙f5 18.♖c2 ♜d8 19.♖e3 ♙e6 20.♙d4 c5 21.♙xg7 ♖xg7. White managed to exchange the bishops in the end, but a strong centre and the possibility of entering a bishop against knight endgame makes me prefer Black.

16...♙f5 17.♙c5 ♚c7 18.♜fe1 d4! 19.♙xd4 ♜d8 20.♜e3 ♙h6 21.f4?

This is far too materialistic. It was better to give up the exchange with 21.♜ae1 even though Black has a clear advantage after 21...♙xe3 22.♜xe3 b6

23. b4 ♙xd3 24. ♚xd3 ♚d6 when he is threatening 25...c5.

21...c5! 22. ♖xc5 ♚xc5 23. ♚e8† ♚f8 24. ♙xc5 ♚xd2 25. ♙xf8 ♙xf8

White is leading on points, but has no way of protecting himself against both ♚xb2 and ♖f7 followed by ♙e4 or ♙d6.

26. ♚ae1 ♚xb2 27. ♚1e2 ♚b1† 28. ♖h2

The endgame is hopeless for White after 28. ♚e1 ♚xe1† 29. ♚xe1 h5, intending h4.

28...♖f7 29. ♚d8 h5 30. ♖g3 ♚c1 31. ♚e3 ♙c5 32. ♚f3 h4†

White resigned since he loses a rook after either 33. ♖xh4 ♙e7† or 33. ♖h2 ♙g1† 34. ♖h1 ♙b6†.  
0-1

### Game 49

Votruba – Motwani

Forli 1991

1. e4 g6 2. d4 ♙g7 3. ♖c3 d6 4. ♙c4 ♖f6 5. ♖f3 0-0 6. h3

With this move White is threatening to play ♚e2, when neither ♙g4 nor ♖xe4 work for Black anymore.

6...♖xe4!

It is also possible to play 6...♖c6, but then I do not like 7. ♙e3! when Black has no choice but to enter a worse position: 7...♖xe4 8. ♖xe4 d5 9. ♙d3 dxe4 10. ♙xe4. This kind of position is generally better for White if Black has already played the knight to c6. If the knight is still on b8 Black can play c7-c5, when White must continue c2-c3, as dxc5 is suspect due to ...♙xb2!

7. ♙xf7†

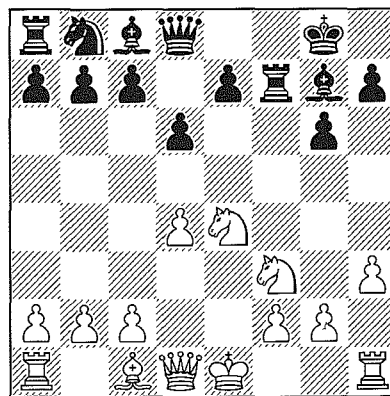
White can also try 7. ♖xe4 d5 8. ♙d3 dxe4 9. ♙xe4, when Black has two moves to choose between:

a) 9...c5 10. dxc5 ♚a5† 11. c3 ♚xc5 12. 0-0 ♖d7 and Black should be fine.

b) 9...♖d7! This prepares c7-c5 and makes the dxc5-line less attractive for White. 10. c3 c5 11. 0-0 cxd4 (11...♚c7 12. ♙g5 cxd4 13. cxd4 ♖f6 14. ♙d3 ♙e6 15. ♚d2 ♚fd8 16. ♙f4 ♚b6 was also fine for Black in Soltanici – Itkis, Kishnev 2001.)

12. ♖xd4 a6 13. ♚c2 ♚c7 14. ♚e1 e5 15. ♖f3 ♚b8 16. ♙d5 b5 17. ♙e3 ♖f6 18. ♙b3 ♙b7 19. ♚ad1 ♚bc8 ½-½ Pilz – Lau, Austria 2002. Instead of 19...♚bc8 I believe 19...a5 would have let the initiative pass to Black.

7...♚xf7 8. ♖xe4



### 8...h6

There is not much wrong with this move, but I do not understand why so few people play 8...d5 here, in analogy to the previous game. White would probably continue:

9. ♖c5

9. ♖eg5 ♚f8 10. ♖e5!? ♚d6 11. ♖gf3 ♖d7 12. 0-0 c5 is fine for Black.

9...♖c6 10. ♙e3 e5

Black should possibly avoid 10...b6 11. ♖d3 ♙a6 12. h4! when White gets some kind of an attack.

11. dxe5

11. ♖b3 a5! 12. c3 a4 13. ♖c1 a3 14. b3 exd4 15. cxd4 ♙f5 with a crushing position for Black in Jaquez – Hiarcs 6.0, Dominican Republic 1998.

11...♖xe5 12. ♖xe5 ♙xe5 13. 0-0 b6

I see nothing wrong with 13...♙xb2.

14. ♖d3 ♙g7 15. ♚d2 d4 16. ♙f4 ♙b7 17. ♚fe1 ♚d5 18. f3 ♚af8

with mutual chances in I. Sokolov – Miles, Wijk aan Zee 1989.

9. ♙e3

In Pytel – Kosten, Toulouse 1990, White fell into a deep rabbit hole: 9.0-0 ♖d7 (9...♞f8! 10.♘h4 g5 11.♘g6 ♞e8 is even better.) 10.♙e3 ♘f8 11.♞d2 ♘h7 12.♞ae1? (12.♘h2 leads to approximate equality) 12...♞xf3 13.gxf3 ♙xh3 and White could have resigned with a clear conscience.

### 9...♞f8!

A multipurpose move: h6 is guarded, ♞xf3 might be an option later, and White must watch out for 10.0-0? ♙xh3! when Black wins a pawn.

A second possibility is 9...♘d7 10.♞d2 ♘h7, but the king can easily be harassed on h7, where it is vulnerable to all sorts of tactical tricks.

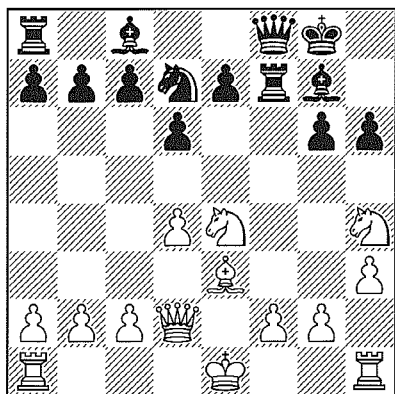
### 10.♞d2

It is too harsh to brand this move a mistake, but I would prefer 10.♞e2, to make the exchange sacrifice on f3 less attractive for Black. In Ritz – Roemer, Seefeld 1998, play continued: 10...♘c6 11.0-0-0 e5?! (This should not be played unless White has played c2-c4, consequently weakening the d4-square.) 12.dxe5 dxe5 13.♞c4 with a clear advantage to White. Black's 11th move was really ugly and 11...♘b4 looks like an improvement.

### 10...♘d7 11.c4

In Delekta – Sieg, Tyskland 1997, White had another idea:

### 11.♘h4!?



This can seem tempting, but it takes very special circumstances for it to work if Black reacts correctly.

### 11...♘f6?!

In the Modern Defence it is important **not** to think, “I will just make this move first.” Such an attitude will render you many painful losses. The other side of the coin is that White is in that very same boat with you ... and just like you is on the verge of falling overboard! After 11...g5! 12.♘g6 ♞e8 13.h4 ♞f5! 14.h5 ♘f8 the white knight is exchanged forcing White to throw all his forces at you: 15.f4 ♘g6 16.hxg6 gxf4 17.♙xf4 ♞xg6 18.♙xh6?! ♞d5! 19.♘f2 ♞xd4, when – SPLASH – only Black can be seen above the surface.

### 12.♘g3 g5 13.♘f3?!

I can see little logic behind this. It is just not worth two tempi to make Black play g6-g5. I for one could very well have played ...g5 anyway. Better was 13.♘g6 ♞e8 14.h4! ♘g4 15.hxg5 hxg5 16.♙xg5 e5! when the play is very unclear.

### 13...♙e6 14.0-0-0 ♙d5

and Black dominated.

I actually believe the most critical move in the position is 11.0-0-0, when White has some initiative. This is the main reason why I prefer 8...d5 rather than 8...h6.

### 11...♘b6?!

In the spirit of Tarrasch, my first reaction to this move was something like “what the H... is the knight doing there?” It is true, the knight is not really well placed on b6, but it is the best Black can do at the moment. On b6 the knight is not obstructing the other black pieces and White has to spend a few moves to get his act together.

Instinctively I would like to play 11...♞xf3! 12.gxf3 ♞xf3 13.♘g3 c5 and the more I look at it, the more I like it. For the sake of honesty I must confess I have a soft spot for exchange sacrifices and maybe you should take my judgement (in this instance only, of course) with a pinch of salt.

### 12.♞c1 ♙d7!

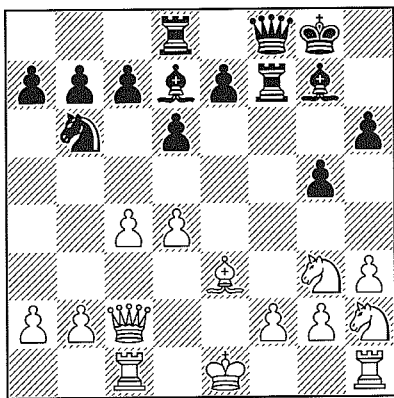
White has the sword of Damocles, ...♞xf3, constantly hanging over his head.

### 13.♘g3?!

The knight has no future on g3 unless Black has played g6-g5. It was better to continue 13.♘h2

with mutual chances. But 13.♘h4? is even worse than before: 13...g5 14.♘g6 ♖e8 and the white knight will end up in Black's nets after 15.h4 ♙f5. 13...♗d8!?

Black is preparing c7-c5.  
14.♖c2 g5 15.♘h2



15...d5! 16.c5?!

It was better to play 16.b3 though Black has the advantage after 16...e5 17.dxe5 dxc4.

16...♘c4 17.0-0 e5! 18.♗fd1 ♖e7 19.♘hf1 ♗df8 20.b3 ♘xe3 21.fxex3 ♙b5!?

Black is a virtuoso with the bishops. A different approach was 21...g4 when White cannot avoid 22.hxg4 ♙xg4 23.♗d2 h5 with a winning advantage for Black. Observe how helpless the knights are when they are uncoordinated and have no outposts.

22.a4 ♙xf1 23.♘xf1 exd4 24.exd4 ♗f4

Black wins a pawn. The rest is simple.

25.♗g6 ♖e4 26.♗xe4 ♗xe4 27.♘g3 ♗xd4 28.♗e1 ♗d3 29.♘h2 ♗f2 30.c6 bxc6 31.♗xc6 ♗dd2 32.♗g1 ♙e5 33.♗xh6 ♘g7 34.♗e6 ♙f4 35.h4 gxh4 36.♘h3 ♙xg3 37.♗ee1 ♗d3 38.♘g4 ♗f4†

0-1

The rule is “there are no rules”, but if there were one it could well be this: “If White avoids ♖e2 and allows ♘xe4, then Black should wait for the right moment to play ♘xe4, which is – in general – when White has played h3.” But, like I said, there are no rules.

**Early combination of ♘c3, ♖e2 and e4-e5**

### Game 50

**Kveinys – Speelman**

Moscow Olympiad 1994

When I refer to Speelman throughout this game it is to his annotations for *ChessBase Magazine*.

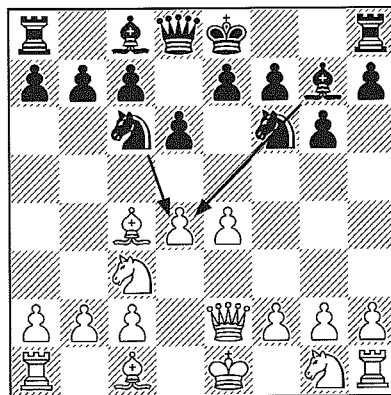
1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♙g7 3.♘c3 d6 4.♙c4 ♘f6 5.♖e2

This move generally signals that White is ready to launch e4-e5 and this is no exception.

If now 5...0-0 then 6.e5! and Black is in trouble since 6...♘e8 (6...dxe5 7.dxe5 and Black still cannot play ♘d5) 7.♙g5! ♘c6 8.0-0-0 gives White a dangerous attack. So what to do? When I find myself seriously troubled by this question, I usually pose a counter question: What is the weakest point in my opponent's position? The answer here is quite obviously...

5...♘c6!

...the d-pawn.



Now 6.♘f3 will be met by 6...♙g4, forcing 7.♙c3 e5 8.dxe5 ♘xe5 9.♙b3 0-0 10.0-0-0 ♙h5! (this avoids exchanging the bishop after 11.h3) 11.h3 (threatening g2-g4) 11...♘xf3 12.gxf3 ♘d7 13.♗g1 ♘e5 14.♗g3 c6! (recommended by Chernin in *Pirc Alert*) when Black seems to have a nice game.

6.e5! ♘d7

This move is the safe positional alternative. In the next game we look at the chaotic 6...♘g4.



**7.♟f3**

White gains nothing from 7.♟f7?! ♟xf7 8.e6† ♟e8 9.exd7† ♟xd7 when Black's bishop pair and better development more than compensates for losing the right to castle. In Kahn – Resika, Budapest 2001, White did not manage to solve the problem of defending his d-pawn: 10.♞f3 ♟g4 11.♟e3 ♞xd4 12.♟xd4 ♟xd4 13.♞b5† c6 14.♞c4 ♟xc3† 15.♞xc3 e5 and Black had an extra pawn and a clear advantage. Another equally unsuccessful try was 10.♟e3 ♞xd4 11.♟xd4 ♟xd4 12.♞d2 ♟xc3 13.♞xc3 ♟f8 when White did not have the faintest compensation for the missing pawn in Zieher – Chandler, Hamburg 1980.

**7...♞b6 8.♟b3!?**

In later games we will see White launching the bishop to b5, but here it is not very good: 8.♟b5 0-0 and White has two possibilities:

a) 9.♟f4 dxe5 10.dxe5 ♞d4 11.♞xd4 ♞xd4 12.♟g3 ♟f5 when Black is better.

b) 9.♟xc6! bxc6 10.0-0 f6 11.exf6 exf6 when White is fighting for equality.

**8...0-0 9.h3 ♞a5**

Just like in the Sicilian, this is something of a standard manoeuvre when White plays ♟f1-c4-b3. The intention is to neutralise the b3-bishop when Black no longer has a problem playing f7-f6, attacking White's centre and making way for the bishop pair. A common mistake in this kind of position is 9...dxe5?! 10.dxe5 ♞d4?! 11.♞xd4 ♞xd4, when 12.f4! leaves Black in a horrible state, where not one single piece has anywhere to go.

**10.0-0**

White is planning to centralise the rooks and then continue ♟c1-f4, ♞e2-e3 and ♟f4-h6. This would leave Black very passive, so it is time to put a stick in White's wheels.

**10...h6!**

Preparing ♟h7 and in the process stopping White from playing ♞e3, ♟h6. Sometimes g6-g5 will be annoying for White.

**11.♞e4**

Ciuksyte – E. Hagesaether, Istanbul 2003, went 11.♟f4 ♞xb3 12.axb3 f6 13.e6 c6 14.g4

g5 15.♟d2 f5 16.gxf5 ♟xf5 17.♟ae1 and now 17...♞e8, intending ♞g6, would have left Black with the clearly better position.

**11...♞xb3 12.axb3 f6**

Speelman logically tries to open up the centre for his bishops. Another interesting possibility is 12...f5!?, when both 13.♞c3 g5 and 13.♞g3 ♞e8 leads to positions where I believe Black has excellent chances.

**13.c4**

After 13.exf6?! exf6 Black has no problems developing the rest of his pieces.

**13...fxe5**

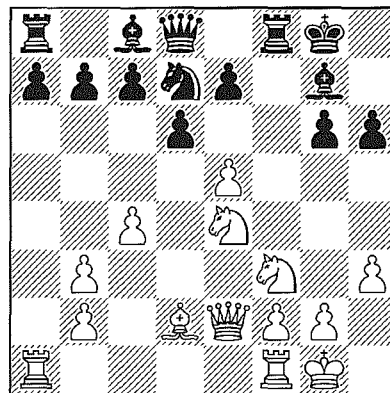
This is the logical follow up to 12...f6, but I believe the resulting position is slightly better for White, who is well centralised and ready for action.

**14.dxe5 ♞d7!?**

Speelman gives both 14...♞e8 and 14...g5 as alternatives. I still think White should be a bit better.

**15.♟d2**

After 15.♟e3 Speelman gives the attractive variation 15...b6 16.♞d2 ♟b7 17.♟xh6 ♟xe4 18.♟xg7 ♟xg7 19.♞g5 ♟f5 20.g4 ♞xe5! 21.gxf5 (21.f4 ♞f7 22.gxf5 ♞xg5 23.♞d4† is unclear) 21...♟xf5 22.f4 ♟xg5† 23.fxg5 ♞d7 when White's ropey kingside leaves Black with plenty of compensation for the exchange.

**15...b6!**

Speelman gives this move a "?!" but I disagree. Neither 15...♙xf3 16.♚xf3 ♗xe5 17.♚e3, intending ♙c3 and f4, nor 15...♗xe5 16.♗xe5 ♙e5 17.♙xh6 is anywhere close to attractive for Black.

**16.e6?**

White is more centralised, has a clear space advantage and should not strive to close the game. After 16.♙c3 he would have been clearly better. Black's king will be exposed for a long time to come and White can improve his position quite a lot before he opens up the centre.

**16...♗f6 17.♗xf6† ♙xf6 18.♗d4 ♙b7?**

Here Black could have gained a small advantage with 18...c5! 19.♚e4 d5! (Speelman only gives 19...♙b8, but he probably did not have access to a strong computer program in those days.) 20.♗c6 dxe4 21.♗xd8 ♙xe6.

**19.♙c3!**

Now White is back on the road to converting his advantage, but the road is still long and full of pitfalls.

**19...a6 20.f4!?**

It seems unnecessary to open up the position further for Black's bishop pair, but White is trying to avoid 20.♗c2 ♙f4 when Black is doing all right.

**20...♚f8 21.♗c2 c5!?**

If you like Russian roulette, then 21...♙xf4 22.♙xf4 ♚xf4 23.♙xg7 ♗xg7 24.♙f1 is the variation for you. Black is in danger, but I see nothing clear for White after 24...♚g5 25.♙f7† ♗g8.

**22.♙xf6! ♚xf6 23.♙ab1!?**

White must try to open files for his rooks and why not immediately? 23.b4 suggests itself.

**23...♙f8 24.b4 ♚f5 25.♗h2**

White has no time to play 25.bxc5, because of 25...♙e4 26.♗e3 ♙d4 when Black is dominating the board with his bishops.

**25...♚e4!**

Speelman enters a really pleasant endgame where his bishops are terribly strong.

**26.♙be1 ♙xf4 27.♚xe4 ♙xe4 28.bxc5 ♙xc4 29.♗e3**

Black is clearly better after 29.cxd6 ♙xc2 30.♙g1 exd6 31.e7 ♙c6 32.e8♚† ♙xe8 33.♙xe8† ♗f7 34.♙a8 ♙e5† 35.♗h1 a5 (Speelman). White can do very little to stop Black creating a passed pawn on the a-file which will eventually promote.

**29...♙xc5**

The smell of gunpowder is receding and it is time to judge the outcome of the battle so far. Materially speaking the position is equal, but the bishops and two pawns are much stronger than the knight and rook. White's only trump is the e6-pawn, which can be used to attack the e7-pawn with ♙f7 and, on a beautiful day, it might turn into a queen. White also has to keep an eye on his weak b-pawn. It is reasonable to say that if White loses one of his pawns he will probably lose the game as well.

**30.b4!**

After 30.♙f7 ♙c7 31.♙ef1 h5! Black is improving his position and White is almost in zugzwang, as every knight move is answered with ♙d5, winning the e6-pawn. The rest of the game is technique propaganda from Speelman. For those interested in the details I recommend looking it up in *ChessBase Magazine* or *Mega Database*.

**30...♙e5 31.♗c4 ♙g5 32.♙e2 ♙d5 33.♙f4 b5 34.♗b6 ♙b3 35.♗d7 ♙f5! 36.♙xf5 gxf5 37.♗g3 ♙c4 38.♙e3 ♙d4 39.♙a3 ♙xe6 40.♗b8 ♙e5† 41.♗f2 ♗f7 42.♗c6 ♙b2 43.♙xa6 ♙d5 44.♗a7! ♙c3 45.♗xb5 ♙xb4 46.♙a1 f4! 47.♙c1 ♙c5† 48.♗f1 e5! 49.♗c3 ♙c6 50.♙a1? ♗e6 51.♙b1 ♙a7 52.♙a1 ♙d4 53.♙a3 e4 54.♗e2 ♙c5 55.♙b3 ♗e5 56.♙b8 f3 57.gxf3 exf3 58.♗g3 ♙d7 59.h4? ♙h3† 60.♗e1 f2† 61.♗e2 ♗f4 62.♙g8 ♙g4† 63.♙xg4† ♗xg4 64.♗e4 ♗h3 65.♗f1 h5 66.♗f6 ♗xh4 67.♗e4 ♗h3 68.♗f6 h4 69.♗e4 ♗h2 70.♗f6 ♗g3 71.♗e4† ♗f4 72.♗xd6 h3**

White resigned because there is no defence against h3-h2-h1=♚† followed by f1=♚.

**0-1**

## Game 51

Kveinys – M. Gurevich

Bonn 1996

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♘g7 3.♟c3 d6 4.♙c4 ♘f6! 5.♖e2  
 ♟c6 6.e5 ♘g4

There are two other sharp ways to tackle White's early aggression:

6...♘d4?! 7.exf6 ♘xe2 8.fxg7 ♖g8 9.♘gxe2 has been played a few times, but the statistics confirm that White has an awesome attack with three pieces for the queen. I would never play like this.

Also quite optimistic is 6...dxe5, when 7.dxe5 ♘g4 8.e6 (8.f4 ♘d4 9.♖d1 ♙f5 10.♙d3 ♘e6 11.♙xf5 ♖xd1† 12.♘d1 gxf5 13.♘e2 f6 is fine for Black.) 8...♘g5! (the only chance to mix things up) 9.exf7† ♜f8! 10.♙e3 ♘d4 11.♙xd4 ♖xd4 12.♙b3 gives White a stable advantage.

7.♙b5

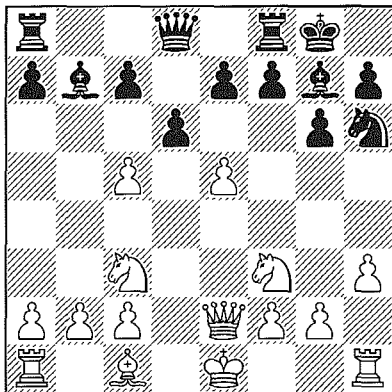
A solid alternative to 7.e6 (see the next game).

7...0-0 8.♙xc6 bxc6 9.h3 ♘h6 10.♘f3 c5!

Black must open up the centre for the bishops, even if it costs a pawn.

11.dxc5 ♙b7

Another interesting possibility is 11...a5 with the idea ...♙a6. A possible continuation is 12.cxd6 cxd6 13.♘d5 ♙a6 14.c4 ♙g7 when Black has reasonable compensation for the pawn. However, there is nothing wrong with 11...♙b7.



12.♙xc6

White has tried a few other moves over the years:

a) In Topakian – van Wely, Arnhem 1988, there followed 12.♙f4 ♖b8!? 13.0-0-0 ♙a8 14.♘d4 ♖d7 15.e6 ♖c8 16.c6 ♘f5 17.♘xf5 gxf5 18.exf7† ♖xf7 19.♖c4 ♖e8 and, as the c6-pawn fell, Black was clearly better.

b) In Kveinys – Novak, Eupen 1993, White tried 12.♙g5!? and gained the advantage after 12...♖d7? 13.0-0-0 ♖ab8?! 14.♖he1 f6 15.exf6 exf6 16.♙f4. I do not like Black's play. After 12...♘f5, threatening ♙xf3, followed by ♙xe5, Black can look forward to a bright future. I do not see how White will neutralise the black bishop pair. Also reasonable was 12...dxe5!.

c) After 12.0-0 ♘f5 White is out of natural developing moves since 13.♙f4 ♙xf3 14.♖xf3 dxe5 15.♙e3 ♘d4 is clearly advantageous for Black. In Lendwai – Mittelberger, Austria 2000, White got lucky with 13.e6! ♙xf3? 14.exf7† ♖xf7 15.♖xf3 ♘d4 16.♖d3, since Black's last three moves were all wrong. From a position full of dynamic prospects, Black has wound up in a dynamically dead position in just three moves. So yes, it is true, the dynamic Modern can easily turn into a miserable pudding that you will find hard to swallow. To avoid this scenario I usually take quite some time to make my first out-of-theory-move. Sometimes I sit on my hands, as Tarrasch recommended, stopping myself from doing something rash. Following this method, Black would probably have stumbled on 13...fxe6! 14.♖xe6† (14.♘g5 ♘d4 is bad for White) 14...♜h8 15.♘g5 ♖e8 with a wonderful position. It is as though the bishops' diagonals have been waxed by Gunde Svan [Editor's Note: Gunde Svan is a famous Swedish cross-country skier and not, as I suspected, a brand of furniture polish.]

12...♙xc6 13.0-0 ♖b8!?

Black poses the threat ♙xf3, followed by ♖xb2. Also possible is 13...♙g7.

14.♖fd1!?

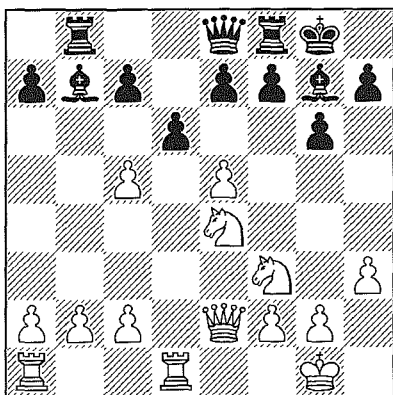
The expert in this line, GM Kveinys, later tried 14.♖ab1 against Keskinen in Jyväskylä 2001.

The game continued 14...♙g7 15.exd6 exd6 16.cxd6 ♖xd6 17.♜fe1 ♗c6 18.♗e3 a5 19.♗f4 ♜fe8 20.♜bd1 ♜e6 21.♜xe6 fxe6 22.♗g5 with a huge advantage for White. I do not see why Black recaptured on d6 with his e-pawn rather than his c-pawn, and instead of 19...♜fe8 I believe 19...♙a8!, with the ideas ♜b4 or ♙xc3, is very nice for Black.

14...♙g7 15.♘e4?!

Mikhail Gurevich is too strong to be afraid of 15.exd6 exd6 16.cxd6, when he thinks Black has good compensation after both 16...♜e8!? 17.♗d3 cxd6 and 16...cxd6.

15...♗e8!



A beautiful move that hints at 16...dxe5.

16.b4

After 16.cxd6 exd6 the e-pawn cannot move and White is forced to enter a middlegame with knights against bishops, without getting as much as a pawn for it.

16...♗c6

The alternative 16...dxe5 was not exactly pleasing to the eye, but a pawn is a pawn and White would have to do something before Black gets organised with h6, f5, e4, etc.

17.♘c3 dxc5!?

Gurevich is critical of this and advocates 17...dxe5!? 18.♘d5 ♜fe8 when he gives various variations that imply Black has the better chances. The Silicon brain immediately comes up with

19.♘g5 intending 20.b5 ♗xc5 21.♘e4 when Black loses his queen. I see nothing convincing for Black after 19.♘g5, so 17...dxc5 might be the best move anyway. In the game continuation Black is slightly better, but White is never really in danger of losing.

18.b5 ♗e6 19.♜e1 ♜fd8 20.♜ab1 ♙xf3 21.♗xf3 ♙xe5 22.♗e3! ♙xc3 23.♗xc3 ♗d6 24.♜e5 c4

The position is absolutely equal after 24...c6 25.a4 cxb5 26.axb5 a6. For those who are interested, Gurevich annotated the rest of the game in *ChessBase Magazine*.

25.♜be1 e6 26.♗xc4 ♜d7 27.♜c5 ♗d2 28.♜e4 ♜bd8 29.♗c3 ♗d1† 30.♜e1 ♗d6 31.♜c6 ♗f4 32.♗e5 ♗xe5 33.♜xe5 ♜d1† 34.♔h2 ♜8d2 35.♜xc7 ♜xf2 36.♜xa7 ♜xc2 37.a4 ♜b2 38.♜e3 ♜a1 39.♜f3 ♜aa2 40.♜xf7 ♜xg2† 41.♔h1 ♜h2† 42.♔g1 ♜ag2† 43.♔f1 ♜c2 44.♔g1 ♜cg2†

And since neither player can make progress they agreed a draw.

½-½

## Game 52

Hoffmann – Jansa

Muenster 1992

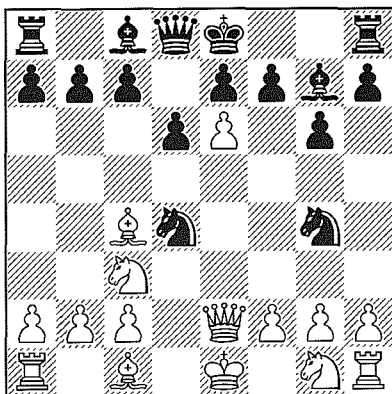
1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♙g7 3.♘c3 d6 4.♙c4 ♘f6! 5.♗e2 ♘c6 6.e5 ♘g4 7.e6

The theoretical reputation of this move is rather shaky. Still, surprisingly many play it and very few of those who encounter it make use of the theoretical “refutation” 7...♘d4.

7...f5!?

As said, the main line is 7...♘d4, when play assumes a forced character. In most books on the Modern/Pirc this is judged to be somewhat better for Black, but I believe there is something for White somewhere.

(See diagram next page.)



After 7...d4 White has two alternatives:

a) 8.♞d1! ♙xe6 9.♙xe6 fxe6 10.f3 (Or 10.h3 ♜xf2 and Black gets good compensation for the piece.) 10...♞e5 11.♞xd4 ♜xf3† 12.♞xf3 ♙xd4 13.♞xd4 ♞d7 is unclear.

b) 8.♞xg4 ♞xc2† is the main line when White has two choices:

b1) 9.♝f1 ♞xa1 10.exf7† ♝f8 11.♞h4 d5! 12.♞xd5! (After 12.♙xd5 c6! 13.♙h6 ♞c2 14.♙e4 ♞d4 Black was fine in Isonzo – Belotti, Mantova 1996.) 12...c6 13.♙h6 and White had a strong initiative in Fontana – Roger Fischer, Frankfurt 2002.

b2) 9.♞d1!? ♞xa1 10.exf7† ♝f8 11.♞h4 d5 12.♙d3 ♙f5 13.♙xf5 gxf5 14.♙h6 e6? (14...♞d6 15.♙xg7† ♝xg7 16.♞f3 was preferable, though still uncomfortable.) 15.♞d4 ♞g5? 16.♞c5† ♞e7 17.♙xg7† and White won in Nemitz – Horstmann, Portz 1992.

I would not like to be Black in either of these lines.

### 8.d5

White gains nothing by holding back the d-pawn. After either 8.f3!? ♞f6! or 8.h3?! ♞xd4 9.♞d1 ♙xe6 10.♙xe6 ♞xf2 11.♝xf2 ♞xe6 Black is doing fine.

### 8...♞a5

I realise this is not to everybody's liking, but I do believe the chances should be balanced. Black will try to undermine the d5-pawn with c7-c6

and has active pieces. White has a lot of space, but it is not easy to make use of it.

### 9.h3?!

White forces the g4-knight to f6, the idea being that Black can no longer answer ♞f3 with ♞e5. Still, it was better to play 9.♞f3 c6 (Black possibly intends ♙xc3, followed by ♞f6, forcing White to explain him/herself in the centre.) 10.0-0, when 10...0-0 leads to a position similar to the game.

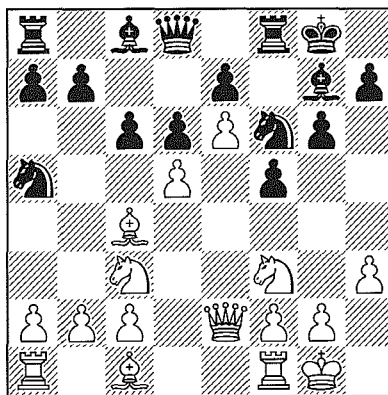
Another possibility is 9.♙d3?! c6! 10.♞f3 0-0 and now two moves have been tried:

a) 11.h4. In Toma – E. Paehtz, Oropesa del Mar 1999, Black had a good game after 11...h6 12.h5 g5 13.♙d2 cxd5. But I prefer 11...♙xc3†! when the white centre will be blown to smithereens: 12.bxc3 cxd5 13.h5 ♞f6 14.♞d4 ♞c6 15.hxg6 ♞xd4 16.gxh7† ♝h8 and, as the e-pawn falls, so will the white monarch soon.

b) 11.h3 ♞e5 12.h4 cxd5 13.h5 ♞ac6 14.hxg6 hxg6 15.♞g5 d4 16.♞d1 ♞a5† 17.♝f1 ♞xd3 18.cxd3 ♞d5 and Black dominated in Knazovcik – Stratil, Czech Championship 1994/95. White cannot stop Black from going ♞c6-d8xe6.

### 9...♞f6 10.♞f3 c6 11.0-0 0-0

We must shun variations like 11...♞xc4?! 12.♞xc4 cxd5 13.♞xd5 0-0 14.♞e1, when divine intervention is the only thing that can save Black from a slow and painful death. Also 11...b5?! is premature due to 12.♞xb5 cxb5 13.♙xb5† ♝f8. It is important to *open up* the position, not just half of it, but *all of it*. Now 12...b5 is a threat.



**12.♙b3!**

White should not ignore the threat of 12...b5 as was illustrated in Belaska – Pribyl, Prague 1994:

12.♘g5?! b5! 13.♘f7

If White moves the bishop, Black wins the d-pawn after 13...b4 and then proceeds to engulf the e6-pawn.

13...♞xf7!?

An excellent but, strictly speaking, unnecessary move. It is often worth the exchange to get a pawn majority in the centre as it will leave the remaining white pieces gasping for air, but there was nothing wrong with the conservative 13...♞c7 14.♙d3 b4 15.♘d1 ♘xd5 when White has some compensation for the pawn, but not enough.

14.exf7† ♘xf7 15.♙b3 b4 16.♘d1 cxd5!

After 16...♘xb3 17.axb3 ♘xd5 Black is better, but White will get counterplay on the a-file.

17.♞b5 ♘xb3 18.axb3 a5!?

Here Black could have taken a firm grip on the initiative with 18...♞c7!. After 19.♞xb4 ♞xc2 I strongly prefer Black's position, and after 19.♘e3 ♞b7 the white queen has to retrace its steps, as the endgame is hopeless.

19.♙e3 ♙d7 20.♞b6 ♞c8 21.♞xa5 ♞b8 22.♞a7 ♙b5 ½-½

Black seems to be clearly better, but maybe he was running out of time...

**12...h6!**

Black stops White from playing ♙c1-g5xf6 and simultaneously prepares g6-g5 and ♞d8-e8-g6. Stohl shows that 12...♘b3 is bad because of 13.axb3 cxd5? 14.♙g5! h6 (14...♘e4 15.♘d5 ♘xg5 16.♘xg5 ♙xb2 17.♞a4 and Black's extra pawn is small consolation for the confusion the e6-pawn spreads in Black's camp.) 15.♙xf6 ♞xf6 16.♘d4, when Black will be utterly mummified: the bishop on c8 has no life.

**13.♙e3**

Stohl suggests 13.♞d1, but it is hard to see how White can continue without ♙e3 in the long run.

**13...♞e8! 14.a3?!**

After 14.h4 a6! (threatening ♘xb3, followed by cxd5 and ♘e4) 15.♙d4 c5! 16.♙xf6 ♙xf6 17.a3

♘xb3 18.cxb3 the position is highly unclear. Black will continue with g5, b6 and ♙b7 and White will be tied to the defence of the d-pawn. Still, White has some space, and yes, "unclear" is as far as I dare to go.

**14...♘b3 15.cxb3 g5 16.b4 ♞g6 17.♙d4 f4**

Stohl gives 17...g4! 18.hxg4 (After 18.♘h4 ♞g5 19.g3 ♘xd5 20.♙xg7 ♞xg7 21.♘g2 f4! White's centre is collapsing.) 18...fxg4 19.♘d2 ♘xd5 20.♙xg7 ♘xg7 21.♘d5 cxd5 with a slight advantage to Black. The game continuation seems just as good.

**18.♞a1 ♞f5?!**

I see no reason to play just with the queen. Why not 18...h5!?, when White's hand is forced due to the threat g5-g4. Both 19.♘h2 g4! 20.hxg4 hxg4 21.♙xf6 ♞xf6 22.♘g4 ♞f5 and 19.h4 g4 20.♘g5 f3 will let the initiative pass to Black.

**19.♞f1 a5 20.♙xf6 ♙xf6 21.♘d4**

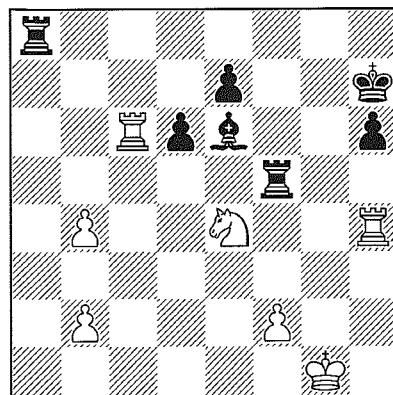
This is the kind of position I would generally try to avoid if it was not for one little detail: Black will be able to play f4-f3. Without this possibility Black would be close to lost.

**21...♙xd4 22.♞xd4 axb4 23.axb4 f3 24.♞xf3?!**

Stohl gives 24.♞f1 fxg2 25.♞xg2 cxd5 26.♘d5 ♞xe6 with the idea 27.♘c7 ♞f6 28.♞d5† e6 as winning for Black. Instead of 27.♘c7 White can try 27.h4, when Black is not out of the woods yet.

**24...♞xf3 25.gxf3 ♞xf3 26.h4 gxh4 27.♞xh4**

**♘h7 28.♘e4 ♞f5 29.dxc6 bxc6 30.♞xc6 ♙xe6**



Black has a few positional trumps like bishop against knight in the endgame, centralisation, two passed pawns and better coordination. White, on the other hand, has a monster b-pawn that can easily get out of control. The position is indeed very complicated, but Black ought to be slightly better.

31.♖c7 ♜g8† 32.♔f1 ♜g7 33.♞c3 ♜gf7 34.♞h2 ♜f4! 35.b5 ♞b4 36.f4!

White has his priorities right, use the b-pawn and then get his pieces active. The f-pawn is of minor importance.

36...♞xf4†?

The last chance to win the game was 36...♞bxf4† 37.♔e1 ♞g4 when 38.b6 ♞b4 is good for Black. It is not easy to see how White will react to the threat of h6-h5-h4, etc.

37.♔e1 ♞f7 38.♞e2 ♞c4

Jansa sets a trap...

39.♞exe7

But White is on his guard. Instead 39.♞e4? would be met with 39...♞f1† 40.♔d2 ♞xb2† 41.♔e3 ♞e1† and Black gets winning chances with ♞xe4 and ♞xb5.

39...♞xe7† 40.♞xe7† ♔g6 41.♞d7

Seeing that 41...d5 42.♞xd5 ♞xd5 43.♞xd5 ♞xb2 is rather drawish, the players agreed to call it a day.

1/2-1/2

**Conclusions:** The ideas featured in Games 45-47 is by far the most dangerous for the Black player. It is important to appreciate the difference between when e5 can be met by dxe5 and ♞d5, and when it is better to retreat the knight to e8. In Games 48 and 49 Black has no problems and the only way for White to improve seems to be 7.♞e3 (as discussed in Game 48), though 7...♞g4 leads to a complicated game where I would be happy to be Black. The line featured in Games 50-52 is very sharp and in the days of computer analysis you never know what fantastic improvements can be found here – for Black or White. Both 6...♞d7 and 6...♞g4 have a solid theoretical reputation, but I prefer the latter since it is more complicated. In Game 52 it is important to consider the position after 12.axb3. If Black can get a good game with 12...f5, then there seems to be nothing wrong with 6...♞d7, otherwise Black needs an improvement earlier.

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## Chapter 8

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# g3 – Fianchetto Variation

When reading through a few theoretical works on the Pirc/Modern Defence, it is easy to get the impression that Black can get away with almost anything in this line. This is far from the truth. In the line with 1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♖g7 3.♗c3 d6 4.g3 ♗f6 5.♙g2 0-0 6.♗ge2 e5 7.h3 Black can choose between a set-up involving exd4, ♗e8 and ♗c6, or one with c6 and ♗a6. Both lines have a reasonable theoretical reputation, but I do not like either of them. I prefer a Sicilian to a Philidor pawn structure, when I can get one. With a little help from the likes of Khalifman, Gulko and Tkachiev I will try to convince you that this is indeed possible:

### 1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♖g7 3.♗c3

White can try to confuse Black with 3.g3, intending 3...d6 4.♙g2 ♗f6 5.♗ge2, possibly followed by c2-c4. A less cooperative line of action is 3...d5!? 4.e5 c5 5.c3 ♗c6 6.♙g2 ♙f5 7.a3 ♗a5 8.♗e2 cxd4 9.b4 ♗a6 10.cxd4 ♗xb4 (10...e6 also looks good for Black) 11.0-0 e6 12.♗bc3 ♗c6 13.♗f4 ♗c4. In Strikovic – Azmaiparashvili, Candas 1992, White did not have enough compensation for the pawn.

### 3...d6 4.♗ge2!?

This move order is somewhat trickier than 4.g3, since it leaves Black guessing what will come next. After 4.g3 Black has the extra option of 4...♗c6 (Game 56), but now this would be quite wrong since White can choose to avoid the fianchetto with either 5.♙g5(!) or 5.♙e3. In such positions the knight is badly placed on c6 and e7-e5, the only logical way to continue for Black is infamous.

### 4...♗d7!

I would love to play 4...a6 here, but I am a bit worried about 5.a4! b6 (otherwise White continues a4-a5) 6.g3! ♗d7 7.♙g2 ♗b8!? (After 7...♙b7 8.0-0 c5 9.d5 Black has a difficult time achieving b7-b5.) 8.d5!? intending ♗d4. If Black instead tries to play a Hippo set-up, White gets the advantage by playing d4-d5, answering e6-e5 with f2-f4! Another possibility is 4...♗f6, but then you have to play a Pirc position after 5.♙e3 e5 6.f3.

### 5.g3

White can also try 5.♙e3, but then it makes more sense to try the a6 idea again. 5...a6 6.a4 b6 7.g3 ♗gf6! 8.♙g2 ♗b8! 9.h3 c5 and Black is back on track. Another possible continuation is 5...a6 6.g3!? b5 7.♙g2 ♙b7 8.0-0 when many moves have been tried. Chernin once played 8...c6 in this position, but I prefer Chepukaitis's 8...c5 9.♗d2 ♗c8 when Black is fine.

### 5...c5 6.♙g2

After 6.♙e3 the more adventurous can try 6...♗gf6 7.dxc5 ♗g4 8.cxd6 ♗xe3 9.fxg3 ♗b6 with compensation for the pawn, or simply 6...b6 7.♙g2 ♗b8 with similar play to the main line.

### 6...♗gf6 7.0-0

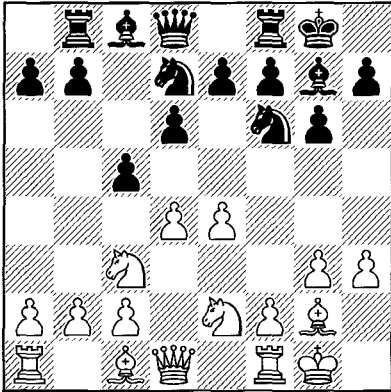
7.h3!? should be answered with 7...♗b8! rather than 7...0-0 when 8.♙e3 is slightly awkward for Black (8...b6? 9.e5 loses the exchange). I am surprised that there are so few games where White has tried this move order trick.

### 7...0-0 8.h3

White prepares to put the bishop on e3 and it is time for Black to come up with a plan.

### 8...♗b8





This is the starting position of Games 53-55 (in Game 54 the move order is slightly different but it makes no difference in the end). In the first game White plays a move of little purpose (13.♔h2!?) and Black is able to release his dynamic potential. In the second game the star of this variation, Boris Gulko, shows how to meet the g3-g4-g5-idea. And in the third game Alexander Khalifman meets the most important plan from White's point of view: a combination of ♕g5 and ♖d5. Finally, the Game 56 deals with an interesting idea that is worth considering.

### Game 53

Sermek – Tkachiev

Pula 1998

#### 1.e4 d6

The Pirc move order in this and the next game does not change anything in the long run. I usually play 1...g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.♖c3 d6 4.g3 ♖d7 and then c5, before moving the g8-knight, but there is nothing wrong with 4...♖f6 which would lead to the same position as in this game.

2.d4 ♖f6 3.♖c3 g6 4.g3 ♗g7 5.♗g2 0-0 6.♖ge2

Also rather common is 6.♖f3 when after 6...♖bd7 White has two important options:

a) 7.0-0 e5 8.a4 b6! This is the key move to achieve a good position against g3/♖f3. 9.♗e1 a5 (9...a6 is another way to stop a4-a5) 10.♗d2 ♗b7 11.♗c1 ♗e8 12.♗h6 ♖c5 13.♗xg7 ♔xg7 and Black had a slight advantage in Tregubov – McNab, Gibraltar 2005. I could write much more about this line, but my general impression is that Black is always fine after b6 and ♗b7. If White plays d5, then c6 opens up the game and if White exchanges on e5 then Black is slightly better since the d7-knight is better placed than its counterpart on c3.

b) 7.e5 dxe5 8.dxe5 ♖g4 9.e6 and now Black should play 9...♖de5 when both

b1) 10.♗xd8 ♗xd8 11.♖xe5 ♖xe5 12.exf7 ♔xf7 and

b2) 10.♖xe5 ♗xd1 ♖! 11.♖xd1 ♖xe5 12.exf7 ♖xf7 are all right for Black, though slightly drawish.

In the Modern move order line b can generally be avoided since ♖d7 can be played before ♖f6, but there is one exception: 1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.♖f3 d6 4.g3 and now 4...♖d7 leads to the King's Indian after 5.c4, so 4...♖f6 5.♖c3 0-0 is necessary when 6.e5 leads to line b.

#### 6...♖bd7 7.0-0 c5 8.h3 ♗b8!

A multipurpose move that prepares to launch the b-pawn and simultaneously evacuates the rook from the a8-h1 diagonal. In this kind of position Black should generally avoid cxd4 until after b7-b6/b5, so that ♖xd4 can be answered with ♗b7. Why? Because after 8...cxd4 9.♖xd4 it would be harder for Black to play ♗b8 and b6/b5 since the d4-knight is hovering like a fork-carrying devil over the c6-square. In general, the exchange on d4 also lets the white pieces breathe easier. In the good old days it was not uncommon for Black to play ♗c7 in these positions, but that has fallen from grace and for good reason: the queen will be vulnerable to all kinds of ♖c3-d5 tricks.

#### 9.♗e3

This is more flexible than 9.dxc5 ♖xc5 10.♗e3 b6 11.g4 ♗b7 (Both 11...♖fd7 12.♗d4 ♗a6 and 11...♗a6 are interesting.) 12.♖g3 ♖fd7 13.♗d2 ♖e5 14.b3 ♗c8 15.♖b5 a6 (Possibly stronger

is 15...♖c6!? 16.♞ad1 a6 with an initiative for Black.) 16.♘d4 ♘c6 17.c3 ♞c7 18.♙h6 ♙xh6 19.♞xh6 e5 Black managed to win after another seventy moves in Luecke – Khalifman, Germany 1998. The position seems unclear.

### 9...b6!

Black overprotects c5 and prepares ♙b7, or even ♙a6. The impatient 9...b5?! leads to a clear advantage for White after 10.e5! dxe5 11.dxc5 b4 12.♘d5 ♙a6 13.♞e1 when the white pieces are ideally placed to trouble Black on the queenside.

### 10.♞d2

In Prandstetter – Ftacnik, Pardubice 1998, White chose immediate aggression with 10.f4. The game continued 10...cxd4 11.♙xd4 ♙b7 12.♘d5 e5! 13.♘xf6† ♘xf6 14.fxe5 ♘xe4 15.exd6 ♞xd6 16.♙xg7 ♖xg7 17.♞xd6 ♘xd6. In this position Black has only a microscopic advantage, but White had a bad day and went down in kamikaze style.

### 10...♞e8!?

10...cxd4 followed by ♙b7 is more common here, but I prefer Tkachiev's flexible move, intending to meet 11.♙h6 with 11...♙h8.

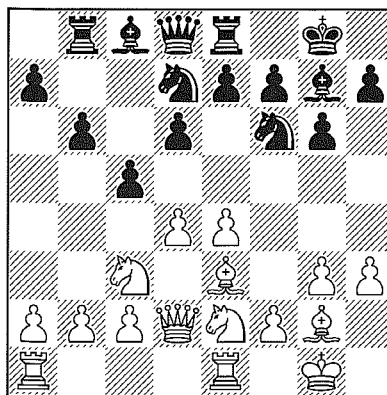
### 11.♞fe1

White has two main set-ups at his disposal:

Overprotecting the d5-square (to stop Black from going cxd4, e7-e5, d6-d5) and then expanding on the kingside with f2-f4, g3-g4, ♘g3, g4-g5 and maybe h3-h4-h5. The downside of this plan is that it takes lots of moves and Black has time to start a counterattack on the queenside with b6-b5.

Playing useful moves, like ♖h2 or ♞fd1, waiting for the moment when Black will lose his temper and exchange on d4. In the resulting position White plans to play ♘c3-d5 with a small advantage. Black should not worry too much about this, but there is always the possibility to play e7-e6 to stop White's ♘d5 intentions.

With his last move White flirts with the second of these two plans. In the next game we shall look at the first plan.



### 11...♙b7!?

The normal thing to do here would be 11...a6 12.a4 cxd4 13.♙xd4 ♙b7 14.♞ad1 when 14...♞c8 (not 14...♙c6? 15.e5! losing a piece) intending ♙c6, b6-b5, is interesting. 15.♘d5?! can be met by 15...e5 16.♙e3 ♘xd5 17.exd5 ♞c7 with excellent play for Black.

### 12.a4

In the next two games White plays this a few moves earlier, but it does not make much of a difference in the long run. If Black plays a6 White generally answers a4 and here it is just the other way round. It is premature to play 12.d5 as after 12...♙a6!? followed by ♙xe2, ♘f6-e8-c7, a7-a6 and b6-b5 Black is doing great. In a closed position it is often the case that the player with less space gains from exchanges and Black is happy to exchange the passive b7-bishop.

### 12...a6!?

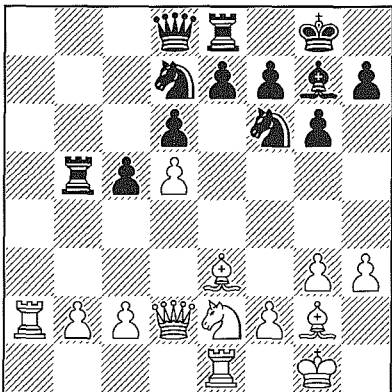
If Black can get away with this move, it is definitely the right thing to do, but there is still nothing wrong with 12...cxd4 13.♙xd4 a6 when 14.a4 leads to the comment to Black's 11th move.

### 13.♖h2!?

White adopts a policy of strengthening his position slowly, but this is too slow.

13.d5 seems more consistent, arguing that the b7-bishop is obstructing Black from achieving

b6-b5. Well, the argument does not hold as after 13...b5 (If 13...♙c8 14.f4! b5 15.axb5 axb5 16.b4! cxb4 17.♖a2 White intends ♖xb4 and Black is slightly worse.) 14.axb5 axb5 15.♖xb5 (15.b4!?) 15...♙xd5 16.exd5 ♜xb5 17.♞a2:



Black has achieved material balance and the position is unclear.

Another possible move is 13.g4, when 13...cxd4 14.♙xd4 leads to a position similar to the next game.

### 13...b5!

White has no pressure on the d-file and Black can even play 13...cxd4 14.♙xd4 e6! (stopping White from playing ♖d5) 15.♞ad1 ♙f8 with an excellent game.

### 14.axb5 axb5 15.♞a7 b4

Here Black had the interesting possibility 15...♖b6!? when White can answer in four different ways:

a) 16.dxc5?! ♖c4 17.♞d1 ♞c8! 18.cxd6 b4 19.♖b5 ♖xe3 20.fxe3 ♞c5 21.c4 bxc3 22.♖exc3 ♖h5 and Black seizes the initiative.

b) 16.♞xb7? ♞xb7 17.e5 dxe5 18.♙xb7 ♖c4 followed by exd4 is advantageous for Black.

c) 16.♞d1?! cxd4 17.♙xd4 e5 18.♙e3 b4 and Black has all he could wish for.

d) 16.e5! is the only move. 16...♖c4! 17.♞c1 (17.♞d1! cxd4!? 18.exf6 dxe3 19.♞xb7 ♞xb7 20.♙xb7 exf2 is incredibly complicated.) 17...♙xg2 18.exf6 ♙xf6 19.♖xg2 ♞b6! (the

point of the combination) 20.♞a1 cxd4 21.♖xd4 ♙xd4 22.♙xd4 ♞xd4 23.♞axe7 ♞xe7 24.♞xe7 b4 with some pressure for Black.

These are long, unclear and difficult variations and one can understand why Black did not go for them. One oversight and he would have lost.

Now, after 16.♖d5 ♖xd5 17.exd5 ♞b6, the chances are balanced.

½-½

### Game 54

van der Weide – Gulko

Wijk aan Zee (B) 2001

1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♖f6 3.♖c3 g6 4.g3 ♙g7 5.♙g2 0-0 6.♖ge2 ♖bd7 7.h3 ♞b8!

As was mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, one should avoid 7...c5?! 8.♙e3 when Black has trouble defending against dxc5 and e5.

### 8.a4 c5 9.♙e3 b6 10.0-0 a6 11.♞d2

After 11.g4 ♙b7 (11...cxd4 12.♙xd4 h6 is another possibility.) 12.♖g3 (12.g5 ♖h5?! 13.f4?! cxd4 14.♙xd4 e5 15.fxe5 ♖xe5 is great for Black.) 12...cxd4 13.♙xd4 ♞c7 (13...h6!?) 14.g5 ♖e8 15.♖d5 ♙xd5 16.exd5 e5 and a draw was agreed in Al Sayed – Izoria, Dubai 2003. It is possible that 16...♙xd4 17.♞xd4 e5 was even more exact.

Another idea is 11.♞b1 intending 12.d5 b5 13.axb5 axb5 14.b4, but Black should play 11...cxd4 12.♙xd4 ♙b7 followed by b6-b5 with a good position, where the audience will wonder what on earth the rook is doing on b1?

### 11...cxd4

This is not as ambitious as 11...♞e8 when we get a position similar to Sermek – Tkachiev. So what if White chooses the g3-g4-g5-plan here?

12.g4!? h5

I was highly suspicious about this move at first. It is indeed dangerous, but for both sides. The alternatives are not so good: 12...cxd4 13.♙xd4! and ♞e8 has lost some of its meaning, but maybe Black can try 13...h6 14.f4 ♙b7, when I am not sure if White can take advantage of the occasion.

13.g5 ♖h7 14.f4 cxd4 15.♖xd4 ♙b7 16.e5!?

In Fernandes – Peralta, Bled (ol) 2002 White tried something different: 16. ♖de2 ♗c7 17. ♖ad1 ♖bc8 (17... ♖hf8!? does not give White the chance to play 18.e5) 18. ♖f2 (18.e5!?) 18... ♖hf8 19.h4?! (a sure sign that White does not know what to do) 19... ♗c4 20. ♗c1 b5 21.axb5 axb5 and Black held the initiative.

16...dxe5

I have been looking into the alternatives, but I do not like neither of them.

a) 16... ♗xg2?! 17. ♗xg2 dxe5 (After 17... ♗c8 18.exd6 exd6 19. ♗f2 ♖c5 20. ♖d5 White has a clear advantage.) 18. ♖c6 ♗c7 19. ♖d5 and

b) 16... ♗c8?! 17. ♗xb7 ♖xb7 18.exd6 ♖c5 19.f5 seem very dangerous for Black.

17. ♖c6 ♗xc6 18. ♗xc6 ♖hf8?!

After this move Black gets into trouble. As I see it the best chance is 18...exf4! 19. ♗xf4 ♗xc3! when White has two alternatives:

x) 20. ♗xc3 e5 21. ♗e3 ♖c8 22. ♖ad1 ♖hf8, when White is worse because of the pin on the c-file, and

y) 20.bxc3 e5 21. ♗e3 ♖e7 when Black has an extra pawn and a safer king to compensate for White's strong bishop pair. In both cases Black is hanging on by a hair, but that hair might turn out to be just strong enough.

19.f5 gxf5 20. ♖xf5

White had a strong initiative and eventually won in Djurhuus – van Wely, Tunja 1989.

Finally Black could also play 11... ♗b7, but after 12.g4 there is nothing better than 12...cxd4 13. ♗xd4 b5 leading to the main game.

**12. ♗xd4**

White is planning g3-g4-(g5), ♖e2-g3, f2-f4, etc...

After 12. ♖xd4 ♗b7 13. ♗h6 ♗xh6 14. ♗xh6 ♖c5 15. ♖fe1 there is nothing wrong with a move like 15... ♖ac8, but in Milov – Agrest, Villarrobledo 2001, Black found a more forcing way to handle the situation: 15...e5 16. ♖f3 ♖cxe4 17. ♖xe4 ♗xe4 18. ♖g5 ♗xg2 19. ♖xg2 ♖e8 20. ♖e4 ♗e7 (20... ♖c8 21. ♖h4 ♖xc2 22. ♖xh7 ♖xh7 23. ♗xh7+ ♖f8 is slightly better for Black but 21.c3 could be an improvement.) 21. ♖h4 ♗f8

22. ♖xh7 ♗xh6 23. ♖xf6+ ♖g7 24. ♖xe8+ ♖xe8 25. ♖xh6 ♖xh6 26. ♖d1 and the position was approximately equal.

**12... ♗b7 13.g4 b5!**

It is also possible to play 13...h6, but it would leave Black with a rather passive position.

**14.axb5 axb5 15. ♖g3**

After 15.g5 ♖h5! (Not 15...b4?! 16. ♖a2 ♖xe4? 17. ♗xe4 ♗xe4 18. ♗xg7 ♖xg7 19. ♗d4+ e5 20. ♗xe4 ♗xg5+ 21. ♗g4 when White is winning.) 16. ♖xb5 ♗xe4 17. ♗xe4 ♖xb5 the position is unclear, though I would prefer to play the black side.

**15...b4 16. ♖d5 ♗xd5**

Not 16...e5? 17. ♗a7, but the computer suggests 16... ♖xd5 17. ♗xg7 (17.exd5 ♗xd4 18. ♗xd4 ♗b6 is fine for Black) 17... ♖e3! 18. ♗xc3 ♖xg7 with mutual chances.

**17.exd5 ♖c5 18. ♖fe1!?**

Black should be doing all right after 18. ♖a7 ♖fd7 19. ♗xg7 ♖xg7 20. ♖e2 ♗b6 21. ♖fa1 b3 22.c3 ♖b7.

**18... ♗c7 19. ♖e2 e5! 20.dxe6 ♖xe6**

Black has an active position and should not be worse.

**21. ♗e3 d5 22. ♖a7 ♖b7 23. ♖xb7 ♗xb7 24. ♗h6! ♗xh6 25. ♗xh6 ♗c7 26. ♗d2 ♗f4**

Black has a slight grip on the position, but 26. ♗xf4 ♖xf4 27. ♖d2, intending ♖d4, is nevertheless drawish, so...

½-½

Black did not encounter serious problems in the first two games. The next one is more critical.

## Game 55

**Aseev – Khalifman**

Vilnius 1997 ,

**1.e4 d6 2.d4 ♖f6 3. ♖c3 g6 4.g3 ♗g7 5. ♗g2 0-0 6. ♖ge2 ♖bd7 7.0-0 c5 8.h3 ♖b8 9.a4**

This is by far the most common move. It stops b7-b5 and gives White the chance to deploy the c1-bishop later.

**9...b6**

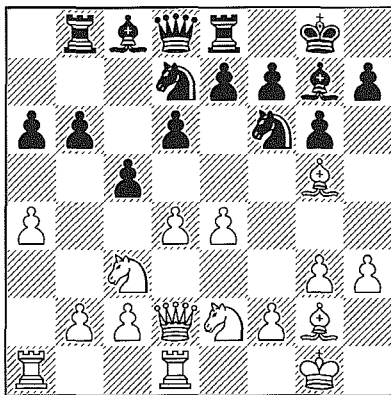
Almost as common is 9...a6, not fearing 10.a5. Gulko played this move order twice in 1996, but neither of his opponents pushed the a-pawn to the fifth rank. There are few reliable games with this motif, but I believe it should be slightly better for White. My first concern is that ...b6 will be met by axb6, when Black's pawn structure is permanently damaged. In De la Villa Garcia – Gulko, Pamplona 1996, White did not make use of this possibility and the game continued 10.♙e3 b6 11.♞d2 (11.♞b1 is interesting, played with the idea of 12.d5 b5 13.b4. But Black can reply with 11...cxd4! when he has no problems.) 11...♞e8 12.♙h6 ♙h8 13.f4 cxd4 14.♗xd4 ♙b7 with mutual chances.

### 10.♙g5!?

White is hoping to be a little more active after 10...cxd4 11.♗xd4 than would be the case after 10.♙e3.

### 10...a6 11.♞d2 ♞e8 12.♞fe1

Boris Gulko, usually an expert with Black in these lines, tried 12.♞fd1 against Matveeva in Helsinki 1992.



The idea seems to be that it is now more difficult for Black to continue cxd4 followed by e6. Matveeva reacted very well:

### 12...cxd4

After 12...♙b7!? 13.♙h6 ♙h8 14.d5 b5 15.axb5 axb5 16.♗xb5 ♙xd5 17.exd5 ♞xb5 18.b3 ♞b4 White should be slightly better.

### 13.♗xd4 ♙b7! 14.♞e3

After 14.♗d5 e5 15.♗b3 ♙xd5 16.♞xd5 ♗xd5 17.♙xd8 ♞exd8 18.♞xd5 ♗f6 Black is OK in the endgame and 14...e6 15.♗xf6† ♙xf6 16.♙xf6 ♞xf6 17.c4 is about balanced.

### 14...♞c8 15.♗de2 ♞c5!

This move is much stronger than the more conservative 15...♞c7. On a good day the rook can help the b6-pawn to move forward, stop White from controlling d5, get annoying on h5 or simply be a nuisance where it is.

### 16.♞d2 ♞a8 17.♞ad1

Now Black self destructed with 17...♞xg5? giving Gulko the perfect opportunity to win the game. The exchange sacrifice was in no way called for and 17...♗e5 18.b3 ♞c8 actually looks better for Black.

### 12...cxd4 13.♗xd4 ♙b7 14.♗d5!?

White is planning c2-c4 with a bind on Black's position.

In Gabriel – Prusikhin, Switzerland 2003, White chose a more subtle continuation: 14.♞d1 e6!? (Also possible is 14...♞c8!? since both 15.e5 ♙xg2 16.exf6 exf6 and 15.♙xf6 ♙xf6 16.e5 ♙xg2 17.exf6 ♙b7 are OK for Black.) 15.♗f3 ♙f8 16.♙f4 e5 17.♙h6 (Black is also fine after 17.♙g5 ♞c7 followed by ♞bc8.) and now 17...♙xh6 18.♞xh6 ♗c5 would have been fine for Black.

### 14...e6!

Better sooner than later. Black cannot do without this move in the long run.

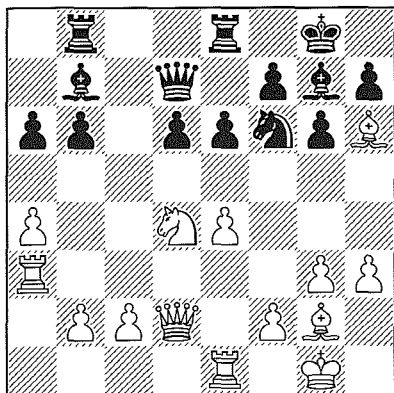
### 15.♗xf6† ♗xf6 16.♞a3!?

An unorthodox way to activate the rook in such a position. Usually White plays c3-c4 if allowed to, stopping Black from going d6-d5 or b6-b5. In this case 16.c4 ♞c7 17.♞ac1 ♗d7 leads to a position where the chances should be balanced.

### 16...♞d7!?

This is not a normal square for the queen in this kind of structure, but Khalifman realises that it is important to put pressure on a4 before White has time to play ♞d3 and b3, followed by pressure on the d6-pawn.

### 17.♙h6!?



One way to get some idea of who is better in a Sicilian structure is to count the number of pieces and pawns that control the d5-square for each side. In general, the one who controls this square has the better position. Such a statement should, of course, be taken with a pinch of salt, but in this position the g5-bishop indirectly weakens Black's control of d5 and, ergo, should have stayed there.

**17...♙h8! 18.♞b4?!**

White does not realise that his advantage is gone and forgets all about the d5-square. It was better to go back to g5 with the bishop, hoping for 18...d5?! 19.♙xf6 ♙xf6 20.e5 with a slight advantage. Black should prefer 18...e5 19.♗b3 a5 intending ♙c6, with mutual chances.

**18...e5! 19.♗b3 a5**

Black is playing it safe. Also promising was 19...d5, as 20.♞xb6 ♗xc4 21.♙xe4 dxe4 22.♗c5 ♞xh3 23.♗xb7 ♞xh6 24.♞xa6 ♞d2 is unattractive for White.

**20.♞c4 ♙xe4 21.♙xe4 d5 22.♙xd5 ♗xd5 23.♗h2 ♞bc8 24.♞e2 ♙g7**

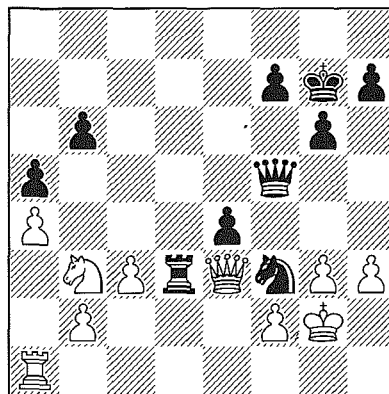
I see no defence for White after 24...e4! 25.c3 ♙e5 when Black intends ♙ce8, e4-e3 or ♙h5.

**25.♙xg7 ♗xg7**

There are many factors that speak in favour of Black here. The b3-knight is badly placed and has no good square within reach. The d5-knight dominates the centre and supports a future e5-e4-e3. The a3-rook makes you feel ill and is

bound to the defence of the a-pawn. In addition to this the white kingside is weak and difficult to defend.

**26.♙a1 ♗b4 27.c3 ♗d3 28.♙ed1 ♙cd8 29.♗c1 e4 30.♞e3 ♞f5 31.♙d2 ♗e5 32.♙xd8 ♙xd8 33.♗b3 ♗f3† 34.♗g2 ♙d3**



White gets nicely packed and wrapped after 35.♞f4 ♞xf4 26.gxf4 ♗f6 followed by ♗f5 and ♗xf4. The same is true after 35.♞e2 ♞d5 and 35.♞xb6 ♗g5, which led White to the conclusion that resigning was a good idea.

**0-1**

It seems to me that Black is doing fine in the main game and also after 14.♙ad1 e6.

My conclusion is that Black's strategy in Games 53-55 is on solid ground. The ball is in White's court.

The last game of this chapter features an alternative way to meet the g3-line (which is not possible if White plays the 4.♗g2 move order):

### Game 56

**Marinkovic – Vujadinovic**

Niksic 1997

**1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♙g7 3.♗c3 d6 4.g3 ♗c6!?**

This is an interesting alternative if you are prepared to take some risks.

**5.♔e3!**

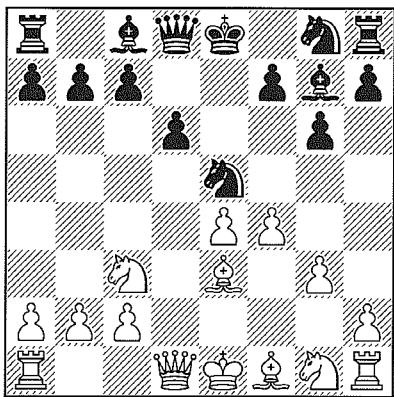
After 5.d5 ♖e5 Black continues with c6 and has nothing to complain about.

**5...e5 6.dxe5 ♜xe5**

Not 6...dxe5? 7.♞xd8† ♜xd8 8.♞d5 ♖c6 9.♔h3 and White has a clear advantage.

**7.h3**

The most critical move is 7.f4!



when 7...♞c6 or 7...♞d7 will leave Black two tempi down. The only way to justify 6...♞xe5 is 7...♔g4!?, when White has three interesting options:

a) 8.♞d5 is not the best since 8...♞e7 9.♞xb7 ♖b8 10.♞xa7 ♞5c6 (10...♞f3† 11.♞xf3 ♔xf3 12.♞a4† c6 13.♖g1 ♖xb2 14.♔d4 is messy) 11.♞a3 0-0 gives Black a terrific initiative.

b) 8.♔e2?! is even worse as 8...♔xe2 9.♞xe2 ♞c6 10.♞f2?? (10.♞d3 is better though Black has the initiative after 10...♞f6 11.♞f3 0-0, intending ♖e8, a6, b5.) 10...♔xc3† 11.bxc3 ♞f6 and White's position was a wreck in A. Shaheen – Hillarp Persson, Elista Olympiad 1998.

c) 8.♞ge2! is the best move and now 8...♞c6 9.♔g2 is better for White so Black has to try 8...♔f3 9.♖g1 ♞c6, though White has a definite initiative after 10.♞d3 intending 0-0-0.

I have my doubts about Black's position in line c, but it might be playable.

**7...♞e7**

It is also interesting to play 7...f5! immediately.

After 8.exf5 ♔xf5 Black has the opportunity to play ♞f6 rather than the passive ♞e7 and I do not see how White will claim any advantage unless he tries the mutually dangerous long castling.

**8.f4 ♞5c6 9.♞ge2 f5 10.exf5**

This is better than 10.♔g2?! fxe4 11.♔xe4 as was seen in Nezar – Tkachiev, Cannes 1999. The game continued 11...0-0 12.♔g2?! ♔e6 13.0-0 ♞d7 14.♞h2 ♖ad8! 15.♞d4 ♞xd4 16.♔xd4 ♞f5 17.♔f2 d5 18.♞d2 d4 with a clear advantage for Black.

**10...♞xf5**

Compared with taking with the bishop this has the advantage of disturbing White somewhat. Also it seems that the bishop is better off on e6 if White plays 0-0-0. In M. Djurkovic – S. Nikolov, Nova Gorica 1998, Black recaptured the other way: 10...♔xf5 11.♔g2 ♞d7 12.♞d4?! (12.g4 ♔e6 13.♞d2 is better, with mutual chances.) 12...0-0-0 13.♞d2 ♞xd4 14.♔xd4 ♔xd4 15.♞xd4 ♞c6 16.♞a4 ♖de8†?! (Black keeps some initiative with 16...♞e7† 17.♞d2 d5 18.♖ae1 ♞c5 19.♞c1 d4.) 17.♞d2 ♖e7 18.g4 ♔e6 19.♔xc6 ♞xc6 20.♞xc6 bxc6 21.♖ae1 and it took some cooperation from White's side for Black to win in the end.

**11.♔f2 ♔e6 12.♔g2 0-0**

After 12...♞d7 13.♞d2 0-0-0?! 14.0-0-0 Black cannot create a counterattack by moving the queenside pawns and is thus deprived of his main line of action.

**13.g4 ♞fe7 14.♞d2 ♞d7**

Black can also try 14...♞e8!? 15.0-0-0 ♞f7 with the intention of making it more difficult for White to play ♞e2-d4.

**15.0-0!**

White has no alternatives since 15.0-0?! h5 is very awkward.

**15...♖ae8**

Black chooses to strengthen his position in the centre and this seems like a good idea since 15...b5?! 16.♞b1! (16.♞xb5 ♔xb2†?! 17.♞xb2 ♖ab8 is very unclear) 16...♞h8 17.♞e4 does not achieve anything. Still, I like 15...♞h8 even better, preparing to meet 16.♞d4 with 16...♔g8.

**16. ♖he1?!**

It seems better to play 16. ♖d4, threatening the e6-bishop before it can go back to g8 in one go.

**16... ♗f7**

The bishop is in the way of the rook here, but Black has no plan and does not know how to improve his position. It was better to play 16... ♖h8 17. ♖d4 ♗g8.

**17. ♖b1 a6 18. ♖e4**

White intends to place the knight on g5, but it was better to play 18. ♖d4 followed by doubling rooks on the e-file.

**18... ♖h8 19. ♖g5?!**

The knight has no value here other than being pretty.

**19... ♗g8 20. ♖c3? b5 21. a3? ♖b8**

...and the players agreed a draw. A surprising decision: After 22. ♖ce4 (what else?) intending ♖c5, Black answers 22... ♖c8 and then it is difficult to see how White can stop the a- and b-pawn avalanche from striking the white king where it hurts. I think White is lost.

½-½

**Conclusions:** The position after 8... ♖b8 (Games 53, 54, 55) seems to hold excellent chances for Black. The most critical lines are seen in Games 54 and 55, but at the time of writing neither line holds any theoretical danger for Black. The line featured in Game 56 is playable if Black can somehow get a good position after 7.f4!? ♗f3 8. ♖g1. I am rather sceptical, but a practical test is needed.



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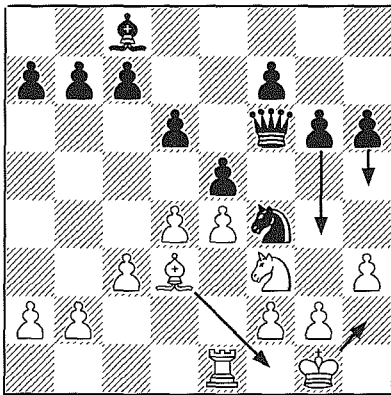
## Chapter 9

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# c3 – Lazy Variation

The c3-lines are the least ambitious of White's choices against the Modern, but that does not mean they are all bad. By pampering the d-pawn early on White is free to finish development behind the centre and does not worry too much about what Black is doing. In the two first games we look at the main line, where White plays  $\text{♙d3}$ . I have played against this set-up many, many times and – most of the time – I have done well with the help of one simple plan:

If White plays an early  $\text{h2-h3}$ , then as soon as I manage to play  $\text{e7-e5}$ , I continue with  $\text{h6}$ ,  $\text{♖h5}$ ,  $\text{♜f6}$ ,  $\text{♗f4}$  and then it is time to improvise. (You will always run into that moment, sooner or later.)



White generally tries to push the knight away from  $\text{f4}$  with  $\text{♙f1}$ ,  $\text{♗h2}$ , (sometimes even  $\text{♗g1}$ ) and  $\text{g3}$ . This will take some time so you will have time to finish your development and put more pressure on  $\text{d4}$  - possibly by playing  $\text{g5}$  and  $\text{h5}$ ,

intending  $\text{g4}$ . (Note that it is generally to Black's advantage if White exchanges on  $\text{e5}$ .) The  $\text{♗f6-h5}$ ,  $\text{♜f6}$  and  $\text{♗f4}$  idea does not automatically give you a great position - and you should generally not play  $\text{g6-g5}$  if White is ready to push the knight away with  $\text{g3}$ .

In the third and fourth game of this chapter we shall look at some less common options for White, none of which should pose any problem for Black.

### Game 57 Godena – Hillarp Persson Bolzano 1998

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♙g7 3.♗f3 d6 4.♙d3 ♗f6 5.0-0 0-0

After  $\text{5.h3 ♗c6 6.d5}$  Black should play  $\text{6...♗b4}$  with a good game.

#### 6.c3

White can try  $\text{6.c4}$ , but Black is fine after  $\text{6...♙g4 7.♗bd2 ♗c6 8.h3 ♙d7!}$ , intending  $\text{e5}$ .

#### 6...♗c6

This is not a very good square for the knight and I am not convinced that  $\text{6...♗bd7 7.♞e1 e5}$  is such a bad idea, especially if Black continues with the same plan as in this game.  $\text{6...♗c6}$  is vastly more popular, but popularity can blind you.

#### 7.h3

In the next game we will look at  $\text{7.d5}$ .

$\text{7.♞e1}$  is the most common move, but it usually leads to the same position as in the game after  $\text{7...e5 8.h3}$ . There are quite a few ways to avoid  $\text{h3}$ , but none very efficient:

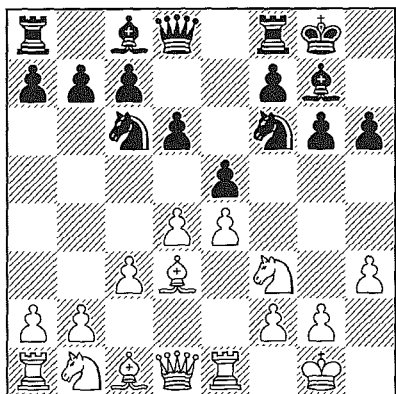
a)  $\text{7.♞e1 e5 8.♗a3 ♙g4 9.♗c2 h6!}$

(After 9...d5 10.g5 White is slightly better.) and White has nothing better than 10.h3.

b) 7.♖bd2 e5 8.b3 ♘h5 and one wonders how White is going to cover both ♘f4 and cxd4.

7...e5 8.♞e1 h6

The start of this very primitive but efficient plan, involving ♘h5, ♞f6 and ♘f4. A common mistake in these positions – one I have committed myself – is 8...♞e8?. After 9.d5! Black will eventually lose two tempi, as the rook stands best on f8 where it supports f7-f5.



9.♘a3

This knight is dreaming of d5 and the a3-c4/c2-e3-d5 route is more flexible than d2-f1-e3-d5. Firstly, the knight is not in the way of the other pieces on a3 and, secondly, from c4 or c2 (via b4) the knight might also cause some other problems for Black. White can also choose to develop the c1-bishop, but this is not so dangerous:

9.♗e3 ♘h5 10.♖bd2 ♞f6 11.♗f1 ♘f4 12.♙h2 (After 12.b4 g5 13.dxe5 dxe5 14.♞c2 h5 15.♘h2 ♞g6 16.♞ad1 ♗e6? White gained the advantage with 17.♗c4 in Rausis – Hillarp Persson, Gausdal 1996. Instead 16...g4! looks more critical, since White does not have access to f1, for regrouping his knights to g3.) 12...g5 13.g3 (Black is fine after 13.dxe5 dxe5 14.g3 ♘g6.) 13...♘g6 14.♙g1 ♞e7 15.♞c2 ♙h8 16.♗g2 ♗d7 17.b4 f5 with counterplay for Black in Villavicencio Martinez – Bologan, Las Palmas 1993.

9...♘d7!?

Because White has developed the knight to the rim Black can start flirting with f7-f5. Another common move is 9...♗d7, and 9...♘h5 is good as usual, but 9...♞e8 should be avoided due to 10.d5, when the rook is badly placed on e8 and – at some point – will have to go back to f8.

10.♗b5!?

In S. Schneider – Hillarp Persson, Copenhagen 1999, White acted with more restraint:

10.♘c2 f5 11.dxe5 (11.exf5 gxf5 12.dxe5 dxe5 13.♘e3 e4 14.♗c4 ♙h8 is very nice for Black, who will soon land a knight on d3.) 11...♘dxe5! (White gets a clear advantage after 11...dxe5?! 12.b4.) 12.exf5 ♘xd3 13.♞xd3 ♗xf5 14.♞d5 ♙h7 15.♘cd4 ♘xd4 16.♘xd4 c6 17.♞b3 ♞d7 18.♘xf5 ♞xf5 19.♗e3 ♞af8?! 20.♞ad1 and my opponent had the initiative. Instead of 19...♞af8 I should have played 19...a6 20.♞ad1 ♞e8, with a level position.

10...♘e7!

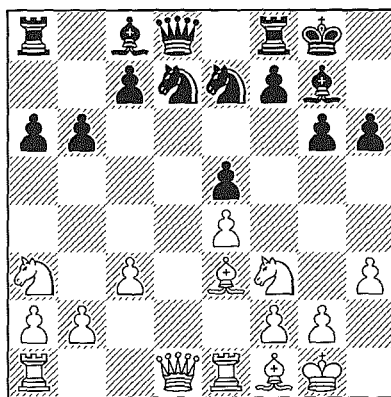
White was threatening to continue ♗xc6, followed by dxe5, when Black would be left with a horrible structure.

11.dxe5 dxe5 12.♗e3 a6

Godena, a specialist with White in this line, has reached this position three times and only achieved one draw.

13.♗f1 ♙h7!?

I believe this is stronger than 13...b6?! which weakens the c6-square prematurely and thus hands the initiative to White:



14. ♖d2 ♘h7 15. ♖ad1 ♘g8 16. ♘c2 ♖e8  
17. ♖d5 ♖a7 18. ♘b4 ♘b8 19. ♖b3 and White  
had some pressure in Godena – Khalifman, Ischia  
1996. Later in Godena – Nevednichy, Saint  
Vincent 2000, Black tried 18... ♘e7 19. ♖c4 c5  
20. ♘d5 ♖b7 21. a4 (21. ♘xe7 ♖xe7 22. a4 ♖c6  
and Black is doing well) 21... ♖xd5 22. exd5 ♘f5  
23. d6 ♘xe3 24. ♖xe3 f5 and the position was  
unclear.

14. ♖d2 ♘g8 15. ♖ad1 ♖e7 16. ♖d5!?

If Black is allowed to continue with ♘gf6, b6  
and ♖b7, White will have trouble with his e-  
pawn.

16... ♘gf6 17. ♖c4 c5 18. b4 cxb4

18... b5 19. ♖xc5 ♘xc5 20. ♖xc5 ♖xc5  
21. bxc5 ♖e8 intending ♖f8 or ♖a8-a7-c7, is also  
interesting.

19. ♖xb4 ♖xb4 20. cxb4 b5

I did not like 20... ♘xe4 21. ♖xh6 ♖xh6 22. ♖xe4  
f6 23. ♘c4 during the game, but 23... b5 24. ♘d6  
♘b8! seems fine for Black.

21. ♘d2! ♖e8?!

The chances are balanced after 21... ♖b7 22. f3  
♖ac8.

22. f3 ♖f8 23. ♘c2 ♖b8?!

After this move my position is passive and bad.  
23... ♘b8 would have been better, aiming for the  
d4-square.

24. ♘b3

If White executes ♘d2-b3-c5 and throws in  
a2-a4 at the right moment, then I am not too  
optimistic about Black's position.

24... ♘b6 25. ♖c5?

25. ♘c5 would have kept up the pressure.

25... ♘a4?

I offered a draw, which was accepted. In the  
final position White can get a big advantage with  
26. ♖xf8 ♖xf8 27. ♖d6, but only because my last  
move was a mistake. 25... ♖e6 would have been  
about equal.

½-½

It seems to me that Black has an excellent game  
after 9... ♘d7, but there is nothing wrong with  
the alternatives 9... ♖d7 and 9... ♘h5. The main  
problem for you in this line will be making up

your mind which line to choose.

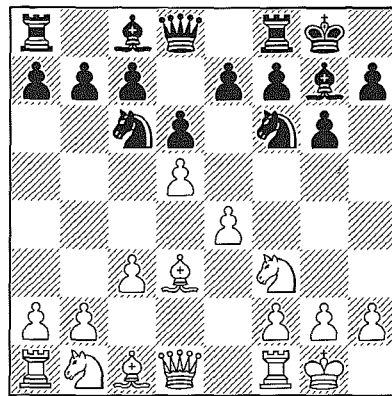
In the next game White tries to win a few tempi  
by playing d5, hitting ♘c6 and thus forcing it to  
return to b8:

### Game 58

#### Korchnoi – Sznapiak

Luzern 1982

1. ♘f3 d6 2. e4 g6 3. d4 ♖g7 4. c3 ♘f6 5. ♖d3 0-0  
6. 0-0 ♘c6 7. d5!?



With this move White aims for a King's Indian  
structure and Black has to react accurately to  
avoid reaching a slightly worse position.

7... ♘b8 8. c4

After this move Black gets active play on the  
dark squares, but the alternative is very slow:

8. h3 c6!

It is important for Black to attack the centre  
immediately.

9. c4 e6!?

If you want to avoid a King's Indian structure it  
is better to play 9... cxd5 10. exd5 (So far no one  
has tried 10. cxd5, when 10... e6! 11. dxe6 ♖xe6  
12. ♘c3 ♘c6 13. ♖f4 d5 14. e5 ♘d7 15. ♖e1 f6  
16. exf6 ♖xf6 seems fine for Black.) 10... ♘a6  
11. ♘c3 ♘c5 12. ♖c2 e6 13. ♖g5 exd5 14. cxd5  
♖d7 with a level game in Sturua – Yrjola,  
Komotini 1992.

10. dxe6 ♖xe6 11. ♘c3 ♘a6 12. ♖e1 ♘d7!

Intending  $\text{d}7\text{-e}5$ .  $12...\text{c}5$   $13.\text{f}1$   $\text{b}6!$ ?  
 $14.\text{xd}6$   $\text{a}8$  and Black has enough compensation for the pawn.

$13.\text{g}5!?$   $\text{b}6!$ !

The position is very unclear after  $13...\text{c}7$   
 $14.\text{c}1$   $\text{e}5$   $15.\text{f}1$   $\text{f}6$   $16.\text{e}3$   $\text{xc}4$ .

$14.\text{b}1$

and White held the initiative in Korchnoi – Cu. Hansen, Biel 1993.

**8...g4!**

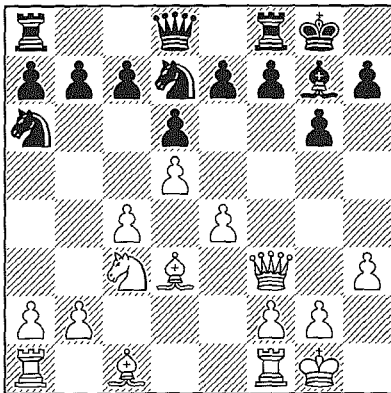
Playing the King's Indian at a high level one can easily get the idea that this is never a good move, but here the circumstances are very special. The most original feature compared to the KID is that Black usually has a pawn on either c5 or e5, whereas here these pawns have still not moved, giving Black the opportunity to use both c5 and e5 for the knights.

After  $8...c6$   $9.\text{c}3$   $a5$   $10.h3$   $\text{a}6$   $11.\text{e}1!$   $\text{e}6$   $12.\text{dxe}6$   $\text{xe}6$   $13.\text{f}1$  White has a slight advantage.

**9.h3**

If White tries  $9.\text{bd}2$   $c6$   $10.h3$  then Black should avoid the exchange on f3 with  $10...\text{d}7$ , when the knight is not well placed on d2.

$9...\text{xf}3$   $10.\text{xf}3$   $\text{a}6!$   $11.\text{c}3$   $\text{d}7!$



White has more space and the bishop pair, but Black is still happy: his pieces are active and White is very vulnerable on the dark squares.

**12.e2**

In Cybulak – Shchekachev, Moscow 1991, White played differently:

$12.\text{d}2$   $\text{e}6!$ ?

A very ambitious move. Both  $12...\text{ac}5$   $13.\text{c}2$   $a5$  and  $12...\text{e}5$   $13.\text{g}3$   $\text{xd}3$   $14.\text{xd}3$   $c6$  are fine for Black.

$13.\text{ae}1$   $\text{f}5!$   $14.\text{xf}5$

White does not fall for  $14.\text{dxe}6$   $\text{e}5$   $15.\text{g}3?$   $\text{f}4!$   $16.\text{xf}4$   $\text{xf}4$   $17.\text{xf}4$   $\text{xd}3$   $18.\text{f}7+$  when Black is winning after  $18...\text{h}8$ .

$14...\text{xf}5$   $15.\text{g}3$   $\text{e}5$   $16.\text{f}4$   $\text{xd}3$   $17.\text{xd}3$   $\text{d}7$   $18.\text{e}3$   $\text{fe}8$

Now White blundered.  $19.\text{e}2$  is about equal.  $19.\text{d}4??$   $\text{xe}1$   $20.\text{xe}1$   $\text{b}4$   $21.\text{d}2$   $\text{xd}4+$   $22.\text{xd}4$   $\text{c}2$

Black wins the exchange.

A third possibility is  $12.\text{c}2$ , when Black can play either  $12...c6$  intending  $\text{e}8$ , or  $12...e6$ , intending  $\text{f}7\text{-f}5$ .

**12...c5** **13.d2**

After  $13.\text{e}3$   $\text{xc}3$   $14.\text{bxc}3$   $\text{e}5$  White is probably better, but instead of  $13...\text{xc}3$  Black should play  $13...a5$ , with a complicated position.

**13...a5** **14.bab1 e6!** **15.d1 f5!**

This highly original plan is the best way to break up White's centre.

**16.dxe6!?**

In similar positions this move is often a mistake, but here it seems like the best option. Worse is  $16.\text{xf}5$   $\text{xf}5$   $17.\text{g}3$  (defending against  $\text{f}5\text{-f}4$ )  $17...\text{e}5$ , when Black has the initiative.

**16...e5** **17.e2!?**

It is important to stop Black from playing  $\text{f}5\text{-f}4$ , so  $17.\text{g}3$  was better. Black should then play  $17...\text{fxe}4$   $18.\text{e}3$   $\text{xe}6$   $19.\text{e}2$   $\text{d}3$   $20.\text{xe}4$   $\text{e}5$   $21.\text{g}4$   $\text{df}4$ , keeping up the pressure.

**17...f4!**

Korchnoi probably thought this was impossible due to...

**18.e7** **xe7** **19.d5** **xf7!?**

Better was  $19...\text{h}4$  with two possibilities:

a)  $20.\text{xf}4!$   $c6$   $21.\text{xe}5$   $\text{xe}5$   $22.\text{c}3$   $\text{xe}4$   $23.\text{d}g4$   $\text{ae}8$  when Black has a strong attack.

b)  $20.\text{xf}4$   $\text{xf}4$   $21.\text{g}3$   $\text{f}3+$   $22.\text{g}2$   $\text{xe}4$   $23.\text{xf}3$   $\text{e}7$  when Black has the initiative.

20. ♖xf4 c6 21. ♗xe5 ♗xe5 22. ♘e3 h5!

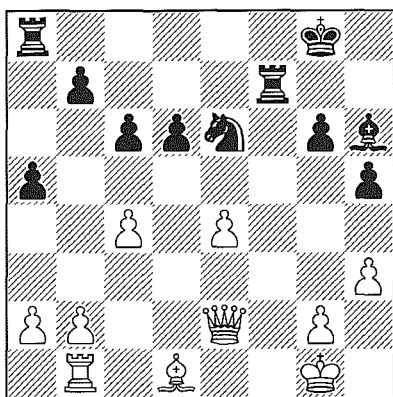
Taking an important square away from the e3-knight. After 22... ♗xe4 23. ♗g4 ♖f4 24. ♗c2 ♗d2 25. g3 ♗f3† 26. ♗g2 ♖d2 27. ♖d1 the position is unclear.

23. f4!? ♗xf4 24. ♗f5 ♗e6!?

A very interesting idea. After 24... gxf5 25. ♖xf4 ♗xe4 26. ♗c2 ♖g6 the position is level.

25. ♗h6† ♗xh6 26. ♖xf7 ♖xf7

This is a critical moment for White. If Black is allowed to put his bishop on e5 or c5, White will live to regret it.



27. c5?!

Korchnoi decides to exchange his bad bishop for the black knight. It may seem practical and wise to exchange the passive ♗d1 for ♗e6 at the price of a pawn, but in fact it lands White in a lost position.

A slightly better chance was 27. ♖d3 ♗c5 28. ♖a3! ♗g7 29. ♗f3 ♗d4† 30. ♗h1 ♖ff8 31. ♖d1 ♗e5, even though only Black can improve his position here. But White's best option was 27. e5! ♗f4 28. ♖f3 dxe5 29. ♖e4 ♖f5 30. ♗f3 with an unclear position.

27... ♗xc5 28. ♗b3 ♗xb3 29. axb3 ♖af8 30. ♖d3 ♖f6 31. e5!? dxe5 32. ♖e1 ♗g7 33. h4 ♗h7 34. ♗h2 ♖f4 35. ♖d7 ♖8f7 36. ♖d8 ♗f6 37. ♖xa5 ♖xh4† 38. ♗g1 e4 39. ♖b6 e3 40. g3 ♖e4

40... ♗d4 won on the spot, but White's position is hopeless all the same.

0-1

In the next game White seems to play ♗g5 simply to get the bishop out of the way before developing the rest of his pieces. Then Black forces the bishop to retreat to h4 with h6, continues with ♖e8 and e5 followed by ♗h5, when White has little choice but to exchange on e5. In the resulting position White misses the influence of his bishop on the queenside and Black can seize a slight initiative by directing his forces towards the d3-square.

**Game 59**

**Tyomkin – Ilincic**

Belgrade 1999

1. e4

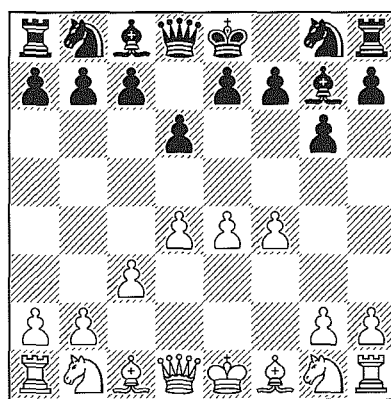
I have changed the move order in this game to fit in with my evil plans. The actual order was 1. d4 ♗f6 2. ♗f3 g6 3. ♗g5 ♗g7 4. ♗bd2 0-0 5. c3 d6 6. e4 h6.

1... g6 2. d4 ♗g7 3. c3 d6

Black gains nothing from going 3... ♗f6 after the central trust 4. e5. White can also play 4. ♗d3 or 4. ♖c2.

4. ♗g5

Another possibility is 4. f4.



This looks impressive, but should not scare Black. The important thing is to put pressure on White's centre:

4... ♗f6 5. ♗d3

After 5.e5 dxe5 6.fxe5 ♖d5 7.♗f3 0-0 8.♙c4 ♗b6! (I do not like 8...c5 9.dxc5 ♙e6 because of 10.♗g5 ♗xc3 11.♞xd8 ♞xd8 12.♙xe6 when White should be better.) 9.♙b3 a5 10.0-0 (Black is doing fine after 10.a4 c5 11.dxc5 ♞xd1† 12.♗xd1 ♗6d7 13.e6 fxe6 14.♙xe6† ♗h8 15.♙e3 ♗a6.) 10...a4 11.♙c2 f6 12.♞e1 ♗c6 13.♞h4 fxe5 14.♗g5 ♞xf1† 15.♗xf1 h6 16.♙xg6 hxg5 17.♞h7† ♗f8 18.♙xg5 ♞d5 19.♗d2 ♞g8 20.♞h5 ♗d5 21.♗g1 ♗f6 22.♞f1 exd4 23.♗e4 ♞a5 White did not have enough for the piece in Ljubisavljevic – Chatalbashev, Padova 1998.

5...0-0 6.♗f3 c5! 7.dxc5 ♗bd7! 8.cxd6 exd6 9.0-0 ♗c5 10.♞c2

Or 10.♙e3 ♗fxe4 11.♙xe4 ♗xe4 12.♙d4 ♙h6, with unclear play in Kiik – Yrjölä, Finland (ch) 2001. 12...♞e8 is also fine.

10...♞e8 11.♗bd2 ♙d7 12.♗d4 ♞c8 13.♗h1 ♞e7

and Black had a pleasant initiative in Hodgson – Norwood, Plymouth 1989.

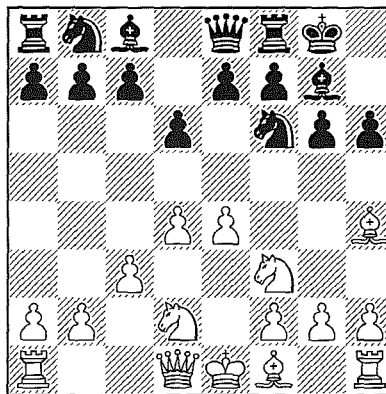
**4...♗f6 5.♗d2 0-0 6.♗gf3 h6!**

Black has many moves at his disposal in this position, but this is the most flexible one, forcing the bishop to declare itself before commencing with ♞e8 and e5. After 6...♗bd7 7.♙e2 e5 8.0-0 h6 9.♙h4 ♞e8 10.dxe5 dxe5 11.♞c2 ♗h5 we get a position similar to the main game, with the exception of the knight being on d7 instead of b8. This somewhat narrows Black's choices, though the position is still rather balanced. 12.♞fe1 ♗f4 13.♙f1 ♗b6 14.a4 a5 15.♗c4 ♞e6!? 16.♗fd2? (16.♗xb6 ♞xb6 17.♗d2 is equal.) 16...♗xg2 17.♙xg2 ♗xc4 18.♗xc4 ♞xc4 and it is a mystery why a draw was agreed in Danielian – Levada, Novgorod 1999. Black is a pawn up and should be winning.

**7.♙h4**

In Harikrishna – Gallagher, Torquay 2002, a draw was agreed after 7.♙xf6 ♙xf6 8.e5 ♙g7 9.♙c4 d5 10.♙d3 c5 11.0-0 ♗c6. I believe that Black has more reasons to play on here than White.

**7...♞e8!**



This move keeps White guessing where the b8-knight will go.

**8.♙e2**

8.♙c4 might seem more active, but it has a way of obstructing White from achieving the ♗d2-c4-e3-d5 manoeuvre.

**8...e5 9.dxe5**

White seldom gains anything from keeping the tension in the centre. I guess this is the reason that there has been only one game so far with 9.♞c2.

**9...dxe5 10.0-0 ♗h5**

It is not easy for White to find a good way to be active since Black has not moved the b8-knight.

**11.♞e1**

With this move White is not so much overprotecting e4 and preparing ♙e2-f1, as discouraging Black from going f7-f5.

**11...♙e6!?**

When I reached positions like this ten years ago, I used to hurl myself at the white king with ♗f4, g5, f6, and h5. Please do not do this until you have developed your queenside, or at least be aware that such an attack will not hurt White unless you can combine threats against the king with pressure on the d-file. 11...♙e6 is a very solid move, but both 11...a5 and 11...♗d7 are also fine.

**12.♗c4 ♗d7 13.♗fd2!?**

White is planning f3, ♔f2, followed by throwing the a- and b-pawns at Black's queenside. After 13.♔f1! f6 14.♔fd2 ♖f7 15.b4 ♜fe8 (if 15...♜fd8 Black is not threatening f6-f5) 16.♔e3, the players agreed a draw in Delemarre – Reschke, Schoeneck 1996. The position is full of life and 16...a5 seems to give Black a slight initiative.

**13...♔f4 14.♔f1 ♔c5! 15.♖c2**

After 15.b4?! ♔cd3 16.♜e3 g5! 17.♔xd3 (17.♔g3 ♜d8 and Black controls d3) 17...gxh4, Black has the initiative on the kingside and the d-file.

**15...a5 16.♔e3?!**

White should not give up the queenside so easily. Better was 16.a4, when 16...g5 17.♔g3 ♖c6 18.♔e3 ♜ad8 19.♜ed1 is unclear.

**16...b5 17.b4**

White gains nothing from 17.♔b3 ♔b7! 18.♔c1 a4.

**17...♔a4 18.♔b3 axb4 19.cxb4 c6 20.♜e1?!**

Tyomkin gives 20.♜ac1 ♜a6 21.♜ed1 ♖b8 22.♔e7 ♜c8 23.♔d6 ♖a8 with equal chances.

**20...♜a6 21.f3 ♖b8 22.♔f2 ♖d6 23.♔d1**

Black has the initiative after 23.a3 ♔xb3 24.♖xb3 ♔e6 25.♔c2 ♜d8. h6-h5 and ♔h6 is coming next.

**23...♜d8**

Tyomkin gives an interesting line: 23...♖xb4 24.♔c5 ♔xc5 25.♔xc5 ♖a5 26.♔xf8 ♔xf8 with compensation for the material deficit. My silicon friend recommends 23...♜c8 when the position is roughly balanced after 24.a3 ♔xb3 25.♖xb3 ♜ca8.

**24.♔c5?!**

Giving Black the opportunity to grab the initiative. Better, according to Tyomkin, was 24.♔a5 when 24...♜c8 25.a3 is unclear. Still, it seems that White should be comparatively happy with this position and therefore I believe 23...♜c8 was better than 23...♜d8.

**24...♔xc5 25.♔xc5 ♖d2! 26.g3?**

White is only slightly worse after 26.♔c3 ♖xc2 27.♜xc2 ♜da8 28.♜d1.

**26...♖xc2!**

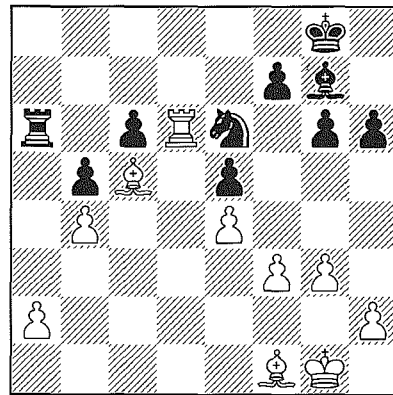
Black also has the advantage after 26...♔h3† 27.♔xh3 ♔xh3 28.♖xd2 ♜xd2 29.♔f2 ♔e6 30.a3 f5, but the text is even stronger.

**27.♜xc2 ♔b3 28.♜cc1 ♔xd1 29.♜xd1 ♜xd1 30.♜xd1 ♔e6**

Tyomkin rightly comments that Black should not be allowed to exchange the dark-squared bishops and place the knight on d4. In such a position Black combines pressure against the a-pawn with creating a weakness on the other flank. The result would be devastating for White.

**31.♜d6!??**

This move should lose, but even after 31.♜d2 ♔f8 Black still achieves his aim.



**31...♔xc5?!**

This is exactly what White was hoping for. Instead 31...♔f8! 32.♔xb5 ♔xc5 33.♔xa6 (33.bxc5? ♜a5 34.♔c4 ♔xd6 35.cxd6 ♔f8 and Black should win.) 33...♔xa6 34.♜xc6 ♔xb4 would have given Black excellent winning chances.

**32.bxc5 ♔f8 33.♜d2 ♔xc5† 34.♔g2 ♔f8 35.♜c2 ♔a3**

This seems illogical to me. Why not 35...♔d4 36.h4 h5 37.a4 (What else?) 37...♜xa4 38.♜xc6 ♜a2† 39.♔h3 ♔g1 40.g4 ♔e3, followed by ♔f4, when White's position is hopeless.

**36.f4 ♔e7 37.♔f3 f6?**

This weakens the kingside light squares and gives White the opportunity to play f4-f5 and try to get the king to g6. Tyomkin annotates

the rest of the game in *ChessBase Magazine*, but I feel it is enough to know that 37...♙d6 38.f5 ♜a3†, followed by ♗d7, would have won easily for Black.

38.h4 ♗d6 39.f5 gxf5 40.exf5 ♙c5 41.♗g4 ♜a3 42.♙g2 ♜e3 43.♙h1 b4 44.♙g2 ♜c3 45.♜xc3 bxc3 46.♙e4 ♙f2 47.♗f3 ♙e1 48.h5 ♗c5 49.g4 ♗d4 50.a4 ♙d2 51.♙c2 ♙c1 52.♙e4 ♙a3 53.a5 ♗c5 54.♗e2 ♗b5 55.♗d3 ♙b4 56.a6 ♗xa6 57.♙xc6 ♗b6 58.♙e4 ♗c5 59.♗e3 ♙a5 60.♙c2 ♗b4 61.♗f3 ♗a3 62.♗e2 ♗b2 63.♗d1 ♙b6 64.♙e4 ♗b3 65.♙c2† ♗c4 66.♗e2 ♙c5 67.♙e4 ♗b3 68.♗d1 ♙e3 69.♙c2† ♗b2 70.♙e4 ♙f4 71.♙c2 ♙g5 72.♙e4 ♗b3 73.♙c2† ♗c4 74.♗e2 ♗d4 75.♗f3 ♗c4 76.♗e2 ♗b4 77.♙e4 ♗b3 78.♗d1 c2† 79.♙xc2† ♗c3 80.♙a4 ♗d3 81.♗e1 ♗e3 82.♙d1 e4 83.♗f1

½-½

In the next game White plays the only patented drawing line in the Modern Defence. The only problem is that Black is not interested in a draw...

### Game 60

Denker – Damljanovic

Lone Pine 1975

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♙g7 3.♗f3 d6 4.c3 ♗f6 5.♗bd2

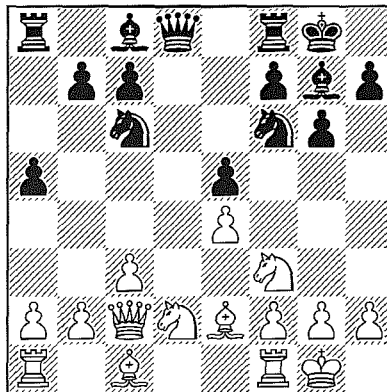
This is the least dangerous of White's options, unless you are easily bored. After 5.♜c2 0-0 6.♙e2 ♗bd7 (6...♜e8!) 7.0-0 e5 8.dxe5 dxe5 9.♙g5 h6 10.♙h4 ♜e8 we reach a position that resembles Tyomkin – Ilincic above.

5...0-0 6.♙e2 ♗c6 7.0-0 e5 8.dxe5 dxe5!?

8...♗xe5 9.♗xe5 dxe5 10.♜c2 is almost dead equal and not very good if you are trying to win against a lower rated opponent. But if you are happy with an absolutely level position then both 10...♙h6 and 10...b6 are fine for Black.

9.♜c2 ♗h5!

It's déjà vu all over again! I see no reason to weaken the queenside with 9...a5.



Yes, it stops b2-b4, but I am more worried about giving White an extra tempo on the kingside. Hracek – Hodgson, Neu Isenburg 1992 continued:

10.a4?!

10.♗c4! ♗h5 11.♜d1 is awkward for Black.

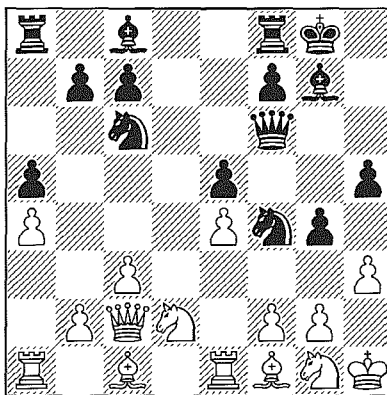
10...♗h5 11.♜e1

Possibly White should try 11.♜d1! ♗f4 12.♗f1 ♜f6 13.♗e3, when 13...h6 14.b3 ♜d8 15.♜xd8† ♗xd8 16.♙f1 ♙e6 is about level.

11...♗f4 12.♙f1 ♜f6 13.h3 h5?!

I propose 13...g5, not allowing White the opportunity for 14.h4!?. After 14.♗h2 h5, the position is complicated.

14.♗h1 g5 15.♗g1 g4





Hodgson has succeeded in getting exactly the kind of position Black should be striving for.

16.♖c4 g3 17.g3 ♖g2 18.♙xg2 hxg2†  
19.♗xg2 ♖e7

It is better to play 19...h4!, when 20.♖f3 loses a piece to 20...h3†.

20.♖e3?!

White had the chance to play 20.♖f3 ♗e6 21.b3 ♗h3† 22.♗g1, with an unclear position.

20...h4 21.b3 b6 22.c4 ♗g6 23.♙a3 c5 24.♞ad1 f5 25.♖d5 ♖xd5 26.exd5 e4

White is defenceless against hxg3, followed by f5-f4.

27.♙b2 ♞a7 28.♞d2 ♙xb2 29.♗xb2 ♞g7 30.♗e5 hxg3 31.fxg3 f4 32.♗xe4 ♗xg3† 33.♗h1 ♙f5 34.♗e7 ♞xe7 35.♞xe7 ♗h4†

and White resigned. A beautiful game by Hodgson.

**10.♞d1**

Or:

10.♞e1 ♖f4 11.♙f1 ♗f6

Black has also tried to provoke h2-h3: 11...♙g4!? 12.b4 a6?! (12...♗f6! 13.b5 ♖b8! 14.a4 a6, with an initiative for Black.) 13.h3 ♙e6 14.h4?! This is Gipslis – Hoi, Ostrava 1992, when Carsten could have gained the advantage with 14...♗f6 intending h6, g5. On the other hand, White should be fine after 14.♗h2.

12.♖c4 h6

Why not 12...♖h3† 13.♗h1 ♙g4 with an attack?

13.♖e3 ♞d8 14.a4 ♙e6 15.♙c4? ♖xg2 16.♗xg2 ♙h3† 17.♗g1 ♗xf3

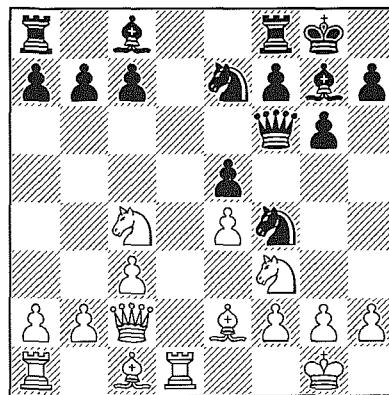
and Black won in the end in van Bentum – Rudolf, Rostock 2002.

**10...♖f4 11.♖f1 ♗f6 12.♖e3 ♖e7**

Another option is 12...h6!? 13.♖d5 (13.♙f1 ♖e7) 13...♖xd5 14.exd5 ♖e7 with mutual chances.

**13.♖c4?!**

Inviting a repetition of moves, but Black is fine after both 13.b3 ♙e6 14.♙a3 ♞fe8 15.♙b5!? ♞ed8 16.♙c4 ♙xc4 17.♖xc4 ♖c6 and 13.♙f1 ♙e6.



**13...♖xe2†? 14.♗xe2 ♗a6 15.♗f1 f6 16.♖e3 ♗xe2†**

I prefer 16...♗c6 when 17.♖d5 ♖xd5 18.exd5 ♗d6 is better for Black and it is difficult to see an alternative for White.

**17.♗xe2 ♙e6 18.b3 ♞fe8**

Not bad, but unnecessary. After 18...♗f7 followed by ♞fd8 I still prefer Black.

**19.h3 a5 20.c4 a4 21.♙b2 ♙f8 22.♖g4 ♙g7 23.♖e3 h5 24.♖e1 ♙h6 25.♖1c2 b5?!**

In an attempt to win the game, Black throws himself into complications that tend to favour White, who is better coordinated on the queenside.

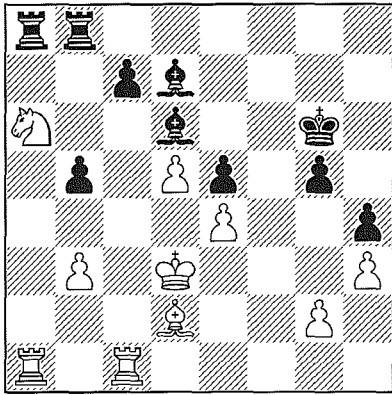
**26.♖d5**

Black gets the initiative after 26.cxb5 ♞eb8.

**26...♖xd5 27.cxd5 ♙d7 28.♖b4 ♙f8 29.♙c3**

White is slightly better due to the possibilities ♖b4-d3, ♙c3-b4, but Black should not lose this position. 29...♙d6 intending 30.♖d3 c6! is one defensive idea.

**29...♞eb8 30.♞dc1 ♙d6 31.♙d2 g5 32.f3 h4 33.♗d3 ♞b7 34.♞ab1 ♗f7 35.♞c2 axb3 36.axb3 ♗g6 37.♞cc1 ♞bb8 38.♞a1 f5 39.♖a6 fxe4† 40.fxe4**



**Conclusions:** The lines involving  $\text{♙g5}$  and  $\text{♙e2}$   $\text{♜c2}$ ,  $\text{♞bd2}$ , are clearly nothing for Black to be afraid of (unless you need to win a game at any price). White's most ambitious idea is  $7.d5$ , as in Korchnoi – Sznajik, but Black has a good game after both  $7...♞b8$   $8.h3$   $c6!$   $9.c4$   $e6$  and  $8.c4$   $\text{♙g4}$   $9.h3$   $\text{♙xf3}$   $10.\text{♜xf3}$   $\text{♞a6}$ . The main line with  $h3$  and  $\text{♞e1}$  is also fine for Black, who can choose between a set-up with  $h6$ ,  $\text{♞h5}$  and  $\text{♜f6}$ , or try the more flexible  $9...♞d7$ , intending  $f5$ . I do not see a real threat to Black in any of these lines.

#### 40...♞b6?!

A blunder, after  $40...♞c8$   $41.\text{♙b4}$   $g4$  Black has enough counter chances.

$41.\text{♞xc7}$   $\text{♞xa1}$   $42.\text{♞xa1}$   $\text{♙xc7}$   $43.\text{♞a7}$   $b4$   
 $44.\text{♞xc7}$   $\text{♙b5}†$   $45.\text{♞e3}$   $\text{♞f6}$   $46.\text{♙xb4}$

The  $e5$ -pawn will soon fall.

**1-0**

A somewhat tragic end to a game where Black was generally pressing.

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## Chapter 10

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# Unusual Lines

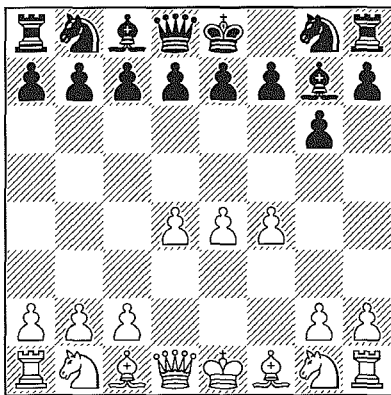
This is a chapter of leftovers. The first game deals with 3.f4, intending  $\mathcal{C}f3$  before  $\mathcal{C}c3$ . It is an idea that can be quite dangerous if not taken seriously. The second game deals with 3.♙e3, a move with a double agenda: if Black plays c6 or a6, then c4 leads to a King's Indian, or if  $\mathcal{C}f6$  then  $\mathcal{C}c3$ , when Black has been lured into a bad Pirc line; in neither case is Black happy. I recommend an immediate c7-c5 in both these lines. In the third game we take a look at the uncommon but dangerous early-h4 lines. They are dangerous in the sense that a car can be dangerous for a pedestrian, if you do not see it coming.

### Game 61

Hillarp Persson – P. Andreassen

Danish Team Championship 2003

1.d4 g6 2.e4 ♗g7 3.f4



I have tried this move a few times myself with considerable success. The point is that the knight

is not optimal on c3 so I would like to play  $\mathcal{C}f3$  and  $\mathcal{C}d3$  first. For instance, the idea behind a6, b5,  $\mathcal{C}d7$ , ♙b7 and c5 is to harass the c3-knight and, after c7-c5, that White cannot support the d-pawn with c3. Therefore, when White delays the development of  $\mathcal{C}b1$  the a6/b5 idea becomes totally worthless.

### 3...c5!

Black has two main alternatives:

After 3...d5 4.e5 Black is worse off than in similar lines where White has committed the knight to c3, since c7-c5 can be met by c3, keeping a slight advantage for White.

The best alternative is 3...d6 when White can continue the I-will-not-play- $\mathcal{C}c3$  strategy in four ways:

a) 4.a3!? is annoying. The move intends to meet 4...c5 (4... $\mathcal{C}f6$  5. $\mathcal{C}c3$  is interesting for White and 5.e5 is also possible.) with 5.dxc5 ♗a5† 6.b4 ♗a4 (6...♗c7 7.cxd6 exd6 8.♙a2  $\mathcal{C}f6$  9.♙d3 ♙e6 10.♙b2 and Black does not have enough compensation for the pawn.) 7.e5, with an advantage for White. Bizarre as it may sound, this is the main reason I prefer 3...c5 to 3...d6. Black can of course enter a Pirc with 4... $\mathcal{C}f6$  5. $\mathcal{C}c3$  0-0, but this kind of position is not to my liking.

b) 4.♙d3 c5 is no problem for Black.

c) 4. $\mathcal{C}f3$  c5 and now White has three moves to choose from:

c1) 5.d5  $\mathcal{C}f6$  6.c3 leads to the text.

c2) 5.c3  $\mathcal{C}f6$  6.♙d3 (6.e5  $\mathcal{C}f7$ ) 6...0-0 leads to a position from the c3-chapter.

c3) 5.dxc5 ♗a5† 6.c3 ♗xc5 7.♙d3  $\mathcal{C}f6$  8.♗e2 0-0 9.♙e3 ♗c7 10. $\mathcal{C}bd2$  (10.c4  $\mathcal{C}g4$ ) 10... $\mathcal{C}bd7$

11. ♖b3 b6 12.0-0 ♘b7 and Black had an excellent position in Ferrec – Davies, Porto San Giorgio 1998.

d) 4.c4 is a fourth possibility when Black can try 4... ♖c6 5. ♘e3 e5 with unclear consequences.

#### 4.d5

After 4. ♖f3?! cxd4 5. ♖xd4 ♖c6 White has no reason to be happy about f4.

More relevant is 4.c3!? cxd4 5.cxd4 and Black has three interesting alternatives:

a) 5... ♖c6 has not been tried, but seems OK after both 6.d5 ♖d4 7. ♖c3 ♗b6 and 6. ♖f3 d5 7.e5 ♖h6.

b) 5... ♗b6 6. ♖f3 ♖c6 7.e5 ♖h6 8.d5 ♖b4 9. ♖c3 has been played a few times, but looks bad for Black. After 9...0-0 (9...d6 10.a3 ♖a6 11. ♘b5† ♘d7 12. ♘xd7† ♗xd7 13. ♗e2 is at least a little better for White.) 10.a3 ♖a6 11.d6! exd6 (11... ♖g4!? 12. ♖e4 ♖c5 13.dxe7 ♖xe4 14.exf8 ♗† ♘xf8 is the kind of position where every computer program predicts the immediate demise of Black though things are not necessarily that easy.) 12. ♖d5 ♗d8 13.f5!! ♖xf5 14. ♘g5 f6 (14... ♗e8 15. ♘xa6 followed by ♖c7 wins for White while after 14... ♗a5† 15.b4 Black loses the queen.) 15.exf6 and Black is crushed.

c) So far Black has been doing OK after 5...d5 6.e5 ♖h6 7. ♘e2 0-0 8. ♖c3 ♖c6 intending to meet ♖f3 with ♘g4. After 9. ♘f3 ♖f5 10. ♖ge2 ♘e6 11.g3 ♗b6 12. ♖a4 ♗a5† 13. ♗f2 b5 14. ♖c5 ♗b6 the position was unclear in Sverushkin – V. Iordachescu, Bucharest 2000.

#### 4...d6 5. ♖f3

5.c4 f5!? (5... ♖f6 6. ♖c3 0-0 7. ♖f3 e6 8. ♘e2 exd5 9.cxd5 ♘g4 leads to a rather harmless – for Black – variation of the King's Indian/Modern Benoni.) 6. ♖d2 (6.exf5 ♘xf5 7. ♘d3 ♖h6 followed by ♖b8-a6-c5, ♗d7, 0-0, e6 looks fine for Black and 6. ♖c3? loses a pawn to 6... ♘xc3† 7.bxc3 fxe4.) 6... ♖f6! 7.e5 dxe5 8.fxe5 ♖g4 9.e6 ♗a5 is very unclear. I might have got a bit carried away here, so maybe it is best to go for the KID/MB variation beginning with 5... ♖f6.

5.a4!? ♖a6 6. ♖f3 ♖c7 7.c4 (I do not like this move. 7. ♘d3 is better, when 7...e6 is unclear.) 7...f5! 8.e5 e6! In the spirit of the Modern the white centre is blown to smithereens! 9.dxe6 (9. ♖c3 ♖h6 10. ♘e2 ♖f7 and White cannot maintain the centre anymore.) 9... ♖xe6 10. ♗a3 ♖h6 11. ♗d3 ♖f7 12. ♖c3 ♘d7! 13. ♗xd6?! (13. exd6 0-0 and Black has a beautiful position after ♘c6 next move.) 13... ♖xd6 14. ♗xd6 ♗f7! 15.h4 ♘c6 and Black showed the necessary technique and won in Bareev – Speelman, Debrecen 1992. An original and beautiful game from Jon Speelman.

#### 5... ♖f6 6.c3!?

White has some alternatives:

6. ♖c3 0-0 7. ♘d3 e6! The standard reaction when White meets c5 with d5 in similar positions. 8.dxe6 fxe6! 9.0-0 (9.e5?! dxe5 10. ♖xe5 ♖d5 and Black has the initiative) 9... ♖c6 and the position is unclear.

6. ♘b5† ♘d7 7. ♘xd7† ♖bxd7! (This is best since 7... ♖fxd7 8.0-0 0-0 9.a4 ♖a6 10. ♖a3 is a bit passive for Black.) 8.e5 dxe5 9.fxe5 ♖g4 10.e6 ♖de5 and I do not see any danger for Black. White's best option seems to be 11.h3 when 11... ♖xf3† 12. ♗xf3 ♖e5 13.exf7† ♖xf7 14.0-0 0-0 is pleasant for Black.

#### 6...0-0 7. ♘d3 e6!

The thematic break and one that Black cannot do without. Moves like a6, intending b5, are meaningless and suicidal in a position where White has not played ♖c3.

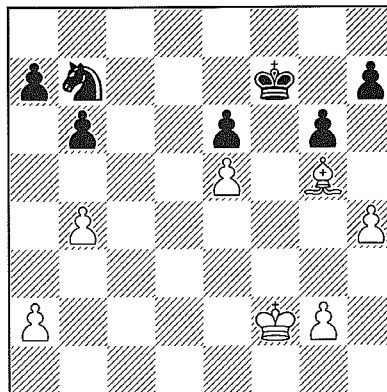
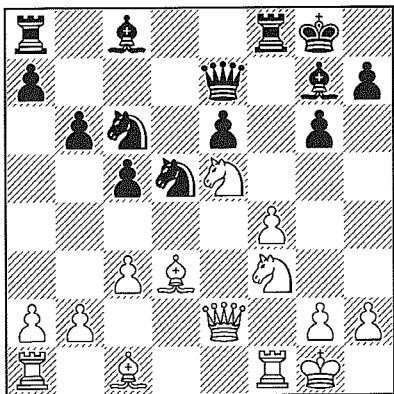
#### 8.dxe6 fxe6!?

This is probably just as good as 8... ♘xe6 9.0-0 ♖c6 (9...d5 10.e5 ♖fd7 11. ♖g5 and I prefer White's position) 10. ♖bd2 d5 11.e5 ♖g4 12. ♗e2 f6 when Black is at least okay.

#### 9.0-0 ♖c6 10. ♗e2 ♗e7 11. ♖a3 b6!?

Black should have played 11... ♖h5! followed by e5, with an interesting game, where Black's chances are not worse.

#### 12.e5 ♖d5 13. ♖c4 dxe5 14. ♖xe5



**14...♖xe5?!**

This exchange gives White the chance to take back with the knight and simultaneously defend the f4-pawn. Better was 14...♙b7! 15.♖xc6 (15.♙d2? ♖xf4) 15...♙xc6 16.♖e5 ♙xe5! 17.♙xe5 ♗ad8 with an active position for Black.

**15.♖xe5 ♙b7 16.♙d2 ♗ad8 17.♗ae1**

White has more space and a better pawn structure. His plan is simple: ♙c1 and ♙b1 followed by g3 and h2-h4-h5 or ♗f1-f3-h3. Black has no active plan.

**17...♙xe5**

After 17...♙h4 18.g3 ♙h3 19.♙e4 the black queen is in trouble due to the threat ♙g2.

**18.fxe5 ♗xf1 †?!**

Black aims for a bad endgame, where he might have some chances to hold on. After 18...♙h4 19.g3 ♙h3 White gets a huge advantage with 20.♙e4 threatening c4.

**19.♗xf1 ♗f8 20.♙h6 ♗xf1 † 21.♙xf1 ♗f7 22.♙xf7 † ♖xf7 23.♖f2**

If only the pawns were not spread over such a huge area, Black would have had reasonable chances to hold a draw, but here it is very difficult.

**23...♖e7 24.♙g5 ♙d5 25.b3 ♙b7 26.h4 ♖c6 27.♙e4!? ♖d8 28.♙xb7?!**

Better was 28.♙d3 ♖c6 29.♙f4.  
**28...♖xb7 29.b4 cxb4 30.cxb4**

**30...♖e8?**

Black can build a fortress by playing 30...b5! 31.♖g3 ♖g7 intending ♖h6, so White has to try 32.h5 gxf5 33.♖f4 ♖g6 34.♙f6. A possible continuation here is 34...a5 35.a3 h6 36.♙e7 ♖f7 37.♙h4 ♖g6 38.♙f6 ♖f7 39.♖g3 ♖g6 40.♖h4 axb4 41.axb4 ♖d6 42.exd6 ♖xf6 43.♖xh5 e5 44.♖xh6 e4 45.g4 e3 46.g5 † ♖e6 47.g6 e2 48.g7 e1 ♙ 49.g8 ♙ † ♖xd6 with a draw.

**31.♖g3**

Now Black is lost because there is no time to set up the fortress.

**31...h6!? 32.♙xh6 ♖d8 33.b5 ♖b7 34.♙e3 ♖a5 35.♖f4 ♖c4 36.♙c1 ♖f7 37.♖e4 ♖a5 38.g4 ♖b7 39.♙a3 ♖a5 40.♖d4 ♖b7 41.♙d6 1-0**

The only “problem” with this game is 5.c4 when Black has to either go fishing in murky waters with 5...f5, or enter a straight King’s Indian with 5...♖f6. If you feel like trying your luck with 5...f5 I recommend you do some homework first.

**Game 62**  
**Mrva – Azmaiparashvili**  
Neum 2000

**1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♙g7 3.♙e3**

This is another of those I-will-not-play-♖c3-until-you-play-♖f6 ideas.

**3...c5!**

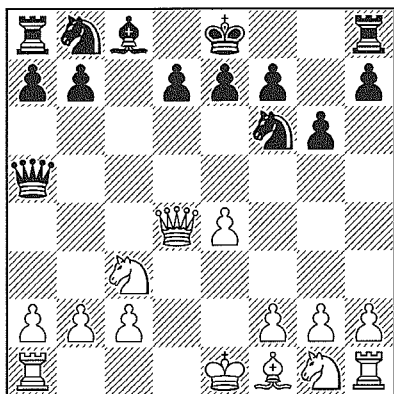
After 3...d6 White has a very flexible move in 4.♘d2! when Black cannot avoid the Sicilian Dragon after 4...c5 5.♗e2!, or after 5.c3 ♗f6 6.f3 Black has no breaks to open the centre.

**4.♗c3**

I find 4.c3 more logical, trying to keep the centre intact for some time. After 4...cxd4 5.cxd4 d5! White must play 6.e5 (6.exd5?! ♗f6 7.♗c3 0-0 8.♗c4 ♗bd7 9.♗ge2 ♗b6 10.♗b3 ♗bxd5 11.h3 b6 with an advantage for Black in Touzane – Bellini, Internet 2003.) 6...♗h6 7.♗c3 ♗f5 8.♘b3 0-0 9.♗f3 ♗c6 10.♗d3 (10.♘xd5 ♗e6 11.♘e4 ♗b4 and Black has enough initiative to compensate for the pawn.) 10...♗e6 11.0-0 ♗xe5!? 12.♗xe5 ♗xe5? 13.♗xf5 was better for White in Mueller – Welz, Baden Baden 1993. Instead of 12...♗xe5 Black could have gained a level position with 12...♗xe3! 13.fxe3 ♗xe5 14.dxe5 d4.

**4...♘a5 5.♘d2 cxd4 6.♗xd4 ♗xd4 7.♘xd4 ♗f6**

From a statistical point of view White has done really badly from this position. This is partly a reflection of the fact that few strong players would enter this position with the white pieces and partly because Black's position is slightly easier to play.

**8.0-0-0**

Black is ahead in development after 8.b4?! ♘d8 9.♗d5 0-0 10.♗xf6† exf6, enough to compensate

for his damaged pawn structure. And after 8.♗f3 ♗c6 9.♘d2 d6 10.h3 ♗e6 11.♗e2 h6 Black intends ♗c8 and maybe ♗e8-f8-g7; the position is level. 12.0-0 ♗c8 13.a3 ♗e5 (13...g5 14.b4 ♘b6) 14.♗xe5 ♘xe5 15.♗d3 g5 was very nice for Black in Montoro – Dolezal, Tres de Febrero 2003.

**8...♗c6 9.♘e3**

Another possibility is 9.♘d2. After 9...d6 10.♗c4 ♗e5 11.♗b3 ♗e6 12.♗b1 ♗c8 13.♗d5 ♘c5 (13...♘xd2 14.♗xf6† exf6 15.♗xd2 ♗c4 16.♗d4 is better for White) 14.♗xf6† exf6 15.♗e2 0-0 16.♗f4 and White was clearly better in Khechumyan – Dibusz, Hungary 2003. I do not see the need to fall for a cheapo like 13.♗d5. Both 10...♗e6 and 12...♗xb3 13.cxb3 ♘b4 look like improvements for Black.

**9...d6 10.♗c4**

10.f3 ♗e6 11.a3 a6 12.♗ge2 b5 13.♗f4 b4 14.♗cd5 ♗xd5 15.♗xd5 ♗xd5 16.♗xd5 ♘c7 and a draw was agreed in Lang – Amura, Elista 1998. Black is not worse in this position and 11...♗c8 followed by 0-0 is a possible improvement.

**10...♗d7!?**

A less ambitious, but equally good, move is 10...♗e6!?. 11.♗xe6 (otherwise Black just wins a tempo compared to the game with 11...♗c8) 11...fxe6 and Black has excellent chances after 12.♘h3 ♘g5† 13.♗d2 ♗e5 14.♗f3 ♗xf3 15.♘xf3 ♗c8.

**11.h3 ♗c8 12.♗b3**

Another line given by Azmaiparashvili in Informant 79 is: 12.♗f3 ♗b4 13.♗b3 ♗e6 14.♗xe6 fxe6 15.a3 ♗xc3 16.bxc3 ♘xa3† 17.♗d2 ♗c6 18.♗a1 ♘c5 with compensation for the lost material. Even better is 17...♗a2!?. 18.♗he1 0-0 19.♗b1 ♗c8 20.♗b3 ♘a5 21.♗a1 a6 22.♗e1 ♗xc3 23.♗xc3 ♘xc3† 24.♘xc3 ♗xc3 when I prefer Black.

**12...♗e6!? 13.♗b1**

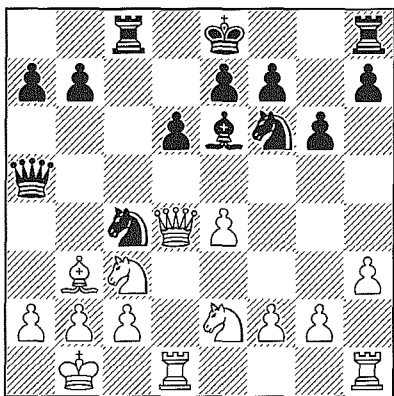
White should avoid 13.♗xe6?! fxe6 when Black is ready to launch an attack on the queenside with b5 and ♗c6-e5-c4.

**13...♗e5 14.♗ge2 ♗c4**

Exchanging on b3 only helps White: 14...♗xb3 15.axb3 ♗c6?! 16.♗d4 and White has repelled

Black's initiative and is ready to launch his pawns on the kingside.

15.♖d4



15...0-0!

In *Informant* Azmaiparashvili criticises this move preferring 15...b5 16.♖d5 ♙xd5 17.exd5 0-0 18.♖he1 ♜c7 19.♖c3 ♜fc8 20.♖e4 ♖xe4 21.♜xc4 ♗b6 with equal chances.

16.f4 b5 17.♖hf1!?

White could have fought for the initiative with 17.f5!? when 17...gxf5 18.exf5 ♙xf5 19.♖hf1 ♜c5 20.♖g3! intending ♜xf6 and ♖g3-e4xf6 is dangerous for Black.

17...b4! 18.f5?

Black is only slightly better after 18.♖d5 ♙xd5 19.exd5 ♖b6 intending ♗b5, a7-a5-a4.

18...bxc3 19.fxe6 ♖xb2! 20.♜xf6

Azmaiparashvili gives some long complicated lines to prove that Black is better after 20.exf7† ♖g7 and this does indeed look correct: 21.♖f4 (21.♜xf6 exf6 22.♜f1 ♗e5 and Black is, at the very least, clearly better.) 21...♜xf7 22.e5!? (22.♙xf7 ♖xd1 wins easily for Black – Azmaiparashvili) 22...dxe5 23.♖e6† ♖h8 24.♗d8† ♜xd8 25.♜xd8† ♗xd8 26.♖xd8 ♜f8 and Black is much better.

20...exf6 21.♗xf6 ♖c4 22.e7 ♜fe8 23.♖xc3

Azmaiparashvili gives 23.♜f1 ♖d2† 24.♖c1 ♖xb3† 25.cxb3 ♗e5 26.♗xf7† ♖h8 27.♗f8† ♜xf8 28.♜xf8† ♖g7 29.♜xc8 ♗xe7 30.♖xc3 ♗g5† as winning for Black.

23...♜xe7! 24.♖d5

24.♗xe7 ♗xc3 25.♙xc4 ♜xc4 threatening ♜b4† is hopeless for White.

24...♜e6 25.♗d4 ♗c5 26.♗d3 ♖g7 27.♜f1 ♜xe4

and White had had enough.

0-1

### Game 63

Rodriguez – Tkachiev

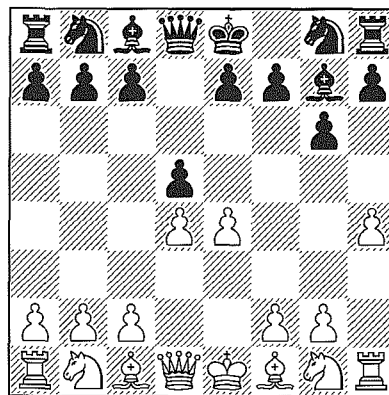
Villa Martelli 1997

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♙g7 3.♖c3

As well as this move we have seen 3.♖f3, 3.f4, 3.♙e3, 3.♙c4, and 3.g3. Are there any other alternatives? The answer is yes:

3.f3 d5! (other moves give White more options) 4.e5 c5 5.c3 ♖c6 6.♙e3 ♖h6 7.g4 cxd4 8.cxd4 f6 9.♗d2 ♖f7 10.exf6 exf6 11.♙b5 f5 and Black was clearly better in Kaloskambis – Grivas, Chalkidiki 2003.

The following exotic move has also been tried: 3.h4?! d5!



It is common knowledge that the most efficient way to counter an attack on the flank is by striking in the centre. Here the concept is seen in practice.

4.e5

4.exd5 ♗xd5 5.♙e3 ♖f6 and the meaning of h2-h4 is lost on me.

4...h5 5.♖e2

Both 5.♗d3 and 5.♗e3 are better, but Black gets an excellent game in both cases by playing c5, ♖c6, ♖h6, waiting for the right moment to develop (and hopefully exchange) the c8-bishop.

5...c5 6.c3 ♖c6 7.a3!?

White has to be ambitious or Black will just have a wonderful Advance Caro-Kann structure. It is well worth taking the time to play through the rest of the game:

7...♖h6 8.b4 cxd4 9.cxd4 ♖f5 10.♖bc3 e6 11.g3 ♗b6 12.♗e3 ♖xe5! 13.dxe5 ♖xe3 14.fxe3 ♗xe3 15.♗d4 ♗xd4 16.♖xd4 ♗xe5 17.♖ce2 ♗d7 18.♗c1 ♖e7 19.♗g2 ♗hc8 20.♖d2 ♗xc1 21.♗xc1 a5 22.b5 a4 23.♗c3 ♗a5 24.♗e3 ♖d6 25.♗f3 f5 26.♗f1 ♗xd4 27.♖xd4 e5 28.♖c2 ♗xb5 29.♖b4 ♗e6 30.♗e1 d4 31.♗f1 ♗a5 32.♗b1 ♗b3 33.♖d3 e4 34.♖c1 d3 35.♗xd3 ♗d5 36.♖e3 exd3 37.♖xd3 ♗c2 38.♗b6† ♖c7 39.♖b4 ♖xb6 40.♖xd5† ♖c5 41.♖f4 ♖c4 42.♖xg6 ♖b3 43.♖d2 ♗e4 0-1

Granda Zuniga – Kakageldyev, Yerevan 1996. I get the feeling that Black was already clearly better after 12...♖xe5.

### 3...d6 4.h4

We know the best way to counter a flank operation is supposed to be by acting in the centre. After 4.g4! I am not sure about 4...♖c6 5.♗e3 e5 6.d5 ♖d4 7.h3 c6, but Black can try 4...a6 and, because f4 has been weakened, even 4...e5.

If White tries a different move order with 4.♗e2 then 4...a6 5.h4 h6! is fine for Black. White has to choose between a set-up with ♗e3 and ♗d2, when ♗e2 does not fit in very well, or play 6.h5 g5 7.f4 gxf4 8.♗xf4 when the position is very nice for Black, who has not yet committed the knight to f6 (compare the 5...h6 line below).

### 4...♖f6!

After 4...h5?! the black kingside is prematurely weakened and White should go for the most aggressive of ideas. 5.♗c4! c6 (5...♖f6?! 6.♗g5) 6.♗f3 e6 This is similar to a line of the c6-Modern where the pawns are still on h7 and h2. This small difference is clearly to White's advantage, as 7.♗g5

♗b6 8.0-0-0 looks horrible for Black.

### 5.♗e2

After 5.f3 Black should play 5...c6 with ideas of ♗b6, 0-0 and e5, or b7-b5. White will possibly regret having thrown away a tempo with h4 without achieving even the slightest concession from Black.

When I have encountered this theoretical main line in books it has been considered something of a paper tiger because of Black's next move.

### 5...c5

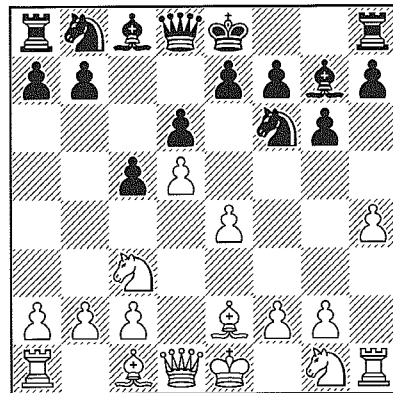
I believe this is the best move, but there are still dangers ahead. There are two (weaker) alternatives:

a) 5...h6!?, which is very flexible, but a bit shaky after 6.h5 (6.f4 h5 and 6.♗e3 ♖c6!?) 6...g5 7.f4 gxf4 8.♗xf4 ♖c6 (8...c6! 9.♗f3) 9.♖f3 ♗g4 10.d5 ♖b8 11.♖h4 and White had a strong initiative in Rodriguez – Spangenberg, Vicente Lopez 2002. Black can improve with 8...c6, but White is still better.

b) 5...h5 6.♖h3 (6.♖f3 ♗g4 7.♖g5 ♗xe2 8.♗xe2 ♖c6 9.♗e3 ♖g4 10.0-0-0 and White has the initiative.) 6...♗h3 Black should not allow ♖g5 when e4-e5-e6 will become a dangerous threat. 7.♗h3 c6 8.♗g5 ♖bd7 9.♗d2 is slightly better for White, though Black is solid and has a simple plan in a6, b5, c5, etc.

### 6.dxc5

Considering the bad reputation of 6.dxc5 it is worth trying 6.d5.





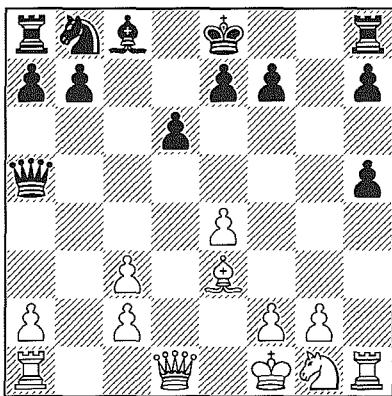
Now Black should avoid the frequently recommended 6...0-0 7.h5 b5 8.hxg6 b4. This position is fine for Black after 9.gxh7(?) ♖h8 10.♗b1 ♗xe4 when the white centre is crumbling and the king is absolutely safe on h8 behind the enemy pawn. However, I cannot see the logic behind 9.gxh7. Much better seems 9.gxf7 ♜xf7 10.♗b1 ♗xe4 11.♗f3 when I suspect Black's position is more original than good.

The best move for Black in the diagram position is 6...h5! to stop the white h-pawn from causing more trouble. In Jansson – Elsness, Norway 1993, play continued 7.♗h3 ♗a6 8.♙g5 ♗c7 9.a4 b6 10.f3 a6 11.♗f2 ♙d7 (Or 11...♞b8! 12.♞b1 intending to meet b5 with b4. Now 12...♗h7 13.♙d2 0-0 is unclear.) 12.0-0 b5? And now, instead of playing 13.♞d2 with an equal position, White could have gained a considerable advantage with 13.e5 dxe5 14.d6!. On the other hand 12...b5 is a mistake and 12...♗h7 13.♙e3 b5 would have led to a position where I would rather be Black.

### 6...♞a5 7.♙d2!?

White has two other alternatives:

a) 7.♖f1 ♞xc5 8.♙e3 ♞a5 9.h5 ♗hx5! 10.♙hx5 ♙xc3 11.bxc3 gxh5



This is an important idea to remember: Black gives up the dark-squared bishop for the c3-knight

in order to ruin White's pawn structure and gain a freer hand on the light squares. White is slightly worse since 12.♞xh5 ♞xc3 13.♙d4 ♞c4† leaves White a pawn down, and after 12.♗e2 ♙e6 Black has an excellent game with ♙c4, ♗c6, ♞g8 and 0-0-0. White's pawn structure is badly damaged and Black can build up the pressure along the g-file and the a6-f1 diagonal.

b) 7.♞d3 ♞xc5 8.♙e3 ♞a5 9.h5 ♗hx5! (there it is again) 10.♙hx5 (10.♞b5† ♞xb5 11.♗xb5 ♗a6 12.♙hx5 gxh5 13.0-0 f5 is fine for Black according to Chernin and Albur, and 13...♙d7 14.♗d4 ♞g8 15.g3 ♙f6 intending h5-h4 is also good.) 10...♙xc3†! 11.bxc3 gxh5 12.♗e2 ♗c6 13.♗f4 ♙g4 14.f3 ♗e5 15.♞d1 ♙e6 16.♙d4 ♙c4 17.♞xh5 f6 and Black is doing very well.

### 7...♞xc5 8.h5 gxh5

8...♗hx5 9.♙hx5 gxh5 10.♞xh5 and White is very active.

### 9.♗h3 ♗c6 10.♗f4 ♙g4!

It is important to prevent White picking up the h-pawn. 10...♗g4 11.♗d3 ♞d4 12.♗d5 ♗ce5 13.0-0! ♖f8 14.♗5f4 ♗f6 was fine for Black in Malaniuk – Azmaiparashvili, Kiev 1986. But if White had played 14.♙g5! could Black really survive? I don't think so.

### 11.f3

This is what Black was hoping for (weakening the e3-square), so maybe White should try 11.♗hx5 ♙hx5 12.♙hx5 ♗e5 13.♙e2 ♗c4 14.♙xc4 ♞xc4 15.♞f3 when White had a slight advantage due to his better pawn structure in Royset – Bull Jager, Tromsø 1996. Perhaps Black can improve with 12...♞g8 or 12...♞e5.

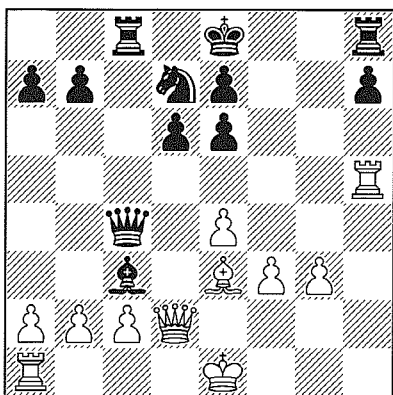
### 11...♙e6 12.♞c1

White makes a strange move to get the bishop to e3, but Black should be fine anyway.

### 12...♗d4 13.♙d3 ♙c4 14.♙xc4 ♞xc4 15.♙e3 ♞c8 16.♞d2 ♗e6 17.♗xe6 fxe6 18.g3?!

Black gets a strong initiative after 18.♙xa7 ♗d7 19.♙e3 ♞g8, but 18.0-0-0 ♗d7 19.♙d4 ♞xd4 20.♞xd4 ♙xd4 21.♞xd4 ♞g8 is about equal and should have been played.

### 18...♗d7 19.♞xh5 ♙xc3



I do not understand why a draw was agreed here as Black is slightly better after 20. ♖xc3 ♜xc3† 21. bxc3 0-0 (or 21... ♗f8) 22. ♞g5† ♕f7. White's pawn structure is a nightmare.

½-½

**Conclusions:** 3.f4, as featured in Game 61, is not theoretically dangerous but leads to unorthodox positions where the better player has excellent chances of claiming the whole point. In the main game both 8...fxe6 and 8...♗xe6 give Black a good game. It is worth noting that 5.c4 f5 is rather speculative for Black and that the alternative 5...♘f6 demands knowledge of only one variation of the King's Indian.

In Game 62 Black has no problems after 4.♘c3, and 4.c3 cxd4 5.cxd4 d5! does not give White much hope of an opening advantage either.

In Game 63 Black gets an excellent position after both 7.♕f1 and 7.♞d3 by following the same path: 7...♞xc5 8.♗e3 ♞a5 9.h5 ♘h5 10.♗xh5 ♗xc3†!. After 7.♗d2 the key move is 10...♗g4 provoking 11.f3, when White can no longer play ♗e3 and has some trouble with coordination.

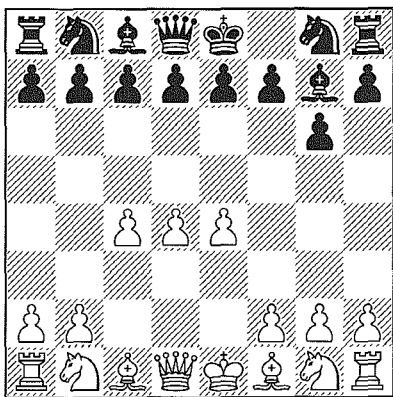
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## Chapter 11

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# Averbach Variation

If someone woke me in the middle of the night and screamed in my ear: “What is the main problem with the Modern?” I would probably mumble “3.c4, if you don’t play the King’s Indian. Now leave me alone.”



(The starting position of the Averbakh variation.)

And this is true, because I would be too tired to lie and I like to be left alone.

So why did God – or someone – create the Modern Defence just to demand that you should also be able play the King’s Indian: it seemed to me that Creation was flawed. There was, of course, the Averbakh, but it did not appeal to me so I did not think I would write this chapter.

But the ways of the Modern are obscure, so I ventured on a quest for a line that I could recommend to the reader without feeling like a

fraud. In other words, something I could and would play myself in a serious tournament game. After long consideration I ended up with 4...e5 in the Averbakh variation, which I feel gives Black a reasonable game (although the KID is still the more reliable choice).

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.c4

This is the starting position of the Averbakh variation, which is what I call any Black line that now avoids ♗f6 transposing to a King’s Indian.

3...d6 4.♗c3

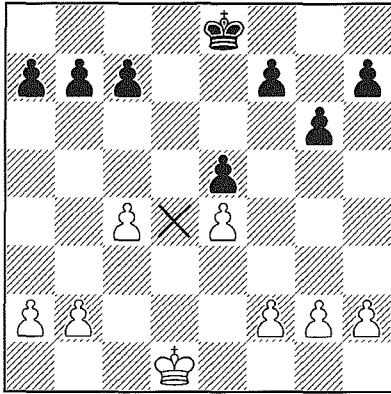
I have always transposed to the King’s Indian Defence (KID) with 4...♗f6, and it was tempting to omit this chapter, as it would take up a few more chapters, or rather books, for me to give a complete picture of the KID-complex.

In this chapter I will ignore the King’s Indian and the main lines of the Averbakh and instead concentrate on a few lesser-known lines. The common denominator in these lines is that Black should always go e5 on the 4th move.

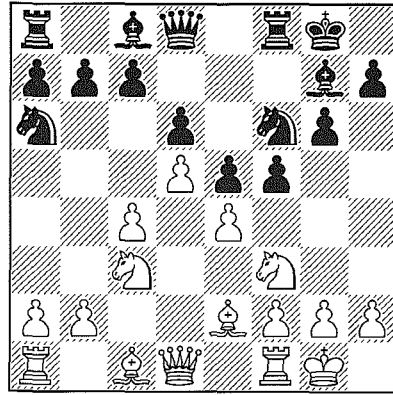
4...e5!

This is considerably less common than 4...♗c6, a line that I cannot recommend because of 5.d5 (see Game 64). The main idea behind 4...e5 is to force White to relieve the tension in the centre and this can be done in two ways: a) dxe5 and b) d5

a) After ...dxe5 and the exchange of queens – ♖xd8†/♗xd8 – Black will have slightly the better structure since White has a weak square on d4.

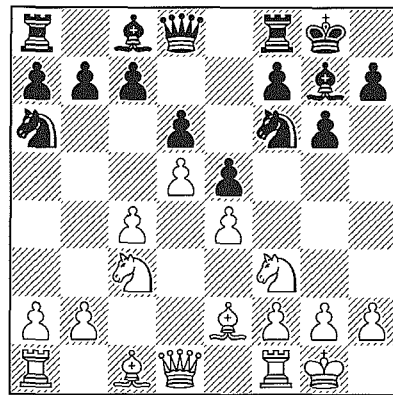
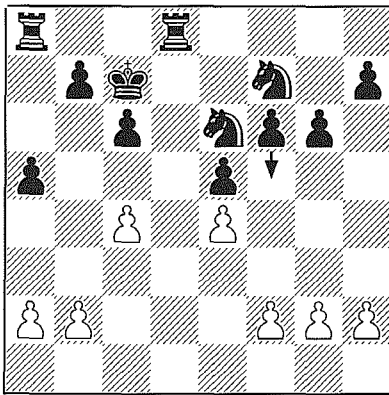


5.d5 f5 6.♘f3 ♘f6 7.♙e2 0-0 8.0-0 ♖a6



In general, you have to suffer a slight White initiative in the opening, but when you know the best way to develop the pieces, you will have every chance to soak up the pressure and go into a promising endgame. (Ideally by exchanging the bishops.)

Compare this position with the Petrosian variation of the Classical KID: 1.d4 ♘f6 2.c4 g6 3.♘c3 ♙g7 4.e4 d6 5.♘f3 0-0 6.♙e2 e5 7.d5 ♖a6 8.0-0



In the beginning White will gain some time harassing the black king, but if he loses the initiative Black has a bright future.

b) Black can win a few tempi compared to the normal KID-lines by playing f5 before developing a knight to f6. If White does not adapt to the special circumstances, and just develops in typical King's Indian style, then Black will indeed be two tempi up on the KID-lines. For example:

The conclusion that can be drawn from the diagrams is that in the Averbakh position Black is much better placed: e4 is under attack and White will not be able to keep the centre closed much longer.

The Averbakh variation is a hybrid between the Modern and the King's Indian and should not be compared with other Modern lines – especially if you like to play the a7-a6 lines. The fact that

White plays c4 makes it impossible to play for a6 and b5 and so it is necessary to learn a completely different system.

The line presented here is the only one in this book that I have not played myself – yet. The first reason for this is that I am fond of the King's Indian and the second is that I used to think the Averbakh was bad for Black. In particular, I did not (and do not) like three of the main lines:

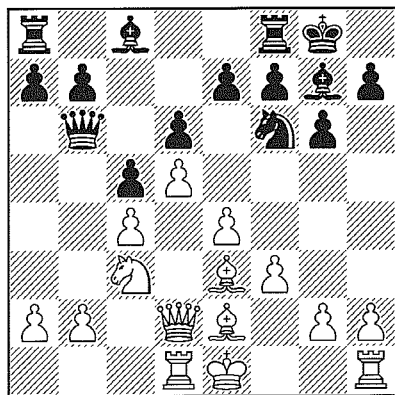
**1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♘g7 3.c4 d6 4.♗c3 ♗c6 5.d5 ♗d4 6.♙e3 c5 7.♗ge2 ♖b6 8.♗d2 ♗f6**

Black can try other moves here, but I know of none better.

**9.f3 0-0**

9...♗d7 10.♖d1 0-0 11.b3! ♗xe2 12.♙xe2 ♗a5 13.♖c1 a6 14.♙h6 ♙xh6 15.♗xh6 b5 16.h4 f6 17.f4 ♖f7 was not so clear in Hernandez Ruiz – Calderin, Colon 1991, but 14.h4 and 17.cxb5 are both strong improvements for White.

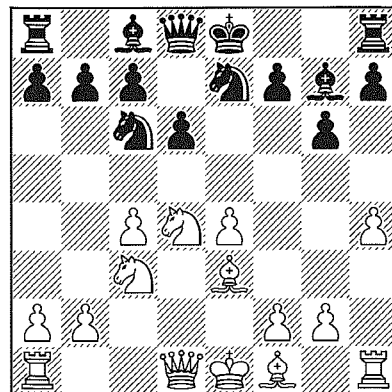
**10.♖d1 ♗xe2 11.♙xe2:**



I have looked at this position for many years, hoping that a good plan for Black would be revealed to me if only I hung in there and did not give up. So far I have had no such luck.

Another line that I have no faith in is:

**1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♘g7 3.c4 d6 4.♗c3 ♗c6 5.♙e3 e5 6.♗ge2 exd4 7.♗xd4 ♗ge7 8.h4**



Not even Jonathan Speelman, a connoisseur of this line, is optimistic about Black's prospects. I spent a few weeks trying to come up with a more optimistic verdict but ended up wading in pessimism.

The final line that I do not like is:

**1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♘g7 3.c4 d6 4.♗f3 ♘g4 5.♙e2 ♗c6 6.♙e3 e5 7.d5 ♙xf3 8.♙xf3 ♗d4 9.♙xd4 exd4 10.♗d2**

For a more detailed discussion of this position see Game 68, comments to move 6.

This is quite a lot to avoid, but I feel that there are enough alternatives to build a repertoire around. In the first game we take a look at what happens if White just pushes the d-pawn after e5 and ♗c6.

#### Game 64

**Gleizerov – Pedzich**

Cappelle la Grande 1995

**1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♘g7 3.c4 d6 4.♗c3**

White can also try d5 before Black has played ♗c6, but this is less logical since the knight is better off on b8 than on e7. One example is 4.♗f3 e5 5.d5! f5 6.♗c3 ♗f6 7.♙d3 0-0 8.♙e3 fxe4 (I do not like this move. It releases the dynamic tension in favour of White whose coordination is improved. Both 8...c6 and 8...h6 look slightly

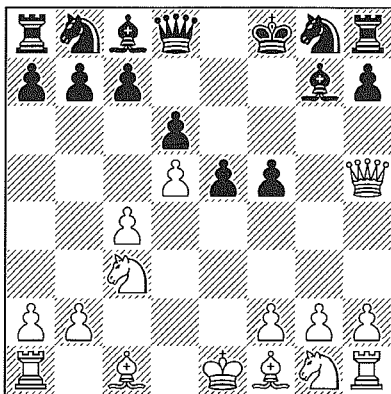
better for Black, or why not even 8...♞e7.) 9.♘xe4 ♘xe4 10.♙xe4 ♘d7 11.h3 ♘f6 12.♙c2 ♞e7 with approximate equality in Kempinski – Solak, Biel 2001.

#### 4...e5

I have absolutely no faith in the main line 4...♘c6 when 5.d5 ♘d4 6.♙e3 leads to one of the Averbakh positions that I expressed my doubts about above.

#### 5.♘f3

It is also interesting to play 5.d5 when Black has a number of moves to choose from: 5...♘a6, 5...a5, 5...♘f6 and 5...f5. Only with the last of these can you avoid transposing into the King's Indian. The main line goes 5...f5 6.exf5 gxf5 7.♞h5† ♖f8



White has managed to prevent Black from castling, but at a price. Black will continue with ♘f6 or ♞e8, improving the position of his pieces while harassing the white Queen. In general I believe Black will get good chances by playing ♘a6, ♘f6, ♞d8-e8-g6 and sometimes c6. Also ♞g8, putting pressure on the g2-pawn, is not out of the question.

#### 5...♘c6 6.d5

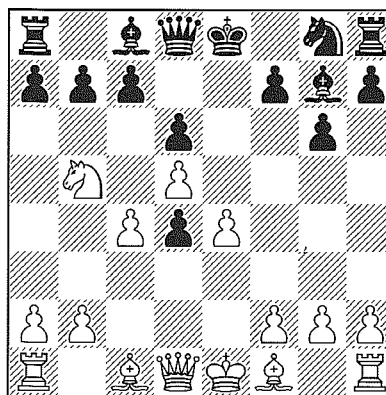
This move is generally stronger after Black has committed a knight to c6.

#### 6...♘ce7

The common opinion among grandmasters is that this is not a good place for the knight, but

because of the closed character of the position Black will have time to improve the knight's prospects with ♘e7-g8-f6, or after g5 with ♘e7-g6.

Black can also try 6...♘d4!? when 7.♙e3 ♙g4 would lead to a position considered in the comment to 6.♙e3 in Game 65. However the critical line is 7.♘xd4 exd4 8.♘b5.



Now Black has a choice between a) 8...c5!? and b) 8...a6

a) 8...c5 9.♞a4 (9.dxc6!? bxc6 10.♘xd4 ♘e7! 11.♙e3 ♞a5† 12.♞d2 ♞xd2† 13.♘xd2 ♖b8 14.♖b1 and Black has some compensation after 14...0-0 or 14...f5.) 9...♘f8 10.♙f4 ♙e5 11.♙xe5 dxe5 12.b4 ♘f6 13.♙d3 a6 14.♘a3 ♙d7 15.♞b3 b6 16.0-0 ♘h5 and Black was fine in Nielsen – Poley, Denmark 2000. This line is worth closer scrutiny.

b) 8...a6 9.♘xd4 ♞h4! 10.e5! (10.♙e3 ♞xe4 11.♞d3 is also slightly better for White) 10...♞e4† 11.♙e3 ♞xe5 12.♙e2 and White was a little better in A. Petrosian – Cifuentes Parada, Groningen 1990.

I would not play 8...c5 without taking a closer look at 9.dxc6, but if that is fine for Black then I see no reason not to try 6...♘d4.

#### 7.♙e2

White has plenty of alternatives here, but 7.♙e2 is the most flexible. After 7.h4 ♘f6! (7...f5 8.h5 must be avoided) 8.♙e2 c6 or 7.♙d3 f5 8.♘g5 ♘f6 9.0-0 c6!? I like Black's position.

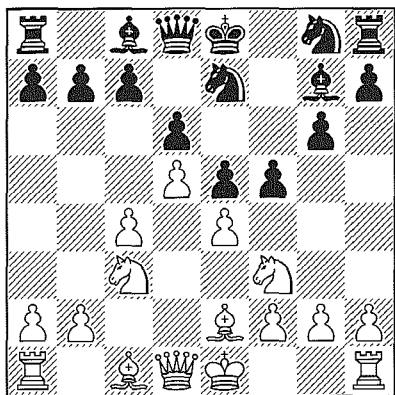
**7...h6!??**

The idea behind 7...h6 is to stop ♖g5 and maybe lure White into playing 0-0 before lashing out with ...f5 and then taking with the knight on f5 after exf5.

However, Black can choose from a veritable smorgasbord of moves:

First of all 7...♘h6?! is met by 8.h4 when Black cannot stop h4-h5 and is clearly worse. A waiting move like 7...c6 is not without merit if White plays 8.0-0, but again 8.h4 is annoying.

So what if Black just goes 7...f5!?



Now 8.exf5 is the best move, when Black has to decide how to take back:

a) 8...gxf5 9.♖g5 ♗g6 (9...♘f6 10.♙h5† ♘f8 11.♙f7, intending ♙e6, is no fun for Black.) 10.♙h5 ♗8e7 (10...♘f6?! 11.♘xh7 ♘xh7 12.♙xg6† ♘f8 13.♙d2 and Black did not have enough for the missing pawn in Arlandi – Rocha, Porto 1999.) 11.f4 White had the advantage in Sosonko – Larsen, Lone Pine 1979. It is possible that Black can improve on this game with 10...♙h6, but White should keep some advantage here too with 11.f4 ♗e7 12.0-0.

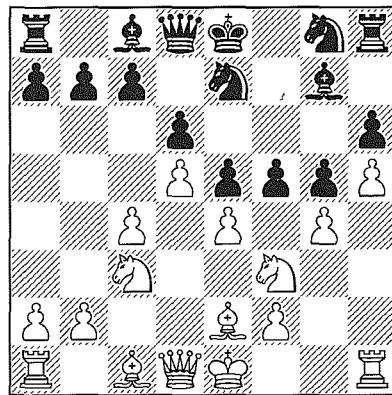
b) 8...♙xf5 9.♖g5 is slightly better for White.

c) 8...♘xf5! 9.h4!?! (other moves leads to positions similar to the main game) 9...♗e7 10.♘e4 ♘f6 11.♙d3 ♘xc4?! 12.♙xe4 ♙d7 13.♗d3 ♙f6 14.g3 ♖g7 15.♙d2 was better for

White in Malakhatko – Kupreichik, Pavlograd 2000. I think Black can improve on this game with 11...h6 when the position is unclear.

**8.0-0**

White's strongest move is probably 8.h4! with the idea of closing the kingside (h5, g4) and then winning on the queenside as in the Averbakh variation of the KID. After 8...f5?! 9.h5! g5 10.g4!! (much stronger than 10.exf5 ♙xf5 11.♘d2 ♘f6 when it is difficult to wrestle the e4 square away from Black) we see White's idea in full bloom. Whichever pawn Black takes, White will efficiently put the g7-bishop out of business:



a) 10...fxe4 11.♘d2 e3!?! (After 11...♘f6 12.♘dx4 0-0 13.♙e3, White controls e4 and the game.) 12.fxe3 e4! 13.♘dx4 ♘f6 14.♘xf6† ♙xf6 and if Black can accomplish ♙e5 and ♘e7-g8-f6 the position is OK, so the question is what White can do in the meantime? This line is clearly a "maybe".

b) 10...fxg4 11.♘h2 ♘f6 12.♘xg4 ♘xg4 13.♙xg4 ♘g8 14.♙e3 ♘f6 15.♗a4† ♙d7 16.♙xd7† ♗xd7 17.♗xd7† ♘xd7 18.♘e2 ♙f8 19.♘d3 ♙e7 20.♘e2 c6 21.♘g3 and Black was suffering in Jovanic – Jurkovic, Pula 2004.

c) 10...f4 11.♘d2 ♘f6 12.f3 0-0 13.b4 and Black can only hope to get in some suspect sacrifice on g4, though that is highly implausible.

Considering the evidence Black should definitely avoid 8...f5 and instead try 8...♘f6

9.♘d2 h5, though I have little doubt that White is quite a bit better here.

### 8...f5 9.exf5 ♖xf5

After 9...gxf5 10.♘h4 ♘f6 11.♙h5† ♘xh5 12.♗xh5† ♘f8 White should be better somehow, though Black has counter chances.

### 10.♘e4 ♘f6 11.♙d3 0-0 12.♗c2?!

The queen is no better here than on d1. Better is 12.♙d2.

### 12...♘h8?!

Black should attack the d-pawn and open the c-file with 12...c6! when White has trouble with the d-pawn after 13.♘xf6† ♗xf6 14.♙e4 ♘c7 15.♙e3 ♙f5 16.♘d2 ♗f7.

### 13.♙d2 ♙d7 14.♞ad1 ♗e8 15.♘xf6 ♙xf6 16.♙c3 ♙g7 17.♘d2 ♗f7 18.♘e4 ♞ac8 19.♞de1 ♗g8 20.f3

White should take some space on the queenside when he has the chance. After 20.a4 intending a5 Black is slightly worse.

### 20...g5 21.♗f2 b6 22.♘g3?!

With this move White heads for exchanges, but this only makes Black's defensive task easier. If White is to win the game he should first create a weakness on the other flank. 22.b4 intending a4-a5 is interesting.

### 22...♗f7 23.♘xf5 ♙xf5 24.♙xf5 ♗xf5 25.♞e4 a5

Material is too reduced for White to have any real chances to win a good versus bad bishop fight. Trying to make progress on the queenside with a3 and b4 only leads to further simplifications and Black can always create enough counterplay with h5 and g4.

### 26.♗e2 ♗d7 27.♙d2 ♗d8 28.♞e1 ♞f5 29.♗f2 h5 30.♗g3 ♞ef8 31.h3 ♗f6 32.♗f2 ♗g6 33.♗e2 ♘h7 34.b3 ♞8f7 35.a3 ♞f8 36.♞a1 ♞a8 37.♗e1 ♞f7 38.♗c1 ♙h6 39.♙e3 ♗f5 40.♗d2 ♞g8 41.♞e1

A draw was agreed.

½-½

*Game conclusions:* It seems that Black is slightly worse if White answers 7...h6 with 8.h4, but 7...f5 is an improvement, intending 8.exf5 ♘xf5!. It is also possible to try 6...♘d4, though I

would recommend spending some time analysing 7.♙xd4 exd4 8.♘b5 c5 9.dxc6 bxc6 10.♘xd4. The question is whether Black has enough compensation for the pawn after 10...♘e7.

In the next game White goes for the exchange of d-pawns and queens.

## Game 65

Karpov – Seirawan

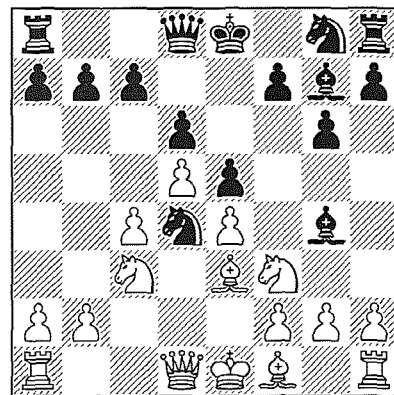
Roquebrune (rapid) 1992

### 1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♙g7 3.c4 d6 4.♘c3 e5 5.♘f3

The main line here is 5...exd4, but I cannot recommend this because after 6.♘xd4 ♘c6 7.♙e3 ♘ge7 8.h4 not even Modern expert Jonathan Speelman is optimistic about Black's chances, and I am even less so. It would take up an extra chapter to get to grips with these variations, and even then none of us would have a real chance to survive against a stronger opponent. Also quite common is 5...♙g4 6.d5 a5, but in the end Black generally winds up in a bad King's Indian.

### 5...♘c6 6.♙g5!?

This is more critical than 6.♙e3 ♙g4 7.d5 (7.dxe5?! dxe5 is very nice for Black who controls the d4-square) 7...♘d4:



A similar position is seen in the comment to move 6 in Game 69, but there White has not yet developed the knight to c3. When the knight has already reached c3 this is nothing to be afraid of:



a) 8.♖b5 ♕xf3! 9.gxf3 ♜c5 10.dxc6 (10.♞a4 ♜f8 is fine for Black. The d4-knight is a beautiful beast.) 10...bxc6 11.♞xd4 exd4 12.♕xd4 ♞a5† 13.♜e2 ♞f6 14.♕xf6?! (14.♕h3 0-0 15.♜f1 is better, but Black keeps the advantage after 15...♞ad8.) 14...♕xf6 15.♕h3 ♞c5 and Black had fantastic compensation for the pawn in Seret – Skripchenko, Cappelle la Grande 2003.

b) 8.♕xd4 exd4 9.♞e2 ♞f6 10.♞xd4 0-0 and Black has superb compensation for the pawn.

c) 8.♕e2 ♕xf3 9.♕xf3 ♜c5! 10.dxc6 bxc6 11.0-0 ♞e7 12.b4 (12.♕xd4 exd4 13.♞e2 ♞b6 is very nice for Black.) 12...0-0 13.♞b1 ♞c8! This move both stops b5 (due to cxb5) and heads for e6, where the queen will be well placed. 14.♕g4?! f5 15.exf5 gxf5 16.♕h3 ♞e6 17.c5 dxc5 18.bxc5 ♞ad8 with an excellent position for Black in I. Ivanov – Burnett, Dearborn 1992.

### 6...f6

This is played in most cases, but there is one interesting alternative: 6...♞d7!? 7.♕e3! ♞f6?! (7...♞h6!? 8.d5! ♞d8 9.c5 ♞g4 10.♕d2 0-0 11.h3 ♞f6 12.cxd6 ♞xd6 intending c6 is only slightly better for White.) 8.d5 ♞e7 9.h3 and the black queen looked silly on d7 in Ziegler – Todorcevic, Mondariz 1994.

### 7.♕e3 ♞h6

This is more reliable than 7...♕h6!? 8.♞d2 ♕xe3 9.♞xe3 ♕g4 when White has tried two moves:

a) 10.dxe5?! ♕xf3 11.gxf3 fxe5 12.c5 ♞d4 13.0-0-0 dxc5 14.f4 exf4 15.♞xf4 ♞d6? 16.♕b5† and White was winning in Radjabov – Basagic, Izmir 2004. Black can improve with 15...♞f6 when I do not see any advantage for White. The trick is 16.♞b5 0-0! 17.♞xd4 cxd4 18.♕c4† ♜h8 19.e5 ♞d7! 20.♞xd4 ♞g5† and Black will be a pawn up in every line. I am more worried about

b) 10.d5! ♞ce7 (10...♞b4 11.♞c1 ♕xf3 12.♞xf3 and a3, b4 and c5, or just directly c5 will hurt Black.) 11.♞d2 when White is clearly better, though Black is solid.

### 8.dxe5

This has for some time been considered the most critical line and the evidence has not changed in the last few years: 8.h3 ♞f7 (8...f5?! is again

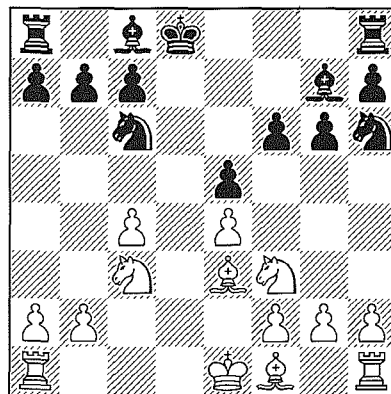
premature, due to 9.dxe5 dxe5 10.♞xd8† ♞xd8 11.♞d5 ♞e6 12.♞g5! and Black cannot hold the c7-pawn.) 9.c5 (very energetic and possibly best since other moves can be met by f6-f5) 9...dxc5! 10.dxe5 (White runs out of energy after 10.dxc5 ♕e6 11.♞a4 0-0 12.♞d1 ♞e8! 13.♞d5 ♞c8.) 10...♞fxe5 11.♕xc5 ♞xd1† 12.♞xd1 ♕d7 13.♕e2 (13.♞xe5 fxe5 is approximately level) 13...0-0-0 and a draw was agreed in I. Sokolov – Vallejo Pons, Sanxenxo 2004.

### 8...dxe5

Experience has shown that Black is very passive after 8...fxe5 9.h3.

### 9.♞xd8† ♜xd8

Not 9...♞xd8? 10.♞d5 ♞e6 11.♞xf6† ♕xf6 12.♕xh6 and White wins a pawn.



### 10.0-0-0†

This is stronger than 10.h3, which was seen in the game Su. Polgar – Azmaiparashvili, Dortmund 1990. The game continued 10...♕e6! (10...♞f7 11.0-0-0† ♕d7 leads to the main game) 11.0-0-0† ♜c8 12.g4 ♞f7 13.♞g1 b6?! 14.c5! ♜b7 15.♞d5 ♞ad8 16.♕a6† ♜b8 17.a3 ♕c8 (17...bxc5 18.♕xc5 ♞d6 19.♕d3 ♞a5) 18.♕xc8 ♜xc8 19.b4 and Black was very passive. Instead of 13...b6, I believe 13...♞d8 is an improvement, when play can continue 14.♞d5 ♞d7! 15.c5 ♞cd8 followed by ...c6 with a nice game for Black.

### 10...♕d7 11.h3 ♞f7

11...f5!? has been suggested by Susan Polgar and is possibly better. The point is that exf5 can be met by ♖xf5 and otherwise Black threatens to wrest control of the d4-square from White with f4.

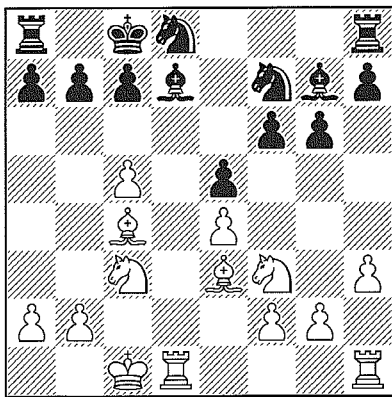
### 12.c5

Black is doing all right after 12.g4 ♖c8 (12...h5?! 13.gxh5 ♖xh5 14.♖g1 ♗e7 15.h4 intending ♖xd7 and ♗h3 is horrible for Black.) 13.♖g1 ♗cd8 14.c5 c6 intending ♖c7 and b6. If White plays ♗c4 then Black counters with ...♗e6, and if White does not play ♗c4, then Black plays ...♗e6.

### 12...♖c8 13.♗c4

In P. Cramling – Foisor, Tilburg 1994, White went one step further with the bishop: 13.♗b5 ♗e6! 14.♖b1 ♗e7?! (The knight is not well placed here and 14...♗cd8, intending c6 and ♖c7, looks better.) 15.♗d2 f5 16.exf5 gxf5 17.♗c4 and White came close to winning the game due to the open character of the position. The lesson is that Black should keep the position closed until the king is safe(r) and the rooks connected.

### 13...♗cd8



### 14.b4

Similar to the main game was 14.♗d2 c6 15.a3?! (This is totally unnecessary. 15.b4 was more to the point.) 15...♗e6 16.b4 ♗h6?! (This loses too much time. Better was 16...♖c7 17.♖b1 ♖ad8.) 17.♗b3

(White could have gained a strong initiative with 17.♗xh6! ♗xh6 18.♗b3 ♖c7 19.♖d6.) 17...♖c7 with a slight advantage for White in A. Spielmann – Foisor, Clichy 2002.

An interesting idea was seen in Illescas Cordoba – Todorcevic, Pamplona 1990. 14.♖d3!? ♗e6 15.♗d2 (White intends ♖hd1 and b2-b4-b5. With the rooks already doubled along the d-file it will be difficult for Black to play c6, ♖c7 and ♗xc4 as will be seen...) 15...♖e8 (I prefer 15...c6 intending ♖c7, h5 and ♗h6.) 16.h4 h5 (16...f5 is interesting but usually premature before Black has exchanged at least one pair of pieces.) 17.♖d1 c6 18.♗xe6† ♗xe6 19.♗c4 ♗f8?! (It is better to play 19...♖e7, intending ♖c7 and ♖d8, with approximate equality.) 20.b4 ♖d8 21.♖xd8† ♗exd8 22.g3 ♗e6 23.f4 ♖c7 24.fxe5?! (After 24.f5! gxf5 25.exf5 ♗g7 26.♖f1, intending ♗e4, Black is in trouble.) 24...♗xe5 25.♗xe5 fxe5 26.♖f1 ♗e7 27.♖f7 ♖d7 and Black had equalized.

In Yakovich – Dunnington, Biel 1992, Black lost two tempi with the rook before finally deciding to play b5: 14.g4 c6 15.♖d2 ♗e6 16.♗e2 ♖c7 (16...b5!? 17.cxb6 axb6 18.♗xb6 ♗h6 19.a4 and White has compensation for the exchange.) 17.b4 ♖c8 (x-raying the white king along the c-file and planning to meet b5 with cxb5, but 17...b5 with the idea 18.a4 a5! 19.axb5 axb4 20.b6† ♖b8, followed by ♗b7 and ♗f8 was maybe better.) 18.♖dd1 ♖a8?! (I would probably play ♖h8-e8-e7-d7 to disarm the pressure along the d-file, but there is nothing wrong with Black's move.) 19.♖c2 b5! 20.a4 a5! 21.♗d5†?! (Black is doing well after 21.♖b1 axb4 22.♖xb4 bxa4) 21...cxd5 22.exd5 ♗xd5 23.♖xd5 ♗c6 24.♖d2 ♗xb4† 25.♖b3 bxa4† 26.♖xa4 ♖hd8 27.♗c4 ♖xd2 28.♗xd2 ♗d8 29.♗e4 and White had just enough compensation for the pawn.

### 14...c6 15.♗d2 ♗e6 16.♗e2

White should avoid exchanging pieces if possible. After 16.♗xe6† ♗xe6 17.♗c4 ♖d8 Black is happy.

### 16...♗h6

This loses a lot of time, but 16...f5?! 17.exf5 gxf5 intending g4 is clearly better for White after 18.f3.

**17.♙xh6 ♜xh6 18.♜c4 ♜df7?!**

It was better to play 18...♙c7 immediately, to be able to meet 19.a4 with 19...b6. Now White gets the opportunity to push the b-pawn to b6.

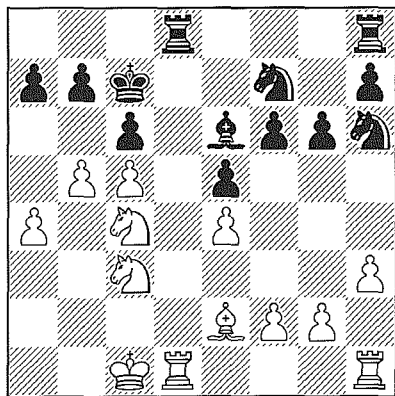
**19.a4!?**

After 19.b5 cxb5 20.♜xb5 ♙b8 intending ♜c8, things are not so clear.

**19...♙c7 20.b5**

White is clearly better here, no doubt, but Black has no weaknesses and can relieve most of White's pressure by exchanging rooks on the d-file.

**20...♜ad8!**



Black connects rooks rather than weakening his queenside further with 20...b6 when 21.cxb6† axb6 22.bxc6 ♙xc6 23.♙b2 is better for White, who will take control of the light squares on the queenside quicker.

**21.b6† ♙b8!**

In principle Black should not give White the opportunity to get a potential passed pawn on the queenside, but here it was still interesting to play 21...axb6? 22.cxb6† ♙b8 with the intention of ♜d4 and ♜d6 with a complicated game.

**22.♜e3**

White should have a slight advantage after 22.a5 ♜d4 23.♜xd4 exd4 24.♜a4 ♜e8 25.♜d2.

**22...♜d4 23.♜c2 ♜xd1† 24.♜xd1 ♜d8 25.♙b2 f5?!**

If the rooks are to come off the board, then it is better to play 25...♜xd1 26.♜xd1 axb6! 27.cxb6 ♜d6 28.♜e3 ♜hf7 29.♙b3 ♜d8 when it will be very difficult for White to win.

**26.a5 ♜g8 27.♜xd8† ♜xd8 28.♙a3**

I am very sceptical about Black's chances for survival after 28.exf5! gxf5 29.♜b4 because the black king will find it very difficult to leave b8. In the meantime White's king moves closer to the centre and f4 at the right time will open a path into Black's position via d4 and e5.

**28...♜f6 29.♜d3 fxe4 30.♜xe4 ♜d7**

I am not sure how this happened, but it is suddenly not so easy to keep the c5-pawn protected.

**31.♜e3?!**

The position is approximately level after 31.♙b4 ♜d5 32.♜e1 ♜e6 33.♜c4 ♜f4 34.f3 ♜xe4 35.fxe4 ♜f6 36.♜d3.

**31...♜d5 32.♙b4 ♜e6?!**

This was a rapid game and I guess time was running short for both sides by now. After 32...♜xe4! 33.♜xe4 ♜e6 White will lose the c5-pawn.

**33.♜c4**

Now White is fine again.

**33...♜f4 34.♜g5 h6 35.♜f7 ♜xf7 36.♜xf7 ♜d3† 37.♙c4 ♜3xc5 38.♜xg6!?**

White also keeps some advantage with 38.bxa7† ♙xa7 39.♜xg6 ♙a6 40.♙b4, but in the game the black king is less active.

**38...axb6 39.axb6 ♜a4 40.♜g4 ♜axb6† 41.♙d3**

Also after 41.♙b3 ♜c5† 42.♙c2 ♜d5 43.h4 ♜f4 44.h5 ♜xg2 45.♜xh6 ♜f4 46.♜g4 ♙c7 Black should be able to draw.

**41...♜d5 42.g3 ♜e7 43.♜f7 ♜f5 44.♙d2**

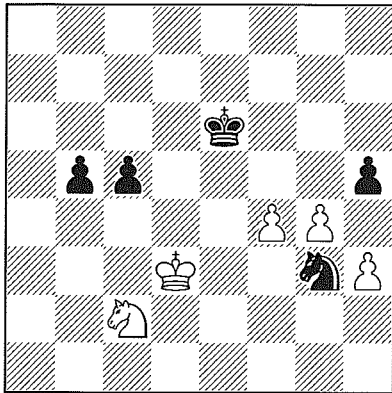
Karpov is trying to win the game, but it was probably wiser to force a repetition of moves with 44.♜g6.

**44...♙c7 45.♜e6 ♜d4! 46.♜xd7 ♙xd7 47.♜xe5†?!**

After this move White starts drifting into a bad position. Better was 47.♜xh6 ♙e6 48.♜g4 b5 49.h4 with an unclear game.

47...♙e6 48.♖g4 h5 49.♗e3 b5 50.♙d3 c5  
51.f4 ♗f5 52.g4 ♗g3!

52...c4† 53.♗xc4 bxc4† 54.♙xc4 is a draw.  
53.♗c2



In the coming moves White misses a few chances to force a draw. First 54.f5† followed by 55.♗a3, then 56.♙c2 ♗f2 57.♙c3 ♗hx3 58.♗g2 ♗f2 59.♗hx4 ♗xg4 60.♙b4 and finally 57.♙d2 b4 58.♙c2 with a dead draw.

53...h4 54.♗e3 c4† 55.♙d2 ♗e4† 56.♙e2 ♗d6 57.♗g2? b4 58.♗hx4?!

White is lost anyway as after 58.♙d2 ♗e4† 59.♙c1 b3 60.♙b2 ♗c5 61.♗hx4 ♗a4† 62.♙a3 b2 63.♙a2 c3 it is only a matter of time before Black makes a touchdown with the help of the king and knight.

58...b3 59.♙d2 ♗e4† 60.♙c1

There is nothing White can do against c3, b2†, ♗d2 and b1=♙.

0-1

*Game conclusions:* it is strong proof of the strength of Black's set-up that Karpov did not manage to win this game in spite of Black's ugly 18th move. It may not be to everybody's liking to defend this kind of middlegame, but the rewards makes it worthwhile. Black has very simple plans: to exchange a few pieces and then make use of the weak squares in the centre, or play f6-f5 at an opportune moment. If White lets go of the initiative Black has every reason to be happy.

White's most dangerous continuation is 14.♙d3, intending ♗d2 and ♙hd1, when Black has to step carefully. My recommendation, 19...♙e7, should be good enough for Black, but there are many possibilities for both sides here.

In the next game White exchanges on e5 as soon as he gets the chance.

### Game 66

Agrest – Morozevich

Calvia Olympiad 2004

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.c4 d6 4.♗c3 e5 5.dxe5

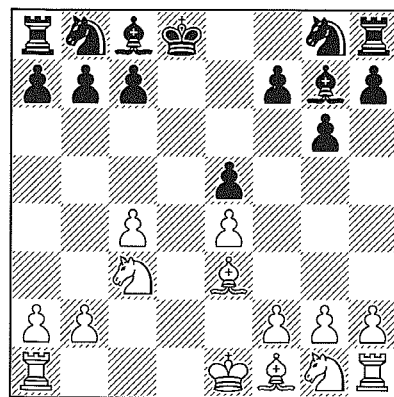
5.♗e3 is not very good here because of 5...exd4 6.♗xd4 ♗f6 intending ♗c6, with a good game for Black. White will have to go back with the bishop to e3 and lose an important tempo in the process.

5...dxe5 6.♙xd8† ♗xd8

If White does not attack e5 here Black will be fine in the long run with either ♗b8-c6-d4, or f6, ♗h6, ♗d7, c6 and ♙c7 if White plays ♗f3. If the position remains closed for some time, Black will eventually take control of the dark squares.

7.f4

White has to play energetically to keep the initiative or Black will slowly improve his position, exchange a few pieces and then occupy the d4-square, or play an endgame with light-squared bishops. The alternatives are not scary: 7.♗f3 is analysed in the next game, but 7.♗e3 is also possible:



Now Black has many moves to choose from:

a) 7...♖h6 8.♞d1† ♖d7 Black intends c6 and ♗c7. 9.♖f3 f6 10.♗xe5!? fxe5 11.♙g5† ♗e8 12.♗d5 ♖b8 13.♗xc7† ♗f8 14.♙e3 (14.c5 ♗f7 15.♗e6† ♗g8 16.♙c4 ♗xg5 17.♗xg5† ♗f8 18.♗f7 ♖g8 19.♗g5 is equal) 14...b6 15.c5 bxc5 16.♙c4 ♗f7 17.♗e6† ♗e7 18.♗xg7 ♗f6 and Black was better in T. Paetz Sr. – Smyslov, Berlin 1979.

b) 7...♙e6 seems like the most flexible move to me. After 8.0-0-0† ♗d7 9.♖f3 f6 Black is OK.

c) 7...c6 is the move Black would most like to play, but it is risky to weaken the d6-square so soon. After 8.0-0-0† ♗c7 9.♙c5 White has some initiative.

d) 7...♗c6 8.0-0-0† ♙d7 9.♖f3 f6 10.♗a4 is similar to the previous game.

### 7...♙e6!?

I think this is the most flexible move since Black can still choose whether to put the knight on d7 or c6. Also possible is 7...♗c6, and now White has two main continuations:

a) 8.♖f3 ♗d4!? (8...♙e6 leads to the main game) 9.♗f2 exf4 10.♙xf4 ♗c6 11.♙d2 (11.♞d1† ♗e8 12.♙e5 ♙xe5 13.♗xe5 c6 14.♗e3 f6 15.♗d3 ♗h6 16.♙e2 ♗f7 17.♙g4 ♗e5 was level in Zayac – Zakharevich, St Petersburg 1998.) 11...♗f6 12.h3 ♗d7 13.♙d3 ♗e5 14.♙e2 c6 15.♗a4 ♗xf3 16.♙xf3 ♗c7 17.♙c3 ♙xc3 18.♗xc3 ♗c5 19.♖hd1 a5 20.♖ac1 ♖e8 21.♖d4 ♖e5 22.♖cd1 ♙e6, Petursson – Ehlvest, Yerevan (ol) 1996. This is a nice example of what Black is dreaming of in these lines.

b) 8.fxe5 ♗xe5 and now:

b1) 9.♙g5†? f6 10.0-0-0† ♙d7 11.♙h4 c6 12.♖f3 ♗c7 is common and quite reasonable for Black.

b2) 9.♖f3 ♗xf3† 10.gxf3 ♙xc3† 11.bxc3 ♙e6 12.c5 intending a4-a5, h4-h5 and ♖b1 is more comfortable for White.

After 7...♗c6 I am more worried about 8.fxe5 than 8.♖f3. I believe 7...♙e6 solves these problems.

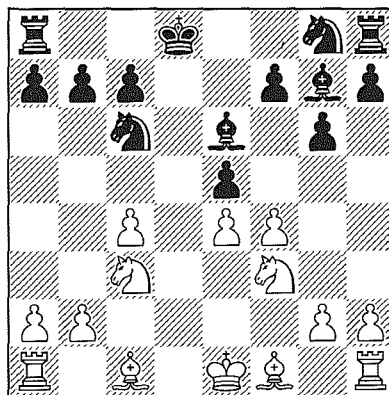
### 8.♖f3

Or 8.fxe5 ♗d7 9.♙g5†? ♗c8 10.♗f3 h6 11.♙f4 g5 12.♙g3 ♗e7 13.0-0-0 ♗c6 14.♙e2?! (14.h3 ♖e8 15.♙e2 ♗xe5 is fine for Black) 14...b6? Baragar – Hergott, Canada 1986. It was better to play 14...g4 15.♗h4 ♙xe5 16.♙xe5 ♗dxe5 with mutual chances.

Instead of wasting a tempo with 9.♙g5, White should play 9.♖f3 when 9...♗xe5 is discussed in the comments to White's ninth move, but 9...h6!? seems better, intending c6, g5 and ♗e7-g6xe5, with mutual chances.

### 8...♗c6

The theoretical main line goes 8...♗d7, but Morozevich's move aims at the d4-square, which looks more logical.



### 9.♗f2!?

This is usually played if Black plays ♗d4, but here it is of dubious value. The most dangerous move is 9.fxe5! when 9...♗xe5 is problematic due to 10.♙g5† f6 11.0-0-0† ♗e7 12.♙h4 ♗xc4 13.♙xc4 ♙xc4 14.e5 and White had a fantastic initiative in Pytel – Kluger, Wroclaw 1972. I think Black can improve on this line with 9...h6 when a possible continuation is 10.♙f4 g5 11.0-0-0† ♗c8 12.♙g3 g4! (better than 12...♗ge7?! 13.♗d5 ♗g6 14.h3 ♗xe5 15.♗xe5 ♗xe5 16.♗e7† ♗b8 17.♗f5 when White has some pressure) 13.♗d4 (13.♗h4 ♙xe5 14.♗d5 ♙xg3 15.hxg3 ♗ge7 16.♙e2 h5 is also fine for Black) 13...♗xd4 14.♖xd4 ♗e7, intending ♗c6 and ♙xe5, with a good position for Black.

There is no reason to be afraid of 9.♘g5, since this only strengthens Black's central control after 9...h6! 10.♖xe6† (10.f5!? hxg5 11.fxe6 fxe6 12.♙xg5† ♗d7 13.♖b5 a6 14.♞d1† ♗c8 15.♖c3 ♙h6 and Black is ready to take advantage of the d4-square.) 10...fxe6 11.g3 ♖b4 12.♞b1 ♖f6 when Black has excellent play on the dark squares.

**9...♖f6! 10.♙e2**

Again Black is not worried by 10.♖g5 h6 11.f5 hxg5 12.fxe6 fxe6 13.♙xg5 ♗d7 14.♙d3 ♞af8 and White is worse.

**10...h6 11.h3 ♗c8 12.g3**

After 12.fxe5 ♖d7 13.♙f4 ♖cxe5 14.♞ac1 c6 Black has achieved a blockade and can start improving the position of his rooks. White can do little other than spectate.

**13...♖d7 13.♗g2**

13.♙d2 was better, not allowing Black the following opportunity.

**13...exf4! 14.gxf4**

After 14.♙xf4 g5 15.♙e3 ♞e8 White is in trouble along the e-file, and ♖b6 and ♖a5 are annoying threats.

**14...♙xc3!?**

Also strong is 14...♞e8 intending ♙xc3, ♙f5 and ♖c5.

**15.bxc3 ♖a5 16.♖d2 c5!**

Morozevich makes sure the c4-pawn stays on c4. This position is truly horrible for White. The knight has to stay on d2 to defend the c4-pawn, meaning that the c1-bishop will be left out of the play. Black's mission is to finish development and then increase the pressure on c4.

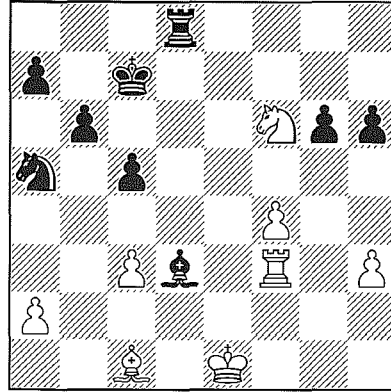
**17.♙a3 ♗c7 18.♞ae1 b6 19.♞hf1 f5!**

Blocking the f-pawn makes the future of the a3-bishop even darker in the long run. Now 20.e5 g5 and 20.exf5 ♙xf5 are both very bad for White, so he tries to keep the tension a bit longer.

**20.♙d3 ♞he8 21.♙c1 ♞ad8 22.♞f3 ♖f6 23.♗f2**

23.e5 ♖h5 and White has to allow g5 since 24.h4? ♞xd3 25.♞xd3 ♖xf4† is very bad.

**23...fxe4 24.♖xe4 ♙xc4 25.♖xf6 ♞xe1 26.♗xc1 ♙xd3**



Black has won a pawn and has the more active pieces. The rest is simple for a guy of Morozevich's calibre.

**27.f5 ♙xf5 28.♙xh6 ♞h8 29.♙f4† ♗c6 30.♞e3 ♞h4 31.♙g3 ♞a4 32.♞e7 ♖c4 33.♞c7† ♗b5 34.♞h7 ♞xa2 35.♖d5 a5 36.h4 ♙e4 37.♖c7† ♗a4 38.♞e7 ♙f3 39.♞e6 ♗b3 40.♞xg6 ♞e2†**

White is mated after either 41.♗f1 ♖e3† 42.♗g1 ♞g2† 43.♗h1 ♞xg3† 44.♗h2 ♖f1 mate, or 41.♗d1 ♖e3† 42.♗c1 ♗a2 followed by ♞c2.

**0-1**

*Game conclusions:* 9.♗f2 is not the best move but 9.fxe5 sets Black a few problems, which are best dealt with by playing 9...h6, intending g5, ♖g8-e7-g6, ♖cxe5. I am optimistic about this line, but it needs to be tested in practice.

In the next game White makes a common mistake on move 5.

### Game 67

**Lputian – Todorcevic**

Cannes 1996

**1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♙g7 3.c4 d6 4.♖f3 e5! 5.♙e3!?**

This move will henceforth be known as the black sheep of the family. The other family members are:

a) 5.dxe5 dxe5 6.♞xd8† ♗xd8 This is not dangerous for Black: the knight on f3 makes it

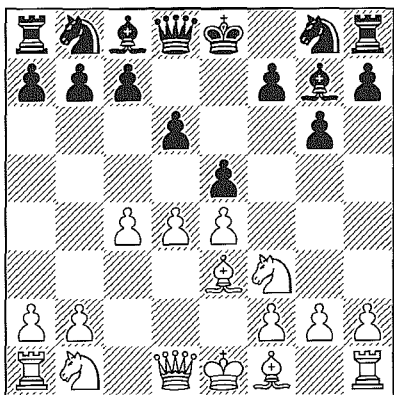
difficult for White to take the initiative and Black can complete development with f6, ♖e6, ♜d7, c6 and ♜g8-h6-f7.

b) 5.♗e2 is seen in Game 68.

c) 5.♜c3 leads to Game 64.

d) 5.♗g5 ♜e7!? This is only possible because there is no knight on c6; compare this with the previous game. (5...f6 6.♗e3 ♜c6 7.♜c3 ♜h6 is seen in Game 65) 6.♜c3 h6 7.♗e3 ♜d7 (This is an Averbakh 4...♜d7 line where Black has gained an important extra tempo in ...h6.) 8.♞d2 f5 9.dxe5 dxe5 10.♞c2 (10.exf5 gxf5 11.0-0 is critical, but Black seems to be fine after 11...b6 12.♞c2 0-0 13.g4 ♗b7 14.♗g2 f4 15.♗d2 ♜c5.) 10...f4 11.♗d2 b6? 12.♜d5? and both players started playing lots and lots of weird moves in Mestdagh – Fox, La Fere 2003. Instead of 11...b6 both 11...g5 and 11...0-0 were excellent for Black.

e) 5.d5?! This move is harmless when there is no knight to kick away from c6. 5...f5 6.♜c3 ♜f6 7.♗d3 0-0 8.♗e3 fxe4 I do not like this move: it releases the dynamic tension, favouring White who otherwise has a clear problem with coordination. (Both 8...c6 and 8...h6 look preferable, or why not 8...♞e7 which looks slightly better for Black.) 9.♜xe4 ♜xe4 10.♗xe4 ♜d7 11.h3 ♜f6 12.♗c2 ♞e7 with approximate equality in Kempinski – Solak, Biel 2001.



5...♜f6!

I have not found a single game with this move (I confess I fiddled the move order of Lputian – Todorovic), but I believe it is the best way to get a reasonable position here. The other options are:

a) 5...exd4 6.♜xd4! (6.♗xd4 ♜f6 was the actual move order of our main game) 6...c5 (6...♜f6 7.f3! and Black cannot avoid the KID-Sämisch) 7.♜b5 ♗xb2 8.♜1c3! ♗xc3† (8...♗xa1 9.♞xa1 and White has fantastic compensation with ♜d5, ♗f4 etc.) 9.♜xc3 ♜c6 10.♜b5 and the black king was caught in a hurricane in Brinck Claussen – Mestel, Esbjerg 1978.

b) 5...♜c6?! 6.d5! (This is stronger here than in Game 69, where White has played ♗e2 instead of ♗e3.) 6...♜ce7 7.c5! and White is clearly better since 7...f5 8.cxd6 cxd6 9.♜c3 ♜f6 10.♗b5† followed by ♜g5 is very bad for Black.

#### 6.♜c3

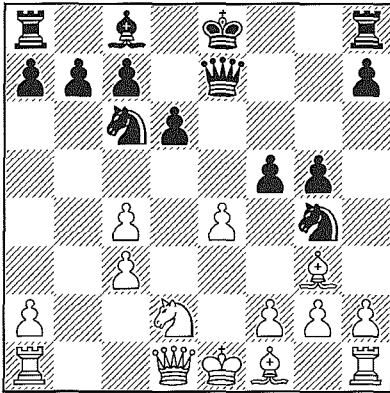
Black is doing fine after 6.dxe5 ♜xe4! 7.♞c2 (7.♗d3 ♜c5 8.♗xc5 dxc5 and it is just a question of time before White loses the e5-pawn.) 7...♜c5! 8.♜c3 ♗f5. I am pretty sure that Black is fine here but I will continue the analysis for a few more moves just to prove my point. 9.♞d2 ♜c6 10.exd6 ♞xd6 11.♞xd6 cxd6 12.♜b5 0-0-0 (12...♜e7!?) 13.0-0-0 ♜b4 14.♜xd6† ♞xd6 15.♞xd6 ♜xa2† 16.♜d1 ♜e4 and Black has plenty of compensation for the exchange.

#### 6...exd4 7.♗xd4

Also possible is 7.♜xd4!? when Black must act immediately to avoid drifting into a bad KID-Sämisch. The key move is 7...♜g4! forcing the e3-bishop to move and ruining White's coordination. (7...0-0?! 8.f3 ♞e8 9.♞d2 is a line from the KID Sämisch that cannot be recommended for Black.) 8.♗f4 (8.♗c1 ♞h4 9.g3 ♞f6 10.♜f3 ♜c6 11.♜d5 ♞d8 and Black is better.) 8...♞f6 (8...♜c6!?) 9.♜de2 ♗e6 and White is in some trouble since both 10.h3 ♜xf2 11.♜xf2 g5 12.♜d5 ♗xd5 13.♞xd5 gxf4 14.♞xb7 0-0 15.♞xa8 ♞xb2 and 10.♞b3 ♜d7 11.♞xb7 ♞b8 12.♞xc7 ♞xb2 13.♞c8† ♞d8 14.♞xd8† ♜xd8 are very promising for Black.

7...♜c6 8.♗e3 0-0

Given the chance I would have gone for 8...♖g4!? 9.♙g5 (9...♙d2 0-0 10.h3 ♗ge5 and Black is ahead in development.) 9...♙xc3?! 10.bxc3 f6 11.♙h4 ♜e7 12.♗d2 g5 13.♙g3 f5



This is a typical King's Indian trick: exchanging the dark-squared bishop on c3 and then taking the initiative on the light squares. I strongly prefer Black's position.

9.♙e2 ♜e8 10.♗d2 ♗d7 11.0-0 ♗d4

I believe it was better to play 11...♗c5!? intending 12.f3 ♙e5 13.♞c1 f5 14.f4 ♙g7 (White has good compensation after 14...♙xc3 15.♞xc3 fxe4 16.♗b3) 15.♙xc5 dxc5 16.e5 ♗d4 17.♗b3 ♗xb3 18.♞xb3 c6 with an unclear position.

12.♙d3 ♗c5 13.♗b3

White regains some control of the dark squares in the centre and is back in the game.

13...♗xd3 14.♞xd3

After 14.♙xd4! ♗f4 15.♙xg7 ♗xg7 16.g3 ♗h3† 17.♗h1 ♗g5 White would have been much better if only the g-pawn had been on g2. Here however, Black has good chances to whip up an attack on the weak light squares around his opponent's king.

14...♗c6 15.♞fd1 ♗e5 16.♞e2 b6!

Stopping c4-c5 and preparing ♙b7 or even ♙a6. 17.♗d4 a6 18.h3 ♙b7 19.♞d2 ♞h4 20.♞e1!?

White can keep the tension with 20.f3! when Black has no way of opening the centre. As a result Black is worse.

20...c5 21.♗f3

White must avoid 21.♗c2? f5 22.♞xd6 f4 23.♞xb6 f3 24.♞f1 fxg2 25.♞xg2 ♙c8 when there is no defence against both ♙xh3 and ♗xc4. 21...♗xf3† 22.♞xf3 ♞ad8 23.♞ed1 ♙xc3 24.bxc3 ♙xe4 25.♞f4 ♞xf4 26.♙xf4 ♞e6 27.♙xd6 ♙c6 28.♙c7 ♞xd2 29.♞xd2 b5 30.♙d6 bxc4 31.♙xc5 f6

Lputian is very strong in the endgame, but even he cannot win this.

32.♞d8† ♗f7 33.♞c8 g5 34.f3 h5 35.♗f2 h4 36.♙e3 ♗g6 37.♞c7 ♞d6 38.f4 ♙d5 39.fxg5 fxg5 40.♙d4 ♗f5 41.a4 ♞g6 42.♞e7 ♙e6 43.a5 ♗e4 44.♞a7 ♙d5 45.♞d7 ♙e6 46.♞d6 ♙f5 47.♙f6 ♙c8 48.♞d4† ♗f5 49.♙d8 ♙e6 50.♞d6 ♙g8 51.♞d7 ♙e6 52.♞d2 ♙g8 53.♗f1 ♙e6 54.♙c7 ♞g7 55.♞f2† ♗g6 56.♙e5 ♞e7 57.♞f6† ♗h5 58.♙d4 ♞f7 59.♗f2 ♞xf6† 60.♙xf6 ♗g6 61.♙d8 ♗f5

½-½

*Game conclusions:* When people realise the strength of 5...♗f6 we will see no more of 5.♙e3.

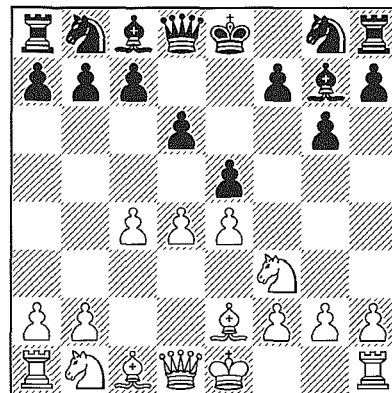
In the next game White plays 4.♗f3 instead of 4.♗c3, but Black still continues with 4...e5.

## Game 68

Boensch – Seirawan

Lugano 1989

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♙g7 3.c4 d6 4.♗f3 e5! 5.♙e2!





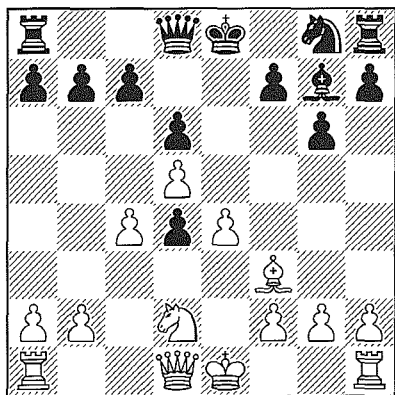
I think this is the most annoying move order, because now there is no ♖f6-g4 trick like in the previous game.

### 5...♖c6 6.♙e3

6.d5 ♖ce7 7.♖c3 h6 (7...f5!) leads to Game 64.

### 6...♖h6!?

The main line here goes 6...♙g4 7.d5 ♙xf3 8.♙xf3 ♖d4 and now there are surprisingly many who play 9.♖c3 when 9...c5 leads to a position discussed in Game 65 (move 6.♙e3 etc). The real problem with this line is that White can play differently with 9.♙xd4! exd4 10.♖d2!:



Black now has two alternatives, neither of which convinces me:

a) 10...c5 11.dxc6 bxc6 12.b4 (I do not like Black's position. The e7-knight is badly placed and if White is allowed to manoeuvre ♖d2 to d3 then I think Black's number is up.) 12...♙b8 13.♙b1 ♖e7 14.a3 0-0 15.♖b3 c5 16.b5 f5 17.0-0 ♖h8 18.a4 fxe4 19.♙xe4 d5 20.♙d3 dxc4 21.♙xc4 ♗d6 22.♙c1 ♙bc8 23.♗d3 and I am very impressed that Black managed to save a draw in Epishin – McNab, Gibraltar 2003. Indeed it was truly miraculous considering the horrible state of Black's pieces.

b) 10...♖e7 11.0-0 0-0 12.♙e2 f5 13.♖f3 (13.♙d3 might be even stronger) 13...fxe4 14.♖xd4 ♙xd4 15.♗xd4 was also better for White in Chuchelov – Sutovsky, Moscow 2003.

All this can be avoided with 6...exd4, but after 7.♖xd4 ♖f6 8.♖c3 0-0 9.0-0 ♙e8 10.f3 Black's wheels are stuck in a KID Sämisch.

### 7.d5

After 7.dxe5 dxe5! (Also possible is 7...♖g4 8.♙g5 ♗d7 9.♖c3 h6 10.♙f4 ♖gxe5) 8.♗xd8† ♖xd8 Black continues with ♖e6 and f5 and stands well.

### 7...♖e7 8.♖fd2

After 8.♖c3 ♖g4 9.♙d2 f5 10.♖g5 ♖f6 11.0-0 0-0 12.♙f3 we have reached a position similar to a Classical King's Indian line where White normally has played both b4 and ♙e1 instead of ♙d2. Somehow this must be to Black's advantage, but the position is still unclear.

### 8...f5 9.f3 ♖f7!

I think it is more exact to play this before castling as the h2-h4-h5 idea loses some of its charm for White. In Brenninkmeijer – Cu. Hansen, Groningen 1991, White did not take advantage of this possibility:

9...0-0 10.0-0

10.h4! ♖f7 11.h5 f4 12.hxg6 ♖xg6 13.♙f2 ♙f6 is slightly better for White, but 10.g4? loses after 10...fxg4 11.fxg4 ♖xd5 intending ♗h4 checkmate.

10...c5!?

I believe one of the main advantages of having the knight on f7 is that Black can take back with the knight after c4-c5xd6, and so I do not see the need to close the queenside further.

11.♖c3 ♖f7 12.a3 ♙h6 13.♙f2

Black is fine after 13.♙xh6 ♖xh6 14.f4 exf4 15.♙xf4 g5 16.♙f2 f4.

13...♙d7 14.b4 b6 15.♗c2 ♖h8! 16.♙ab1 ♖g8! 17.bxc5 bxc5 18.♙b7 ♙c8 19.♙b2 ♖f6 20.♙b1 ♙f4 21.♙d3 ♖g5 22.h4 ♖f7

This seems too slow, so I would try 22...♙xd2 23.♗xd2 ♖f7 24.♗c2 f4 25.♗a4 ♙g8 intending g6-g5-g4.

23.♖f1 ♙g8 24.exf5 g5! 25.♖h1 g4 26.g3 gxf3 27.gxf4 exf4 28.♖h2 ♖e5 29.♙g1

After 29.♗d1 White should be able to defend and keep the piece.

29...♙xg1† 30.♙xg1 ♖h5 31.♙f2 ♖g3† 32.♖g1

♖g8 33.♙xg3 fxg3 34.♗f1 ♖g4 35.♙e4 ♙xf5 36.♗e3 ♖h3 and 0-1.

When Curt Hansen plays the Modern the opening often seems both solid and strategically superior to, well, anything. This game went wrong somewhere around move 22 and must be considered an exception to his other games. It is, however, a typical example of how to save a bad position in the Modern, the rule being: do not retreat to the trenches but instead throw everything you have at your opponent!

10.♗c3 0-0

10...c5 is possible here, but do not ever play f5-f4 in this kind of position if you can help it: Black needs to keep the central tension. In the next game we will see that there are exceptions to this rule and that it all depends on the general state of White's coordination (in the next game White's ♗e2 goes back to g1 just to achieve better coordination).

11.c5

White should avoid castling short for as long as possible since it is more difficult for Black to launch an attack against a moving target.

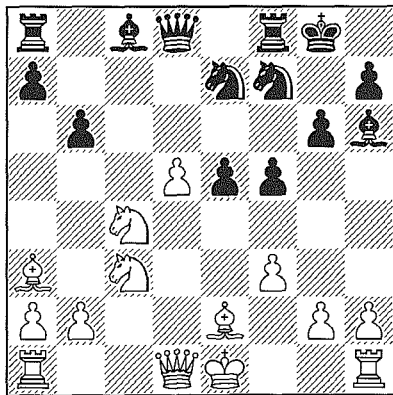
11...♙h6 12.♙f2 c6!

The black knights are perfectly placed to execute this idea.

13.♗c4

This is more ambitious than 13.cxd6 ♗xd6 14.dxc6 ♗xc6 15.♗c4 ♗f7 16.♙c5 ♖e8 17.♖xd8 ♖xd8 18.♗d5 b6 which is about level.

13...cxd5 14.exd5 dxc5 15.♙xc5 b6 16.♙a3



16...♙d7?

This is far too passive. It is important to keep the pressure on d5 so that White does not get the chance to play ♖b3 and ♖d1. After 16...♖e8! (defending against d5-d6-d7) 17.♗b5 (17.♖b3? ♗xd5 is no good and 17.0-0 ♖b8 intending b5 is also annoying for White.) 17...♗xd5 18.♗bd6 ♙e6 19.♗xe8 ♖xe8 Black has a pawn and fantastic compensation for the exchange.

17.♖b3 ♗h8 18.♖d1 ♖e8 19.♗b5 ♙xb5

Black is clearly worse after 19...♗c8 20.d6 ♖b8 21.♗c7.

20.♖xb5 ♗g8 21.d6 ♗f6 22.0-0!?

After this move White loses most of his advantage. Better was 22.d7! ♖e6 23.♖b3 when Black has no acceptable defence against 24.♗d6.

22...♖d7 23.♖xd7 ♗xd7

Black has managed to block the d-pawn and has reasons to look forward to the future.

24.b3 b5 25.♗a5 a6 26.g4 ♗g7 27.♙c1?

White could have kept an advantage with 27.♗c6 intending ♗e7. Now the initiative passes to Black.

27...♖e6 28.♙xh6† ♗xh6 29.♖d2 ♖b8 30.♖c1 ♖xd6 31.♖xd6 ♗xd6 32.♖c7 ♗f6 33.h4

This idea keeps White in the game. The rest of the game is quite complicated and White manages to stay just on the right side of the drawing line.

33...g5 34.♖c6 ♗fe8 35.h5 fxg4 36.fxg4 ♖c8 37.♖xa6 ♖c1† 38.♗f2 ♗g7 39.♗e3 ♖c3† 40.♗d2 ♗e4† 41.♗d1 ♗8d6 42.♖c6 ♗f7 43.♖xc3 ♗xc3† 44.♗d2 ♗xa2 45.♗c6 e4 46.♗e3 ♗c3 47.♙f1 ♗e6 48.♗d4 ♗b1 49.♙e2 ♗d2 50.♙d1 ♗f3† 51.♗c5 ♗e1 52.♗d4† ♗e5 53.♗c6† ♗e6 54.♗d4† ♗d7 55.♗d5 ♗d3 56.♗c2 h6 57.♗e3 ♗e7 58.♙c2 ♗b4† 59.♗e5 ♗d3† 60.♗d5 ♗d7 61.♙b1 ♗e7 62.♙c2 ♗f2 63.♗e5 b4 64.♗d5 ♗b5 65.♗e5 ♗c3 66.♗f5† ♗f8 67.♗e3 ♗f7 68.♗f5 ♗e2 69.♗e5 ♗c3 70.♗f5 ♗e2 71.♗e5 ♗c1 72.♙xe4 ♗xe4 73.♗xe4 ♗xb3 74.♗f5 ♗c5† 75.♗d4 ♗d7 76.♗xh6†

1/2-1/2

*Game conclusions:* I am generally doubtful about the value of moves like 6...♖h6 but studying this game and the next one has made me realise that h6 is a quite legitimate square for the knight - sometimes. Black was clearly worse after 16...♗d7, but 16...♞e8 seems like a better shot at equality (and maybe more). It is a fine line to walk for Black, but I find 5...♗g4 distinctly unpromising, at best drawish, for Black.

In the final game White develops the g1-knight to e2 trying to achieve a Sämisch King's Indian.

### Game 69

Razuvaev – Todorcevic

Rome 1990

1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.c4 d6 4.♖c3 e5 5.♗ge2

With this move White prepares to play a Sämisch King's Indian (♗e3 and f3), if Black does not exchange on d4.

5...♖c6!?

A really crazy move is 5...c5 with the idea that 6.dxc5 dxc5 7.♞xd8† ♗xd8 8.♗e3 b6 9.0-0-0 ♗d7 is not so bad for Black, since there is nothing White can do to prevent Black from going ♖b8-c6-d4. I am more worried about 6.d5, though I will pretend that I have a good Old Benoni after 6...f5. This could well turn out to be just bad, but I do not see how.

6.♗e3

Also critical is 6.d5 ♖ce7 (6...♖d4?! 7.♗e3 is just bad for Black since the knight cannot stay on d4.) and White has a choice:

a) 7.♖g3 f5! (7...h5?! 8.h4 when it is hard for Black to achieve f5 and the ♗g7-h6 idea is generally not good with a knight on e7.) 8.exf5 ♖xf5 (8...gxf5 9.♗d3 ♖f6 10.♖h5 is better for White) 9.♗d3 ♖f6 10.♗g5 h6 11.♗xf6 ♞xf6 and White controls the e4-square, but Black can jump to d4, attack White's centre with c6 and activate the bishop with h5 and ♗h6.

b) 7.f3 f5 8.♗e3 ♗h6! and Black has an excellent position.

c) 7.h4! is the most dangerous move, when Black has little choice but to play 7...f5!?. (7...h5!?

8.♖g3 is covered in line a.) After 8.h5 ♖h6 9.hxg6 hxg6 10.exf5 gxf5 11.♖g3 ♖f7 12.♖h5 ♞g8 the position is very complicated, though White should be a little better.

6...♖h6

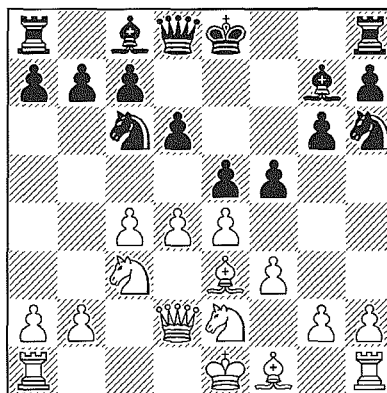
It is premature to play 6...f5 here, as it generally is before the centre is closed. 7.exf5 gxf5 (After 7...♗xf5 8.d5 ♖ce7 9.♖g3 ♖f6 10.♗d3 White controls e4 and is at least slightly better.) 8.dxe5 (8.d5 ♖ce7 9.f4 ♖f6 10.h3 ♖g6 11.♞d2 a6 12.g3 h5 looks unclear to me.) 8...dxe5 9.♞xd8† ♖xd8 10.f4 ♖e6 This has been played a few times and seems playable for Black, but I would rather avoid it.

7.f3

7.h3 f5! 8.dxe5 (8.exf5? ♖xf5 9.d5 ♖cd4 and Black has the initiative) 8...dxe5 9.♞xd8† ♖xd8 is a clear improvement on 6...f5: the additional moves h3 and ♖h6 are in Black's favour.

7...f5 8.♞d2!

This forces Black to close the kingside. An alternative is 8.d5 ♖e7 9.♞d2 ♖f7 (9...f4 leads to the main game) 10.0-0-0 0-0 11.♗b1 a6 12.♖c1 ♞e8?! (It is better to play 12...c5 13.dxc6 ♖xc6! 14.♖b3 ♗e6, intending b5.) 13.♗e2 ♗d7 14.♖d3 c6 15.dxc6 bxc6 16.♖c5 ♗c8 17.♖5a4 ♗e6 18.♖b6 ♞d8 and Black had an excellent position in O. Jakobsen – Lars Hansen, Copenhagen 1996.



8...f4!?

I would prefer to live without this move, but I do not approve of Black's pawn structure after 8...♟f7 9.exf5 gxf5 10.f4! with a typical King's Indian advantage for White in Ionescu – Welling, Pardubice 1997.

Really bad is 8...fxe4? 9.d5! exf3 10.dxc6 fxe2 11.♙g5 ♙f6 12.♙xf6 ♜xf6 13.♜xh6 and Black is lost because 13...exf1=♚† 14.♞xf1 ♙f5 15.g4 wins a piece for White.

**9.♙f2 ♟f7**

The knight has done its job on h6. Now White has to watch out for mass exchanges on d4 followed by ♟e5.

**10.d5**

The scenario mentioned in the last comment can look something like 10.0-0-0 0-0 11.♞b1 exd4 12.♟xd4 ♟xd4 13.♙xd4 ♟e5 14.c5 ♙e6 15.cxd6? ♜xd6 16.♟b5 ♜e7 17.♜c3 ♞fd8 18.♙e2 a6 19.b3 ♙f7 20.♙c5 ♜g5 and White's position crumbled in Antonsen – O. Jakobsen, Copenhagen 1998. This seemed like a walk in the park for Black, but can it really be this easy? More critical than 14.c5 is 14.♟d5! attacking f4 and now Black has to play accurately: 14...g5 15.h4 c6 16.♟c3 g4! 17.♙e2 (17.♙c5 gxf3 18.gxf3 ♙g4! is unclear) 17...♙e6! 18.fxg4 a6! and Black intends b5 with counterplay. It is necessary to keep the files closed on the kingside even at the cost of a pawn.

10.g3? ♟g5 11.♙g2 ♙h3 12.0-0 ♜c8 is awful for White.

**10...♟e7**

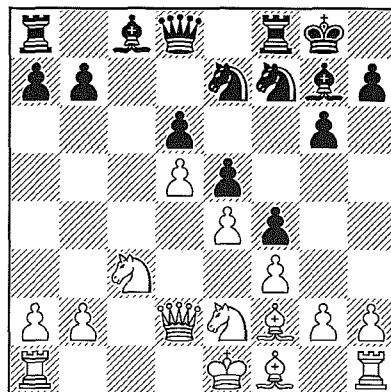
For the moment this is a really bad place for the knight, but luckily its neighbour on f7 is well placed, defending the d6-pawn if Black tries c6 later.

**11.c5**

Black is fine after 11.g3!? g5! followed by h5.

**11...0-0 12.0-0-0**

After 12.cxd6 I prefer 12...♟xd6, but it is not out of the question to try 12...cxd6:



This kind of position is generally bad for Black if the e7-knight is still on b8. My first reaction was that it is even worse on e7, but now I think that the knight will be useful on the kingside after g5, ♟e7-g6 and possibly on to h4. All this would be merely academic if White could coordinate his pieces and attack Black's queenside, but it is not so easy and in every line I have analysed Black is in good time to play g4 and ♟g5.

**12...dxc5!? 13.♙xc5 ♟d6 14.♟g1**

The knight must have swallowed a beetle or two considering the magical mystery tour it embarks on here. A more normal reaction is 14.♞b1 intending ♟c1, but the g1-knight will eventually turn up on f2 and is not in the way on the c-file.

**14...a6**

Black tries to get some play on the queenside. Worse is 14...g5 15.♟h3 ♟g6 16.♟f2 when Black has not achieved much on the kingside. The g5-idea will not run away, but it is important to be active on the queenside before White is fully coordinated.

**15.h4!?**

After 15.♟h3 ♙xh3 16.gxh3 ♙f6 17.♞b1 ♜d7 the position is very unclear.

**15...b6 16.♙a3 b5 17.♟h3 h6**

It is necessary to stop ♟h3-g5-e6.

**18.♟f2 ♙d7**

White is slightly better after 18...♞b8 19.♟b1! (stopping b4 and a5).

**19.b3?!**

This makes the king's position considerably draughtier. On the other hand 19.♖d3 allows 19...a5 and 19.♜b1 ♞b8 is also annoying since ♖b1 is no longer possible. So what should White do? The best chance seems to be 19.♙c5 ♖b7 20.♗d3 (20.♙b4?! ♞f7 and ♗ec8 and a5 is threatening) 20...♗xc5 21.♗xc5 ♙c8 when White can steer for a drawish endgame with 22.♗e6 ♙xe6 23.dxc6 ♞xd2† 24.♞xd2 ♞fd8 25.♗d5.

**19...♗ec8?!**

Black misses a strong move in 19...a5! when 20.♙xd6 (20.♙c5 b4 21.♗e2 ♖b7) 20...cxd6 21.♙xb5 (21.♗xb5 a4) 21...♙xb5 22.♗xb5 a4 is extremely dangerous for White and 20.♙c5 b4 21.♗e2 ♖b7 is clearly better for Black.

**20.♗d3 a5 21.♙b2?!**

This is too passive. After 21.♙c5 Black has the interesting option 21...♖b7!?, intending 22.♙xf8 ♞xf8 with compensation for the exchange.

**21...♖b7 22.♜b1 ♗cd6 23.♞f2 b4**

An interesting alternative is 23...a4! 24.♖b4 ♖a5 25.♞c2 ♞e7 with the idea ...♗xe4 and ...♞xb4.

**24.♗e2 ♞e7?**

Black does not like the thought of losing his e-pawn, but this is too slow and the e-pawn should have been sacrificed. 24...a4! and White can take the pawn in two ways:

a) 25.♗xe5 axb3 26.axb3 ♖b5 27.♗d4 ♖a3† 28.♙xa3 ♞xa3 29.♗xg6 ♖a5 and Black has fantastic compensation considering the sorry state of the white king.

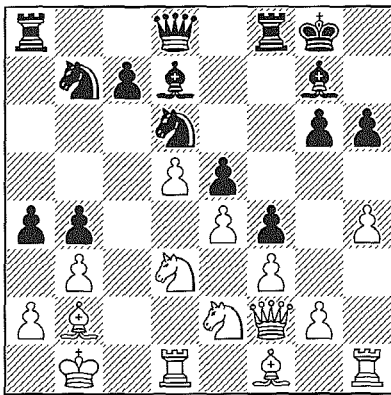
b) 25.♙xe5 ♙xe5 26.♗xe5 ♞e8 27.♗d3 axb3 28.axb3 ♖b5 and I would not be too comfortable as White.

**25.♗c5?**

25.g3!  
25...a4 26.♗xd7 ♞xd7 27.♗c1 axb3 28.axb3 ♙a5 29.♞d2 ♞fa8 30.♞xb4 ♖b5 31.♙xb5 ♞xb5 32.♞c3 ♞c5 33.♞b4 ♞b5 34.♞c4 ♗d6 35.♞c3 ♞c8 36.♗d3 ♞ba5 37.♖b4 ♞b7 38.♜c2 ♞b8 39.♗d3 ♙a2 40.♜b1 ♖b5 41.♞c4 ♞a6 42.♗c5 ♞a7 43.d6† ♜h7 44.dxc7 ♖a3† 45.♙xa3 ♞xa3 46.♞c3 ♞a8 47.♗d3 ♞c8 48.♞d2 ♞xd2 49.♞xd2 ♞xb3† 50.♖b2 ♞xc7 51.♞c1 ♞a7 52.♞c8 h5 53.♞c3 ♞a2† 54.♜c1 ♙f8 55.♞d5 ♞a1† 56.♜c2 ♞f1 57.♜b3 ♙a3†

**0-1**

*Game Conclusions:* I believe the set-up in this game is the most dangerous in this chapter (if Black avoids the KID). Especially critical is the line beginning with 10.0-0-0 when Black has to play exd4 at some moment. The resulting positions are very sharp and everything depends on how quickly Black can organise a counter attack with a6 and b5. In the main game Black achieves a very good position with 12...dxc5 and 13...♗d6 so maybe White should wait with c5!?. Anyway, I think that Black should be fine with either g5, ♗g6, g4 or c5 and b5. It is all about adapting and improvising.



### Chronological index of complete games

The games in brackets indicate full games given in the annotations to the main game mentioned above it.

#### 1. f4 – Austrian Style

1. Ghannoum – Hillarp Persson *17*
2. Yemelin – Chepukaitis *20*
3. Forster – Bacrot *21*
4. Malmdin – Hillarp Persson *25*  
(Yusupov – Forster) *26*  
(Karjakin – Hillarp Persson) *27*
5. Mortensen – Hillarp Persson *28*
6. Schlosser – Chernin *31*
7. De Firmian – Hillarp Persson *33*
8. Stefansson – Hillarp Persson *36*
9. Ramesh – Hillarp Persson *38*
10. A. Sokolov – Bricard *41*
11. Fluvia Poyatos – Hillarp Persson *43*
12. Galkin – Ponomariov *45*  
(Rosandic – Delchev) *46*
13. Hermansson – Hillarp Persson *46*
14. Spiess – Hillarp Persson *49*
15. Turov – Hillarp Persson *51*

#### 2. Flexible Dragon Unleashed

– ♖e3 without ♘f3

16. Apicella – Hillarp Persson *54*  
(I. Sokolov – Hillarp Persson) *56*
17. E. Berg – Hillarp Persson *58*  
(E. Berg – Nill) *58*
18. Yagupov – Hillarp Persson *60*  
(Miladinovic – Hickl) *61*
19. Shabalov – Benjamin *63*
20. Burrows – Hillarp Persson *65*
21. van Delft – M. Gurevich *67*
22. Sion Castro – Hillarp Persson *70*

#### 3. Flexible Dragon Restrained – ♖e3 and ♘f3

23. Manca – Hillarp Persson *74*
24. Levin – Rausis *76*
25. Carlsson – Hillarp Persson *80*
26. von Bahr – Hillarp Persson *83*
27. Kolev – Hillarp Persson *85*
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29. Yuferov – Chepukaitis *95*
30. Spoelman – Hort *96*
31. Drei – Gofshtein *98*
32. A.Ivanov – Benjamin *100*
33. Brynell – Hillarp Persson *104*  
(Kleinplatz – Barlov) *105*
34. J. Shahade – Hillarp Persson *107*
35. Gabriel – Bischoff *109*
36. Yagupov – Shchekachev *111*
37. Bromann – Hillarp Persson *114*
38. Couso – Åkesson *116*

#### 5. Classical Variation

39. Khalifman – Popov *119*
40. Vernersson – Hillarp Persson *123*  
(Antic – Barlov) *123*
41. Zontakh – Jenetl *125*  
(Amrein – Belotelov) *126*  
(Brynell – Agrest) *127*
42. Ilincic – Todorcevic *129*  
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#### 6. ♖g5 – Into midair

43. Tydecks – T. Paetz Jr *134*
44. Videki – Hillarp Persson *136*

**7. ♘c4 – Mad Dog**

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- 46. Schlosser – Bologan *146*
- 47. Shamkovich – Keene *147*
- 48. Medina Garcia – Larsen *151*
- 49. Votruba – Motwani *153*
- 50. Kveinys – Speelman *155*
- 51. Kveinys – M. Gurevich *158*
- 52. Hoffmann – Jansa *159*  
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- 53. Sermek – Tkachiev *164*
- 54. van der Weide – Gulko *166*
- 55. Aseev – Khalifman *167*
- 56. Marinkovic – Vujadinovic *169*

**9. c3 – Lazy Variation**

- 57. Godena – Hillarp Persson *173*
- 58. Korchnoi – Sznepik *175*
- 59. Tyomkin – Ilincic *177*
- 60. Denker – Damljanovic *180*  
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**10. Unusual Lines**

- 61. Hillarp Persson – P. Andreasen *183*
- 62. Mrva – Azmaiparashvili *185*
- 63. Rodriguez – Tkachiev *187*  
(Granda Zuniga – Kakageldyev) *188*

**11. Averbakh Variation**

- 64. Gleizerov – Pedzich *193*
- 65. Karpov – Seirawan *196*
- 66. Agrest – Morozevich *200*
- 67. Lputian – Todorcevic *202*
- 68. Boensch – Seirawan *204*  
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- 69. Razuvaev – Todorcevic *207*

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Numbers in bold refers to game no and italics to page no. Numbers in brackets indicate complete games given in the annotations to a main game.

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 Karpov - Seirawan **65**, 196  
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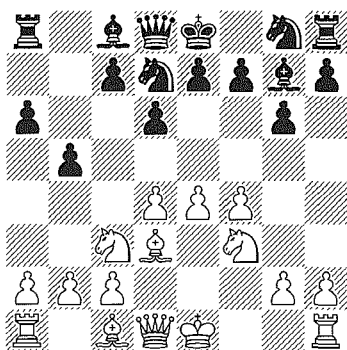


## Index of variations

To create an index for a book based on ideas more than lines can seem like a dubious idea. None the less we have decided to give the reader this extra tool to navigate through the book, reminding him that the map is not the territory. Also for this reason we have decided to add a few extra moves in some lines, which should help the reader to navigate well in the text. For this reason we have chosen to indicate the different options according to both page (*italics*) and game (**bold**) numbers.

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- 1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.♣c3 d6 4.f4
- 4.♗e3 a6 5.a4 b6 6.♗f4 **Game 15**, 51
- 4...a6 5.♣f3 127
- 5.♗e3 b5 6.♗e2 ♣d7 (6...b4?! **Game 12**, 45)
- 7.♗f3 e5 **Game 11**, 43 (7...e6 8.♣h3 **Game 10**, 42)
- 5.a4?! **Game 14**, 49
- 5...b5 6.♗d3
- 6.a3 **Game 3**, 21
- 6.a4 46
- 6...♣d7
- 6...♗b7?! 7.♖e2 ♣d7 8.e5 c5 **Game 7**, 33

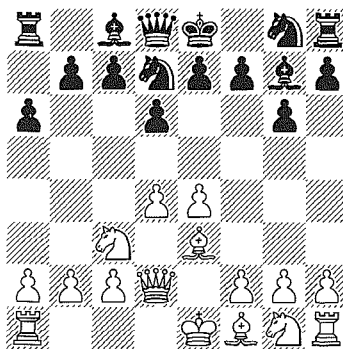


- 7.♗e3 ♗b7 8.0–0
- 8.e5 c5 **Game 5**, 28
- 8.♖e2 **Game 9**, 38
- 8.♖d2 **Game 9**, 38
- 8...c5 9.dxc5 **Game 8**, 36

- 9.♣h1 **Game 8**, 36
- 7.a4 **Game 13**, 47
- 7.e5 c5 (7...♗b7 **Game 4**, 28)
- 8.e6 **Game 1**, 18
- 8.♗e4 ♖b8 9.0–0 **Game 4**, 25 (9.♗e3 **Game 3**, 22)
- 8.exd6 **Game 6**, 31
- 8.0–0 ♗b7 9.♗e4 **Game 6**, 31
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- 1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.♣c3 d6 4.♗e3 a6
- 4...c6 5.f4! Introduction to Chapter 2. 53
- 5.♖d2
- 5...b5 6.a4 (6.h4 h5 **Game 17**, 58) 6...b4 7.♣d1
- a5 **Game 21**, 68
- 5...♣d7

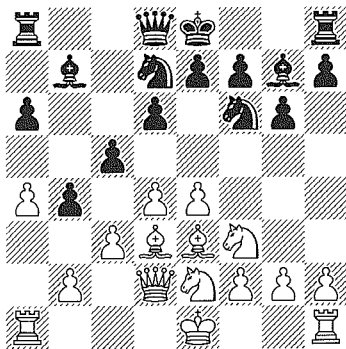


- 6.h4 h5 **Game 16** (6...h6 **Game 16**) 54
- 6.0–0–0 b5 7.f3?! **Game 18**, 60
- 6.a4 b6 7.f3 c5 **Game 22**, 70
- 6.f3 b5 7.a4 (7.g4 ♗b7 **Game 19**, 63) 7...b4
- 8.♣d1 c5 **Game 20**, 66

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– ♖e3 and ♜f3

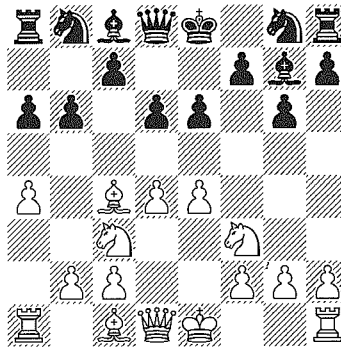
- 1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.♖c3 d6 4.♗e3 a6 5.♜f3  
 5.a4 *Game 28, 88*  
 5...b5 6.♗d3  
 6.a4 b4 7.♜e2 (7.♜d5 *Game 23, 74*) 7...♜d7  
*Game 23, 74*  
 6.♞d2 ♜d7 7.a4 *Game 27, 85*  
 6...♜d7 7.♞d2  
 7.e5 ♗b7 8.e6 *Game 24, 76*  
 7.0–0 ♗b7 (7...c5 *Game 23, 74*) 8.a4 b4 9.♜e2  
 ♜gf6 *Game 23, 75*  
 7...♗b7 8.a4 b4 9.♜e2 c5  
 9...a5 *Game 25, 80*  
 10.c3  
 10.dxc5 *Game 25, 80*  
 10...♜gf6



- 11.♗h6 *Game 25, 81*  
 11.♜g3 *Game 26, 83*

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- 1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♗g7 3.♜c3 d6 4.♜f3  
 4.♗g5 a6 5.a4 ♗h6 *Game 37, 114*  
 4.♗e3 a6 5.♞d2 ♜d7 6.a4 b6 *Game 38, 116*  
 4...a6 5.a4 b6 6.♗c4  
 6.♗g5 *Game 31, 98*  
 6...e6



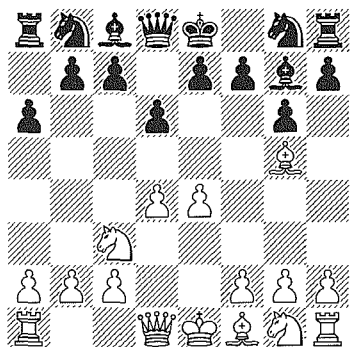
- 7.0–0  
 7.h4 *Game 33, 104*  
 7.e5 *Game 34, 107*  
 7.♞e2 *Game 34, 107*  
 7.♗g5?! *Game 36, 111*  
 7...♜e7 8.♗e3  
 8.♗e1 *Game 31, 98*  
 8.♗f4 *Game 33, 104*  
 8.♞e2 *Game 35, 109*  
 8...♜d7 9.♞d2 h6  
 10.d5?! *Game 31, 99*  
 10.h3 *Game 32, 101*  
 10.h4 *Game 32, 101*

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- 1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♘g7 3.♟f3 d6 4.♞c3
- 4.♙e2 ♟f6 (4...a6?! **Game 41, 126**) 5.♞c3 0-0
- 6.0-0 e6 **Game 41, 126**
- 4.h3 ♟f6 5.♞c3 0-0 6.♙e3 a6 **Game 42, 129**
- 4...a6 5.♙e2 b5
- 5...e6 **Game 39, 120**
- 6.0-0 ♞d7?!
- 6...♙b7 **Game 39, 120**
- 7.♙e1
- 7.d5 **Game 39, 120**
- 7...c5 (7...♙b7 **Game 39, 120**)
- 8.♙g5 ♙b7 9.a4 **Game 39, 121**
- 8.♙f1 ♙b7 **Game 40, 123**

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- 1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♘g7 3.♞c3 d6 4.♙g5 a6



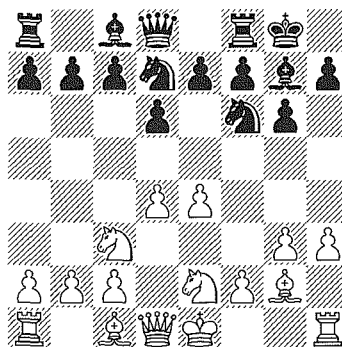
- 5.f4?! **Game 43, 134**
- 5.♙d2 **Game 43, 134**
- 5.♟f3 **Game 44, 136**
- 5.♙c4 **Game 44, 136**

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- 1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♘g7
- 3.♙c4 c5 **Game 45, 142**
- 3.♟f3 d6 4.♙c4 ♟f6 5.♙e2
- 5.♞c3 0-0 6.0-0 (6.h3 ♟xe4 **Game 49, 153**)
- 6...♞c6 **Game 48, 151**
- 5...0-0 6.0-0
- 6.e5 ♟e8 7.h3 **Game 47, 148**
- 6...♙g4 7.e5
- 7.h3 **Game 45, 143**
- 7...dxe5 **Game 46, 146**
- 7...♟e8 **Game 47, 148**
- 3.♞c3 d6 4.♙c4 ♟f6 5.♙e2 ♞c6 6.e5
- 6...♞xd4 **Game 51, 158**
- 6...♞d7 **Game 50, 155**
- 6...♞g4 7.e6 **Game 52, 159** (7.♙b5 **Game 51, 158**)

**Chapter 8: g3 – Parrot Fashion**

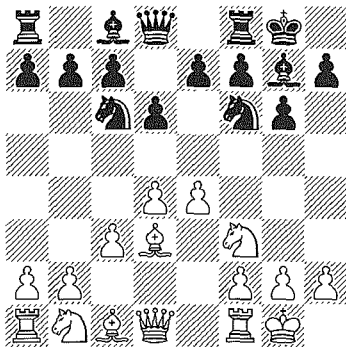
- 1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♘g7 3.♞c3 d6 4.g3 ♟f6
- 4...♞c6 **Game 56, 169**
- 5.♙g2 0-0 6.♟ge2
- 6.♟f3 **Game 53, 164**
- 6...♞bd7
- 7.0-0 c5 8.h3 ♙b8 9.♙e3 (9.a4 **Game 55, 167**)
- 9...b6 **Game 53, 164**
- 7.h3



- 7...c5?! **Game 54, 166**
- 7...♙b8 8.a4 c5 9.♙e3 b6 **Game 54, 166**

## Chapter 9: c3 – Lazy Variation

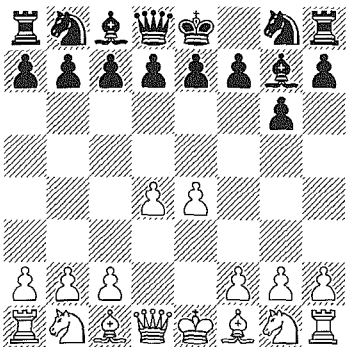
1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♘g7 3.♗f3  
 3...c3 d6 4.♙g5 Game 59 (4.f4 Game 59) 177  
 3...d6 4.♙d3  
 4.c3 ♗f6 5.♗bd2 0–0 6.♙e2 Game 60, 180  
 4...♗f6 5.0–0 0–0 6.c3 ♗c6



7.h3 Game 57, 173  
 7.♖e1 Game 57, 173  
 7.♗bd2 Game 57, 174  
 7.d5 Game 58, 175

## Chapter 10: Unusual Lines

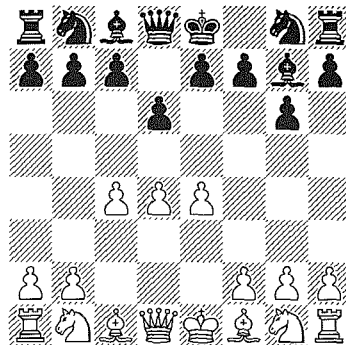
1.e4 g6 2.d4 ♙g7



3.♙e3 c5 4.♗c3 Game 62, 186  
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